
Chapter 2

Questionnaires

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 laptop computer – 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 property. 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 them into digital data.

Overview

- 2.1 The content of the interview survey is reviewed annually. 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. 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 Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and key survey users across both departments.⁵
- 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 changes since its inception in 2008-09. 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.

⁵ The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy was created on 14 July 2016. This Department took over energy policy from the former Department of Energy and Climate Change.

Interview questionnaire

2.4 A core set of questions is asked of respondents every year. They 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; and
- income.

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 that a consistent picture is provided over time. A number of questions (such as marital status and ethnic group) adopt the wording of the Office for National Statistics Harmonised Questions for Social Data Sources 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>

2.5 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; and
- tenancy deposits.

2.6 Table 2.1 outlines the topics included in the 2014-15 questionnaire. In addition to a number of minor wording changes designed to improve comprehension of questions, the main changes that were made to the 2014-15 questionnaire were the addition of questions on:

- whether individual respondents have served in the armed forces;
- whether health conditions or illnesses are a consequence of serving in the armed forces;

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- private renting history;
 - the length of respondents' tenancies;
 - safety in the neighbourhood;
 - responsibility for repairs of rented properties;
 - length of social renters' tenancy agreements;
 - whether social renters have considered moving;
 - receipt of financial support for energy saving improvements;
 - the effect of new government schemes on respondents' likelihood of buying a property; and
 - reasons why mortgage applications were turned down.

Table 2.1 Household interview questionnaire topics 2014-15

demographics including age, sex, marital status, household reference person and household relationships
type of property
tenure
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 – smoke alarms
buying aspirations
working status and job details
economic status
income and earnings
benefits
income support and mortgage interest
savings and investments

In addition, the rotating question set on fire hazards and outbreaks of fires was rotated out of the questionnaire. It was replaced by the rotating question sets on tenancy deposits and on the adaptations to the home needed for household members with a long-term disability. The full EHS 2014-15 questionnaire is published on the DCLG website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-housing-survey-questionnaires>.

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- 2.7 In 2014-15, the median interview length including recruitment to the physical survey was 33 minutes. This length is calculated on full interviews only; partial interviews are excluded⁶.

Physical survey

- 2.8 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.
- 2.9 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; and
 - assessments of the health and safety risks associated with the dwelling (these were extended in 2008-09).
- 2.10 The content of the physical survey is reviewed annually and new questions are added where appropriate to reflect changing technology, for example, the presence of solar panels or wind turbines.
- 2.11 In 2011, as part of the major EHS review, 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 (see the 2012-13 technical report for the full details);
 - the separate form for house in multiple occupation (HMO) was dropped with some questions added to section 7 of the main form; and
 - 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.

⁶ A partial interview is when a substantial part of the interview is carried out (up to the question PlanTen which asks about the type of housing the respondent expects occupy in the longer term) but the interview is stopped before the end is reached.

2.12 Table 2.2 outlines the topics covered in the 2014-15 physical survey. In comparison with previous years, changes to the 2014-15 physical survey were relatively minor and included:

- the presence of smart meters for gas or electric meters (Page 5);
- the inclusion of biomass fuel options for the type of heating fuel (page 6);
- new questions to the household questionnaire on the presence of overheating in the dwelling, the presence of an in house display and whether the dwelling has any internal or external solid wall insulation (page 8);
- whether there is any stone present in the construction materials of the dwelling and if so its proportion and type (page 13)
- the area in m² of roof covered with PV panels (page 14); and
- summary questions on the presence of internal / external wall insulation and further question on % of walls with insulation present (page 18).

Table 2.2 Physical survey topics 2014-15

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

2.13 The full EHS 2014-15 physical survey form is published on the DCLG website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-housing-survey-physical-surveys>