Childcare and early years survey of parents 2023: Push-to-web mode trial

Methodological report

Contents

List of figures

Summary

The Childcare and early years survey of parents (CEYSP) has, since 2004, provided salient, up-to-date information on parents' use of childcare and early years provision, as well as on parents' attitudes towards, and experiences of, local childcare. Funded by the Department for Education (DfE), it is a major cross-sectional survey which collects data through face-to-face in-home interviews with around 6,000 parents of children aged 0 to 14 in England (since 2021 a subset of interviews have been carried out by telephone and Microsoft Teams because of the COVID-19 pandemic).

In 2018, DfE commissioned Ipsos (then Ipsos MORI) to carry out a 'mode trial' to explore the scope for data to be collected online, rather than face-to-face, using a 'push-to-web' design. Under a push-to-web design sampled parents are invited by post to take part in an online survey by navigating to a web-link printed on their invitation letter. The research found that the push-to-web survey produced similar estimates to the 2018 face-to-face CEYSP for certain simple, factual questions, but produced greater differences for questions relating to parents' attitudes and intentions. DfE commissioned Ipsos to conduct a further mode trial in 2023, which is the subject of the present report.

The 2023 push-to-web mode trial used the online questionnaire that had been developed - using both cognitive and usability testing - for the earlier mode trial research and extended it to test the impact of a longer questionnaire, and to produce a larger number of survey estimates that could be compared with the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP.

An equal probability sample of 7,500 children aged 0 to 14 in England was drawn from the Child Benefit Register. A letter was mailed to each child's benefit claimant (i.e. their parent) inviting them to complete the survey using the URL and unique access code contained in their letter. A reminder letter, followed by a reminder postcard, was sent to non-responders. Fieldwork lasted for seven weeks, between September and November 2023.

Two features of the survey were experimentally manipulated to explore the optimal design: incentivisation (a £5 vs £10 vs £15 gift voucher conditional on completion) and stating (vs not stating) the survey deadline on the reminder postcard.

The response rate increased with the value of the incentive (19.1% vs 24.0% vs 27.1% respectively) but remained lower than the response rate achieved for the parallel-run 2023 face-to-face CEYSP (39.4%). Whether the survey deadline was stated or not made no difference to the overall response rate, but there was evidence that it damaged response slightly among those who saw it.

Four split-ballot experiments were embedded in the questionnaire. These experiments found that open-numeric data can be collected successfully, that multiple-response questions can be highly sensitive to the ordering of response options, and highlighted the

difficulties of incorporating "Don't know" response options online in a manner that mirrors face-to-face administration.

Respondent experiences to the 2023 push-to-web mode trial were broadly positive, boding well for engagement and consequently for data quality. However, over two in five of those who took between 25 and 35 minutes to complete the survey - for whom the actual survey length accorded with the length stated in the invitation materials - felt that the survey was too long.

While the 2023 push-to-web mode trial delivered a sample that was not as representative of the population as the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, there was evidence that offering a higher-value incentive improved the representativeness of the achieved sample. A comparison of key survey estimates between the two modes found a significant difference for most key survey estimates, averaging 5.8 percentage points for those key survey estimates that were fully comparable. The size of this difference was similar across the three incentivisation conditions.

Key survey estimates derived from questions measuring parents' preferences exhibited the largest differences between the two modes, while those derived from questions measuring behaviours exhibited the smallest differences. Respondents to the 2023 push-to-web mode trial chose more response options at multiple-response questions than did their face-to-face counterparts. It is unclear to what extent these differences in survey estimates between the two modes are due to selection effects, mode-specific measurement effects, or both.

Introduction

Background

The Childcare and early years survey of parents (CEYSP) is a major Department for Education (DfE) funded cross-sectional survey series, with a history stretching back to 2004. It provides salient, up-to-date information on parents' use of childcare and early years provision, as well as on parents' attitudes towards, and experiences of, local childcare.

The data have traditionally been collected through face-to-face in-home interviews with around 6,000 parents of children aged between 0- and 14-years-old living in England. The 2020 survey wave was cancelled due to restrictions on face-to-face interviewing arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, and since 2021 the survey has implemented a mixed-mode design, using the interviewer-administered modes of face-to-face, telephone, and Microsoft Teams interviewing. For the 2023 survey wave most interviews (73%) were conducted face-to-face, 26 per cent were conducted by telephone, and very few (1%) were conducted by Microsoft Teams.

In 2019, Ipsos (then Ipsos MORI) carried out a push-to-web 'mode trial', to explore the scope for certain CEYSP measures to be collected online, rather than face-to-face. This mode trial invited parents by post to respond to an online survey. Such a change of mode is attractive as it can lower survey costs and shorten fieldwork periods. But these advantages must be weighed against certain sacrifices, including lower response rates and consequently a greater scope for non-response bias, and less detailed data collection instruments.

The 2019 mode trial found that the push-to-web survey produced similar estimates to the 2018 face-to-face CEYSP for certain simple, factual questions, but produced greater differences for questions relating to parents' attitudes and intentions. It found that a conditional £5 gift voucher was effective in increasing the response rate (versus no incentive, or an unconditional tote bag enclosed in the initial mailing). It also found that a stated interview length of 15 versus 20 minutes did not affect the response rate, nor did the inclusion of a survey leaflet in the initial mailing.

DfE commissioned Ipsos to conduct a further push-to-web mode trial in 2023, to build on the evidence collected from the mode trial in 2019.

Aims

The aims of the 2023 push-to-web mode trial survey were to:

- Assess the response rate achievable with a relatively long (c.30 minutes) questionnaire

- Experimentally test the impact of different incentive regimes on survey response and sample representativeness

- Experimentally test the impact of stating (vs not stating) the survey deadline on the final reminder mailing on survey response and sample representativeness

- Assess the accuracy of survey estimates, by comparison against data collected from the concurrent 2023 face-to-face CEYSP

- Assess the impact of certain different question designs on response patterns via "split-ballot" experiments

- Assess measures of data quality and respondent experience

Terminology

Throughout this report, we refer to the traditionally face-to-face Childcare and early years survey of parents as "the face-to-face CEYSP" or, where specifying a survey year, as (for example) "the 2021 face-to-face CEYSP". We refer to the mode trial surveys as "the push-to-web mode trial surveys" or, where specifying a survey year, as (for example) "the 2023 push-to-web mode trial survey".

Structure of this report

Chapter 3 (Methodology) describes the sample design, the experimental design, the questionnaire development, and the invitation and reminder mailings posted to sampled parents.

Chapter 4 (Results) begins with a presentation of response rates, analysing how these vary by geodemographic variables, by family characteristics, and by experimental condition. Comparisons are made to the equivalent response rates to the face-to-face CEYSP where relevant.

The chapter then turns to other response considerations, including break-off rates, when the survey was accessed and completed, the device types used for completion, the use of QR codes to access the questionnaire, the questionnaire length, rates of consent to recontact, and parents' experiences of completing the questionnaire. Next, the results of four split-ballot experiments embedded in the questionnaire are presented.

The data weighting strategy is then described. Following this, the representativeness of the achieved 2023 push-to-web mode trial sample is considered, and key survey estimates are compared with the equivalent estimates from the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP.

Chapter 5 (Conclusions) presents the conclusions and recommendations arising from the 2023 push-to-web mode trial.

Methodology

Overview

Survey population and sampling

Following the approach of the face-to-face CEYSP, the survey population for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial was children aged 0 to 14 living in private residential accommodation in England. While children were the sampling unit, interviews were sought with one of the child's parents (or more specifically, an adult with 'main or shared responsibility for making decisions about the child's childcare').

An equal probability sample of 7,500 children was drawn from the Child Benefit Register (CBR) by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC) . Each sampled child was the 'selected child' about whom detailed child-specific questions were asked in the interview.

Invitation and reminder mailings

The invitation and reminder mailings were designed following the principles described in the Tailored Design Method (TDM), which seeks to minimise the perceived costs of survey participation, while simultaneously highlighting the benefits .

There were three survey mailings: an invitation letter, a reminder letter, and a reminder postcard. All mailings were addressed to the named benefit recipient of the child sampled from the Child Benefit Register and were mailed second class.

The fieldwork period was seven weeks and two days, with the invitation letter arriving on Monday 25 September 2023 and fieldwork closing on Wednesday 15 November 2023.

Questionnaire development

The questionnaire from the 2019 push-to-web mode trial was used as the starting point for questionnaire development, and to this questionnaire around 15 minutes' worth of content was added. The aim was an average survey length of around 30 minutes. New content was adapted from the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP questionnaire, to allow for the comparison of survey estimates between the surveys.

Experimental design

Two features of the 2023 push-to-web mode trial methodology were experimentally manipulated to explore the optimal survey design:

- Incentivisation (3 conditions): £5 vs £10 vs £15 gift voucher, conditional on survey completion.

- Deadline on reminder postcard (2 conditions): stated vs not stated

In addition, four 'split-ballot' experiments were embedded in the questionnaire, to assess the impact of various different question wording and answer option approaches.

A full factorial design was implemented across all experimental treatments so the impact of the treatments could be assessed independently, as well as interactions between the treatments explored.

Sampling

Survey population

Mirroring the approach to the face-to-face CEYSP, the survey population for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial was children aged 0 to 14 living in private residential accommodation in England. Although the sampling units were children, the interview for each selected child was sought with an appropriate adult, defined as an adult within the child's household with 'main or shared responsibility for making decisions about the child's childcare' .

This survey population definition, and approach to identifying an eligible respondent, was identical to that of the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP.

Sampling frame

Children were sampled from the Child Benefit Register (CBR) by HM Revenue & Customs (HMRC).

The CBR has historically provided near total coverage of the survey population, given the near universal take-up of Child Benefit among parents of children aged 0 to 14 in England. In 2013, however, this coverage was damaged by the introduction of the High Income Child Benefit Charge (HICBC), the effect of which has been to decrease the likelihood that children born since 2013 to higher income parents (those where one or both partners earn £60,000 or more per year) are listed on the CBR.

DfE commissioned Ipsos (then Ipsos MORI) to investigate the potential impact of this change, and to explore potential solutions for the sampling strategy for the face-to-face CEYSP . The report found that persisting with the CBR as the sole sampling frame would introduce non-coverage bias that would reduce both the accuracy of survey estimates, and the ability to compare changes in survey estimates over time. The report recommended that a sample of children should be drawn from the CBR, as per previous survey waves, but should be supplemented with a sample of respondents to the Family Resources Survey (FRS) who had agreed to be recontacted for the purposes of future research. The FRS respondents were those with a child (or children) who had not made a claim for Child Benefit, or who had made a claim for Child Benefit but had subsequently

opted-out of receiving Child Benefit due to having a high income. These families would have little or no chance of being selected in the CBR sample.

From 2017 onwards, the face-to-face CEYSP implemented this recommendation, using a dual-frame approach, sampling from both the CBR and the FRS.

Consistent with the approach taken for the 2019 push-to-web mode trial, however, the FRS was not used as a sampling frame for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial. The reasons for this were twofold. First, all eligible FRS respondents had already been sampled for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. Inviting these individuals to participate in two separate surveys, on the same topic, with concurrent fieldwork periods, would have been too burdensome, and could have caused confusion between the two surveys. Second, the expected response rate to the 2023 push-to-web mode trial led us to expect that too few FRS interviews would be achieved to make any meaningful correction to any bias in survey estimates.

Sample requirements

Approximately 1,700 completed interviews were sought, from an unclustered equal probability sample drawn to be nationally representative of the survey population. Although the face-to-face CEYSP boosts children aged 0 to 4 relative to older children (to maximise the analytical opportunities among this age group), no boost was implemented for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial. This is consistent with the approach taken for the 2019 push-to-web mode trial survey and was implemented because disproportionate sampling would increase the variance of the selection weights, and would hence reduce the efficiency of the sample.

Sample design

The sample design was developed from a consideration of the response rates to the 2019 push-to-web mode trial, for which a £5 conditional gift voucher and a stated survey length of 20 minutes (vs 30 minutes for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial) delivered a response rate of 21.2 per cent. The 2023 push-to-web mode trial included an incentivisation experiment with three conditions (£5, £10, and £15, provided conditional on survey completion).

Sampled cases were randomly allocated such that 43 per cent were assigned to the £5 condition, 30 per cent to the £10 condition, and 27 per cent to the £15 condition. The allocation was structured in this manner because higher incentive values typically lead to higher response rates. The goal was to achieve roughly equal numbers of achieved interviews across the three incentive conditions, to maximise the opportunities for analyses between the conditions. It was assumed that the three incentivisation conditions (£5, £10, and £15) would deliver response rates of 18 per cent, 25 per cent, and 29 per cent respectively, with an overall response rate of 23.1 per cent. These assumptions

were based on the achieved response rates from the 2019 mode trial, in combination with past research that has investigated the impact of incentivisation on response rates.

To achieve the target of at least 1,700 interviews, 7,500 children in England were sampled by HMRC. This sample was expected to deliver 1,730 completed interviews, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample design

Incentive	Number of cases	Of total issued (%)	Of cases issued by incentive condition (%)
Total issued cases	7,500	100.0	n/a
Issued cases by incentive condition: £5 incentive	3,225	43.0	100.0
Issued cases by incentive condition: £10 incentive	2,250	30.0	100.0
Issued cases by incentive condition: £15 incentive	2,025	27.0	100.0
Expected interviews by incentive condition: £5 incentive	581	7.7	18.0
Expected interviews by incentive condition: £10 incentive	563	7.5	25.0
Expected interviews by incentive condition: £15 incentive	587	7.8	29.0
Total achieved	1,730	23.1	n/a

Sample selection

The sample of children from the CBR was selected by HMRC from all children in England, for whom a Child Benefit claim had been made, that would be aged 0 to 14 on the final day of fieldwork (10 November 2023).

A small number of children were excluded from the sampling frame before selection took place. The exclusions were made according to HMRC procedures and the reasons included: the death of a child, cases where the child has been taken into care or put up for adoption, cases where the child does not live at the same address as the claimant

and cases where there has been any correspondence by the recipient with the Child Benefit Centre (because the reason for correspondence cannot be ascertained and may be sensitive). Furthermore, prior to selection children who were sampled for either the 2022 or 2023 face-to-face CEYSP surveys were excluded, to avoid overburdening parents or causing confusion between the surveys.

To select the sample of children, all postcode sectors in England were first stratified by region, population density, the proportion of households in managerial professional and intermediate occupations, and the proportion of the population that was unemployed. HMRC then created a list of all eligible children who would be aged 0 to 14 on 10 November 2023, sorted by the stratified order of postcode sectors, and within this by full postcode and child benefit number (to minimise the chance of children from the same household being selected). HMRC then drew an equal probability sample of 7,500 children whose parent/guardian was invited to take part.

Each sampled child was the 'selected child' about whom detailed child-specific questions were asked in the interview. This child's name was fed-forward into the questionnaire script. Where parents reported in the interview that a new child had been born into their household since the sample was drawn, the interview script gave this child a chance of becoming the selected child. As there was approximately a four-month gap between the sample being drawn and the start of fieldwork, failure to take this step would have meant that children aged four months and under would not be represented in survey estimates. A new child was born at 29 households (1.7% of completed interviews), and at 8 of these households (0.5% of completed interviews) the interview script selected the new child to be the selected child.

Experimental design

Two features of the 2023 push-to-web mode trial methodology were experimentally manipulated to explore the optimal survey design:

- Incentivisation (3 conditions): £5 vs £10 vs £15 gift voucher, conditional on survey completion.

- Deadline on reminder postcard (2 conditions): stated vs not stated.

- In addition, four 'split-ballot' experiments were embedded in the questionnaire, each with two conditions. Details of these split ballot experiments can be found in section 3.5 'Invitation and reminder mailings'.

- Split-ballot experiment 1: Hours of childcare received by the selected child (2 conditions): banded scale vs open-numeric responses

- Split-ballot experiment 2: Whether parent will apply for Tax-Free Childcare (2 conditions): "Don't know" answer option shown vs hidden

- Split-ballot experiment 3: Why parent will not apply for Tax-Free Childcare (2 conditions): "I/We don't use formal childcare" answer option at the beginning vs towards the end of the answer options

- Split-ballot experiment 4: Influences on parent's decision to work (2 conditions): "Childcare arrangements" answer option at the top vs the bottom of the answer options

A full factorial (3 [incentive] x 2 [deadline] x 2 [Split-ballot experiment 1] x 2 [Split-ballot experiment 2] x 2 [Split-ballot experiment 3] x 2 [Split-ballot experiment 4]) experimental design was implemented so the impact of the experimental treatments could be assessed independently of each other, as well as allowing for interactions between the treatments to be explored.

Questionnaire development

Approach to questionnaire development

The existing questionnaire from the 2019 push-to-web mode trial was used as the starting point for the development of the 2023 push-to-web mode trial questionnaire. A full account of the development and content of the 2019 push-to-web mode trial questionnaire can be found in the methodological report from that study, and is not repeated here, except to highlight the following important features of the questionnaire:

- The questionnaire was developed using a "Mobile First" approach, with completion on a mobile device foremost in mind. In practice, this meant that rather than attempting to replicate the face-to-face CEYSP questionnaire in an online format, childcare-related research questions of interest were identified, and from there, a Mobile First questionnaire was developed afresh.

- Where possible, questions from the face-to-face CEYSP questionnaire were retained with as few changes as possible, to allow for the comparison of survey estimates with the face-to-face CEYSP.

- The questionnaire was subjected to both cognitive testing and usability testing with parents.

- The survey length was experimentally manipulated, with most parents assigned to a 15-minute condition, but some parents assigned to a 20-minute condition. For those in the 20-minute condition, the survey materials stated that "The survey should take around 20 minutes to complete", and an additional battery of questions was included. The average completion time for parents in the 20-minute condition was 14 minutes and 21 seconds.

An aim of the 2023 push-to-web mode trial was to assess the response rate achievable with a relatively long (c.30 minutes) questionnaire. To this end, additional content was added to the 2019 push-to-web mode trial questionnaire, to increase the average

completion time to around 30 minutes. New questionnaire content was adapted from the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP questionnaire, and where possible, questions were retained with as few changes as possible, to allow survey estimates to be compared with the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP.

The 2023 push-to-web mode questionnaire contained a total of 182 questions, of which 93 were new. The questionnaire contained extensive routing, such that many questions were only asked of a subset of parents.

Respondent experience questions

An aim of the 2023 push-to-web mode trial was to assess measures of respondent experience. While response rates, break-off rates, and measures of data quality can provide indirect evidence about respondents' experiences of completing a survey, asking respondents explicit questions about their experiences provides more direct evidence.

After respondents had completed the survey and submitted their answers, they were asked if they would like to answer a small number of optional questions about how they found completing the survey. These questions were placed after the gift voucher redemption section of the questionnaire, and receipt of the voucher was not conditional on answering these questions. These questions were not included in either the 2019 push-to-web mode trial, nor the face-to-face CEYSP. Respondents were asked:

- Whether they found the survey to be too long, about the right length, or too short

- How much, if at all, they enjoyed completing the survey (a great deal, a fair amount, not very much, not at all)

- How easy they found the survey to complete (very easy, easy, neither easy nor difficult, difficult, very difficult)

- For those finding the survey 'difficult' or 'very difficult' to complete, which parts of the survey they found difficult to complete (open text)

- Any comments or suggestions for how the survey could be improved (open text)

Split-ballot experiments

Four split-ballot experiments were embedded in the questionnaire. These are described below. The full questionnaire specifications for each can be found in Appendix B.

Split-ballot experiment 1

The first split-ballot experiment concerned parents' reports of how many hours their child spent at formal and informal childcare providers during a typical term-time week. Specifically, it compared responses captured through a scale using banded hours, with responses captured through an open-numeric response field. The banded scale included

10 scale points (less than 1 hour, 1 to 2 hours, 3 to 5 hours, 6 to 10 hours, 11 to 15 hours, 16 to 20 hours, 21 to 25 hours, 26 to 30 hours, 31 to 35 hours, and More than 35 hours). The open numeric response field permitted any value between 0 and 70.

This experiment was included to provide evidence as to which type of response format is preferable for this type of question. While it was not possible to assess the accuracy of each response format given that the true values were not independently available, other analyses were possible, including comparisons of response distributions, break-off rates, proportions answering "Don't know", and the amount of time taken to answer the question.

Split-ballot experiment 2

The second split-ballot experiment concerned whether respondents intended to apply for the Tax-Free Childcare scheme (Yes – definitely, Yes – probably, No – probably not, No – definitely not). Specifically, it compared a version of the question in which the "Don't know" answer option was hidden and appeared only if the respondent pressed 'Next' without having selected an answer, with a version in which the "Don't know" answer option was visible on screen from the start. The first version of the question, in which the "Don't know" answer option was initially hidden, is consistent with the default approach used throughout the questionnaire.

The 2022 face-to-face CEYSP found that among respondents eligible to answer the question, 13 per cent responded with "Don't know". The face-to-face administration involved the interviewer asking the respondent whether he or she would apply for Tax-Free Childcare, and if the respondent answered 'yes' or 'no', probing whether the respondent would "probably or definitely apply" or would "probably or definitely not apply" respectively. An explicit "Don't know" option was not offered but was accepted if provided by the respondent.

This experiment was included to shed light on whether an explicit "Don't know" answer option should be displayed for this type of question. While the population parameter for those who don't know whether they will apply for the Tax-Free Childcare scheme is unknown, the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP survey provides the best available estimate of this parameter. This is because the face-to-face CEYSP has a relatively high response rate and gives respondents the option to answer "Don't know" freely and easily. It should be noted, however, that differences in the proportions choosing "Don't know" between the push-to-web and face-to-face modes could be, at least in part, a result of social desirability effects due to the presence of an interviewer.

Split-ballot experiment 3

The third split-ballot experiment concerned the reasons why respondents would probably not, or would not, apply for the Tax-Free Childcare scheme.

Data from the 2022 face-to-face CEYSP showed that at the equivalent question in this survey, one of the most frequently provided responses was "I don't use formal childcare", chosen by 19 per cent of those responding. In the face-to-face CEYSP this question does not use a showcard from which parents choose their answer; rather, interviewers pose the question and then code respondents' verbatim answers to one or more of a list of answer options displayed on their CAPI laptop.

For the 2023 push-to-web mode trial survey, at this question respondents were provided with a list of 12 answer options and asked to select all that applied. For one version of the question the answer option "I/we don't use formal childcare" was the first of the 12 answer options presented. For the other version of the question, this answer option was moved down the list to occupy the eighth position.

This experiment was included to understand how the order in which answer options are presented affects the likelihood of choosing the available answer options. The theory of survey satisficing holds that responding to a survey question fully and accurately requires a certain level of cognitive effort, and that the required level of effort may sometimes exceed a respondent's motivation or ability . As a result, a respondent may seek ways to avoid expending this cognitive effort, while giving the appearance of responding to the survey appropriately.

This behaviour is termed 'satisficing'. In the context of the present type of question, satisficing would be manifested by respondents choosing not every answer option that applies to them, but rather enough answer options to provide – in their estimation – a satisfactory answer to the question. To the extent that respondents will read down the list of answer options and will select those that apply to them, satisficing behaviour will result in a higher proportion of respondents choosing "I/we don't use formal childcare" when it appears higher (versus lower) in the list of answer options.

Split-ballot experiment 4

The fourth split-ballot experiment concerned the factors that influenced respondents' decision to work, among respondents who were in paid employment, and who lived with a partner.

Like split-ballot experiment 3, this experiment was included to understand how the order in which answer options are presented affects the likelihood of choosing the available answer options, providing a measure of satisficing behaviour.

Data from the 2022 face-to-face CEYSP showed that at the equivalent question in this survey, 14 per cent of respondents chose the answer option "childcare arrangements" from a showcard which contained 19 separate answer options. The answer option "childcare arrangements" was placed 17th in the list of answer options, succeeded only by "Other (please specify)" and "None of these reasons".

For the 2023 push-to-web mode trial survey, respondents were provided with a set of 19 answer options and asked to select all that applied. For one version of the question this answer option occupied the 17th position (as per the face-to-face CEYSP), while for the other version it was the first of the 19 answer options presented.

To the extent that respondents engage in satisficing behaviour when answering this question we would expect a higher proportion of respondents to choose "childcare arrangements" when it is presented as the first answer options, rather than towards the end.

Questionnaire structure and content

The structure of the final questionnaire is shown in Table 2. Content that was absent from the 2019 push-to-web mode trial questionnaire but included in the 2023 push-to-web mode trial questionnaire is flagged with "[NEW]".

Table 2: Questionnaire structure

Section	Content
Household composition	Confirmation that selected child is resident in the household
Household composition	The number and ages of children in the household
Household composition	Whether the parent has a partner in the household
Household composition	Marital status [NEW]
Working status	Parent's working status
Working status	Partner's working status.
Working patterns	Frequency of working at home for parent and partner [NEW]
Use of childcare	Types of formal and/or informal childcare providers used in a typical term-time week
Use of childcare	Use of childminder agencies [NEW]
Use of childcare	Location of after-school clubs [NEW]
Use of childcare	Days of the week on which formal providers are used
Use of childcare	Number of hours of formal provision received per week
Use of childcare	Number of hours of informal provision received per week
Use of childcare	What would lead parent to start using formal childcare [NEW]
Use of childcare	Use of formal childcare in school holiday periods
Use of childcare	Ease of finding childcare in school holiday periods [NEW]

Section	Content
Use of childcare	Why child didn't receive childcare in school holiday periods [NEW].
Childcare costs	Awareness of and application for free hours of childcare
Childcare costs	Understanding of the 30 free hours [NEW]
Childcare costs	Take-up of free hours of childcare
Childcare costs	Days on which free hours received [NEW]
Childcare costs	Satisfaction with free hours [NEW]
Childcare costs	Eligibility for 2-year-old offer [NEW]
Childcare costs	Receipt of support from employer [NEW]
Childcare costs	Receipt of tax credits
Childcare costs	Awareness of Universal Credit [NEW]
Childcare costs	Sources of financial help for childcare
Childcare costs	Payment for formal childcare
Childcare costs	Awareness and receipt of Tax-Free childcare
Childcare costs	Intention to apply for Tax-Free childcare [NEW]
Impact of support	Impact of support received on the parent's (and partner's) employment
Impact of support	Impact on family life; impact on family finances [NEW]
Details of provider(s)	Reasons for choosing the child's main formal provider
Details of provider(s)	Reasons for choosing the child's main informal provider
Details of provider(s)	Whether main formal provider advises on home learning activities, and whether family acts on this advice [NEW]
Details of provider(s)	Checks carried out by family before choosing main formal provider [NEW]
Home learning environment	Frequency with which child engages in home learning activities
Home learning environment	The number of books/e-books in the home aimed at children aged 5 or under
Home learning environment	Parents' perceptions of the amount of learning and play activities they do with their child
Home learning environment	Sources of information about home learning activities [NEW]
Home learning environment	Use of family hubs and children's centres [NEW]

Section	Content
Home learning environment	Extent to which parent believes it is the responsibility of schools and childcare providers, rather than parents, to help children aged 5 and under to learn to speak and hold conversations [NEW]
Digital technology	Whether children take part in learning activities using a digital electronic device at home
Digital technology	Which digital electronic devices children use at home; reasons why children use digital electronic devices at home.
Use of childminders	Whether parent has ever looked into using a childminder for their child [NEW]
Use of childminders	Why parent has chosen not to use a childminder for their child [NEW]
Attitudes towards childcare	Parent's perceptions of the availability, quality, and affordability of formal childcare in their local area
Attitudes towards childcare	Which factors parent feels are most important for delivering high quality childcare and early years education for pre-school children [NEW]
Attitudes towards childcare	Which factors parent feels are most important for delivering high quality childcare and out-of-school activities for school aged children [NEW]
Attitudes towards childcare	Whether parent experiences problems finding childcare flexible enough to meet their needs [NEW]
Attitudes towards childcare	What types of childcare would parent like to use more of [NEW]
Attitudes towards childcare	At what times does childcare provision need improving in order to meet parent's needs [NEW]
Attitudes towards childcare	What changes to term-time childcare provision would help parent to work [NEW]
Awareness of childminder registration	Awareness that childminders need to be registered with Ofsted of with a Childminder Agency [NEW]
COVID-19	Perceptions of harm done to child's social and educational development from the Coronavirus pandemic [NEW]
Employment	Hours parent works [NEW]
Employment	Whether parent is enrolled in a course [NEW]
Employment	How many paid jobs parent has [NEW]; whether parent does any shift work [NEW]

Section	Content
Employment	The impact of shift work on the parent's childcare arrangements [NEW]
Employment	Influences on parent's decision to work [NEW]
Employment	Childcare-related reasons parent is working
Employment	Employment preferences
Employment	Reasons why non-working parent is not working
SEN and disabilities	Whether child has a special educational need (SEN)
SEN and disabilities	Reason child has been identified as having a SEN [NEW]; whether child has a long-term illness, health condition or impairment [NEW]; what kind of long-term illness, health condition or impairment child has [NEW]; childcare-related experiences of parents with a child with a SEN or disability.
Demographics	Child's ethnicity; parent's ethnicity [NEW]
Demographics	Parent's sex [NEW]
Demographics	Parent's age
Demographics	Parent's highest qualification
Demographics	Tenure
Demographics	Sources of income [NEW]
Demographics	Family annual income
Demographics	Whether parent is claiming back any childcare costs through Universal Credit [NEW]
Demographics	consent to recontact [NEW]
Respondent experience (optional)	Parent's perception of the survey length
Respondent experience (optional)	Parents enjoyment of completing the survey
Respondent experience (optional)	ease of completing survey, parts found to be difficult; suggestions for improvements [NEW]

Online questionnaire implementation and functionality

Parents accessed the online survey by navigating to www.childcaresurvey.org, which took them to the survey's 'landing page'. This landing page displayed the logos of both the Department for Education and Ipsos and included the survey's title (Childcare and out of school activities survey), followed by some introductory text, and a text box into which they could enter their unique six-character alphanumeric access code.

The landing page (and all subsequent survey screens) included, at the top, accessibility options (which enabled parents to vary the font size and the background colour), and links, at the bottom, to: information about Ipsos, the survey's Privacy Policy, a document of FAQs about the survey, and a 'Contact Us' option from which parents could email the survey's dedicated helpline.

The landing page also instructed parents:

- that they could click on information buttons next to certain words or questions to see additional information;

- that if they did not know the answer to a question, or would prefer not to answer, they could press the 'next' button at the bottom of the screen, and these options would appear;

- that they could exit the survey and return to it later by logging back in with their access code;

- that they could complete the survey on a desktop, laptop, tablet or smartphone (but should use the same device if exiting the survey and returning to it later).

Invitation and reminder mailings

Mailings

The survey mailings closely followed the approach and designs of the 2019 push-to-web mode trial mailings. These mailings were designed following the principles set out in the Tailored Design Method developed by Professor Don Dillman and colleagues , and were subjected to cognitive and usability testing with parents. There were three survey mailings:

- Mailing 1: the initial invitation letter, despatched on 22 September 2023.

- Mailing 2: a reminder letter, despatched on 11 October 2023.

- Mailing 3: a reminder postcard, despatched on 27 October 2023.

All mailings were posted second class and were addressed to the named benefit recipient of the child sampled from the Child Benefit Register.

Copies of the materials used for each mailing can be found in Appendix A.

Mailing 1 (initial invitation letter)

The Mailing 1 letter was a single sheet of A4, printed in colour, and double-sided. The front of the letter introduced the survey and asked the parent to complete it and provided the information necessary for completion (the survey's URL, and the parent's unique access code) using prominent graphically designed elements.

Also included was a QR code which parents could use to navigate to the survey's landing page. QR codes were not included on the 2019 push-to-web mode trial letters but were included on the 2023 letters given the public's increased familiarity with them, brought about in part due to their extensive use during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The letter used a blue colour scheme and took a gentle tone in terms of wording. The first header stated "Share your views on services for children and families and receive a [£5/£10/£15] thank you", with the incentive value dependant on the experimental incentivisation condition to which the address had been assigned. The letter informed parents that the survey "should take around 30 minutes to complete".

The reverse of the letter provided answers to FAQ, such as 'Who is carrying out the survey?', 'I don't use childcare or out of school activities, do you still want to hear from me?' and 'How was I chosen for this survey?'. The reverse also included information about privacy and data protection, the dedicated survey email address and freephone number via which parents could withdraw from future mailings or ask questions, and contact details for the Department for Education for parents wanting further information about the background to the research.

Mailing 2 (reminder letter)

As per the Mailing 1 letter, the Mailing 2 letter was also a single sheet of A4, printed in colour, and double-sided. The front of the letter introduced the survey, asked the parent to complete it, and provided the information necessary for completion (the survey's URL, a QR code pointing at the survey's landing page for those wishing to use it, and the parent's unique access code) using prominent graphically designed elements which differed in style from the Mailing 1 design.

The Mailing 2 letter had a more insistent tone than the Mailing 1 letter. It used a red colour scheme, intended to convey a sense of urgency and a need for action, and included as the first header "We need to hear from as many parents as possible", and as the second header "Taking part will help improve services for families".

The letter specified that the parent would receive a [£5/£10/£15] gift voucher on completion of the survey, with the incentive value dependant on the experimental incentivisation condition to which the case had been assigned, and that the survey "should take around 30 minutes to complete".

The reverse of the letter contained the same FAQ, privacy, and contact information as the Mailing 1 letter (albeit using the red colour scheme).

Mailing 3 (reminder postcard)

Mailing 3 was an A5 postcard, printed in colour and double-sided, and enclosed within a white C5 envelope.

The front of the postcard showed the Department for Education's logo, and an image of a jigsaw with one piece missing alongside the words "We're missing a key piece" (this replaced the design used in the 2019 push-to-web mode trial of a paper-chain of people with one person missing, alongside the words "Please help us complete the chain").

The reverse of the postcard contained the information necessary for completion (the survey's URL, a QR code pointing at the survey's landing page for those wishing to use it, and the parent's unique access code) using prominent graphically designed elements similar in design to Mailing 1, and also using a blue colour scheme. The text used the principle of scarcity, by stating that "There is still time to complete the childcare and out of school activities survey".

Two versions of the reminder postcard were created, one for each of the "Deadline on reminder postcard" experimental conditions (stated vs not stated). For full details about the experimental design, see section 3.3 'Experimental design'. For those parents assigned to the 'deadline stated' experimental condition, the front of the postcard included the text "The survey will close on 10 November!", and the reverse included "The survey will be closing on 10 November, so this is the last contact from us you will receive." For those parents assigned to the "deadline not stated" experimental condition, the front of the postcard did not make any reference to the survey's closing date, and the reverse included the text "The survey will be closing soon, so this is the last contact from us you will receive."

Respondent communications

The survey helpline was contacted on 33 occasions, via email or phone. This constitutes less than half of one per cent of the 7,500 issued addresses.

Thirteen of these contacts were queries relating to receiving the gift voucher. Two parents had queries about accessing the survey, and two requested to be opted out of the survey. Four parents made contact to provide updated contact or personal details. Twelve contacts to the phone helpline were empty voicemails. These may have been parents checking the legitimacy of the survey.

Results

Response rates

Reporting response rates

Two separate measures of response are presented in this report:

- The proportion accessing the survey. This is defined as the proportion of all issued access codes that were entered at the survey's landing page, irrespective of subsequent progress.

- The proportion completing the survey. This is defined as the proportion of all issued access codes for which the survey was both accessed, and for which all presented questions were answered.

Overall response rates

As shown in Table 3, 25.8 per cent of all issued addresses accessed the survey, and 22.7 per cent completed the survey. For the purposes of comparison, the response rate for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP (which used no incentives) was 39.4 per cent .

The response rate of 22.7 per cent for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial falls within the range of other major national push-to-web surveys. For instance, the Participation Survey (for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport) achieved a household-level response rate of 32 per cent in 2022-23; the Food and You 2 Survey (for the Food Standards Agency) achieved a household-level response rate of 29 per cent in 2022-23; the GP Patient Survey (for NHS England) achieved an individual-level response rate of 27 per cent in 2024; the Active Lives Adult survey (for Sport England) achieved a household-level response rate of 21 per cent in 2021-22; the Gambling Survey for Great Britain (for the Gambling Commission) achieved a household-level response rate of 17 per cent in 2023; and the British Social Attitudes Survey (carried out by the National Centre for Social Research for a range of funding organisations) achieved a household-level response rate of 13 per cent in 2022.

Caution should be exercised in making response rate comparisons between these surveys and the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, given certain methodological differences. For instance: the comparator surveys included an offline mode (most commonly paper, but telephone was used for the British Social Attitudes survey); most of them allowed more than one individual in the household to complete the survey, and report the household-level response rate under which a household is considered to be productive if at least one member of the household completes an interview; and most of them used the Postcode Address File (PAF) as a sampling frame, for which the ineligibility (or 'deadwood') rate is lower. Each of these differences favour a higher response rate in the comparator surveys than the 2023 push-to-web mode trial.

Table 3: Response as a proportion of the issued sample

Response	Number	%
Accessed	1,936	25.8
Complete	1,705	22.7
Issued sample	**7,500**	**100.0**

Evidence from the 2018 face-to-face CEYSP shows that at around 19 per cent of addresses listed on the Child Benefit Register, the selected child had moved address by the time the interviewer visited (Child Benefit continues to be paid where a family moves but does not inform HMRC of their new address).

While face-to-face interviewers make efforts to trace the selected child to his or her new address, in the absence of a face-to-face interviewer, no such efforts were possible for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial. It is therefore likely that in the great majority of these cases, the push-to-web mailings were not received by the family of the selected child. As such, the 22.7 per cent completion rate is not synonymous with the co-operation rate.

An estimated co-operation rate can be calculated as the number of completed interviews as a proportion of those addresses at which the family of the selected child received the survey mailings. The proportion of addresses at which the family of the selected child received the survey mailings must itself be estimated and can be done so via two components: i) the proportion of sampled addresses from which the selected child had moved, and ii) the proportion of these addresses from which the current residents forwarded the survey mailings on to the selected child's new address.

With respect to i) evidence from fieldwork outcomes from previous waves of the face-to-face CEYSP shows that for 19 per cent of issued addresses, the selected child was found to have moved. With respect to ii) no direct evidence is available, however anecdotal evidence from interviewers working on the face-to-face CEYSP shows that residents often have no knowledge of the sampled family, perhaps because another family has lived at the address since the sampled family moved out. If we assume a wide range of between two per cent (at the low end) and ten per cent (at the high end) of push-to-web survey mailings being forwarded on, the estimated co-operation rate falls between 27.4 per cent, and 27.9 per cent .

Response rates by experimental design

Figure 1 and Table 4 show survey response by individual experimental condition. The completion rate ranged from 19.0 per cent (£5 incentive, deadline stated) to 28.9 per cent (£15 gift voucher, deadline not stated).

Figure 4: Response by experimental condition
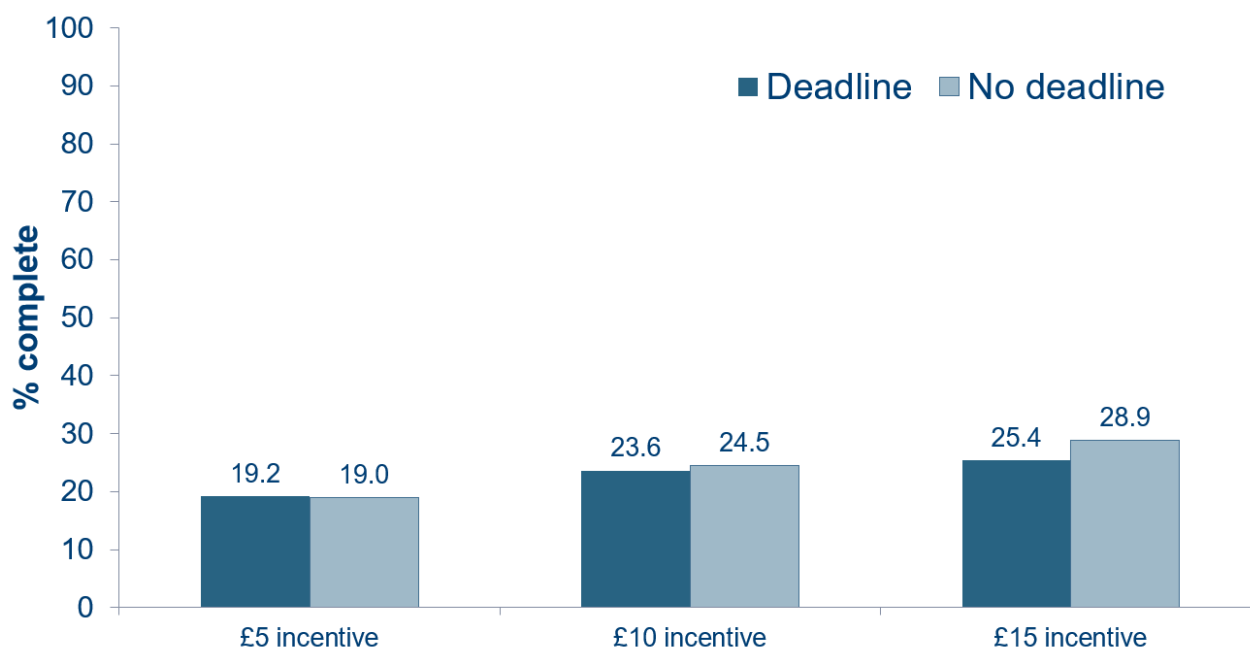
Table 5: Response by experimental condition

Incentive	Deadline	Issued sample (Number)	Accessed (%)	Complete (%)
£5 gift voucher	Stated	1,612	22.3	19.2
£5 gift voucher	Not Stated	1,613	21.8	19.0
£10 gift voucher	Stated	1,125	27.6	23.6
£10 gift voucher	Not Stated	1,125	27.6	24.5
£15 gift voucher	Stated	1,012	28.3	25.4
£15 gift voucher	Not Stated	1,013	31.3	28.9
Total	-	**7,500**	**25.8**	**22.7**

Response was significantly associated with incentivisation. Completion rates for sampled parents offered the £5, £10 and £15 gift vouchers were 19.1 per cent, 24.0 per cent, and 27.1 per cent respectively. Post-hoc (Tukey's HSD) tests among the three incentivisation conditions showed that all three pairwise comparisons were significant; that is, both the £10 and £15 gift vouchers increased response compared to the £5 gift voucher, and the £15 gift voucher increased response compared to the £10 gift voucher.

This pattern of response exhibits diminishing returns for each £5 unit increase in the value of the incentive. Raising the incentive from £5 to £10 increased the completion rate by a factor of 1.26, while raising it further from £10 to £15 increased the completion rate

by a factor of 1.13 . Raising the incentive from £5 to £15 increased the completion rate by a factor of 1.42.

Turning to whether the survey deadline of 10 November was stated or not stated on the third and final mailing, the decision was taken during fieldwork to keep the survey open until 15 November to reach the target of at least 1,700 completed interviews. Keeping the survey open beyond the stated deadline might have led parents in the 'deadline stated' condition to be less likely to respond after 10 November than parents in the 'deadline not stated' condition. Therefore, we have analysed response by the deadline treatment twice: once including only those who completed up to and including the stated deadline of 10 November, and once including all those who completed up to and including the final data collection date of 15 November.

In neither of these analyses was response significantly associated with deadline condition. In the former analysis (which included only those parents who completed by the stated deadline) the completion rate was 22.0 per cent in the 'deadline stated' condition and 23.1 per cent in the 'deadline not stated' condition. In the latter analysis (which included those parents who completed after the stated deadline) the completion rate was 22.2 per cent in the 'deadline stated' condition and 23.3 per cent in the 'deadline not stated' condition.

The interaction between the incentivisation and deadline treatments was tested, both for those completing by the stated deadline, and separately including those who completed after the stated deadline. The interaction was not significant under either of these analyses. That is, the relationship between completion rates and incentivisation did not differ by whether or not the survey deadline was stated.

As a final piece of analysis, we compared the completion rate between the two deadline conditions excluding all parents who had completed the survey prior to the arrival of Mailing 3, on 1 November 2023. In addition, parents who completed the survey after the stated deadline of 10 November were recoded as unproductive. This provides a more direct test of the effect of stating the deadline, as responses that could not have been affected by the deadline treatment are removed. This analysis found that the completion rate was significantly higher in the 'deadline not stated' condition than in the 'deadline stated' condition (5.4% vs 4.3% respectively). This suggests that rather than serving as a response maximisation technique, stating a deadline might actually damage survey response. The data are silent on the reasons behind this finding, but possibilities include i) that the deadline was interpreted as hassling or hectoring in nature and put some parents off completing the survey, and ii) that there were some parents in the 'deadline stated' condition who initially intended to complete the survey, but later assumed that they had missed the deadline, even though they had not.

Response rates by geodemographics

There was a significant relationship between response and region of England. The completion rate was highest in the East Midlands (25.2%), the East of England (25.2%), the West Midlands (24.2%) and the South West (24.2%). The completion rate was lowest in the North East (21.9%), the North West (20.6%) and London (19.1%) (see Table 5).

Turning to the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, the completion rate was also below average in London, and above average in both the West Midlands and the East of England. But the regional variations in the completion rates bore few other similarities between the surveys.

Table 6: Response by region

Region	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Issued sample (Number)	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Accessed (%)	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Complete (%)	2023 F2F CEYSP (%)
North East	343	25.9	21.9	45.7
North West	1,034	23.8	20.6	36.9
Yorkshire and the Humber	763	24.9	22.3	41.5
East Midlands	647	28.0	25.2	33.1
West Midlands	854	28.1	24.2	44.0
East of England	831	27.4	25.2	42.1
London	1,165	23.4	19.1	34.8
South East	1,169	26.3	23.6	40.0
South West	694	26.2	24.2	40.3
Total	**7,500**	**25.8**	**22.7**	**39.3**

The relationship between area deprivation (as defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)) and response was statistically significant. Parents living in more deprived areas of the country were less likely to complete the survey. Fewer than one in five (18.3%) parents living in the most deprived quintile of areas completed the survey, rising to around three in ten (29.4%) of those living in the least deprived quintile (see Table 6).

The 2023 face-to-face CEYSP also showed a significant relationship between area deprivation and completion rates, but this relationship was far weaker. Parents living in the least deprived areas of the country were the most likely to complete the survey, but the completion rate in this IMD quintile was only 4.8 percentage points higher than the

rate in the median IMD quintile, which had the lowest completion rate. By contrast, for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, the difference in the completion rate between the most and the least deprived IMD quintiles was 11.1 percentage points.

Table 7: Response by area deprivation (IMD quintiles)

Index of multiple deprivation quantile	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Issued sample (Number)	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Accessed (%)	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Complete (%)	2023 F2F CEYSP (%)
1st quintile – most deprived	2,035	22.2	18.3	39.4
2nd quintile	1,601	24.7	21.3	38.0
3rd quintile	1,412	24.3	21.5	37.6
4th quintile	1,294	29.3	26.9	39.7
5th quintile – least deprived	1,158	31.7	29.4	42.4
Total	**7,500**	**25.8**	**22.7**	**39.3**

The Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) is a subset of the Income Deprivation Domain of the Index of Multiple Deprivation. IDACI measures the proportion of all children aged 0 to 15 years living in income deprived families, and as such is of particular relevance to the CEYSP given the survey's focus on matters concerning childcare usage, payments, and affordability.

The relationship between IDACI quintiles and response was statistically significant, and very similar to the pattern observed for the IMD quintiles. Parents living in more deprived areas, as defined by IDACI, were far less likely to complete the survey, with response among those living in the most deprived areas 10.2 percentage points lower than among those living in the least deprived areas (see Table 7). By comparison, while there was significant variation in response by IDACI quintiles for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP survey, the extent of this variation was far smaller, with a difference of only 3.8 percentage points in response between the most and least deprived areas.

Table 8: Response by IDACI quintiles

Income deprivation affecting children index quantile	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Issued sample (Number)	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Accessed (%)	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Complete (%)	2023 F2F CEYSP (%)
1st quintile – most deprived	1,985	23.2	18.9	38.5
2nd quintile	1,750	23.0	20.0	38.5
3rd quintile	1,398	25.7	23.2	38.6
4th quintile	1,274	29.0	26.4	39.8
5th quintile – least deprived	1,093	31.6	29.1	42.3
Total	**7,500**	**25.8**	**22.7**	**39.3**

Those living in rural areas responded at a slightly higher rate than did those living in urban areas (24.4% vs 22.4%) however this difference was not statistically significant. For the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, those living in rural areas also responded at a higher rate than did those living in urban areas (42.1% vs 38.7%) and this difference was statistically significant.

Table 9: Response by rurality

Response	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Issued sample (Number)	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Accessed (%)	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Complete (%)	2023 F2F CEYSP (%)
Rural	1,140	26.6	24.4	42.1
Urban	6,360	25.7	22.4	38.7
Total	**7,500**	**25.8**	**22.7**	**39.3**

Response rates by family characteristics

The relationship between the number of children aged 0 to 14 in the family at the time of fieldwork (as derived from information provided by HMRC) and response was significant, such that families with three or more children were significantly less likely to complete the survey (19.3%) than families with one child (24.1%) or those with two children (23.4%) (see Table 9).

This pattern can be compared to response for the 2018 face-to-face CEYSP, for which the opposite pattern was in evidence: the response rate was 46.2 per cent for families with one child, rising to 54.9 per cent for families with three or more children[1].

Table 10: Response by number of children in the family

No of children	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Issued sample (Number)	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Accessed (%)	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Complete (N)	2018 F2F CEYSP (%)
1	2,567	27.0	24.1	46.2
2	3,282	26.5	23.4	52.0
3+	1,651	22.7	19.3	54.9
Total issued sample	**7,500**	**25.8**	**22.7**	**50.9**

Families with only pre-school children in the household at the time of fieldwork were significantly more likely to complete the survey (28.5%) than families with both pre- and school-age children (22.0%), or with school-age children only (21.7%) (see Table 10).

This pattern differs from the 2018 face-to-face CEYSP, for which response is highest among families with both pre-school and school-age children (54.8%) and is equivalent among families with pre-school children only (49.0%), and school-age children only (also 49.0%)[1].

Table 11: Response by age of children in the family

Age of children	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Issued sample (Number)	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Accessed (%)	2023 push-to-web mode trial: Complete (%)	2018 F2F CEYSP (%)
Pre-school only	1,049	31.1	28.5	49.0
Pre- and school-age	1,815	25.3	22.0	54.8
School-age only	4,636	24.8	21.7	49.0
Total issued sample	**7,500**	**25.8**	**22.7**	**50.9**

---

[1] The 2018 face-to-face CEYSP provides the most recent comparable data because it is the last survey where the child was the sampling unit, and where the data from the sampling frame about children living at the address should match the composition of the interviewed household. From the 2019 face-to-face CEYSP onwards the sampling unit changed to the address, and an interview could be carried out with a new family at the address if the sampled family had moved.

Break-offs

Overall break-off rates

Among parents who accessed the survey and were not screened out , 89.0 per cent went on to complete the survey. The remaining 11.0 per cent 'broke-off' at some point prior to the end of the survey (see Table 11).

Break-off rates varied significantly by the experimental incentivisation treatment. Among parents offered the £5 gift voucher, 12.8 per cent of those starting the survey broke off before the end, compared with 11.7 per cent under the £10 condition and 8.2 per cent under the £15 condition. Post-hoc (Tukey's HSD) tests among the three incentivisation conditions showed that the only significant pairwise comparison was between the £5 and £15 conditions.

Table 12: Response among all accessing the survey, by incentivisation condition

Survey outcome	All (%)	Incentivisation condition: £5 (%)	Incentivisation condition: £10 (%)	Incentivisation condition: £15 (%)
Base: All accessing survey and not screened out (number)	*1,916*	*705*	*613*	*598*
Complete	89.0	87.2	88.3	91.8
Incomplete (break-off)	11.0	12.8	11.7	8.2
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Break-offs by questionnaire section

Table 12 shows how break-offs were distributed across the sections of the questionnaire. One in eleven (9.0%) break-offs occurred at the first question (SclnHH), at which parents were asked to confirm that the selected child (listed on the Child Benefit Register) was living in their household.

Parents were next most likely to break-off during the 'Attitudes to childcare' section of the questionnaire (17.5% of break-offs) followed by the 'Childcare costs' section (17.1%).

Table 13: Break-off points for accessed but incomplete surveys

Questionnaire section	Number	%
Confirmation selected child is in household	19	9.0
Household composition	17	8.1
Working status	14	6.6
Use of formal childcare	9	4.3
Use of informal and holiday childcare	26	12.3
Childcare costs	36	17.1
Impact of support	2	0.9
Details of provider(s)	2	0.9
Home learning environment	24	11.4
Use of childminders	0	0.0
Attitudes towards childcare	37	17.5
Employment	17	8.1
SEN and disabilities	2	0.9
Demographics	6	2.8
Total accessing but not completing the survey	**211**	**100.0**

Break-offs by device type

Among parents accessing the survey, those using a smartphone were significantly more likely to break-off before reaching the end (11.8%) than were those using a desktop or laptop computer (6.9%) (see Table 13) .

Because the device used to access the survey was self-selected by parents, differences in break-off rates between devices cannot be attributed to differences in the quality of the survey implementation or usability between devices, or to the characteristics of parents. This pattern is, however, consistent with the possibility that parents starting the survey on a smartphone were more likely to become distracted or disturbed while completing it, and to have not returned to complete it later.

Table 14: Break-offs by device type

Survey outcome	Total (%)	Smartphone (%)	Desktop /laptop (%)	Tablet (%)	Other/ unknown (%)
Base: All accessing survey and not screened out (number)	*1,916*	*1,497*	*391*	*18*	*10*
Complete	88.1	87.2	92.6	77.8	60.0
Incomplete (break-off)	11.0	11.8	6.9	22.2	40.0
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Date of access

The effectiveness of the survey materials in persuading parents to go online to do the survey – the 'push-to-web' – can be understood by examining the distribution of access codes entered across the fieldwork period. Figure 2 shows the date on which the survey was first accessed, for each of the 1,936 addresses that accessed the survey.

This chart shows three 'spikes' in access, corresponding to the dates on which Mailings 1, 2 and 3 arrived.

Figure 15: Date on which the survey was first accessed, among all addresses accessing the survey
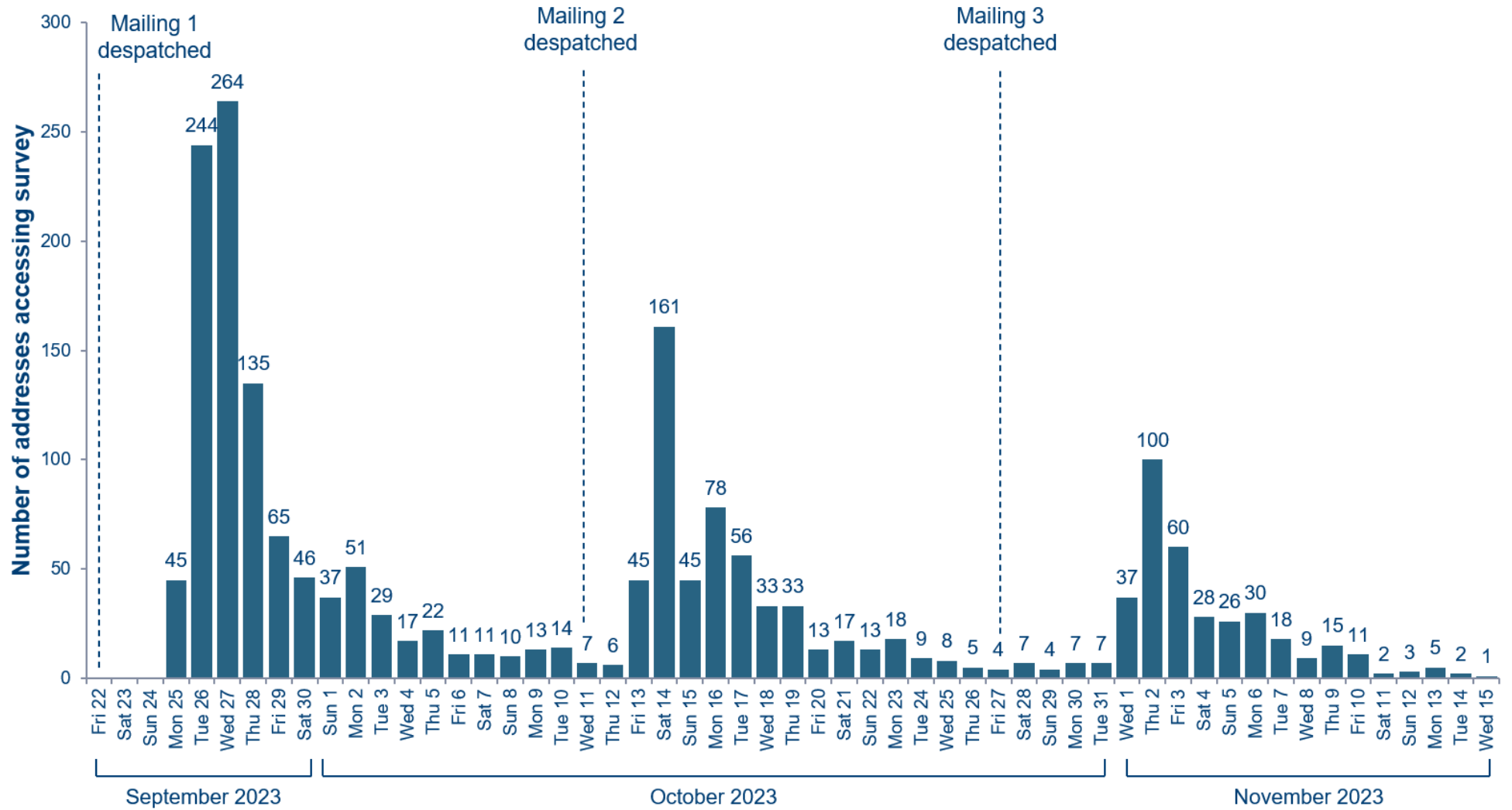
Day of week, and time of day, of completion

The great majority of parents (96.2%) completed the survey on the same day that they first accessed it.

The most common day of the week for parents to complete the survey was Tuesday (19.9%), followed by Wednesday (18.2%) and Thursday (16.9%). Parents were less likely to complete the survey on a Saturday (14.1%), Monday (12.8%) or Friday (10.9%), and were least likely to complete it on a Sunday (7.2%).

This pattern of response likely bears a greater relationship to the days of week that the three mailings arrived, than to more generalised preferences among parents. However, it is notable that there are 'dips' in the numbers of parents accessing the survey for the Sundays following both Mailings 1 and 2: more parents accessed the survey the day before (on the Saturday) or the day after (on the Monday). This suggests that Sundays may be parents' least preferred day for completing surveys of this nature.

By time of day, almost half of parents completed the survey in the afternoon (47.7%), just under a third completed it in the morning (31.4%), and around one in five completed it in the evening (20.9%)[2].

Days elapsed between invitation and completion

The number of days it takes sample members to complete a push-to-web survey after receiving their invitation letter has implications for the survey's budget. Earlier completion requires fewer reminder mailings, saving on both printing and postage costs.

The mean number of days between the arrival of Mailing 1 and survey completion was 16.4 days, with a standard deviation of 14.3 days as shown by Table 14. The median number of days was 11.0.

There was a significant relationship between the mean number of days taken to complete the survey and the incentivisation condition, as shown in Table 13. Parents in the £15 condition were the fastest to respond (mean of 13.9 days) while parents in the £5 condition were slowest (mean of 16.5 days).

We consider these differences in the wider context of survey costs and survey response in section 4.10 'Impact of incentivisation on survey costs'.

---

[2] Morning was defined as between midnight and 11:59, afternoon as between noon and 17:59, and evening as between 18:00 and 23:59.

Table 16: Days elapsed between first mailing and completion by incentive condition

Incentivisation condition	Number	Days elapsed: Mean	Days elapsed: Std. Dev.	Days elapsed: Median
£5 gift voucher	615	16.5	14.6	18.0
£10 gift voucher	541	15.6	14.4	13.0
£15 gift voucher	549	13.9	13.9	7.0
Total	**1,705**	**15.4**	**14.3**	**11.0**

Device type

Over three-quarters (77.5%) of parents completed the survey using a smartphone, with around one in five (21.4%) using a desktop or laptop computer (see Table 15). Parents were considerably more likely to complete the 2023 push-to-web mode trial survey using a smartphone than were parents completing the 2019 push-to-web mode trial survey (77.5% vs 45.6% respectively). This is likely to reflect both an increase in the use of smartphones over time, as well as the inclusion of a QR code on the survey materials which parents could use to access the questionnaire.

Table 17: Completed surveys by device type

Device type	%
Base: All completing survey (number)	1,705
Smartphone	77.5
Desktop/laptop	21.4
Tablet	0.8
Other/unknown device	0.3
Total	**100.0**

Among parents completing the survey using a smartphone, 87.7 per cent completed the survey in 'one sitting'. That is, they did not leave the survey and restart it later in the day, or on a subsequent day. This was not significantly different among parents who completed the survey using a desktop or laptop, for whom 86.8 per cent completed the survey in one sitting.

Analyses on how the questionnaire length varied by device type is presented in section 4.8 'Questionnaire length'.

Use of QR codes to access survey

Each of the three mailings sent to sampled parents included both the survey's URL which parents could type directly into a web browser, and a QR code which parents could use to navigate directly to the online survey.

Table 16 shows the route by which parents accessed the survey, among those who responded. Most parents (62.6%) accessed the survey by typing the survey's URL into a browser, with the remainder (37.4%) using the QR code. Among parents completing the survey on a smartphone, almost half (47.0%) accessed the survey via the QR code.

Table 18: Use of QR codes to access survey

Route to enter survey	All (%)	Device: Smart phone (%)	Device: Desktop /laptop (%)	Device: Tablet (%)	Device: Other device (%)
Base: All completing survey (number)	*1,705*	*1,321*	*346*	*14*	*6*
Survey URL	62.6	53.0	96.7	92.9	33.3
QR code	37.4	47.0	3.3	7.1	66.7
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Questionnaire length

Questionnaire timing data is based on interviews that were completed in 'one sitting'; that is, where the parent did not leave the survey and restart it later in the day, or on a subsequent day. Around one in eight (12.6%) completed surveys were completed in more than one sitting. Of these, most (70.6%) were completed later in the same day, with the remainder (29.4%) being completed on a different day.

The mean time taken to complete the survey was 22 minutes and 17 seconds (median = 19 minutes and 43 seconds). This was faster than the expected time conveyed to parents in the survey materials, which stated that "the survey should take around 30 minutes to complete". There was, however, considerable variation in completion times, reflecting the extensive routing within the questionnaire (standard deviation = 10 minutes and 54 seconds, with around five in six (83.7%) parents completing the survey within 30 minutes, and the remainder (16.3%) taking more than 30 minutes to complete the survey).

Table 17 shows the average length of the questionnaire broken down by questionnaire section, for all parents who completed the survey. Parents who did not answer a particular section of the questionnaire because they were routed past it based on earlier answers are excluded from the section-specific calculations.

Table 19: Length of questionnaire, by questionnaire section

Questionnaire section	Mean length	Median length
Base: All completing survey in one sitting (number)	*1,491*	*1,491*
Household composition	0m 54s	0m 42s
Working status	0m 35s	0m 29s
Use of formal childcare	0m 47s	0m 33s
Use of informal and holiday childcare	1m 42s	1m 26s
Childcare costs	2m 17s	1m 48s
Impact of support	0m 51s	0m 37s
Reasons for using formal provision	0m 40s	0m 32s
Reasons for using informal provision	0m 36s	0m 30s
Home learning environment	3m 31s	2m 52s
Use of childminders	0m 30s	0m 23s
Attitudes towards childcare	4m 23s	3m 43s
Employment	2m 40s	2m 14s
SEN and disabilities	0m 26s	0m 11s
Demographics	1m 48s	1m 28s
Recontact and gift voucher	0m 52s	0m 43s
Respondent experience questions	0m 40s	0m 26s
Total questionnaire length	**22m 17s**	**19m 43s**

By device type, completion on smartphones took a mean of 21 minutes and 57 seconds, and completion on desktops or laptops took a mean of 23 minutes and 11 seconds (see Table 18). This difference was not significant. Completion on tablets and other devices have been excluded from this analysis due to low base sizes.

Table 20: Length of questionnaire by device type

Device type	Mean length	Median length	Base
Desktop/laptop	23m 11s	20m 44s	316
Smartphone	21m 57s	19m 18s	1,158
Total questionnaire length	**22m 17s**	**19m 43s**	**1,491**

Consent to recontact

Towards the end of the questionnaire parents were asked for their consent to be recontacted within the next two years to be invited to take part in follow-up research about childcare.

Three-quarters (74.6%) of parents consented to recontact (see Table 19), and this proportion did not vary significantly by incentivisation condition. This cannot be interpreted as meaning that the value of the incentive offered – and therefore presumably the value of the incentive that might be offered for future research – has no effect on parents' willingness to consent to future research. This is because these data only include those parents who were happy to complete the survey for the incentive they were offered.

By comparison, consent to recontact in the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP - in the absence of any incentive - was almost ten percentage points higher (83.6%).

Table 21: Consent to recontact, by incentivisation condition

Consent	2023 Push-to-web mode trial: All (%)	2023 Push-to-web mode trial: Incentivisation condition: £5 (%)	2023 Push-to-web mode trial: Incentivisation condition: £10 (%)	2023 Push-to-web mode trial: Incentivisation condition: £15 (%)	2023 F2F CEYSP (%)
Base: All (number)	*1,684*	*605*	*536*	*543*	*5,715*
Consented to recontact	74.6	75.4	73.3	75.1	83.6
Did not consent to recontact	25.4	24.6	26.7	24.9	16.4
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Impact of incentivisation on survey costs

Increasing the value of the incentive offered in a push-to-web survey will ordinarily increase the total cost of the survey. However, this increase will not be directly proportional to the increase in the value of the incentive for two reasons. First, higher-value incentives tend to produce higher response rates, and also lead those who complete the survey to respond sooner , meaning that fewer reminder mailings are required for a given achieved sample size. For each achieved interview in the £5 incentivisation condition, 14.6 mailings were required. This fell to 11.2 in the £10 condition, and to 9.8 in the £15 condition. Second, the cost of purchasing and administering incentives tends to be a relatively small proportion of a survey's total cost, which will include other elements such as staff time, direct costs (including printing and postage costs, and the costs of hosting the survey), and overheads.

Analyses of costs and response data for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial survey indicates that had the survey been conducted with a £5 conditional gift voucher offered to all sampled parents, and with 1,700 interviews achieved, then :

- increasing the value of the incentive from £5 to £10, while holding the number of achieved interviews constant, would represent a 100 per cent increase in the value of each incentive, but would increase the total cost of the survey by only seven per cent. The completion rate would rise by five percentage points, or by 26 per cent, meaning that each one per cent increase in the total cost of the survey,

up to a seven per cent increase, would be associated with a 3.7 per cent increase in the completion rate.

- increasing the value of the incentive from £5 to £15, while holding the number of achieved interviews constant, would represent a 200 per cent increase in the value of each incentive, but would increase the total cost of the survey by only 16 per cent. The completion rate would rise by eight percentage points, or by 42 per cent, meaning that each one per cent increase in the total cost of the survey, up to a 16 per cent increase, would be associated with a 2.6 per cent increase in the completion rate.

A further point of relevance to this analysis is that, as described in section 4.13 'Weighting', the efficiency of the weighting increased with the value of the incentive offered. Specifically, the efficiency of the child-level weight was 90.3 per cent for the £5 gift voucher condition, 92.4 per cent for the £10 gift voucher condition, and 95.7 per cent for the £15 gift voucher condition. A higher weighting efficiency is directly related to the effective sample size achieved, where the effective sample size measures the size of an (unweighted) simple random sample that would have provided the same precision as the design being implemented (effective sample size = actual sample size x weighting efficiency).

If we focus on the effective sample sizes rather than the actual sample sizes, we find that increasing the value of the incentive from £5 to £10, while holding the number of achieved interviews constant, increases the total cost of the survey by six per cent (as opposed to seven per cent when using the actual sample sizes), and increasing the value of the incentive from £5 to £15, while holding the number of achieved interviews constant, increases the total cost of the survey by 15 per cent (as opposed to 16 per cent when using the actual sample sizes).

Respondent experience questions

As detailed in section 3.4 'Questionnaire development' five optional questions were included at the end of the survey, after parents had submitted their answers, asking them about their experiences of completing the survey.

Responses to these questions are analysed by incentivisation condition. When considering these results it should be borne in mind that while parents were randomly allocated to each of the three incentivisation conditions, survey completion was the result of a self-selection process under which parents decided whether or not to participate in light of the incentive offered. As such, parents' characteristics and motivations will be confounded with the incentivisation condition. For instance, parents completing in the £5 condition might, on average, have had a greater interest in the survey topic, and this might have affected their enjoyment of the survey, or their perceptions of its length. Or alternatively, parents completing in the £15 condition might, on average, have been more motivated by the receipt of a gift voucher, such that the incentive led to a more positive

predisposition to the survey, which might have affected their enjoyment of the survey, or their perceptions of its length.

Overall response to respondent experience questions

The overwhelming majority of parents (93.8%) chose to answer the respondent experience questions (see Table 20), suggesting that parents remained engaged throughout the survey.

Among parents in the £15 incentivisation condition 95.8 per cent answered the respondent experience questions, compared to 92.6 per cent in the £10 condition and 93.0 per cent in the £5 condition. These differences were not statistically significant.

Table 22: Whether respondent experience questions answered, by incentivisation condition

Whether answered	All (%)	Incentivisation condition: £5 (%)	Incentivisation condition: £10 (%)	Incentivisation condition: £15 (%)
Base: All completing survey (number)	*1,705*	*615*	*541*	*549*
Answered	93.8	93.0	92.6	95.8
Not answered	6.2	7.0	7.4	4.2
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Perceptions of survey length

As discussed in section 4.8 'Questionnaire length', the mean questionnaire length was 22 minutes and 17 seconds, shorter than the estimate of "about 30 minutes" in the mailings.

Nevertheless, while most parents (67.3%) who completed the survey in one sitting felt that the survey was "about the right length" (see Table 21), a considerable minority (32.3%) felt that it was "too long". Almost no parents (0.4%) felt that the survey was "too short".

Perceptions of survey length varied significantly across the incentivisation conditions, with 61.6 per cent of those offered a £5 gift voucher feeling that the survey was "about the right length", rising to 69.0 per cent among those offered the £10 gift voucher, and 71.9 per cent among those offered the £15 gift voucher. Post-hoc (Tukey's HSD) tests showed that the £5 condition differed significantly from both the £10 and £15 conditions, but that there was no significant difference between the £10 and the £15 conditions.

Table 23: Perceptions of survey length, by incentivisation condition

Question - Answer	All (%)	Incentivisation condition: £5 (%)	Incentivisation condition: £10 (%)	Incentivisation condition: £15 (%)
Base: All choosing to answer, and who completed survey in one sitting (number)	*1,410*	*502*	*445*	*463*
Did you find this survey to be too long, about the right length, or too short? - Too long	32.3	37.8	30.8	27.9
Did you find this survey to be too long, about the right length, or too short? - About right	67.3	61.6	69.0	71.9
Did you find this survey to be too long, about the right length, or too short? - Too short	0.4	0.6	0.2	0.2
Did you find this survey to be too long, about the right length, or too short? - Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

There was a significant relationship between perceptions of survey length and the length of time parents actually took to complete the survey. Among parents who completed the survey in 15 minutes or less, around three-quarters (76.1%) felt that it was "about the right length" (see Table 22). This fell to just over half (51.6%) among parents who took more than 30 minutes to complete the survey.

Among parents who took between 20 and 30 minutes to complete the survey – for whom the stated survey length in the materials could be said to be either accurate, or conservative – most (63.8%) felt that the survey was "about the right length", but a considerable minority (35.6%) felt that it was "too long". Among parents who took between 25 and 35 minutes to complete the survey – for whom the stated survey length in the materials could be said to be accurate – most (57.5%) felt that the survey was "about the right length", but over two in five (42.1%) felt that it was "too long".

Table 24: Perceptions of survey length, by length of time taken to complete survey

Question - Answer	All (%)	15 mins or less (%)	>15 mins, up to 20 mins (%)	>20 mins, up to 30 mins (%)	>30 mins (%)
Base: All choosing to answer, and who completed survey in one sitting (number)	1,410	347	414	436	213
Did you find this survey to be too long, about the right length, or too short? - Too long	32.3	23.9	28.0	35.6	47.9
Did you find this survey to be too long, about the right length, or too short? - About the right length	67.3	76.1	71.7	63.8	51.6
Did you find this survey to be too long, about the right length, or too short? - Too short	0.4	0.0	0.2	0.7	0.4
Did you find this survey to be too long, about the right length, or too short? - Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**

Enjoyment of completing the survey

Most parents reported that they enjoyed completing the survey "a fair amount" (53.6%), with a small proportion (6.5%) reporting that they enjoyed completing it "a great deal" (see Table 23). A significant minority (36.0%) however reported that they did not enjoy completing the survey very much, and a small number of parents (3.8%) said they did not enjoy completing it at all.

The proportion of parents who reported that they enjoyed completing the survey "a great deal" or "a fair amount" showed no significant variation by incentivisation condition.

Table 25: Enjoyment of completing the survey, by incentivisation condition

Question - Answer	All (%)	Incentivisation condition: £5 (%)	Incentivisation condition: £10 (%)	Incentivisation condition: £15 (%)
Base: All choosing to answer (number)	1,588	568	499	521
How much, if at all, did you enjoy completing this survey? - A great deal	6.5	5.5	6.8	7.5
How much, if at all, did you enjoy completing this survey? - A fair amount	53.6	53.9	52.5	54.3
How much, if at all, did you enjoy completing this survey? - Not very much	36.0	36.4	36.7	34.9
How much, if at all, did you enjoy completing this survey? - Not at all	3.8	4.2	4.0	3.3
How much, if at all, did you enjoy completing this survey? - Total	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**	**100.0**
How much, if at all, did you enjoy completing this survey? - Net: great deal/fair amount	60.1	59.3	59.3	61.8
How much, if at all, did you enjoy completing this survey? - Net: Not very much/at all	39.8	40.7	40.7	38.2

Ease of completing the survey

The great majority of parents (79.8%) reported that the survey was "easy" or "very easy" to complete, with only 2.4 per cent considering it "difficult" or "very difficult" to complete (see Table 24).

The proportion of parents reporting that the survey was "easy" or "very easy" to complete showed no significant variation by incentivisation condition.

Table 26: Ease of completing the survey, by incentivisation condition

Question	All (%)	Incentivisation condition: £5 (%)	Incentivisation condition: £10 (%)	Incentivisation condition: 15 (%)
Base: All choosing to answer	1,588	564	500	524
How easy did you find this survey to complete? - Very easy	33.6	35.1	34.8	30.9
How easy did you find this survey to complete? - Easy	46.2	46.5	43.6	48.5
How easy did you find this survey to complete? - Neither easy nor difficult	17.8	15.8	19.4	18.3
How easy did you find this survey to complete? - Difficult	1.6	1.6	1.6	1.7
How easy did you find this survey to complete? - Very difficult	0.8	1.1	0.6	0.6
How easy did you find this survey to complete? - Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**
How easy did you find this survey to complete? - Net: Very/fairly easy	79.8	81.6	79.4	79.4
How easy did you find this survey to complete? - Net: Very/fairly difficult	2.4	2.7	2.2	2.3

Suggestions for improving the survey

Parents were asked to provide any comments or suggestions they had for how the survey could be improved, via an open text response box. These answers were coded into a code frame for the purposes of analysis.

The great majority of parents (81.2%) did not provide any comments or suggestions as to how the survey could be improved. Among the 18.8 per cent of parents who did provide a response most (60.9%) suggested a change that they felt would improve the survey. The remaining parents either stated explicitly that they had no comments or suggestions, used the question as an opportunity to provide details of their own childcare-related experiences or opinions, provided positive feedback about the survey, or gave thanks for the opportunity to participate.

Among parents who did provide a comment or suggestion as to how the survey could be improved, around a third (34.8%) mentioned specific content that they would have liked the survey to cover (see Table 25). These suggestions included: more questions about children with special educational needs and disabilities, questions that address the financial strain associated with childcare and the cost-of-living crisis, questions about parental wellbeing and mental health, and questions about children's own preferences of childcare and out of school activities.

One in four (24.9%) parents commented that the survey, or specific questions or topics within the survey, were not relevant to them (with some suggesting that they would be more applicable to families with younger children). Around one in seven (14.9%) commented that the survey was too long , and a similar proportion (13.8%) felt that the survey should have made use of open text boxes so they could explain their answers, or provide specifications at "other" answer options.

Table 27: Parents' suggestions for improving the survey

Suggested improvement	%
Base: Parents who provided a suggestion for improving the survey (number)	*181*
Specific content suggestions	34.8
Survey is not relevant to situation	24.9
Survey is too long	14.9
Request for open text boxes	13.8
Questions are too long, ambiguous, or have too many answer options	11.6
Questions should consider the other children in the family	9.4
Questions are too similar to one another	4.4
Survey is too sensitive or intrusive	3.9

Suggested improvement	%
Survey should have a progress bar	2.8
Don't like questions on income	2.2
Comments concerning the gift voucher	1.7

Note: Percentages sum to more than 100 per cent as some parents provided a response which fell into more than one answer category

Split-ballot experiments

Four split-ballot experiments were embedded in the questionnaire. These are described in section 3.4 'Questionnaire development'. The full questionnaire specifications for each experiment can be found in Appendix B.

Split-ballot experiment 1

Split-ballot experiment 1 investigated how response distributions of numeric data (the number of hours the child spent in childcare in a typical term-time week) differed when this data was captured via an answer scale using banded hours, versus an open-numeric answer field.

There were two versions of the experiment, one for the number of hours children spent in formal childcare, and the other for the number of hours children spent in informal childcare. The type of question (banded versus open-numeric) was randomised across parents but was kept consistent for any given parent (that is, a parent presented with banded answer options for hours in formal childcare would also be presented with banded answer options for hours in informal childcare, and vice versa for the open-numeric answer field).

Hours in formal childcare

Figure 3 shows the response distributions for the number of hours the child spent in formal childcare, for each condition. For this analysis the responses to the open-numeric condition were coded into the same bands as those used for the banded condition, for the sake of comparability. There were no significant differences between the conditions with respect to the proportion of parents falling into each of the nine bands.

A risk of this analysis is that that low bases sizes for each of the nine bands may have obscured a meaningful difference between the conditions. The analysis was therefore re-run, with the nine hourly bands collapsed into just three: up to 10 hours, 11 to 25 hours, and 26 or more hours. This analysis again did not find any significant differences between the conditions with respect to the proportion of parents falling into each of the bands (see Figure 4).

Figure 28: Results of split-ballot experiment 1, hours in formal childcare in nine bands
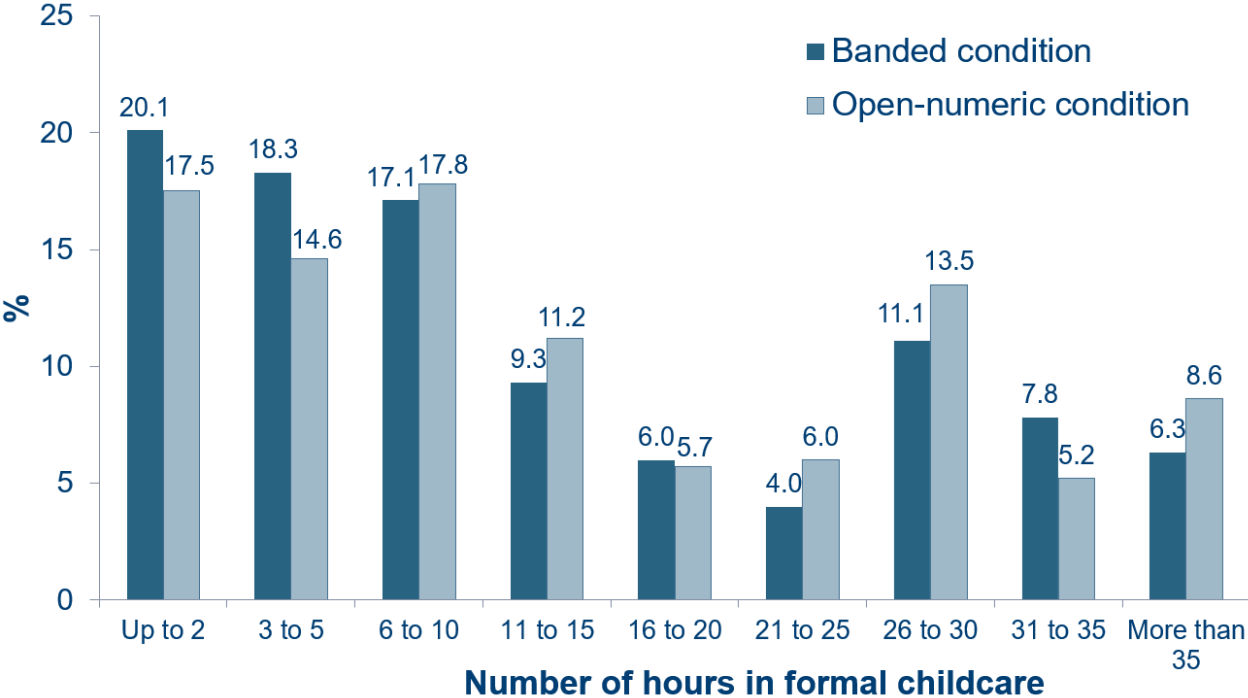
Base: Parents whose child received formal childcare in a typical term-time week, random half allocated to each condition (774)

Figure 29: Results of split-ballot experiment 1, hours in formal childcare collapsed into three bands
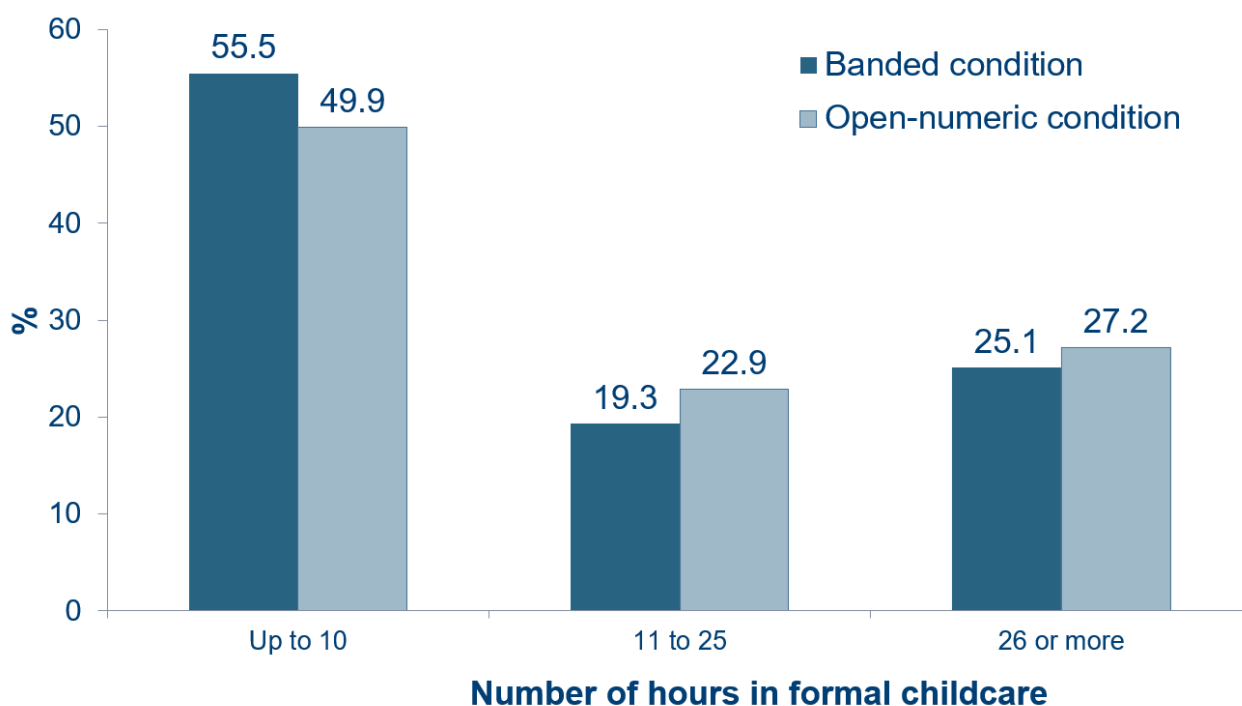
Base: Parents whose child received formal childcare in a typical term-time week, random half allocated to each condition (774)

Aside from the response distributions, the two conditions may have differed in other respects of relevance to data quality. To explore this, we analysed i) the numbers of break-offs, ii) the numbers of parents answering "don't know", and iii) how long it took parents to provide their answers.

With respect to break-offs, only one parent broke off on reaching the banded question (that is, reached the question, but proceeded no further with the questionnaire), and no parent broke off on reaching the open-numeric question.

With respect to "don't know" responses, no parent provided a "don't know" response under either condition.

Turning to how long it took parents to provide their answer, those in the banded condition took a mean of 22 seconds, significantly faster than those in the open-numeric condition, who took a mean of 27 seconds.

Overall, this pattern of results suggests that the accuracy and quality of the data is broadly equivalent between the two conditions. There is evidence that asking for a specific figure from parents was a more cognitively demanding task than asking parents to choose from a number of bands, given that it took them longer to provide their answer. But an analysis of the response distributions, break-offs, and "don't know" responses does not provide any evidence that this increased cognitive demand threatened data quality.

The open-numeric condition provides data at a finer resolution and allows the data to be analysed as a continuous variable, as well as combined into whichever bands might be of analytical interest, and so is to be preferred.
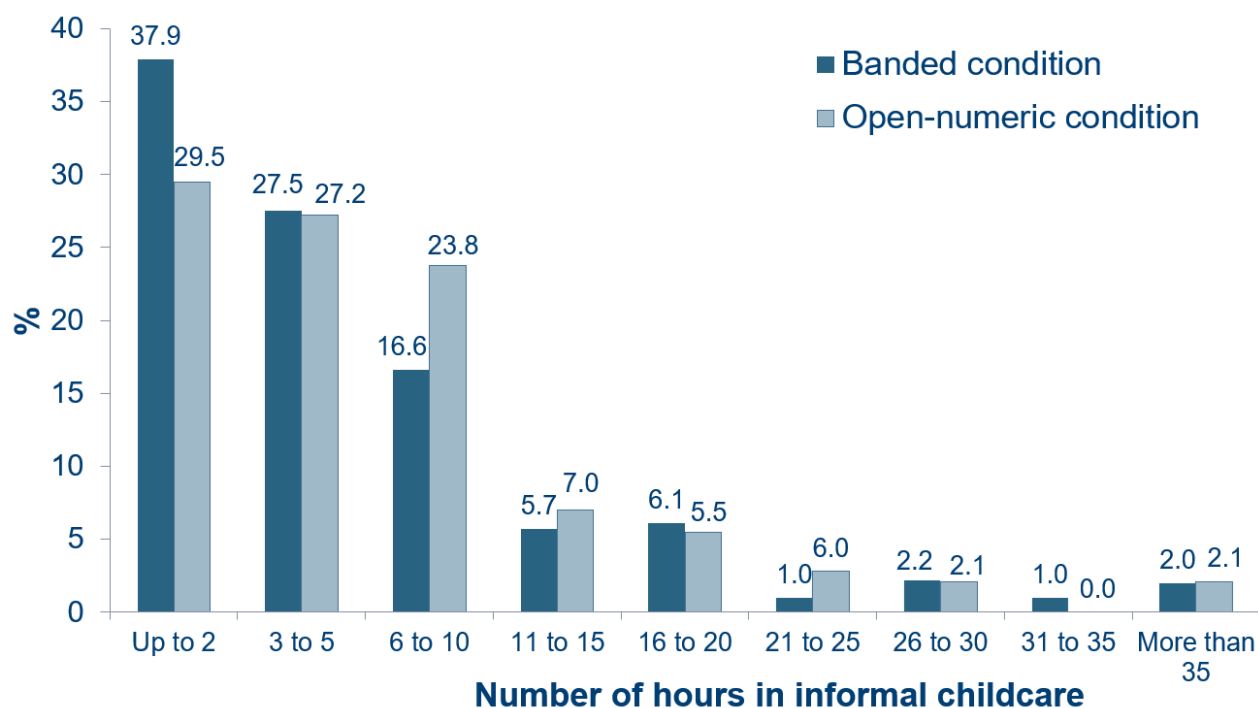
Hours in informal childcare

Figure 5 shows the response distributions for the number of hours the child spent in informal childcare, for each condition. As per the approach for hours in formal childcare, for this analysis the responses to the open-numeric condition were coded into the same bands as those used for the banded condition, for the sake of comparability.

There were significant differences between the conditions for two of the bands: "up to 2 hours" was more likely to be chosen by parents in the banded than the open-numeric condition (37.9% vs 29.5% respectively), and "6 to 10 hours" was more likely to be chosen by parents in the open-numeric than the banded condition (23.8% vs 16.6% respectively).

As such, which question type was used made a meaningful difference to the response distribution, with the estimate for the number of hours in informal childcare being higher under the open-numeric administration.

Figure 30: Results of split-ballot experiment 1, hours in informal childcare in nine bands

Base: Parents whose child received informal childcare in a typical term-time week, random half allocated to each condition (965)

Aside from the response distributions, the two conditions may have differed in other respects of relevance to data quality. To explore this, we analysed i) the numbers of

break-offs and ii) the numbers of parents answering "don't know". Timestamp data was not collected for these questions so it was not possible to compare how long it took parents to provide their answers.

With respect to beak-offs, one parent broke off on reaching the banded question (that is, reached the question, but proceeded no further with the questionnaire), and five parents broke off on reaching the open-numeric question. While this difference was not significant, it is worth considering whether there were any features of the open-numeric question that might have increased the likelihood of a parent breaking off. Of potential relevance to this, among parents who answered the open-numeric question (and who completed the questionnaire), 4.7 per cent entered '0' into the open-numeric answer field. These may have been parents who typically used less than one hour of informal childcare per week but who were unable to enter this as the open-numeric answer field only allowed integer values . As such, allowing for non-integer values, with appropriate instructions to the parent, would likely be a worthwhile adaptation.

With respect to the numbers of parents answering "don't know", no parent chose this answer option in either the banded or open-numeric condition.

Split-ballot experiment 2

Split-ballot experiment 2 investigated how response distributions were affected by the treatment of a "Don't know" answer option, with this answer option being visible on screen in one condition and hidden in the other condition (only appearing on screen if 'Next' was pressed without an answer option having been selected).

As shown in Table 4.24, this treatment had a considerable impact on the response distributions. While the proportions of parents choosing "Yes – definitely" and "No – definitely not" did not differ significantly between the conditions, the remaining three answer options ("Yes – probably", "No – probably not", and "Don't know") all showed significant differences.

The greatest difference was for the "Don't know" answer option, which was chosen by almost none (0.2%) of the parents in the 'hidden' condition and by 30.7 per cent of parents in the 'visible' condition, a difference of 30.6 percentage points. The next greatest difference was for the "No – probably not" answer option, which was chosen by almost half (47.1%) of parents in the 'hidden' condition and by 28.1 per cent in the "visible" condition, a difference of 19.0 percentage points. The smallest (but still significant) difference was for the "Yes – probably" answer option, which was chosen by one in five (20.1%) parents in the 'hidden' condition and by one in eight (12.4%) in the 'visible' condition, a difference of 7.7 percentage points.

These results suggest that regardless of whether an online survey makes clear up-front that "Don't know" answer options are available to respondents, whether this option is hidden or is visible on screen when a question is presented has major implications for

response distributions. The present data imply that around 30 per cent of parents did not know whether they would apply for Tax-Free Childcare. When a "Don't know" answer option was not visible when the question appeared almost all these parents placed themselves into one of the two answer options which indicated the greatest levels of uncertainty in the absence of a "Don't know" answer option, namely "Yes – probably" and "No – probably not".

Almost no parents chose to 'unhide' the "Don't know" answer option and select it. This may have been for a variety of reasons, including that:

- parents may not have read the instruction at the start of the survey relating to providing "Don't know" responses,

- parents may have forgotten the instruction at the start of the survey relating to the provision of "Don't know" responses,

- parents may have felt that one of the existing answer options gave a satisfactory enough account of their intentions without needing to 'unhide' and choose the "Don't know" answer option,

- parents may have considered "Don't know" to be the only satisfactory account of their intentions, but may not have been willing to expend the cognitive effort to deviate from their established pattern of selecting from the immediately available answer options, and

- parents may have considered "Don't know" to be the only satisfactory account of their intentions, but may have had concerns about causing a technical error if they pressed 'Next' without having selected an answer option.

The results of this split-ballot experiment can be compared to the data from the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, for which no response options were presented visually. Rather, the interviewer read out the question "Will you apply for Tax-Free Childcare". If the respondent answered "yes" or "no" the interviewer probed whether they would "definitely" or "probably" apply/not apply. If the respondent said they didn't know whether or not they would apply, or words to that effect, the interviewer recorded this as a "Don't know" response.

Table 26 shows that 13.3 per cent of respondents to the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP answered "Don't know", roughly in the middle of the proportions obtained under the 'hidden' and 'visible' conditions from the 2023 face-to-face mode trial. These results highlight the difficulty of designing online survey questions that are comparable to their face-to-face counterparts that do not present the "Don't know" response option, but allow for it to be volunteered spontaneously.

Table 31: Results of split-ballot experiment 2

Question - Answer	2023 push-to-web mode trial condition: "Don't know" hidden (%)	2023 push-to-web mode trial condition: Don't know" visible (%)	2023 F2F CEYSP: "Don't know" accepted if spontaneously volunteered (%)
Base: Parents with child(ren) aged 0-11, who are unaware of the Tax-Free Childcare scheme or are aware but have not applied for it. Random half allocated to each condition for P2W survey. (number)	552	540	3,629
Will you apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - Yes – definitely	8	6.5	5.9
Will you apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - Yes – probably	20.1	12.4	14
Will you apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - No – probably not	47.1	28.1	26.2
Will you apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - No – definitely not	24.6	22.2	40.6
Will you apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - Don't know	0.2	30.7	13.3
Will you apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - Total	**100**	**100**	**100**
Will you apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - Net: Yes	28.1	18.9	19.9
Will you apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - Net: No	71.7	50.4	66.8

Split-ballot experiment 3

Split-ballot experiment 3 investigated how response distributions were affected by varying the position of a single answer option at a 'select all that apply' question. Parents were asked why they would not apply for the Tax-Free Childcare scheme. The answer option "I/we don't use formal childcare" was the first of the 12 answer options in the 'at beginning' condition, and eighth of the 12 answer options in the 'towards end' condition.

Two in five (41.2%) parents chose the answer option "I/we don't use formal childcare" when it appeared first, significantly more than chose this option when it was placed towards the end (28.3%) (see Table 27).

The only other answer option for which there was a significant difference between the conditions was "Another reason", which was the final answer option in both conditions. This answer option was chosen by 8.6 per cent of parents in the 'at beginning' condition, and by almost twice as many parents (16.4%) in the 'towards end' condition.

A possible explanation for this pattern of results is that responding parents tended to concentrate their attention predominantly on the answer options highest in the list, and if these did not satisfactorily encapsulate their reasons, skimmed down the list paying relatively less attention to the subsequent codes. In this manner some parents in the 'towards end' condition may have failed to notice the "I/we don't use formal childcare" answer option, and on arriving at the end of the answer option list without having identified an answer option with sufficiently captured their reasons, chose "Another reason". This explanation represents a form of survey satisficing, whereby survey respondents seek to limit the cognitive effort they expend in answering a question while giving the appearance of responding to the question appropriately (see section 3.4 'Questionnaire development' for a fuller explanation of survey satisficing).

It should also be noted that for some parents the answer option "I/we don't use formal childcare" may have applied to them, but they may have been looking for an answer option that expressed this same meaning in a different form of words. For instance, these parents might have been looking for an answer option that stated "I don't need any childcare" or "My children don't receive formal childcare". If parents spent less time and effort considering answer options lower (versus higher) in the list, this mismatch might have contributed to parents being less likely to choose the "I/we don't use formal childcare" answer option when it appeared lower down the list.

Parents in the 'at beginning' condition chose a mean of 1.39 answer options. This did not differ significantly from the mean of 1.46 answer options in the 'towards end' condition.

Table 32: Results of split-ballot experiment 3

Question – Answer	Condition: "Childcare arrangements" answer option at beginning (%)	Condition: "Childcare arrangements" answer option towards the end (%)
Base: Parents with child(ren) aged 0-11, who are unaware of the Tax-Free Childcare scheme or are aware but have not applied for it, and who will probably or definitely not apply for it. Random half allocated to each condition. (number)	304	245
Why will you [probably/definitely] not apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - I/we don't use formal childcare	41.2	28.3
Why will you [probably/definitely] not apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - I/we are not working	12.7	16.4
Why will you [probably/definitely] not apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - I don't think I/we earn enough	3.7	5.6
Why will you [probably/definitely] not apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - I think my/our income is too high	17.6	18.3
Why will you [probably/definitely] not apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - I/we claim Tax Credits	5.3	5.6
Why will you [probably/definitely] not apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - I/we claim Universal Credit	15.1	19.1
Why will you [probably/definitely] not apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - I/we wouldn't be eligible	12.2	13.5
I/we use Employer-Supported Childcare/childcare vouchers	6.1	4.3
I don't understand what it is/how it works	7.3	7.6
Why will you [probably/definitely] not apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - My/our childcare provider is not signed up	0.8	1.3
Why will you [probably/definitely] not apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - I don't think the payments are worth my while/too much hassle	9	9.9
Why will you [probably/definitely] not apply for Tax-Free Childcare? - Another reason	8.6	16.4

Split-ballot experiment 4

Like split-ballot experiment 3, split-ballot experiment 4 also investigated how response distributions were affected by varying the position of a single answer option at a 'select all that apply' question. Working parents were asked what influenced their decision to work. The answer option "Childcare arrangements" was the first of the 19 answer options in the 'at beginning' condition, and 17th of the 19 answer options in the 'towards end' condition.

Almost three in ten (28.3%) parents chose the answer option "Childcare arrangements" when it appeared first, significantly more (around two and a half times as many) than chose it when it was placed towards the end of the answer options (11.2%) (see Table 28).

The only other answer option for which there was a significant difference between the two conditions was "I've no choice because I need to contribute to the household income". This was the third answer option in the 'at beginning' condition, and the second answer option in the 'towards end' condition. This answer option was chosen by 57.3 per cent of parents in the 'at beginning' condition, and by 68.5 per cent of parents in the 'towards end' condition.

As per the results of split-ballot experiment 3, this pattern of results can also be explained by the theory of survey satisficing, whereby survey respondents seek to limit the cognitive effort they expend in answering a question, while giving the appearance of responding to the question appropriately (see section 3.4 'Questionnaire development' for a fuller explanation of survey satisficing).

Specifically, parents may have scanned through the list of answer options, choosing the first three or four that seemed most relevant to them, rather than every answer option which was relevant to them. Parents in the 'towards end' condition may have paid relatively less attention to the answer options further down the list, or may not have felt the need to choose additional answer options if they had already chosen what they considered to be a satisfactory number, thus lowering the proportion choosing "Childcare arrangements". Parents in both the 'at beginning' and 'towards end' conditions chose a mean of 3.76 answer options.

It is also instructive to consider in more detail the proportions of parents choosing the "I've no choice because I need to contribute to the household income" answer option, which was more than ten percentage points lower in the 'at beginning' condition (when it was preceded by "Childcare arrangements") than in the 'towards end' condition (when it was not preceded by "Childcare arrangements"). This may be due to a certain amount of overlap between the two answer options. For instance, some parents may feel that they

need to work and contribute to the household income because their current childcare arrangements are expensive. Such parents who choose "Childcare arrangements" in the 'at beginning' condition might feel that they have already given a satisfactory account of this reason, and so satisfice by not also choosing "I've no choice because I need to contribute to the household income".

Table 33: Results of split-ballot experiment 4

Question - Answer	Condition: "I/we don't use formal childcare" at beginning (%)	Condition: "I/we don't use formal childcare" towards end (%)
Base: Parents in paid work and who live with a partner. Random half allocated to each condition (number)	506	536
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - Childcare arrangements	28.3	11.2
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - I've no choice because my husband/wife/partner does not work	4.3	4.7
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - I've no choice because I need to contribute to the household income	57.3	68.5
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - I like to have my own money/the extra money	47.2	44.8
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - I need to keep on contributing to my pension	34.4	36.6
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - I want to get out of the house	17.2	16
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - I enjoy working	50.6	51.9
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - I would feel useless without a job	27.7	28.7
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - My career would suffer if I took a break	25.5	25.7
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - I can work from home some of the time	14	13.1
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - I can work from home most/all of the time	16.6	16.8
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - My husband/wife/partner can work from home some of the time	9.9	9.1
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - My husband/wife/partner can work from home most/all of the time	5.7	7.1
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - I don't have to work during school holidays	11.7	15.3

Question - Answer	Condition: "I/we don't use formal childcare" at beginning (%)	Condition: "I/we don't use formal childcare" towards end (%)
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - My husband/wife/partner doesn't have to work during school holidays	2.6	3.5
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - I can work flexi-time	15.6	16.2
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - My husband/wife/partner can work flexi-time	5.5	3.7
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - Another reason	1.6	1.7
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work? - None of these reasons	5.5	3.9

Note: Answer options are shown in the order of presentation of the 'at beginning' condition. For the 'towards end' condition, the answer option "Childcare arrangements" was the 17th option, positioned in between the answer options 'My husband/wife/partner can work flexi-time' and "Another reason".

Weighting

Survey weights are values that are assigned to each interviewed sample unit to assign greater, or lesser, importance to that unit when calculating survey estimates. For instance, in the present context assigning a weight of 2 to a parent would double the influence of that parent's survey responses on the obtained survey estimates, relative to a parent with a weight of 1. And conversely, a weight of 0.5 would halve the influence of that parent's survey responses, relative to a parent with a weight of 1.

Survey weights are primarily calculated to i) account for biases at the sample selection stage (known as 'design weighting' or 'selection weighting'), and ii) correct for survey non-response by ensuring the achieved sample matches the known profile of the population on key demographic variables (known as 'calibration weighting').

Survey weights were calculated for the push-to-web mode trial sample to allow comparable analyses to be carried out between survey estimates from the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, and survey estimates from the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP (these comparisons of key survey estimates are presented in section 4.15).

This was achieved by weighting the push-to-web mode trial sample using the same approach, and to the same child- and family-level population profile, as used for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP.

Because only incentivisation had an impact on response among the experimental treatments (see section 4.1 'Response rates'), the analyses concentrated on comparisons of the three incentive groups: £5 gift voucher, £10 gift voucher, and £15 gift voucher. Weights were therefore generated separately for these three groups, as well as for the full responding sample.

In addition, as analyses were carried out at both the family- and child-levels, weights were generated for both levels: family weights for analyses of data about the family, and child weights for analyses of data about the selected child. This meant that eight sets of weights were generated for the analyses comparing the 2023 push-to-web mode trial estimates to the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP estimates: family- and child-level weights for each of the full sample and the three incentive condition groups.

The approach to generating the family- and child-level weights is described below for the full 2023 push-to-web mode trial sample, but the approach to generating the weights for the three experimental incentives groups was fully equivalent.

Family weights

Family selection weight

The sample was designed to be representative of the population of children of parents receiving Child Benefit, rather than the population of parents or families themselves. This design feature means that larger families are over-represented in the sample . The first stage of the weighting for the family weights therefore corrects for these design features by calculating the appropriate selection weights.

The family selection weight is the inverse of the family's selection probability, so larger households are weighted down:

W1 = 1 / Pr(F); where

Pr(F) = # children aged 0 to 14

Family calibration weight

The next stage of the weighting adjusted the sample using calibration weighting, so that the weighted distribution for region and the number of children in the household at the family-level matched the family-level Child Benefit counts, and the weighted distribution for age groups at the child-level matched child-level Child Benefit counts (see Table 29).

HMRC provided a breakdown of the sampling frame (before exclusions) for different family- and child-level variables for the calculation of the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP weights. These same calibration totals were used to calculate the 2023 push-to-web mode trial weights, to preserve comparability of survey estimates between the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, and the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP.

The family selection weights (W1) were used as the starting weights for the calibration weighting stage.

Table 34: Control totals for the family calibration weights

Family calibration	Population (Number)	Population (%)
Region (families) - North East	247,865	4.6
Region (families) - North West	727,012	13.6
Region (families) - Yorkshire and the Humber	536,874	10
Region (families) - East Midlands	464,456	8.7
Region (families) - West Midlands	587,587	11
Region (families) - East of England	599,830	11.2
Region (families) – London	839,152	15.7
Region (families) - South East	849,479	15.9
Region (families) - South West	498,714	9.3
Region (families) – TOTAL	**5,350,968**	-
Children's age (children) - 0-1	648,525	7.5
Children's age (children) - 2-4	1,523,826	17.7
Children's age (children) - 5-7	1,777,134	20.7
Children's age (children) - 8-11	2,590,879	30.2
Children's age (children) - 12-14	2,051,047	23.9
Children's age (children) - TOTAL	**8,591,411**	-
Number of children in household (families) - 1	2,874,653	53.7
Number of children in household (families) - 2	1,889,440	35.3
Number of children in household (families) - 3	452,270	8.5
Number of children in household (families) - 4+	134,605	2.5
Number of children in household (families) - TOTAL	**5,350,968**	-

The adjustment for the calibration weight was trimmed to avoid extreme weights to give the family weight (W2).

Child weights

Child selection weight

At each sampled address from the Child Benefit sample, a single child was selected at random to be the focus of the detailed child-level questions in the questionnaire.

The child selection weight (W3) is the inverse of the child selection probabilities applied within each household:

W3 = 1 / Pr(C); where

Pr(C) = 1 / (# children aged 0 to 14)

Child calibration weight

The next stage was to produce calibration weights that adjusted the sample of selected children so that the weighted distributions for age/sex groups, region and number of children in the household matched child-level Child Benefit counts (see Table 30). These were the same control totals that were used for weighting the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP sample, again, to preserve comparability of survey estimates between the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, and the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP.

The starting weights for the calibration stage (W4) were obtained by combining the family weight (W2) with the child selection weights (W3): W4 = W2 x W3.

Table 35: Control totals for the child calibration weights

Child calibration	Population (Number)	Population (%)
Region (families) - North East	395,326	0.046
Region (families) - North West	1,183,167	0.138
Region (families) - Yorkshire and the Humber	874,816	0.102
Region (families) - East Midlands	743,436	0.087
Region (families) - West Midlands	972,158	0.113
Region (families) - East of England	953,884	0.111
Region (families) – London	1,331,465	0.155
Region (families) - South East	1,339,192	0.156
Region (families) - South West	797,966	0.093
Region (families) – TOTAL	**8,591,410**	-
Selected child's gender/age (children) - Males: 0-1	333,110	0.039
Selected child's gender/age (children) - Males: 2-4	781,967	0.091
Selected child's gender/age (children) - Males: 5-7	910,542	0.106
Selected child's gender/age (children) - Males: 8-11	1,326,519	0.154
Selected child's gender/age (children) - Males: 12-14	1,050,336	0.122
Selected child's gender/age (children) - Females: 0-1	315,415	0.037
Selected child's gender/age (children) - Females: 2-4	741,859	0.086

Child calibration	Population (Number)	Population (%)
Selected child's gender/age (children) - Females: 5-7	866,592	0.101
Selected child's gender/age (children) - Females: 8-11	1,264,360	0.147
Selected child's gender/age (children) - Females: 12-14	1,000,711	0.116
Selected child's gender/age (children) - TOTAL	**8,591,411**	-
Number of children in household (families) - 1	2,874,400	0.335
Number of children in household (families) - 2	3,778,548	0.44
Number of children in household (families) - 3	1,356,691	0.158
Number of children in household (families) - 4+	581,773	0.068
Number of children in household (families) - TOTAL	**8,591,412**	-

Effective sample size

Disproportionate sampling and sample clustering usually result in a loss of precision for survey estimates. All else being equal, the more variable the weights, the greater the loss in precision.

The effect of the sample design on the precision of survey estimates is indicated by the effective sample size. The effective sample size measures the size of an (unweighted) simple random sample that would have provided the same precision as the design being implemented. The efficiency of a sample is given by the ratio of the effective sample size to the actual sample size.

The estimated 'average' effective sample size and sample efficiency were calculated for both weights (Table 31). These figures provide a guide to the average level of precision of child- and family-level survey estimates. This is an 'average' effect for the weighting – the true effect will vary from question to question. Note that for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP data the calculations include only the effects of the weighting, and not the clustering effects, which will be question-specific.

The lower efficiency for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP sample compared to the 2023 push-to-web mode trial sample is due to children aged 0 to 4 being over-sampled (by a factor of 6.6 relative to children of other ages) for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. No boost was included in the sample design for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial. Disproportionate sampling increases the variance of the selection weights, and hence reduces the efficiency of the sample.

Table 36: Effective sample size and weighting efficiency

	2023 push-to-web mode trial: All	2023 push-to-web mode trial: £5 gift voucher	2023 push-to-web mode trial: £10 gift voucher	2023 push-to-web mode trial: £15 gift voucher	2023 F2F CEYSP
Base: All cases	1,705	615	541	549	5,715
Child weight - Effective sample size	1,643	556	500	525	3,304
Child weight - Sample efficiency	96.3%	90.3%	92.4%	95.7%	57.8%
Family weight - Effective sample size	1,353	457	422	451	2,780
Family weight - Sample efficiency	79.4%	74.3%	78.0%	82.2%	48.6%

2023 face-to-face CEYSP issued sample weights

One final set of weights was required for analyses comparing the achieved sample profile from the 2023 push-to-web mode trial to the sample profile for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP (these sample profile comparisons are presented in section 4.14).

The 2023 face-to-face CESYP used a sample design under which selected children aged 0 to 4 were over-sampled by a factor of 6.6 relative to children of other ages. This step was taken to boost the number of children in this age range, to maximise the potential for sub-group analyses. The achieved sample profile is therefore skewed towards families with a child aged 0 to 4. To correct this, a weight was generated for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP that adjusted the sample profile to represent that sample that would have been achieved had no over-sampling been carried out.

This 2023 face-to-face CEYSP comparability weight was calculated as:

WC = Pr(W) / Pr(F); where

Pr(W) = (# children aged 0 to 14)

and Pr(F) = (# children not aged 0 to 4) + 6.6 x (# children aged 0 to 4).

Sample profile

Approach and rationale for sample profile comparisons

This section examines the representativeness of the achieved 2023 push-to-web mode trial sample in two ways.

First, for variables that are present on the sampling frame, the profile of the achieved sample is compared to the issued sample. This is done for: region, rurality, area deprivation (as defined by the Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)), and the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). These analyses are also carried out between the issued and achieved samples for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. This approach allows us to compare the representativeness of the 2023 push-to-web mode trial with that of the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP for these geodemographic variables.

Second, for sample profile characteristics that are not present on the sampling frame, the unweighted achieved sample profile of the 2023 push-to-web mode trial is compared with the achieved sample profile of the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP . The sample profiles are compared on respondent-level characteristics (e.g. ethnicity, sex, and working status) and family-level characteristics (e.g. couple vs lone parent family, family annual income, and tenure).

Given the higher response rate achieved for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP (39.3%) compared to the 2023 push-to-web mode trial (22.7%), the sample profile for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP provides the most accurate available estimates of the true population profile of families with a child aged 0 to 14, and of children within these families . By extension, deviations from this sample profile can be understood to indicate to what extent, and in which ways, the achieved 2023 push-to-web mode trial sample is biased away from the population profile.

It is possible that differences between the sample profiles derived from these questions could, to some extent, arise from mode-specific measurement effects, which are generally referred to simply as 'mode effects'. This would occur if the sample profiles differ not as a result of differences between the respondents taking part, but because of a tendency for respondents to answer in a different manner to interviewer-administered than to self-administered questions. The questions from which the sample profiles are derived, however, are simple, factual questions, which are relatively unlikely to be subject to mode effects.

Incentivisation had a significant impact on response to the 2023 push-to-web mode trial. Therefore, the sample profile for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial is shown separately for the three incentive groups (£5 gift voucher, £10 gift voucher, and £15 gift voucher) as well as for the full responding sample. This allows for an examination of whether the higher response rates under the higher-value incentive conditions are associated with sample profiles that are closer to the population profile.

The data underlying the analyses in this chapter are presented in Tables C.1 to C.4 in Appendix C.

Overview of sample profile comparisons

A comparison of the issued and achieved samples for variables present on the sampling frame finds that the 2023 push-to-web mode trial underrepresented those living in the more deprived areas of the country, with the extent of this underrepresentation being similar across the incentivisation conditions. By contrast, the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP accurately represented the country by area deprivation. Both survey modes accurately represented the country by region, and while both modes very slightly underrepresented those living in urban (vs rural) areas, the £15 incentivisation condition for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial delivered a representative sample by rurality.

Turning to a comparison of the two modes for the sample profile characteristics derived from survey questions, we find that respondents to the 2023 push-to-web mode trial were more likely to be: White, female, unmarried, living with a partner, more highly educated, in work, working from home at least some of the time (among those in work), living with a partner who was working from home at least some of the time (among those with a partner in work), in a household with two working parents, in a household earning £45,000 or more per year, and living in owner occupier accommodation .

Offering a £15 (vs £5) conditional gift voucher delivered a sample profile that was closer to that of the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP for each of these characteristics with the exceptions of ethnicity and sex (for which the profiles of the incentivisation conditions were very similar), and marital status (for which the £5 condition was closer to 2023 face-to-face CEYSP).

Taken together these results indicate that i) the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP delivered a more representative sample than did the 2023 push-to-web CEYSP, and ii) that higher-value incentives in the 2023 push-to-web CEYSP were broadly effective in delivering a sample profile that more closely approximated that of the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP.

This pattern of results is broadly consistent with those from the 2019 mode trial, which found that the push-to-web sample profile differed from the face-to-face sample profile in similar ways, with the extent of the differences being smaller where a £5 conditional gift voucher (vs no incentive) was offered.

Results of sample profile comparisons: variables present on the sampling frame

Tables C.1 and C.2 in Appendix C compares the issued sample with the achieved sample for the geodemographic variables present on the sampling frame. These analyses are presented for both the 2023 push-to-web mode trial and the 2023 face-to-

face CEYSP. For the 2023 push-to-web mode trial the issued and achieved samples are broken down by incentivisation condition.

"Bias" columns are included which show the differences, in percentage points, between the issued and achieved samples for each subcategory of each geodemographic variable. These bias columns show the extent to which certain regions and area types are over- or under-represented in the achieved samples compared to the issued samples. For instance, for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial 27.1 per cent of the issued addresses fell into the most deprived IMD quintile, while only 21.8 per cent of the achieved interviews fell into the most deprived IMD quintile. This gives a difference figure of -5.3 percentage points (i.e. 21.8 – 27.1). For each geodemographic variable these bias figures are converted to absolute figures (i.e. ignoring the sign) and the average is computed across the subcategories of the variable. This "average absolute bias" figure provides an overall measure of how representative the achieved sample is, for a given variable.

The results of these analyses show that:

- Area deprivation: the 2023 push-to-web mode trial underrepresented those living in the more deprived areas of the country (as defined by IMD quintiles), and overrepresented those living in the less deprived areas of the country. The average absolute bias was 3.0 percentage points, and this figure showed very little variation by incentivisation condition. By contrast, the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP closely represented the population by IMD quintiles, with an average absolute bias of only 0.6 percentage points. A very similar picture presented itself in terms of the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI). This variable had an average absolute bias of 2.9 percentage points for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, compared to 0.5 percentage points for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. The average bias was slightly lower in the £15 incentivisation condition of the 2023 push-to-web mode trial (2.0 percentage points) than in the £5 condition (3.0 percentage points).

- Region: both the 2023 push-to-web mode trial and the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP closely represented the population with respect to region, each with average biases of 0.9 percentage points. The average bias in the 2023 push-to-web mode trial showed little variation by incentivisation condition.

- Rurality: the 2023 push-to-web mode trial slightly underrepresented those living in urban (vs rural) areas, with an absolute bias of 1.1 percentage points. The average absolute bias in the 2023 push-to-web mode trial was higher for the £5 and £10 conditions (1.9 and 2.1 percentage points respectively) and lower for the £15 condition (0.7 percentage points). The 2023 face-to-face CEYSP also slightly overrepresented those living in urban (vs rural) areas, with an absolute bias of 1.2 percentage points.

Results of sample profile comparisons: variables not present on the sampling frame

Tables C.3 and C.4 in Appendix C compare the achieved sample profile of the 2023 push-to-web mode trial with the sample profile of the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, for variables that were not present on the sampling frame, but for which data is available given their inclusion in the respective questionnaires.

"Difference" columns are included to show the differences, in percentage points, between the 2023 push-to-web mode trial and the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. For variables with more than two substantive categories (i.e. excluding "Don't know) these figures are converted to absolute figures (i.e. ignoring the sign) and the average is computed across the subcategories of the variable. This "average absolute difference" figure provides an overall measure of the extent of the difference between the modes for a given variable.

With respect to respondent-level characteristics, we find that for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial:

- Sex of respondent: respondents were more likely to be female (89.7% for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, compared to 82.8% for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, a difference of 6.9 percentage points). The extent of this difference showed little variation between incentivisation conditions. It should be noted that for both survey modes, either parent was eligible to complete the survey, as long as he or she had "main or joint responsibility for making decisions about childcare arrangements" for the children in the household. As such it is not correct to interpret the face-to-face data as more accurately representing the population profile in this instance. Rather, the samples profiles merely happen to differ between the modes. Further, this difference may account for some of the variation in the respondent-level profiles presented in the following bullets.

- Age of respondent: the mean age of respondents was similar (38.8 vs 39.2 years, a difference of -0.4 years), with little variation between the incentivisation conditions.

- Ethnicity of respondent: respondents were slightly more likely to be White (76.2% vs 73.7%, a difference of 2.5 percentage points). The extent of this difference showed very little variation by incentivisation condition. It should be noted however that 5.0% of the 2023 push-to-web mode trial sample refused to state their ethnicity, compared with just 0.6 percent for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. This difference is likely to have arisen because the 2023 push-to-web mode trial questionnaire displayed the answer option "Prefer not to answer", whereas this option was only coded if volunteered spontaneously by the respondent.

- Working status of respondent: respondents were more likely to be in work (74.4% vs 71.8%, a difference of 2.6 percentage points). The extent of this difference was greater in the £5 incentivisation condition (4.2 percentage points) than in the £10 (1.7 percentage points) or £15 (1.8 percentage points) conditions.

- Highest educational qualification of respondent: respondents were more likely to hold an honours degree or above (41.1% vs 35.9%, a difference of 5.3 percentage points). The extent of this difference was fairly large in both the £5 (8.3 percentage points) and £10 (6.6 percentage points) conditions, but was largely absent for the £15 condition (0.8 percentage points).

- Marital status of respondent: respondents were less likely to be married (67.4% vs 72.9%, a difference of -5.5 percentage points). The extent of this difference was lower in the £5 (3.6 percentage points) and £10 (3.0 percentage points) conditions than in the £15 condition (9.9 percentage points).

- With respect to family-level characteristics, we find that for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial:

- Family type: families were slightly more likely to be couple (as opposed to lone parent) families (76.3 vs 74.1%, a difference of 2.2 percentage points). The extent of this difference was similar in the £5 (4.7 percentage points) and £10 (4.2 percentage points) conditions, but was -2.7 percentage points in the £15 condition, such that couple families were slightly underrepresented.

- Family work status: families were more likely to be couple families with both parents in work (55.5% vs 50.7%, a difference of 4.8 percentage points). The extent of this difference was greatest in the £5 condition (8.5 percentage points), followed by the £10 condition (5.1 percentage points), and was largely absent in the £15 condition (0.3 percentage points).

- Working from home: Parents in work were more likely to work from home at least some of the time (48.7% vs 39.4%, a difference of 9.2 percentage points). The extent of this difference was similar for the £5 and £10 conditions (10.5 and 10.7 percentage points respectively), and was lower in the £15 condition (6.4 percentage points). Partners were also more likely to work from home (44.0% vs 32.4%, a difference of 11.6 percentage points). The extent of this difference was large for both the £5 and £10 conditions (15.8 and 13.0 percentage points respectively), and was considerably lower in the £15 condition (4.8 percentage points). It should be noted that for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial parents were asked how often they (and their partner) "currently work from home". For the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP however, parents were asked how often they (and their partner) worked from home during the most recently elapsed term time week. These differences in wording may have contributed to the observed differences between the modes.

- Family annual income: families were slightly more likely to earn £45,000 or more per year (gross) (45.2% vs 42.2%, a difference of 2.9 percentage points). By incentivisation condition the extent of this difference was similar in the £5 (5.9 percentage points) and £10 (5.5 percentage points) conditions, but was -2.9 percentage points in the £15 condition, such that this condition slightly underrepresented these higher income families. However, it was also the case

that families were more likely to earn under £20,000 per year (gross) (22.6% vs 14.5%, a difference of 8.1 percentage points). The extent of this difference is 4.7 percentage points in the £5 condition, rising to 9.3 percentage points in the £10 condition and 10.6 percentage points in the £15 condition. This seemingly conflicting picture, whereby both lower- and higher-income families are overrepresented should be interpreted in light of the fact that respondents to the 2023 push-to-web mode trial were less likely to refuse to provide their income, or to say they "don't know" (4.3% vs 12.1%, a difference of 7.8 percentage points). This might reflect social desirability pressures in the face-to-face mode; for instance, it is possible that those on relatively lower incomes were more likely to refuse or to say they didn't know their household income.

- Tenure: families were more likely to live in owner occupier accommodation (59.1% vs 53.4%, a difference of 5.7 percentage points). The extent of this difference was similar in the £5 (7.9 percentage points) and £10 (8.2 percentage points) conditions but was largely absent in the £15 condition (0.7 percentage points). The 2023 push-to-web mode trial underrepresented renters (36.0% vs 44.4%, a difference of 8.3 percentage points). The extent of this difference was the same in the £5 and £10 conditions (-10.4) and was lower in the £15 condition (-3.9 percentage points).

Key survey estimates

Approach and rationale for key survey estimate comparisons

This section presents weighted key survey estimates from the 2023 push-to-web mode trial and compares them to the equivalent weighted key survey estimates from the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP . These analyses describe the extent to which the two surveys produce comparable data, and for which types of questions differences are greatest.

Where estimates do differ between the survey modes it is ultimately not possible to determine whether these are attributable to i) differences in the profile of the responding samples (i.e. mode-specific selection effects), or ii) differences in how respondents answer specific questions between the modes (i.e. mode-specific measurement effects), because these two factors are confounded. Indeed, each of these factors can work in combination to produce differences in survey estimates, and the extent to which each factor contributes to these differences can vary across survey items.

It is also not a simple matter to determine which of the two modes produces the most accurate survey estimates. The 'true' population parameters the survey estimates seek to measure are unknown, so any such determination is necessarily speculative. To the extent that the 2023 push-to-web mode trial is less representative of the population than the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP (see section 4.14 'Sample profile'), and to the extent that the lower response rate of the 2023 push-to-web mode trial confers greater opportunities

for non-response bias, then one can expect the estimates from the 2023 push-to-web mode trial to be less accurate than those produced by the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP.

However, these arguments do not account for the potential influence of mode-specific measurement error, which in some instances may result in the 2023 push-to-web mode trial producing more accurate survey estimates than the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. For instance, social desirability bias can lead respondents to provide inaccurate answers to questions, or to refuse to answer certain questions, where they wish to present themselves in a positive light. This form of bias is more prevalent in interviewer-administered surveys than in self-administered surveys. It should be noted that both non-response bias and mode-specific measurement error are question-specific, rather than survey-specific. As such, it is possible for some survey estimates to be very similar between the modes, and for others to be quite different.

The survey estimates compared are those for which the respective questions are the same, or similar, between the two modes. Where questions differ between the modes in a manner that threatens the comparability of the estimates, these differences are noted.

The data underlying the analyses in this chapter are presented in Tables D.1 to D.9 in Appendix D. These tables present the weighted survey estimates from the 2023 push-to-web mode trial broken down by incentivisation condition, alongside the respective weighted survey estimates from the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. 'Difference' columns are included which show the differences, in percentage points, between the 2023 push-to-web mode trial and the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, for each subcategory of each question.

For each question a single 'key survey estimate' is identified and the difference between the two modes is tested for statistical significance. These key survey estimates are those that tend to be reported on in official statistics publications for the face-to-face CEYSP. For instance, for a question measuring awareness the key survey estimate is the proportion who are aware, while for a question using a Likert-type scale the key survey estimate is the net proportion responding, for instance, 'agree strongly' or 'agree'.

The questions are grouped together according to topic, with each topic presented separately in the tables, and discussed separately in the commentary. For instance, questions relating to children's receipt of childcare are considered together, as are questions relating to the home learning environment. For each topic we comment on the nature and extent of the differences in the key survey estimates between the two survey modes.

We also consider the key survey estimates by question-type, to examine whether the size of the differences between the modes depends on whether the questions measure awareness, perceptions, preferences, or behaviours.

The questions from which the key survey estimates are derived are all single-response questions, for which only one response option can be chosen. Some multiple-response

questions, for which respondents are instructed to select all answer options that apply, are also compared between the modes. For these questions, all response options are tested for significance between the modes, as is the mean number of response options chosen.

Finally, given the large number of key survey estimates compared between the modes, we start this section by providing an overview of the main findings arising from these comparisons.

Overview of key survey estimate comparisons

A total of 43 key survey estimates were identified for comparison between the 2023 push-to-web mode trial and the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. For 28 of these key survey estimates (around two-thirds) there was a statistically significant difference between the modes. The average absolute difference between the modes across all 43 key survey estimates was 7.5 percentage points, and this difference was broadly similar across the incentivisation conditions (7.5, 8.5, and 7.7 percentage points for the £5, £10 and £15 conditions respectively). For the 28 key survey estimates for which there was a significant difference between the modes, the average absolute difference was 10.3 percentage points, and this difference was also broadly similar across the incentivisation conditions (9.5, 11.3 and 10.1 percentage points respectively).

Some key survey estimates are not fully comparable between the two modes given differences in question wording or presentation. For instance, a difference for certain questions was for a "Don't know" response option to be presented on-screen for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, but not included on the showcard for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, only being accepted if spontaneously volunteered by the respondent. Excluding these key survey estimates from the analysis provides a fairer appraisal of the differences between the two modes.
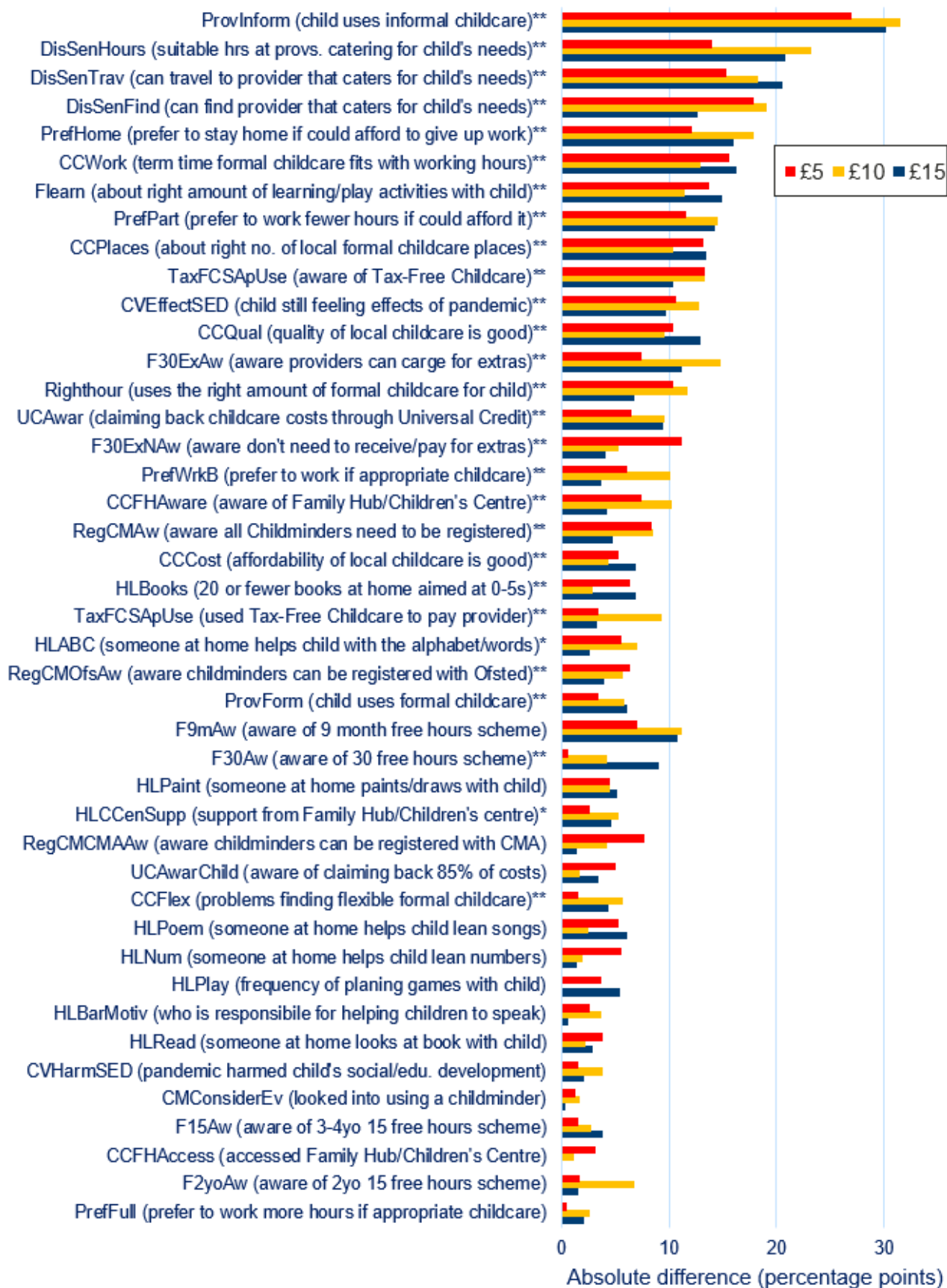
Of the 43 key survey estimates 33 can be considered fully comparable between the two modes, and of these, for 18 (just over half) there was a statistically significant difference between the two modes. The average absolute difference across all 33 fully comparable key survey estimates was 5.6 percentage points, and this difference was broadly similar across the incentivisation conditions (6.0, 6.8 and 5.7 percentage points respectively).

For the 18 fully comparable key survey estimates for which there was a significant difference between the modes, the average absolute difference was 8.5 percentage points, and this was also broadly similar across the incentivisation conditions (8.0, 9.7 and 7.8 percentage points respectively).

Figure 6 presents the absolute differences between the modes for each of the 43 key survey estimates that were identified for comparison, broken down by incentivisation condition. Significant differences between the 2023 push-to-web survey and the 2023

face-to-face CEYSP are flagged with asterisks. The full details of the question wordings, base definitions, and key survey estimate derivations can be found in Appendix D.

Figure 37: Absolute difference of key survey estimates between the 2023 push-to-web mode trial and the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, by incentivisation condition

An examination of Figure 4.6 does not suggest any clear tendency for higher-value incentives to produce estimates that are closer to those from the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. This finding reflects the similarity of the average absolute differences across the incentivisation conditions, noted above. Indeed, across the 33 key survey estimates that can be considered fully comparable between the two modes, for 11 the £5 condition produced the closest estimate to the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, for six the £10 condition produced the closest estimate, and for 16 the £15 condition produced the closest estimate.

To examine whether certain types of question exhibit greater differences between the modes, each of the 33 key survey estimates that can be considered fully comparable between the modes was assigned to one of the following categories: questions measuring awareness, questions measuring perceptions, questions measuring preferences, and questions measuring behaviours.

Table 32 shows the results of this analysis. Questions asking about preferences exhibited the largest differences between the modes (an average absolute difference of 10.1 percentage points), while questions asking about behaviours exhibited the smallest differences (an average absolute difference of 4.0 percentage points). This finding broadly accords with the results of the 2019 push-to-web mode trial research, which found that "the push-to-web survey produces similar estimates to the 2018 face-to-face CEYSP for certain simple, factual questions, but finds greater differences for questions relating to parents' attitudes and intentions."

Table 38: Average absolute difference of key survey estimates between the 2023 push-to-web mode trial and the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, by question type and incentivisation condition

Question type	N	Average Absolute difference: All (percentage points)	Average absolute difference: Incentivisation condition £5 (percentage points)	Average absolute difference: Incentivisation condition £10 (percentage points)	Average absolute difference: Incentivisation condition £15 (percentage points)
Awareness	12	5.3	5.9	7.1	5.6
Perception	3	5	5	6.8	4.2
Preference	6	10	9.1	11.4	9.6
Behaviour	12	4	4.9	4.3	4.1
Total	**33**	**5.8**	**6.2**	**7**	**5.9**

Awareness of childcare-related policies and services

Table D.1 in Appendix D shows the survey estimates for 13 questions relating to parents' awareness of various childcare-related policies and services. These include questions measuring awareness of the free hours of childcare schemes, awareness of the Tax-Free Childcare scheme, awareness of policies relating to childminders, awareness of local family hubs or children's centres, and awareness of Universal Credit.

Across the 13 key survey estimates derived from these questions, for eight there was a statistically significant difference between the two survey modes. For five of these eight estimates awareness levels were higher for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial than for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. These estimates include parents' awareness of the Tax-Free Childcare scheme (58.3% vs 45.9% respectively, a difference of 12.3 percentage points); questions measuring parents' awareness of childminder registration policies, including awareness that all childminders need to be registered (86.6% vs 80.0%, a difference of 6.9 percentage points); and awareness of a Family Hub or Children's Centre in the local area (53.8% vs 46.7%, a difference of 7.1 percentage points).

For the remaining three estimates awareness levels were lower for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial than for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. These estimates all relate to parents' awareness of the 30 free hours of childcare scheme, and comprise awareness of the 30 free hours scheme (80.3% vs 84.9% respectively, a difference of -4.6 percentage points), awareness that providers offering the free hours can charge for certain extras (71.6% vs 82.6%, a difference of -11.0 percentage points), and awareness that parents can choose not to receive or pay for these extras (67.2% vs 74.6%, a difference of -7.4 percentage points).

Across all 13 key survey estimates the average absolute difference was 5.8 percentage points. This difference showed little variation by incentivisation condition, ranging between 6.0 percentage points for the £15 condition and 7.6 percentage points for the £10 condition. Across the eight key survey estimates for which there was a significant difference the average absolute difference was 7.8 percentage points. This difference ranged between 7.1 percentage points for the £15 condition and 9.0 percentage points for the £10 condition.

It is instructive to reflect on the fact that awareness levels were significantly higher in the 2023 push-to-web mode trial for some key survey estimates, but significantly lower for others. It is difficult to see how mode-specific selection effects can provide a full explanation of these results, as this would require the responding sample for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial to be more knowledgeable about certain childcare-related policies, but less knowledgeable about other, similar childcare-related policies. It is also difficult to see how mode-specific measurements effects can provide a full explanation of the results. For instance, if social desirability bias influenced responses to the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, one would expect awareness levels to be higher for each awareness estimate in the face-to-face mode, to the extent that parents wish to portray themselves

to the interviewer as being informed. This pattern of results does not lend itself to a straightforward explanation, but rather highlights the unpredictable nature of the results obtained when switching between data collection modes.

Overall perceptions of local childcare

Table D.2 in Appendix D shows the survey estimates for five questions relating to parents' overall perceptions of local childcare. For three of these questions (perceptions of the availability, quality, and affordability of local childcare), a "Don't know" response option was presented on-screen for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, but this option was not included on the showcard for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, only being accepted by the interviewer if spontaneously volunteered by the respondent. This decision was taken given the relatively high rates of "Don't know" responses – in the region of a quarter of responses – to these questions in previous waves of the face-to-face CEYSP.

For the remaining two questions (ease of finding formal childcare that fits with the family's working hours, and problems finding formal childcare flexible enough to fit the parent's needs) a "Don't know" response option was not presented on-screen for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial. However, a "Not applicable – I don't use/need formal childcare" response option was presented on-screen for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, but this option was not included on the showcard for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, only being accepted by the interviewer if spontaneously volunteered by the respondent. Again, this decision was taken given the relatively high rates of parents saying "Not applicable – I don't use/need formal childcare" – in the region of a third of responses – to these questions in previous waves of the face-to-face CEYSP.

Each of the five key survey estimates derived from these questions showed a statistically significant difference between the two survey modes. For the three questions where a "Don't know" response option was presented on-screen for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, the proportions answering "Don't know" were significantly higher for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial than for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. Likely in consequence of this, the key survey estimates for these three questions were significantly lower for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial than for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. An alternative approach would have been to hide the "Don't know" response options at these questions for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial such that they only appeared on screen if 'Next' was pressed without an answer option having been selected. However, as evidenced by the results of split-ballot experience 2 (see section 4.12 'Split-ballot experiments'), the likely effect of this would have been to force the great majority of parents who would have liked to answer "Don't know" into one of the other response options, creating a more severe problem in the other direction.

For the three key survey estimates derived from the questions where the "Don't know" response option was presented on-screen for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, the average absolute difference was 9.7 percentage points. This showed relatively little variation by incentivisation condition, ranging from 8.1 percentage points in the £10

condition to 11.1 percentage points in the £15 condition, with the £5 condition sitting within this range at 9.6 percentage points.

For the two questions where a "Not applicable – I don't use/need formal childcare" response option was presented on-screen for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, the proportion providing this response were significantly higher for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial than for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. And as with the on-screen presentation of the "Don't know" response option for the other questions in this section, likely in consequence of this, the key survey estimates for these two questions were significantly lower for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial than for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP.

The average absolute difference for these two key survey estimates was 9.1 percentage points, and this showed little variation by incentivisation condition, ranging from 9.1 percentage points in the £15 condition to 10.1 percentage points in the £10 condition.

Perceptions of local childcare for children with SEN or disabilities

Table D.3 in Appendix D shows the survey estimates for three questions relating to parents' experiences of finding, travelling to, and accessing local childcare for children with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities. For these questions, a "Don't know" response option was presented on-screen for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, but was not included on the showcard for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, only being accepted if spontaneously volunteered by the respondent. This decision was taken given the relatively high rates of "Don't know" responses – in the region of one in five responses – to these questions in previous waves of the face-to-face CEYSP.

For each of these three questions, the proportion of parents answering "Don't know" was over twice as high in the 2023 push-to-web mode trial as in the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. Likely in consequence of this, the key survey estimates for these three questions were significantly lower for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial than for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. As per the questions about perceptions of local childcare discussed above, an alternative approach would have been to hide the "Don't know" response options at these questions for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial such that they only appeared on screen if 'Next' was pressed without an answer option having been selected. However, as evidenced by the results of split-ballot experience 2 (see section 4.12 'Split ballot experiments'), the likely effect of this would have been to force the great majority of parents who would have liked to answer "Don't know" into one of the other response options, creating a more severe problem in the other direction.

For the three key survey estimates derived from these questions, the average absolute difference was 19.7 percentage points. This ranged from 15.7 percentage points for the £5 condition, to 20.1 percentage points for the £10 condition.

Children's receipt of childcare

Table D.4 in Appendix D shows the survey estimates for three questions relating to children's use of formal and informal childcare during term time. The first two questions concern whether children are receiving formal and informal childcare, and the third concerns parents' preferences in terms of the amount of formal childcare their child is receiving.

It is important to note some differences between the modes with respect to the questions that measure children's receipt of childcare. For the 2023 push-to-web mode trial, parents were asked which formal and informal childcare providers they used for the selected child in a "typical term-time week", while for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, parents were asked which formal and informal providers the selected child had used in the most recently elapsed term-time week specifically. The 2023 push-to-web mode trial referred to a "typical term-time week" because the experiences of interviewers working on the face-to-face CEYSP show that identifying the most recently elapsed term-time week can be complex for some parents, especially where there have been atypical circumstances, such as illness or school closure days. In the absence of an interviewer to provide guidance, this approach was not considered to be in keeping with a Mobile First questionnaire design.

The 2023 push-to-web mode trial also used a shorter list of formal childcare providers, with a single response option of "nursery or pre-school" in place of the separate options of "nursery class", "day nursery", "pre-school", and "playgroup" used in the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. This followed from cognitive testing carried out for the 2019 mode trial research which found some parents to be confused by the distinction between these provider types, and was also consistent with the Mobile First approach of minimising the number of answer options presented on screen as far as possible.

The key survey estimates for children's receipt of both formal and informal childcare were significantly higher for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial than for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. Receipt of formal childcare showed a difference of 4.8 percentage points between the modes, and this ranged from 3.4 percentage points in the £5 condition to 6.2 percentage points in the £15 condition. Receipt of informal childcare showed a substantially larger difference of 29.7 percentage points, and this ranged from 26.9 percentage points in the £5 condition to 30.2 percentage points in the £15 condition.

The far higher estimate for the use of informal childcare during term time for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial mirrors the finding found in the 2019 mode trial research and is likely due to the differences in the question wording between the surveys mentioned above. Specifically, some respondents to the 2023 push-to-web mode trial may have counted informal providers as providing childcare "in a typical term time week" even if these providers only looked after the child once every two or three few weeks on average. For the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, the estimate could not have been inflated in this manner given the question's focus on receipt of childcare in a specific term-time

week. The estimate for the use of formal childcare in the push-to-web mode trial sample may not have been inflated in this manner given the greater consistency in patterns of formal childcare use during term time.

With respect to parent's preferences in terms of receipt of formal childcare, parents responding to the push-to-web mode trial were significantly less likely to say that the amount of formal childcare their child receives is "about right" (58.9% vs 68.2%, a difference of -9.3 percentage points). These parents expressed a preference to use less formal childcare, relative to those responding to the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP.

Behaviours relating to childcare

Table D.5 in Appendix D shows the survey estimates for four questions measuring behaviours relating to childcare, covering: whether parents have accessed any services from a local Family Hub or Children's Centre, whether parents have received support from a local Family Hub or Children's Centre for the selected child specifically, whether parents have looked into using a childminder to care for the selected child, and whether parents have applied for the Tax-Free Childcare scheme.

For two of the four key survey estimates derived from these questions there was a statistically significant difference between the two survey modes. Parents were less likely to have received support from a local Family Hub or Children's Centre for the selected child (20.8% for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial vs 24.9% for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, a difference of -4.1 percentage points), but were more likely to have applied for the Tax-Free Childcare scheme (25.8% vs 20.5%, a difference of 5.3 percentage points).

Across the four key survey estimates the average absolute difference was 2.8 percentage points, ranging from 2.1 percentage points in the £15 condition to 4.3 percentage points in the £10 condition. For just the two key survey estimates for which there was a significant difference the average absolute difference was 4.7 percentage points, ranging from 3.1 percentage points for the £5 condition to 7.3 percentage points for the £10 condition.

The home learning environment

Table D.6 in Appendix D shows the survey estimates for nine questions relating to the selected child's home learning environment. These questions cover the frequency with which someone at home takes part in a range of activities with the selected child, including reading, learning numbers, and painting or drawing; the number of books at home aimed at children aged 0-5; how parents feel about the amount of learning and play activities they do with their child; and whether parents feel that schools and childcare providers, rather than parents, are responsible for helping children to learn to speak and hold conversations.

Across the nine key survey estimates derived from these questions, for three there was a statistically significant difference between the two survey modes. Specifically: parents were less likely to say that someone at home helps the selected child to learn the alphabet or recognise words, or does activities with the child that includes the alphabet or words, at least once a day (41.3% for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial vs 46.3% for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, a difference of -5.0 percentage points); parents were more likely to say they have 20 or fewer books or e-books at home aimed at children aged 0-5 (31.6% vs 26.1%, a difference of 5.5 percentage points); and parents were substantially less likely to say that the amount of learning and play activities they do with their child is "about right" (50.7% vs 64.3%, a difference of -13.7 percentage points).

Across the nine key survey estimates the average absolute difference was 4.4 percentage points, ranging from 4.0 percentage points in the £10 condition to 5.7 percentage points in the £5 condition. For the three key survey estimates for which there was a significant difference the average absolute difference was 8.0 percentage points, ranging from 7.1 percentage points for the £10 condition to 8.6 percentage points for the £5 condition.

It is notable that for the six key survey estimates concerning the home learning environment that relate directly to behaviours of household members, rather than to parents' perceptions and opinions, the two modes produced similar estimates. Across these key survey estimates, the average absolute difference was 3.1 percentage points, ranging from 3.0 percentage points in the £10 condition to 4.7 percentage points in the £5 condition.

The impact of COVID-19 on children's social and educational development

Table D.7 in Appendix D shows the survey estimates for two questions concerning parents' perceptions of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected their child's social and educational development.

For the first of the key survey estimates derived from these questions there was no significant difference between the two survey modes. Specifically, parents were no more likely to believe that the pandemic had harmed their child's social and educational development "a great deal" or "a fair amount" (49.1% for the 2023 push-to-web mode trial vs 47.5% for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, a difference of 1.6 percentage points).

For the second of the two key survey estimates there was a significant difference. Specifically, parents who felt that their child's social and educational development had been harmed were more likely to believe that their child was still feeling the effects of this harm "a great deal" or "a fair amount" (72.0% vs 60.4%, a difference of 11.6 percentage points).

Across both key survey estimates the average absolute difference was 6.6 percentage points, ranging from 5.9 percentage points in the £15 condition to 8.3 percentage points in the £10 condition. For the key survey estimate for which there was a significant difference the average absolute difference was 11.6 percentage points, ranging from 9.8 percentage points in the £15 condition to 12.8 percentage points in the £10 condition.

Employment preferences

Table D.8 in Appendix D shows the survey estimates for four questions relating to parents' employment preferences. These questions cover whether working parents would prefer to stay at home and look after their children, or work fewer hours so they can spend more time looking after their child(ren), if they could afford it; whether working parents would prefer to work more hours if they could arrange appropriate childcare; and whether non-working parents would prefer to work if they could arrange appropriate childcare.

Across the four key survey estimates derived from these questions, for three there were substantial and statistically significant difference between the two survey modes. These differences were characterised by a greater preference to stay at home, to work fewer hours, and to remain out of the work force among parents responding to the 2023 push-to-web mode trial relative to the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. For instance, the 2023 push-to-web mode trial found that 47.8 per cent of working parents would prefer to stay at home and look after their child(ren) full-time if they could afford to, which compares with 32.2 per cent for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, a difference of 15.6 percentage points.

Across the four key survey estimates the average absolute difference was 9.2 percentage points, ranging from 7.6 percentage points in the £5 condition to 11.3 percentage points in the £10 condition. For the three key survey estimates for which there was a significant difference the average absolute difference was 12.2 percentage points, ranging from 9.9 percentage points for the £5 condition to 14.2 percentage points for the £10 condition.

As noted above in section 4.14 'Sample profile', respondents to the 2023 push-to-web mode trial were more likely to be female than were respondents to the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. This may account for some of the differences observed between the modes for these key survey estimates.

Multiple-response questions

Table D.9 in Appendix D shows the survey estimates for nine multiple-response questions, for which respondents are instructed to select all answer options that apply. These questions cover: the impact of support received on parents' jobs, and on the jobs of their partners; reasons why parents are not working; what kinds of childcare providers parents would like to use more of; what changes to term-time childcare provision would help parents work more, or look for work; what parents consider to be the most important

factors for delivering high quality childcare for pre-school and (separately) for school-age children ; the sources from which parents have obtained information about local childcare; and the sources from which parents have obtained information about learning and play activities they can do with their child.

These nine questions had a total of 110 response options between them, and for 54 of these (almost exactly half) there was a statistically significant difference between the two survey modes. The average absolute difference between the modes across all 110 response options was 3.2 percentage points, and this difference was broadly similar across the incentivisation conditions (3.7, 3.2, and 3.6 percentage points for the £5, £10 and £15 conditions respectively). For the 54 key survey estimates for which there was a significant difference between the modes, the average absolute difference was 5.2 percentage points, and this difference was also broadly similar across incentivisation conditions (5.7, 4.5 and 5.7 percentage points respectively).

Across the full set of 110 response options, for 73 (70%) the difference was positive; that is, the response option was more likely to be chosen in the 2023 push-to-web mode trial than in the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. And for the 54 response options for which there was a statistically significant difference between the two survey modes, for 36 (also 70%) the difference was positive. This pattern was reflected in the mean number of substantive response options chosen (i.e. those excluding "none" and "Don't know"). Across the nine multiple-response questions, for six the mean number of response options chosen was significantly higher for the 2023 push-to-web survey than for the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP (see Table D.9 in Appendix D). For the remaining three questions, there was no significant difference between the two modes. It is unclear whether the tendency for respondents to the 2023 push-to-web survey to choose more response options is attributable to differences in the profile of the responding samples, to differences in how respondents answer specific questions between the modes, or to both.

Conclusions

This research builds on the findings of the 2019 push-to-web mode trial research, which found that a push-to-web survey of parents sampled from the Child Benefit Register is feasible, and that a response rate of 21.3 per cent is attainable with a stated survey length of "around 20 minutes" and the offer of a conditional £5 gift voucher. The present research found that increasing the stated survey length to "around 30 minutes " delivered a response rate of 19.1 per cent with a conditional £5 gift voucher, rising to 24.0 per cent with a £10 gift voucher and to 27.1 per cent with a £15 gift voucher. In comparison, the response rate for the parallel-run 2023 face-to-face CEYSP (which used no incentives, and which had a mean interview length of 45 minutes) was 39.4 per cent .

Response rates are frequently used by data users as a key indicator of a survey's quality and credibility, and as such, the higher response rates delivered under the higher-value incentive conditions are to be preferred. But it is also important to consider value for money, given that higher-value incentives demand a larger budget. While increasing the value of the incentive from £5 to £15 represents a 200 per cent increase in the value of each incentive, it only increases the total cost of the survey (assuming 1,700 achieved interviews) by 16 per cent. This is because i) the incentive budget constitutes a relatively small portion of the total survey costs, and ii) higher-value incentives confer considerable savings in printing and postage costs, as fewer reminder mailings are required.

While the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP delivered a more representative sample than did the 2023 push-to-web mode trial in terms of area deprivation, the use of a £15 (vs £5) incentive in the 2023 push-to-web CEYSP was effective in improving the representativeness of the achieved sample for most demographic characteristics.

For the majority of key survey estimates there was a significant difference between the modes, averaging 5.8 percentage points for key survey estimates that were fully comparable. The extent of this difference was very similar across the incentivisation conditions, meaning that a higher-value incentive did not tend to deliver results that were closer to those of the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP.

The average difference of 5.8 percentage points for the key survey estimates masks some substantial differences for particular key survey estimates. For instance, the proportion of parents who felt that the overall number of formal childcare places available locally was "about right" was 12.4 percentage points lower in the 2023 push-to-web mode trial than in the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, while the proportion of parents who would prefer to stay at home and look after their child(ren) full-time if they could afford to was 15.6 percentage points higher in the 2023 push-to-web mode trial than in the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. Questions measuring preferences exhibited the greatest differences between the modes, followed by questions measuring awareness and perceptions. Questions measuring behaviours exhibited the smallest differences between the modes.

For questions which allowed multiple-responses, respondents to the 2023 push-to-web mode trial tended to choose more response options than did respondents to the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP, and in consequence the survey estimates tended to be higher in the 2023 push-to-web mode trial than in the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP.

It is not clear to what extent the observed differences between the modes are driven by differences in the responding samples, or by mode-specific measurement effects (i.e. 'mode effects'), as these factors are confounded. However, the fact that the observed differences are larger for certain types of question does suggest that mode effects play an important role.

Taken together, these findings suggest that if the CEYSP is to continue its existing series of trend data, which stretches back to 2004 for some survey estimates, it should not transition from face-to-face to push-to-web administration. Rather, this change of mode would require a new time series to be initiated. Other major surveys that have changed mode have tended to establish a new time series, including the Active People Survey (now the Active Lives Adult survey), Food and You (now Food and You 2), and Taking Part (now the Participation Survey). Some other surveys have investigated the feasibility of changing mode but have thus far not made the transition, largely due to concerns over the risks posed to the continuation of trend data. These include the Crime Survey for England and Wales, and the English Health Survey. In Appendix E, we have presented for context a number of case studies of surveys which have transitioned mode, or which have actively investigated transitioning mode.

A question worthy of consideration is whether a higher-value incentive is 'worth it', given that it makes little difference to how close the key survey estimates are to the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP data. There are several points to reflect on here:

- First, response rates are frequently used by data users as a key indicator of a survey's quality and credibility, and a higher-value incentive produces a markedly higher response rate for a comparatively small increase in the survey's total budget.

- Second, the data suggests that a higher-value incentive delivered a more representative sample, which is also valued by data users when appraising a survey's quality and credibility, and which, all things being equal, will tend to deliver more accurate survey estimates.

- Third, the efficiency of the weighting increased with the value of the incentive offered, conferring improvements in terms of the effective sample sizes.

- Fourth, a higher-value incentive is less wasteful in terms of the quantity of printing and postage required. Each achieved interview in the £5 incentivisation condition required 14.6 items of mail to be printed and posted, compared to 9.8 in the £15 condition. identical

- Fifth, it is not the case that all key survey estimates delivered by the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP are necessarily more accurate than those delivered by the 2023 push-to-web mode trial. Each mode will have its own degree of measurement error between its estimates and the respective 'true' population parameters, and the size of this error will vary across each estimate in the survey. For some estimates, especially those at risk of certain response tendencies such as social desirability bias, the 2023 push-to-web mode trial may deliver more accurate estimates than the 2023 face-to-face CEYSP. And while for some estimates a 'true' population parameter does exist - for instance, the proportion of families who have applied for a Tax-Free Childcare account - even if this parameter is unknown, for other estimates, such as those measuring perceptions and preferences, whether a 'true' population parameter exists or not is highly questionable and enters the territory of long-standing and unresolved philosophical debates between idealism and materialism.

The present research highlighted the importance of a Mobile First approach to questionnaire design in finding that over three-quarters (77.5%) of parents completed the survey using a smartphone. This compares to under half (45.6%) for the 2019 push-to-web mode trial. This substantial increase is likely due to both increases in smartphone usage over time, as well as the inclusion of a QR code on the survey materials which parents could use to access the questionnaire. Over a third (37.4%) of those completing the survey accessed it via the QR code.

Most respondents had a positive experience of completing the survey, which bodes well for the quality of the survey data. The great majority (93.8%) chose to answer the optional respondent experience questions, and of these four in five (79.8%) found the survey easy to complete, three in five (60.1%) enjoyed completing the survey, and around two-thirds (67.3%) felt that the survey was about the right length. However, a sizeable minority (32.3%) thought the survey was "too long", and this increased to over two in five (42.1%) among those who took between 25 and 35 minutes to complete the survey, which accorded with the stated length of "around 30 minutes". These findings urge caution against increasing the survey length beyond 30 minutes, both in terms of respondent burden, and data quality.

Four split-ballot experiments were embedded in the questionnaire, the results of which provide valuable insights in terms of questionnaire design. First, the results show that continuous data can be collected via open-numeric answer fields, as opposed to presenting a scale with discrete banded response options, and that this delivers more detailed data without damaging data quality. Second, even when respondents are informed up-front that they can 'unhide' the "Don't know" answer option to select it, almost no respondents make use of this functionality, with major implications for response distributions. Conversely, when "Don't know" is presented on screen as an answer option, respondents are considerably more likely to select it than their face-to-face counterparts for whom this response option is not presented but can be spontaneously volunteered to the interviewer. Third, the placement of answer options in

multiple-response questions has considerable implications for response distributions, especially where there is overlap between the answer options.

The present research, in combination with the findings of the 2019 push-to-web mode trial, demonstrates that while a push-to-web survey of parents is feasible, such a survey will not provide survey estimates that can continue the time series of the existing face-to-face CEYSP. As such, any further investigations would be best directed at optimising the design of the push-to-web survey as a data collection tool in its own right, rather than attempting to attain fully comparable survey estimates between the two modes.

The push-to-web survey design is considerably less costly to administer per achieved interview than the face-to-face design, and has a far shorter fieldwork period, while enjoying the benefits of a random probability sampling approach. As such, if the face-to-face CEYSP is to be maintained in order to continue the existing time series, a push-to-web survey could be used as an additional data collection tool, for instance to provide between-wave data with the face-to-face CEYSP being conducted less frequently than annually.

Further avenues of research into optimising the push-to-web design could explore the use of an adaptive design, where different sample members receive different survey protocols depending on certain known characteristics. Of most promise might be an adaptive incentivisation design, with, for instance, those living in more deprived areas offered a larger incentive than those in less deprived areas. One would expect this approach to deliver a more representative sample profile by area deprivation. This approach is equivalent to the 'knock to nudge' approach employed in the Transformed Labour Force Survey, as detailed in Appendix E.

Another avenue for research might be to explore the use of a modular questionnaire design, with different sample members randomly allocated to one of a number of different versions of the questionnaire, but with a 'core' set of questions in common across all questionnaires. Such a design can be an effective way of maximising the range of topics asked about while limiting the length of the questionnaire, although it does lead to certain complexities in terms of data analyses and weighting. A modular questionnaire design is used in some existing push-to-web surveys, including British Social Attitudes, Food and You 2, and the Participation Survey.

Appendix A: Survey materials

Mailing 1 letter: Front

Department for Education

<<TITLE>> <<FIRST NAME>> <<SURNAME>>
<<ADDRESS 1>>
<<ADDRESS 2>>
<<ADDRESS 3>>
<<ADDRESS 4>>
<<POSTCODE>>

September 2023

Dear <<Title>> <<Surname>>,

Share your views on services for children and families and receive a £<<INCENTIVE>> thank you.

We are writing to ask for your help with an important study. The Department for Education has asked Ipsos, an independent research organisation, to conduct a large survey of parents to understand what types of childcare and out of school activities – if any – they use, and what they think of them.

We are interested in the views of all parents, so we are really keen to hear from you whether or not you use any childcare or out of school activities.

Your answers will help the government improve the services it provides. Taking part is completely voluntary, but it is also a good opportunity to have your say.

It's easy to take part.

The survey should take around 30 minutes to complete.

1 Go to: www.childcaresurvey.org on your computer, tablet or smartphone, or scan the QR code at the bottom of this page

2 Enter your access code: <<access_code>>

3 Complete the survey and we'll give you a £<<INCENTIVE>> gift voucher

There is more information about the survey, including about confidentiality and privacy, on the back of this letter.

Thank you in advance for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Nava
Head of Childcare Markets and Demand Research
Department for Education

Please turn over

94

Mailing 1 letter: Reverse

Who is carrying out the survey? This survey is being carried out by Ipsos, an independent research organisation, on behalf of the Department for Education. For more information visit: www.ipsos.com. The Department for Education is the government department responsible for education and children's services. This research will help the Government improve the services it provides to families. For more information visit: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education.

Why should I take part? This is an opportunity to have your say in shaping services for families and children. We would like to hear from a wide range of parents from different backgrounds and communities to make sure the survey captures the views of parents across the country.

I don't use any childcare or out of school activities, do you still want to hear from me? Yes. We want to hear from all parents, including those who look after their children entirely by themselves. We are interested to know how and why parents make choices about childcare and out of school activities, and what they think about the options available to them.

Can my spouse or partner to do the survey? Yes, as long as he or she has main or joint responsibility for making decisions about childcare arrangements for your child or children.

How was I chosen for the survey? It is not possible to invite all parents to take part, so we have selected a sample of parents, completely at random, from Child Benefit Records, held by HM Revenue & Customs.

Can I exit the survey and come back to it later? Yes, you can close the questionnaire and continue at any other time. Just log back in with your access code.

How do I get the £<<INCENTIVE>> gift voucher? At the end of the survey, you will be asked for your email address. An email will be sent to you within 10 days with a link to a website where you can choose a £<<INCENTIVE>> voucher from a selection of retailers (including Argos, Boots, WHSmith, ASOS, John Lewis, and Waitrose). We will only use your email address to send you your gift voucher. We will not contact you for any other reason.

Your Privacy

Taking part in this survey is voluntary. Data will be used for research purposes only, and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Ipsos will store your information securely and keep it confidential. Your name, address, and other personal details will not be passed on to any other organisation, and will be deleted by February 2024. You won't receive any 'junk mail' as a result of taking part. Your answers will be combined with those of others taking part and only anonymous statistics will be reported.

A full Privacy Policy, setting out your rights and covering accessing, amending and deleting your data, is available at www.childcaresurvey.org or on request.

Contact Us

If you require further help or information, or wish to opt out of further communications about the survey, please contact us: childcare@ipsos.com or Freephone 0800 014 9460

For more background about the research you can contact Rachel Murphy at the Department for Education: Rachel.Murphy@education.gov.uk

Mailing 2 letter: Front

Department for Education

<<TITLE>> <<FIRST NAME>> <<SURNAME>>
<<ADDRESS 1>>
<<ADDRESS 2>>
<<ADDRESS 3>>
<<ADDRESS 4>>
<<POSTCODE>>

October 2023

Dear <<Title>> <<Surname>>,

We recently invited you to take part in an important study about childcare and out of school activities for the Department for Education.

We need to hear from as many parents as possible.

We are interested in the views of all parents, including those who don't use any childcare or out of school activities. We are writing again because it is only by hearing from all those we have invited to take part that the results will truly reflect the opinions and experiences of parents across the country.

To the best of our knowledge you have not yet completed the survey. If you have completed it in the last few days, thank you! If not, there is still time – just follow the simple steps below.

1 Go to **www.childcaresurvey.org** on your computer, tablet or smartphone, or scan the QR code at the bottom of this page

2 Enter your access code: **<<access_code>>**

3 Complete the survey **and we'll give you a £<<INCENTIVE>> gift voucher**

Taking part is completely voluntary, but it is also a good opportunity to have your say.

Taking part will help improve services for families.

Your answers will help the government improve the services it provides. The survey should take around **30 minutes** to complete, and asks questions on a range of topics related to childcare and out of school activities.

There is more information about the survey, including about confidentiality and privacy, on the back of this letter.

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Nava
Head of Childcare Markets and Demand Research
Department for Education

Please turn over 👉

Mailing 2 letter: Reverse

Who is carrying out the survey? This survey is being carried out by Ipsos, an independent research organisation, on behalf of the Department for Education. For more information visit: www.ipsos.com. The Department for Education is the government department responsible for education and children's services. This research will help the Government improve the services it provides to families. For more information visit: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-education.

Why should I take part? This is an opportunity to have your say in shaping services for families and children. We would like to hear from a wide range of parents from different backgrounds and communities to make sure the survey captures the views of parents across the country.

I don't use any childcare or out of school activities, do you still want to hear from me? Yes. We want to hear from all parents, including those who look after their children entirely by themselves. We are interested to know how and why parents make choices about childcare and out of school activities, and what they think about the options available to them.

Can my spouse or partner to do the survey? Yes, as long as he or she has main or joint responsibility for making decisions about childcare arrangements for your child or children.

How was I chosen for the survey? It is not possible to invite all parents to take part, so we have selected a sample of parents, completely at random, from Child Benefit Records, held by HM Revenue & Customs.

Can I exit the survey and come back to it later? Yes, you can close the questionnaire and continue at any other time. Just log back in with your access code.

How do I get the £<<INCENTIVE>> gift voucher? At the end of the survey, you will be asked for your email address. An email will be sent to you within 10 days with a link to a website where you can choose a £<<INCENTIVE>> voucher from a selection of retailers (including Argos, Boots, WHSmith, ASOS, John Lewis, and Waitrose). We will only use your email address to send you your gift voucher. We will not contact you for any other reason.

Your Privacy

Taking part in this survey is voluntary. Data will be used for research purposes only, and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

Ipsos will store your information securely and keep it confidential. Your name, address, and other personal details will not be passed on to any other organisation, and will be deleted by February 2024. You won't receive any 'junk mail' as a result of taking part. Your answers will be combined with those of others taking part and only anonymous statistics will be reported.
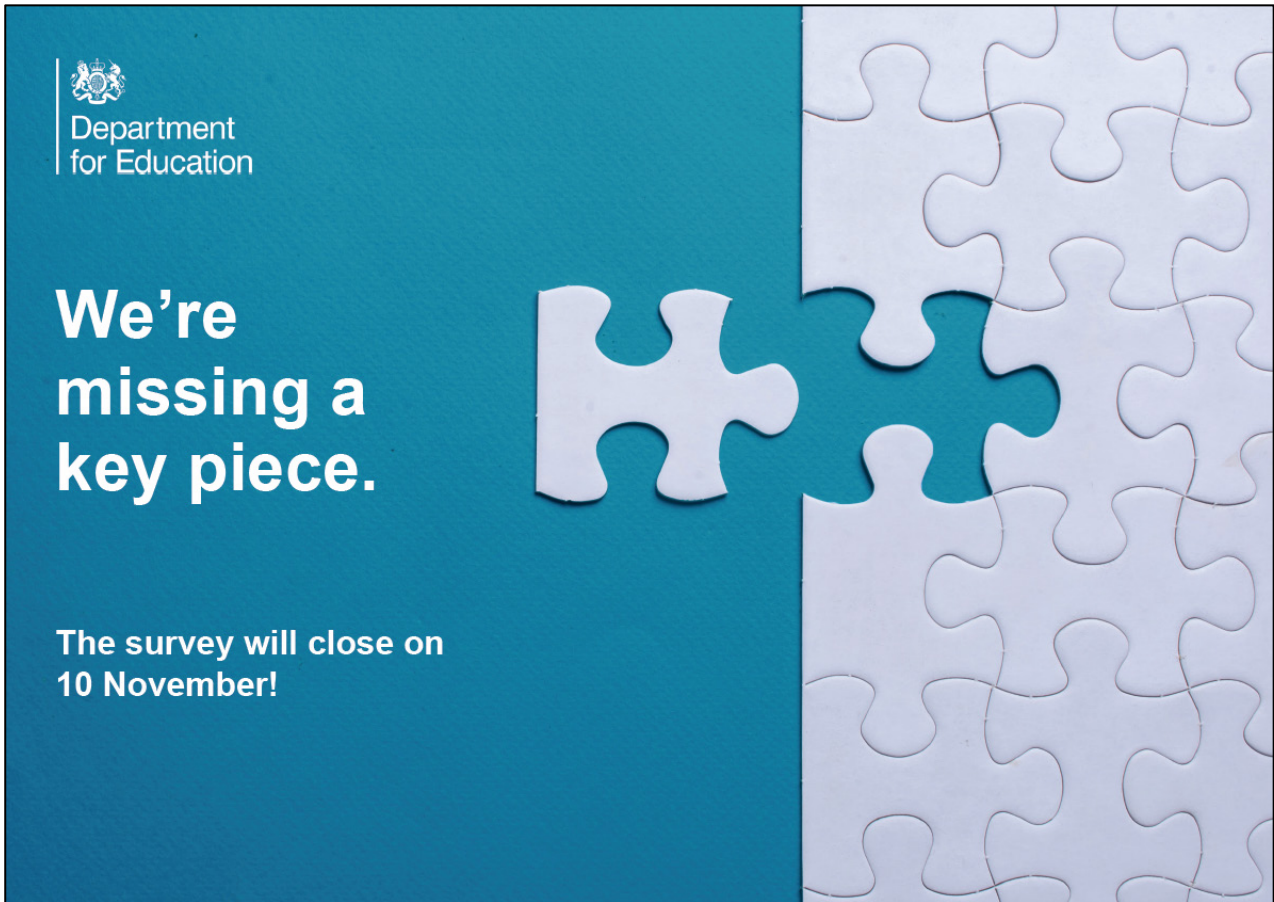
A full Privacy Policy, setting out your rights and covering accessing, amending and deleting your data, is available at www.childcaresurvey.org or on request.

Contact Us

If you require further help or information, or wish to opt out of further communications about the survey, please contact us: childcare@ipsos.com or Freephone 0800 014 9460

For more background about the research you can contact Rachel Murphy at the Department for Education: Rachel.Murphy@education.gov.uk

Mailing 3 postcard: Front, Deadline condition: 'stated'

Department for Education

We're missing a key piece.

The survey will close on 10 November!

Mailing 3 Postcard: Reverse, Deadline condition: 'stated'

Department for Education

Ipsos

There's still time to complete the childcare and out of school activities survey. Your answers will help the Government improve services for families.

We want to hear from you, even if you don't use any childcare or out of school activities.

If you have recently completed the survey, thank you very much. If you have not yet managed to do so, we would be very grateful if you could take part. The survey will be closing on **10 November**, so this is the last contact from us you will receive.

Completing the survey is easy.

1

Go to **www.childcaresurvey.org** on your computer, tablet or smartphone, or scan the QR Code below on the bottom right

2

Enter your access code: <<access_code>>

3

Complete the survey **and we'll give you a £<<INCENTIVE>> gift voucher**
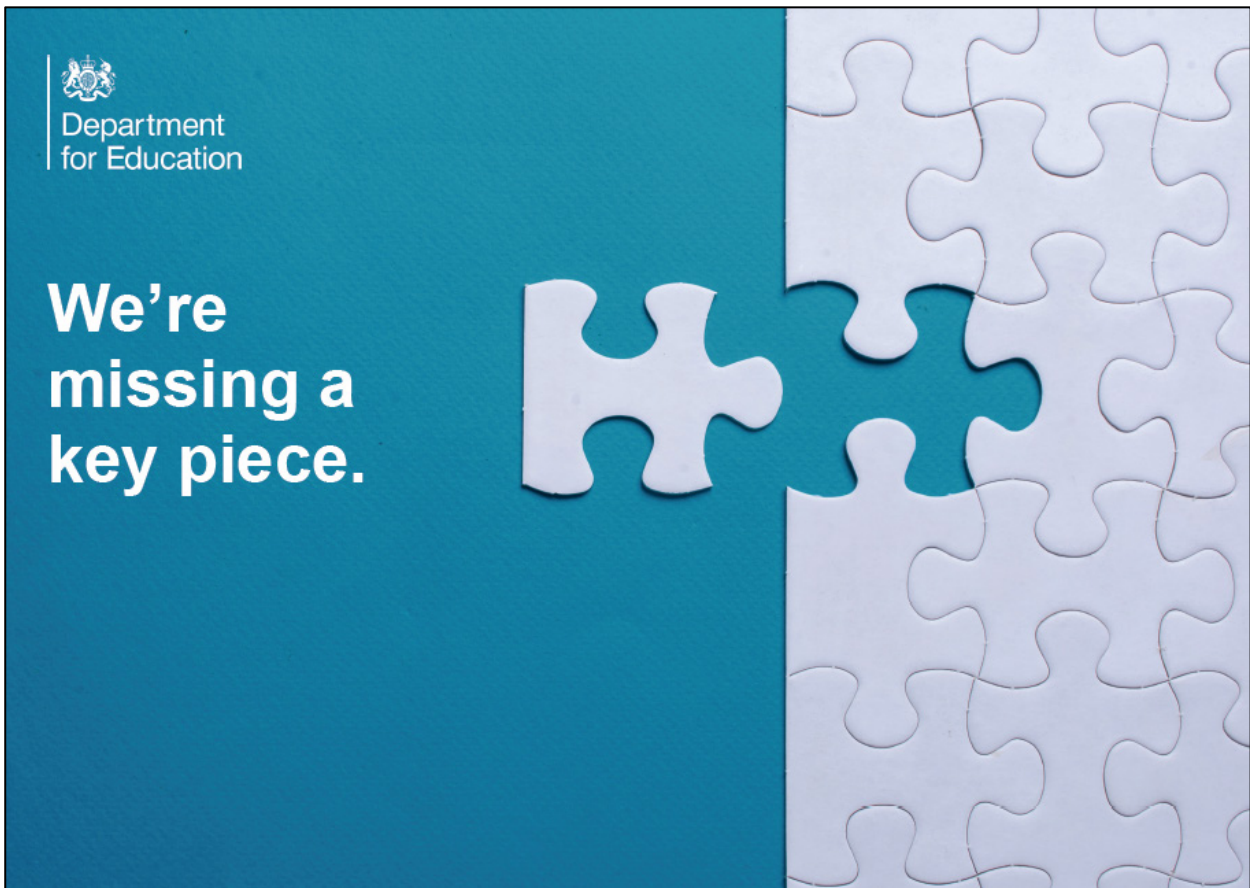
The survey should take around **30 minutes** to complete.

Please be reassured that your responses will be kept private and confidential.

Any questions? childcare@ipsos.com | Freephone 0800 014 9460

Mailing 3 Postcard: Front, Deadline condition: 'not stated'

Mailing 3 Postcard: Reverse, Deadline condition: 'not stated'

Department for Education

Ipsos

There's still time to complete the childcare and out of school activities survey. Your answers will help the Government improve services for families.

We want to hear from you, even if you don't use any childcare or out of school activities.

If you have recently completed the survey, thank you very much. If you have not yet managed to do so, we would be very grateful if you could take part. The survey will be closing soon, so this is the last contact from us you will receive.

Completing the survey is easy.

1
Go to **www.childcaresurvey.org** on your computer, tablet or smartphone, or scan the QR Code below on the bottom right

2
Enter your access code: <<access_code>>

3
Complete the survey **and we'll give you a £<<INCENTIVE>> gift voucher**

The survey should take around **30 minutes** to complete.

Please be reassured that your responses will be kept private and confidential.

Any questions?   childcare@ipsos.com | Freephone 0800 014 9460

Appendix B: Questions used in the split-ballot experiments

Split-ballot experiment 1

Version of question using response scale with banded hours (formal childcare)

{ASK IF ProvForm = 1-8
AND FF_Hrs = 0}

FormHrs

Approximately how many hours in total
[IF ONLY ONE CODE SELECTED AT ProvForm:
[IF ProvForm = 1: "does [DV_Firstname_SC] go to nursery or pre-school";
IF ProvForm = 2: "does [DV_Firstname_SC] go to reception class";
IF ProvForm = 3: "is [DV_Firstname_SC] looked after by a childminder";
IF ProvForm = 4: "is [DV_Firstname_SC] looked after by a nanny or au pair;
IF ProvForm = 5: "is [DV_Firstname_SC] looked after by a babysitter";
IF ProvForm = 6: "does [DV_Firstname_SC] go to a breakfast club";
IF ProvForm = 7: "does [DV_Firstname_SC] go to an after school club";
IF ProvForm = 8: "does [DV_Firstname_SC] go to the other type of formal provider"]
"in a typical term-time week?"]
[IF MORE THAN ONE CODE SELECTED AT ProvForm:
"does [DV_Firstname_SC] spend at [IF DV_Sex_SC = 1: "his"] [IF DV_Sex_SC = 2: "her"] formal childcare providers in a typical term-time week?"]
[IF ProvForm = 6 or 7: "Do not count time that [DV_Firstname_SC] is at school during normal school hours."]
SINGLE CODE
1.   Less than 1 hour
2.   1 to 2 hours
3.   3 to 5 hours
4.   6 to 10 hours
5.   11 to 15 hours
6.   16 to 20 hours
7.   21 to 25 hours
8.   26 to 30 hours
9.   31 to 35 hours
10.   More than 35 hours

Version of question using open numeric response scale (formal childcare)

{ASK IF ProvForm = 1-8
AND FF_Hrs = 1}
FormHrs_Open
Approximately how many hours in total

[IF ONLY ONE CODE SELECTED AT ProvForm:
[IF ProvForm = 1: "does [DV_Firstname_SC] go to nursery or pre-school";
IF ProvForm = 2: "does [DV_Firstname_SC] go to reception class";
IF ProvForm = 3: "is [DV_Firstname_SC] looked after by a childminder";
IF ProvForm = 4: "is [DV_Firstname_SC] looked after by a nanny or au pair;
IF ProvForm = 5: "is [DV_Firstname_SC] looked after by a babysitter";
IF ProvForm = 6: "does [DV_Firstname_SC] go to a breakfast club";
IF ProvForm = 7: "does [DV_Firstname_SC] go to an after school club";
IF ProvForm = 8: "does [DV_Firstname_SC] go to the other type of formal provider"]
"in a typical term-time week?"]
[IF MORE THAN ONE CODE SELECTED AT ProvForm:
"does [DV_Firstname_SC] spend at [IF DV_Sex_SC = 1: "his"] [IF DV_Sex_SC = 2:
"her"] formal childcare providers in a typical term-time week?"]
[IF ProvForm = 6 or 7: "Do not count time that [DV_Firstname_SC] is at school during
normal school hours."]
SINGLE CODE
[OPEN NUMERIC, RANGE 0 TO 70]

Version of question using response scale with banded hours (informal childcare)

{ASK IF ProvInform = 1-5
AND FF_Hrs = 0}
InformHrs
For how many hours in total do relatives, friends or neighbours, and providers of other
activities look after [DV_Firstname_SC] in a typical term-time week?
SINGLE CODE
1.   Less than 1 hour
2.   1 to 2 hours
3.   3 to 5 hours
4.   6 to 10 hours
5.   11 to 15 hours
6.   16 to 20 hours
7.   21 to 25 hours
8.   26 to 30 hours
9.   31 to 35 hours
10.   More than 35 hours

Version of question using open numeric response scale (informal childcare)

{ASK IF ProvInform = 1-5
AND FF_Hrs = 1}
InformHrs_Open
For how many hours in total do relatives, friends or neighbours, and providers of other
activities look after [DV_Firstname_SC] in a typical term-time week?
SINGLE CODE
1.   Less than 1 hour
2.   1 to 2 hours

3. 3 to 5 hours
4. 6 to 10 hours
5. 11 to 15 hours
6. 16 to 20 hours
7. 21 to 25 hours
8. 26 to 30 hours
9. 31 to 35 hours
10. More than 35 hours

SINGLE CODE
[OPEN NUMERIC, RANGE 0 TO 168]

Split-ballot experiment 2

Version of question with "Don't know" answer option initially hidden, appearing only if respondent presses 'next' without having selected an option

{ASK IF ANY CHILD AGED 0-11 AT DV_Age_2 to DV_Age_16
AND TaxFCSApUse = 3-4
AND FF_TaxFCSAy = 0}
TaxFCSAy
The Tax-Free Childcare scheme operates using an online account. Parents pay money into their account and the government adds their contribution. Parents can pay registered childcare providers from their account. Children aged up to 11 are eligible, or up to 17 for children who are disabled. Parents must earn at least the National Minimum or Living Wage for 16 hours a week on average and no more than £100k per year. Parents are not eligible if they receive tax credits, Universal Credit or employer childcare vouchers.
Will you apply for Tax-Free Childcare?
SINGLE CODE
1. Yes – definitely
2. Yes – probably
3. No – probably not
4. No – definitely not

Version of question with "Don't know" answer option shown

{ASK IF ANY CHILD AGED 0-11 AT DV_Age_2 to DV_Age_16
AND TaxFCSApUse = 3-4
AND FF_TaxFCSAy = 1}
TaxFCSAy_DK
The Tax-Free Childcare scheme operates using an online account. Parents pay money into their account and the government adds their contribution. Parents can pay registered childcare providers from their account. Children aged up to 11 are eligible, or up to 17 for children who are disabled. Parents must earn at least the National Minimum or Living Wage for 16 hours a week on average and no more than £100k per year. Parents

are not eligible if they receive tax credits, Universal Credit or employer childcare vouchers.

Will you apply for Tax-Free Childcare?

SINGLE CODE
1. Yes – definitely
2. Yes – probably
3. No – probably not
4. No – definitely not
5. Don't know

Split-ballot experiment 3

Version of question with answer option "I/We don't use formal childcare" towards the end of the list of answer options

{ASK IF TaxFCSAy = 3-4
AND FF_TaxFCSWy = 0}

TaxFCSwy

Why will you [if TaxFCSAy = 3 "probably"] [if TaxFCSAy = 4 "definitely"] not apply for Tax-Free Childcare?

SINGLE CODE
1. I/we are not working
2. I don't think I/we earn enough
3. I think my/our income is too high
4. I/we claim Tax Credits
5. I/we claim Universal Credit
6. I/we wouldn't be eligible
7. I/we use Employer-Supported Childcare/childcare vouchers
8. I/we don't use formal childcare
9. I don't understand what it is/how it works
10. My/our childcare provider is not signed up
11. I don't think the payments are worth my while/too much hassle
12. Another reason

Version of question with answer option "I/We don't use formal childcare" at the beginning of the list of answer options

{ASK IF TaxFCSAy = 3-4
AND FF_TaxFCSWy = 1}

TaxFCSwy_Expt

Why will you [if TaxFCSAy = 3 "probably"] [if TaxFCSAy = 4 "definitely"] not apply for Tax-Free Childcare?

SINGLE CODE
1. I/we don't use formal childcare
2. I/we are not working
3. I don't think I/we earn enough
4. I think my/our income is too high

5. I/we claim Tax Credits
6. I/we claim Universal Credit
7. I/we wouldn't be eligible
8. I/we use Employer-Supported Childcare/childcare vouchers
9. I don't understand what it is/how it works
10. My/our childcare provider is not signed up
11. I don't think the payments are worth my while/too much hassle
12. Another reason

Split-ballot experiment 4

Version of question with answer option "Childcare arrangements" towards the end of the list of answer options

{ASK IF ActA = 1-3
AND PtnrYN = 1
AND FF_CWrkEmp = 0}
CWrkEmp
Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work?
CODE ALL THAT APPLY
1. I've no choice because my husband/wife/partner does not work
2. I've no choice because I need to contribute to the household income
3. I like to have my own money/the extra money
4. I need to keep on contributing to my pension
5. I want to get out of the house
6. I enjoy working
7. I would feel useless without a job
8. My career would suffer if I took a break
9. I can work from home some of the time
10. I can work from home most/all of the time
11. My husband/wife/partner can work from home some of the time
12. My husband/wife/partner can work from home most/all of the time
13. I don't have to work during school holidays
14. My husband/wife/partner doesn't have to work during school holidays
15. I can work flexi-time
16. My husband/wife/partner can work flexi-time
17. Childcare arrangements
18. Another reason
Or
19. None of these reasons

Version of question with answer option "Childcare arrangements" at the beginning of the list of answer options

{ASK IF ActA = 1-3
AND PtnrYN = 1
AND FF_CWrkEmp = 1}
CWrkEmp_Expt

Which of these, if any, influence your decision to work?
CODE ALL THAT APPLY
1. Childcare arrangements
2. I've no choice because my husband/wife/partner does not work
3. I've no choice because I need to contribute to the household income
4. I like to have my own money/the extra money
5. I need to keep on contributing to my pension
6. I want to get out of the house
7. I enjoy working
8. I would feel useless without a job
9. My career would suffer if I took a break
10. I can work from home some of the time
11. I can work from home most/all of the time
12. My husband/wife/partner can work from home some of the time
13. My husband/wife/partner can work from home most/all of the time
14. I don't have to work during school holidays
15. My husband/wife/partner doesn't have to work during school holidays
16. I can work flexi-time
17. My husband/wife/partner can work flexi-time
18. Another reason
Or
19. None of these reasons

Appendix E: Case studies of surveys that have made, or have considered, a mode transition to online data collection

Active Lives Adult Survey (formerly Active People Survey)

The Active People Survey was commissioned by Sport England and ran between 2005 and 2013. It collected data on engagement in, and attitudes to, sport and physical activity. Interviews were carried out by telephone using a Random Digit Dialling (RDD) sampling approach. Around 160,000 interviews were conducted annually, with a response rate of around 27 per cent. The questionnaire took around 15 minutes to complete. No incentives were offered.

The Active Lives Adult Survey is the successor survey to the Active People Survey. It started in 2015 and is still ongoing. It is a push-to-web survey with addresses sampled from the Postcode Address File, and with data collected online and by paper. Up to two adults per household (any two) can take part. Around 175,000 adults are interviewed each year, with a response rate of around 21 per cent. The questionnaire takes on average 12 minutes to complete. A conditional £5 voucher is provided to each adult who completes the survey.

The decision to transition mode was taken in large part due to the rise of mobile-only households, which threatened the RDD sampling approach. The Active Lives Adult survey made certain changes to the questionnaire. Because of these changes, as well as the change in survey mode, no attempt was made to continue the time series.

British Social Attitudes survey (BSA)

The British Social Attitudes survey (BSA) is conducted by the National Centre for Social Research and is funded by multiple organisations. It was established in 1983 as an annual random probability cross-sectional survey tracking social, political and moral attitudes.

BSA used face-to-face interviewing since its establishment in 1983 until 2019. Addresses were sampled from the Postcode Address File. In 2019 just over 3,000 interviews were conducted, with a response rate of 44 per cent. The questionnaire took around one hour to complete. No incentive was offered.

In 2020 BSA transitioned to a push-to-web design with addresses sampled from the Postcode Address File, and with data collected online, or by telephone (CATI) for those who requested this mode. Almost all those completing did so online. Up to two adults per household (any two) can take part. Just under 7,000 interviews were conducted in the 2022 wave, with a response rate of 14 per cent. The questionnaire takes around 30

minutes to complete. A conditional £10 voucher is provided to each adult who completes the survey. The response rate of 14 per cent is low compared to other push-to-web surveys, and is likely to be due to the absence of a paper version of the questionnaire.

Comparisons between the face-to-face and push-to-web approaches have found certain differences in sample profiles, including that the push-to-web mode underrepresents Black people, but overrepresents those with a degree. Comparisons of survey estimates have found social attitudes to be similar but has also found greater levels of political engagement in the push-to-web surveys. To our knowledge no official decision has been taken to break the long-term time series, and recent published reports include data from both designs; however, some data users might decide not to compare the data between the modes, or to caveat the findings, perhaps depending on discontinuities in the trend data over time.

Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW)

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is commissioned by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). It was established in 1982 (as the British Crime Survey) to measure the crime experienced by households in England and Wales in the 12 months prior to interview, including unreported and unrecorded crime.

The CSEW is a repeated cross-sectional face-to-face survey, with addresses sampled from the Postcode Address File. In 2022-23 around 31,000 adult interviews, and around 1,300 child interviews (aged 10-15) were completed, with a response rate of around 42 per cent. The questionnaire takes around 52 minutes to complete. An unconditional incentive of a credit card protector is included in the advance letter.

The CSEW has only changed mode briefly and temporarily, in 2021-22, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, when it transitioned to telephone data collection and was renamed the Telephone-operated Crime Survey for England and Wales (TCSEW). ONS advises that survey estimates from the TCSEW are not directly comparable with those from the CSEW, given this change in methodology.

A considerable amount of research has been directed at exploring the feasibility of transitioning the CSEW to online data collection. This work has found that such a transition would require extensive changes to the data collection instruments and would pose particular challenges for victims with complex experiences of crime[3]. In 2017/18, a self-completion web instrument was developed which was found to be suitable for respondents who had experienced no crime, a single incident, or clearly separated incidents, but was

---

[3] Details of research exploring the feasibility of transitioning the CSEW to online data collection are at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/methodologies/transformationofth ecrimesurveyforenglandandwalesdiscoveryresearchontheredesignofmultimodequestions and https://www.veriangroup.com/case-studies/transforming-the-crime-survey-for-england-and-wales and https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/redesignofcrimesurveyfore nglandandwalescsewcorequestionsforonlinecollection/2018-07-19

less suitable for more complex experiences. No transition has been made to date, although research continues to explore its feasibility.

European Social Survey (ESS)

The European Social Survey (ESS) is a repeated cross-sectional survey measuring issues relating to social trust, politics, values and wellbeing. It is conducted face-to-face every two years across 30+ European countries. In the UK it is funded by the ESRC. It was established in 2002 and is still ongoing. In the UK addresses are sampled from the Postcode Address File, with around 2,000 interviews completed each wave. The response rate has fallen over time, from 55 per cent in 2002 to 41 per cent in 2018 (and to 21 per cent in 2020, although this is largely attributable to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic). The questionnaire takes around 55 minutes to complete. An incentive of an unconditional £5 voucher is included in the advance letter, and in addition each interviewer is allocated two £25 vouchers to use at their discretion as a refusal conversion tool.

The ESS is planning to move data collection from face-to-face to online completion, which in the UK will mean moving to a push-to-web design, using online and paper completion. The ESS questionnaire is relatively straightforward in terms of its questions and routing, removing a significant barrier to transition. Most recently, in the UK, a push-to-web parallel run was carried out at the time of the 2021 survey. The push-to-web survey achieved a 39 per cent response rate, with a survey length of around 47 minutes. Certain design features are likely to have contributed to this high response rate, including: £5 cash as an unconditional incentive in the invitation letter; a £10 cash conditional incentive (in addition to the unconditional cash incentive); a survey 're-launch' phase, whereby another invitation letter was sent which included an unconditional £5 gift card; a relatively long fieldwork period at around 15 weeks; and the survey being a general attitudes survey branded as "Living in Britain" and university-sponsored (City, University of London) so of relatively high interest and legitimacy[4].

Work is ongoing to assess the sample composition, the comparability of survey estimates between the modes, the accuracy of the within-household person selection, break-off rates, and differences in data quality by device used to complete the survey.

For the next round of the ESS in 2025 a large scale parallel run will be conducted, with half of the achieved interviews being conducted via the traditional face-to-face design, and the other half conducted via a push-to-web design. The intention is for the ESS to transition to a fully push-to-web design from 2027 onwards. The findings of the parallel run experiment will determine to what extent the existing time series can be maintained.

---

[4] Further details are available in the following Webinar:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p0j70kzROv0

Food and You 2 (formerly Food and You)

Food and You was commissioned by the Food Standards Agency (FSA). It ran between 2010 and 2018 and measured people's self-reported knowledge, attitudes and behaviour relating to food safety and other food-related behaviours. It was a repeated cross-sectional face-to-face survey, sampling from the Postcode Address File. Around 3,000 interviews were achieved each wave, with a response rate of around 48 per cent. The questionnaire took around 40 minutes (in England and Wales) or 55 minutes (in Northern Ireland) to complete. An incentive of an unconditional £10 Post Office Payout was included in the advance letter.

Food and You 2 is the successor survey to Food and You. It started in 2020 and is still ongoing. It is a push-to-web survey with addresses sampled from the Postcode Address File, and with data collected online and by paper. Up to two adults per household (any two) can take part. Around 4,000 interviews are achieved each wave, with a response rate of around 29 per cent. The questionnaire takes on average 26 minutes. A conditional £10 shopping voucher is provided to all those who complete the interview.

The decision to transition mode was made by a Working Group established by the FSA's Advisory Committee for Social Science[5]. The Working Group found that a push-to-web approach could reduce the per-interview cost and could therefore provide an opportunity to increase the sample size, and could also reduce the potential for social desirability bias. But they acknowledged that the change in mode could require the time series to be broken, would necessitate a shorter questionnaire, and would lower the response rate and thus increase the scope for non-response bias.

The Food Standards Agency decided to break the time series with the change of mode, writing in a Social Research Association Blog[6] that "*The change in methodology has allowed us to future proof the Food and You survey, but has also meant that there is a break in the data time-series, and findings between Food and You 2 and Food and You 1 are not directly comparable. Whilst we could have investigated the impact of changing mode, for instance by doing a parallel run of face-to-face and online fieldwork, we decided not to go down that route due to the associated cost of this additional fieldwork and the limited existing time series*".

Health Survey for England (HSE)

The Health Survey for England (HSE) is commissioned by NHS England. It was established in 1994 and is still ongoing. The survey monitors trends in the nation's health and care, providing information about adults aged 16 and over, and children aged 0 to 15. Interviews are carried out face-to-face with addresses sampled from the Postcode Address

---

[5] https://acss.food.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fandyousurvey.pdf
[6] https://the-sra.org.uk/SRA/SRA/Blog/ExplorethedataFoodandYoutwo.aspx

File. A nurse visit is also included for some sample members, to collect certain bio-samples. Around 8,000 interviews are conducted annually with adults, and around 2,000 with children. A response rate of around 60 per cent is achieved. The questionnaire takes around 35 minutes to complete. An incentive of £10 is provided to those completing the survey.

A feasibility study was carried out in 2020 to explore whether the collection of key HSE data could be transitioned from face-to-face to push-to-web interviewing, using online and paper data collection[7]. This research found that a push-to-web design resulted in a large drop in the response rate to around 25 per cent, and differences in key survey estimates compared to the face-to-face survey. Compared to the face-to-face survey those responding to the push-to-web survey were older, more likely to be White, were living in less deprived areas, and were less likely to be renting their accommodation. The study noted the challenges in developing a self-completion questionnaire given the complex nature of the face-to-face questionnaire, and the absence of an interviewer to provide guidance. The authors concluded that a move to a push-to-web design would "*result in a notable break in time series trend data.*"

Transformed Labour Force Survey (formerly Labour Force Survey)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and has been running since 1973. It is a UK-wide household survey that collects data about employment and earnings. Interviews are collected face-to-face, with addresses sampled from the Postcode Address File. A rotating panel design is used, with participants staying in the sample for five waves. Interviews are carried out at around 130,000 households annually, with all adults in the household eligible for interview. The response rate was 70 per cent in 2001, but this has fallen steadily over time, reaching 47 per cent in 2019, and 27 per cent in 2022 (although the 2022 response rate is likely to be accounted for in part due to methodological changes necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic). No incentive is offered.

ONS has carried out an extensive programme of work to transition the LFS to a push-to-web design. This push-to-web survey is called the Transformed Labour Force Survey (TLFS). Addresses are sampled from AddressBase Premium, which is similar to the Postcode Address File but has certain benefits, including better identification of ineligible 'deadwood' addresses. Completion is online-only, although telephone completion is available on request.

---

[7] See "The Health survey for England 2020/2021 Feasibility Study": https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/areas-of-interest/public-health/health-survey-for-england---health-social-care-and-lifestyles/feasibility-study-2020---2021#chapter-index

The design incorporates a "knock-to-nudge" approach whereby field interviewers visit non-responding addresses in areas known to have a low propensity to respond (as defined by expected age and area deprivation profiles) to maximise the representivity of the achieved sample. Early work has indicated that a response rate of around 39 per cent can be achieved. An unconditional incentive of a branded ONS notepad is included in the invitation letter, and a conditional £10 shopping voucher is provided to households in which every adult completes the survey.

ONS intend to decommission the LFS and move their collection of labour market statistics entirely to the TLFS in the near future. Extensive work on this transition is currently underway, including a parallel run of the LFS and the TLFS to compare data between the modes, testing of design improvements, user feedback, and an independent academic review[8]. Challenges identified thus far include a bias in the TLFS response towards older age groups, and greater levels of partial completes, and less detail in verbatim responses. ONS plans to continue the time series between the LFS and the TLFS, but the success of this, including what caveats might be required, and what statistical adjustments might be required, await the results of the current investigations.

Participation Survey (previously Taking Part)

Taking Part was commissioned by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS). It ran between 2005 and 2019 and measured cultural, digital, and sporting engagement. It was a repeated cross-sectional face-to-face survey, with data collected from adults (aged 16+)m and children (aged 5 to 15). Addresses were sampled from the Postcode Address File. Around 8,000 interviews were achieved each wave, with a response rate of around 43 per cent. The questionnaire took around 40 minutes (for adults) and 12 minutes (for 5-10 year olds). An incentive of an unconditional £10 Post Office Payout was included in the advance letter.

The Participation Survey is the successor survey to Taking Part. It started in 2021 and is still ongoing. It is a push-to-web survey with addresses sampled from the Postcode Address File, and with data collected online and by paper. Up to two adults per household (any two) can take part. Around 33,000 interviews are achieved each wave, with a response rate of around 33 per cent. The questionnaire takes on average 26 minutes. A conditional £10 shopping voucher is provided to all those who complete the interview.

The decision to transition mode was after a consultation found that the Taking Part survey was not meeting data users' needs in terms of level of "geographic granularity". The Participation Survey was therefore commissioned with the aim of increasing the sample size for the same budget. The COVID-19 pandemic meant that it was not possible to conduct a parallel run to assess the impact of the change of mode. Although the Participation

---

[8] A July 2024 update on these plans is available here:
https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourmarkettransformationupdateonprogressandplans/july2024

Survey asks similar questions to Taking Part it was accepted that a move to online data collection would mean that the time series would need to be broken, and that robust comparisons with Taking Part data would not be possible given the difficulty of disentangling whether any differences reflect real changes, or are an artefact of the change of mode[9].

---

[9] For further information, see: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/participation-survey-methodology/comparability-between-taking-part-survey-and-the-participation-survey