



Department for
Business, Energy
& Industrial Strategy

Developments to the BEIS Public Attitudes Tracker

An update on the consultation outcomes and
next steps for the survey



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Introduction

The department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) uses the Public Attitudes Tracker (PAT) to understand and monitor public attitudes to the department's main business priorities. The quarterly survey originated in the department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) in March 2012 and has evolved to cover a range of policies under the BEIS banner. The previous contract for the PAT survey expired in May 2021. BEIS reviewed the uses and methodology for the survey before retendering the contract.

This document summarises the outcome of these investigations and the new methodology adopted for the survey. Some revisions to the historic publication schedule are also set out.

Context

From its inception, the PAT has been run using a face-to-face interviewing methodology. However, due to the impacts of Covid-19, the methodology had to be changed and from March 2020 to the end of the previous contract in May 2021, data collection was moved to an online panel. This was an interim methodology introduced at short notice in the middle of Wave 33 to ensure data collection could continue. At the same time, this offered an opportunity to investigate the implications of asking the PAT questions via an online, self-completion method. Inevitably, this methodological change caused a break in the previous time series as results from the two different survey methodologies cannot be directly compared.

It is not currently feasible to return to face-to-face data collection for this survey, and as the online panel used as an interim mode had considerable limitations compared to the face-to-face methodology, we needed to consider alternative options for the future survey methodology. To aid this, we consulted with users to ensure that the new contract met their needs as far as possible, within the current methodological constraints.

Internal and External Consultation

BEIS ran an external consultation between 12th November 2020 to 30th November 2020 and encouraged external users of the survey to submit their views on questions relating to the future of the survey. In addition, an extensive internal consultation was carried out in December 2020, to ensure the survey continues to meet the department's needs.

As well as reviewing the survey content (topic areas and questions), BEIS took this opportunity to consider the frequency and sample size of the survey, as well as the outputs produced to ensure that they provide good quality evidence, are insightful and accessible for users, and deliver value for money.

The [consultation document](#) (including questions asked) is available on the PAT website.

After conducting the consultations, BEIS used the results to inform a series of decisions made during the re-tender process, with the proposed changes listed below.

Proposed changes

Methodology

Following a competitive tender process, BEIS decided to use an Address Based Online Survey (ABOS) methodology to conduct the survey over the life of the new contract. This uses a random probability sampling methodology and has been established as a feasible approach for other government surveys, including the Community Life Survey. One advantage of this method over an online panel is that it should avoid the risk of conditioning respondents, which is particularly important for the PAT given the number of questions about respondents' awareness of different concepts and technologies.

Due to the change in methodology, the results from the new survey will not be directly comparable with previous survey methods. As before, there will be a technical annex summarising the methodology and key survey metrics as part of the summary report(s) published each wave and a more detailed technical note will be published at the end of the first year of the new contract (May 2022).

As results from waves conducted under this methodology constitute the creation of a new timeseries, the wave numbering will be reset, with the first wave under the contract being named Wave 1. Similarly, the question identifiers used within the survey will also be reset, and so the question identifiers used will not necessarily match up with those used in previous waves of the survey.

Wave 1

Due to some delays in the tender process for the new contract of the survey, the continuing complications of Covid-19 and the challenges of implementing a new methodology, BEIS decided not to conduct a summer wave this year and will instead incorporate the questions usually asked in the summer into the Autumn wave (Wave 1) and Winter wave (Wave 2). These include questions on: Shopping Around, Switching, Consumer Rights, Consumer Dispute Resolution, Consumer Problems, Trust in Consumer Organisations and Artificial Intelligence.

The Autumn wave of each year would normally be published in November, with fieldwork conducted in the preceding September. However, due to the reasons listed above, BEIS have had to adjust this slightly this year. We plan to publish Wave 1 in December. After Wave 1 has been published, BEIS will look to keep to the previous publication timetable, with publication in the months of February, May, August and November.

Content

BEIS have conducted a full questionnaire review following the consultation, to ensure that the questions contained within the survey are still relevant and fit for purpose. This review has resulted in a few questions being removed (as they were no longer as relevant to ask), some adjustments being made to existing questions and some new questions being added in. A full

list of the changes made to the questionnaire will be provided as part of the technical note at the end of the first year under the new methodology (May 2022).

Frequency

The frequency of the publication was reviewed to determine whether it might be a better use of public resources to move from a quarterly to a bi-annual or annual publication. Many of the statistics reported do not change a great deal from quarter to quarter.

After consideration, BEIS have decided to continue with quarterly publication, due to limited internal support of a move to bi-annual and some external views indicating a clear desire for quarterly publication. The frequency of the survey will likely be reviewed again towards the end of the new contract.

Outputs

The relevance and effectiveness of the existing outputs in their current design and layout was re-considered. After deliberation, BEIS have decided to stop publishing the pdf and excel crosstabulation tables due to their lack of use amongst users and difficulties in making these tables fully accessible for all users. BEIS will still continue to publish the questionnaire, data set and summary report documents for each wave. Following user feedback, BEIS are also planning to reformat the quarterly report as a set of short, topic-based reports to make it easier for users to access the results they are most interested in.

User Feedback – Get in touch with us

At BEIS we are always looking to gather user feedback so that we can provide the best experience that we can to our users. If you would like to provide feedback or if you have any questions about the PAT survey and its future, please contact us at BEISPAT@beis.gov.uk.