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# Chapter 2

## Questionnaires

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The English Housing Survey (EHS) collects data in two separate phases. In the first phase an interviewer visits a sampled address and conducts a face-to-face interview, using a questionnaire that is administered by an Interviewer on a laptop – i.e. computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). Following the interview a second phase of data collection occurs when, for a sub-sample of cases, a qualified surveyor visits the address to make an assessment of all physical aspects of the home. The surveyor completes a detailed survey form using a digital pen, an input device which captures the surveyor’s handwriting and brush strokes and converts it into digital data.

### Overview

- 2.1 Each year the relevance of the data collected by the interview questionnaire and physical survey form is reviewed. Questions are revised to improve data quality, or removed altogether if the information they elicit is no longer relevant to users’ needs. In addition, the questionnaire contains a number of rotating question sets which come in and out of the survey on an annual, biennial or less frequent basis. The review process also selects the rotating question sets to be included in a particular year.
- 2.2 The annual questionnaire review is led by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in consultation with the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and key survey users across both departments.
- 2.3 While the content of the physical survey has remained largely unchanged from the former English House Condition Survey (EHCS), the interview questionnaire has undergone more radical changes since its inception in 2008-09. More details on the content and annual review of the questionnaire and survey form are provided below.

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## Interview questionnaire

- 2.4 A core set of questions is asked of respondents every year. These questions cover:
- household composition, ethnicity, nationality, economic status, education and health
  - household accommodation and length of residence
  - housing history and aspirations
  - rent and mortgage payments
  - satisfaction with landlord/attitudes to neighbourhood
  - income
- 2.5 These topics cover the key attributes of a household and the dwelling it occupies. The permanent inclusion of questions on these topics (with minimal change to the phrasing of the questions) ensures a consistent picture is provided over time. A number of questions (such as marital status and ethnic group) use the ONS Harmonised wording to allow comparison across different government surveys:
- <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/harmonisation/primary-set-of-harmonised-concepts-and-questions/index.html>
- 2.6 The questionnaire also contains a number of rotating question sets which come in and out of the survey on an annual or biennial basis (or in some cases, less frequently). Topics covered in these modules include:
- second homes
  - fire and fire safety
  - satisfaction with the neighbourhood
  - work undertaken to improve energy efficiency of the home
  - adaptations made to the home to improve accessibility
  - tenancy deposits
- 2.7 The content of the interview survey is reviewed annually. A fairly radical overhaul of the questionnaire was undertaken during the development of the 2011-12 survey. This was driven by a significant reduction in funding and the consequent requirement to reduce the length of the questionnaire from 50 to 30 minutes. By comparison, changes to the interview questionnaire since this time have been relatively minor.
- 2.8 The 2013-14 questionnaire covered the following topics:
- demographics including age, sex, marital status, household reference person and household relationships
  - type of property
  - tenure

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- individual characteristics including nationality, country of birth, ethnicity, wellbeing, time at address, health and disability, education
  - age of accommodation
  - housing history
  - subletting
  - waiting lists (for social housing)
  - rooms available to the household and shared facilities
  - type of dwelling and household
  - satisfaction with accommodation and neighbourhood
  - access to vehicles
  - council tax and utilities
  - energy efficiency
  - ownership type (i.e. leasehold or freehold)
  - satisfaction with repairs and maintenance
  - ownership details including when bought property, how financed purchase, who bought it from, how much it cost
  - mortgages, including type, payments and arrears
  - tenancy type
  - social renting details
  - rent and housing benefit including payments and arrears
  - number of tenancy agreements
  - fire safety
  - second homes
  - buying aspirations
  - working status and job details
  - economic status
  - income and earnings
  - benefits
  - income support and mortgage interest
  - savings and investments

2.9 The main changes that were made to the 2013-14 questionnaire were:

- questions on fire hazards and outbreaks of fires were rotated into the questionnaire
- questions on Energy Performance Certificates were rotated out of the questionnaire
- questions on marital status, living together as a couple, and health were updated to reflect changes to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) harmonised concepts and questions up to the end of 2012
- a new module of questions which asks about wellbeing was added which has also been included in many other government surveys
- the question asking for consent to data matching on energy use and efficiency was amended to make it clearer for respondents

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- Universal Credit was incorporated into questions about benefits and income and the relevant follow up questions were added
  - Personal Independence Payment was incorporated into questions about benefits and income and the relevant follow up questions were added
  - a new question was added asking if respondents have an overnight carer
  - a number of other minor wording changes were made to improve comprehension of questions
- 2.10 In addition, the upper and lower limits allowed in responses to questions where the respondents had to give a number, for example age last birthday, as well as the warnings to interviewers when a relatively high or low value has been entered, were reviewed and amended where appropriate.
- 2.11 The full EHS 2013-14 questionnaire is published on the DCLG website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-housing-survey-questionnaires>.
- 2.12 In 2013-14, the median interview length including recruitment to the physical survey was 39 minutes. This length is calculated on full interviews only; partial interviews are excluded<sup>1</sup>.

## Physical survey

- 2.13 The physical survey form is designed to collect information about the dwelling and its surroundings, and about the condition of the property and what would need to be done to remedy defects.
- 2.14 The content of the physical survey has remained largely unaltered from the former EHCS. Surveyors continue to record the following:
- details of the nature and type of each dwelling
  - the presence and condition of facilities and services
  - the condition of the internal and external building materials
  - the presence and condition of shared facilities and services in blocks of flats or on estates
  - an assessment of the environment in which the dwelling is located
  - assessments of the health and safety risks associated with the dwelling (these were extended in 2008-09)

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<sup>1</sup> A partial interview is when a substantial part of the interview is carried out (up to the variable PlanTen in the buying aspiration module) but the interview is stopped before the end is reached. There were 5 partial interviews in 2013-14.

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- 2.15 The content of the physical survey is reviewed annually and new questions are added where appropriate to reflect, for example, changing technology, e.g. the presence of solar panels or wind turbines.
- 2.16 In 2011, as part of the major EHS review (see paragraph 2.7), BRE and DCLG undertook an extensive review to identify and recommend areas and options for reducing the scope and complexity of the physical survey. Following this review:
- redundant questions were removed (details below)
  - the separate HMO (house in multiple occupation) form was dropped with some questions added to section 7 of the main form
  - the number of housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS) hazards that were directly measured by the surveyor was reduced from ten to six; the others were flagged only when an extreme risk (equating to a Category 1 Hazard) was found as part of the physical survey.
- 2.17 Details on specific questions removed can be found in the 2012-13 Technical report. The 2013-14 physical survey covered the following topics:
- amenities
  - services, heating and energy
  - construction
  - measurement
  - exterior and plot
  - ageing elements
  - Internal / external defects
  - structural faults
  - housing health and safety rating system
  - pests
  - drains
  - common parts
  - shared facilities
  - flat construction and faults
  - local area and environment
- 2.18 In comparison with previous years changes to the 2013-14 physical survey were minor and included:
- whether the hot water cylinder has been physically seen by the surveyor (page 7)
  - repositioning of the question on how the loft information has been obtained (page 7)
  - a new question has been added within the wall structure section to collect wall thicknesses of each different wall type (page 16)

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- the 'standard cavities' and 'narrow cavities' options within the wall structure section have been changed to 'cavity 1' and 'cavity 2' to enable us to record cavity walls of different ages (page 16)

2.19 The full EHS 2013-14 physical survey form is published on the DCLG website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-housing-survey-physical-surveys>