



Department
of Energy &
Climate Change

DECC Public Attitudes Tracker survey

Technical note to accompany published datasets

April 2014

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URN 14D/131

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DECC Public Attitudes Tracker – technical note to accompany published datasets

Background

The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) set up a tracking survey in 2012 to understand and monitor public attitudes to the department's main business priorities. TNS BMRB, an independent research organisation, was commissioned to conduct this research.

The survey began in March 2012 and runs four times a year, with a large set of questions asked annually and a sub-set of these questions asked quarterly.

This technical note is intended to accompany the full datasets from the public attitudes tracker, which are published alongside the summary results for each wave at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/public-attitudes-tracking-survey>.

Methodology and sampling

The tracking survey is conducted on the TNS UK face-to-face omnibus survey.

The TNS UK omnibus uses a random location sampling methodology. Random location is a quota sampling approach where interviewers are given very little choice in the selection of respondents. Respondents in each interviewer assignment are drawn from a small set of homogenous streets. Quotas are set in terms of characteristics which are known to have a bearing on individuals' probabilities of being at home and so available for interview. This minimizes any bias introduced as a result of interviewers focusing on groups that are more likely to be at home. Rules are also given which govern the spacing between addresses and timing of interviews.

Each week, a varying number of sampling points are issued depending on the length of the questionnaire. Census small area statistics and the Postcode Address File (PAF) are used to define sampling points. Sampling points are areas of similar population sizes formed by the combination of wards, with the constraint that each point must be contained within a single Government Office Region (GOR).

The addresses are issued to achieve an adult sample of between 13 and 18 interviews in provincial areas and 12 and 15 in London. Assignments are conducted over two days of fieldwork and carried out on weekdays between 2pm and 8pm and at the weekend. Interviews are conducted by computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). Approximately 2,000 UK interviews are conducted with adults aged 16+ on the omnibus each week.

Questionnaire design and piloting

The questionnaire was designed by TNS BMRB working alongside DECC. Where possible existing questions were used from other surveys to ensure they were tried and tested and to help maximise comparability.

A cognitive pilot of the Wave 1 questionnaire (the first annual questionnaire) was conducted in March 2012. Cognitive interviewing helps to identify any ambiguities on question or response wording and any words or phrases that are open to misunderstanding or misinterpretation. It does this through assessing the thought processes that respondents go through when trying to answer a question. The full Wave 1 questionnaire was tested as part of the pilot exercise and a number of changes were agreed ahead of the start of Wave 1 fieldwork in late March 2012.

The quarterly questionnaire is a shortened version of the questionnaire used for the annual survey. Questions relating to issues where attitudes might shift quickly and those that might be subject to seasonal change are included in the quarterly questionnaire. Where questions used in Wave 1 (the first annual survey) were not considered to work effectively at the sample level, questions were revised and included at Wave 2 to allow for a new baseline measure to be developed. Where Wave 1 questions cannot be compared with subsequent waves due to question wording, this is indicated using a ‘***’ in the headline data tables.

The cognitive pilot exercise conducted before Wave 1 was repeated ahead of Wave 2 to ensure that any new or revised questions could be tested. A further 20 interviews were conducted at this stage by members of the TNS BMRB team.

Question 14a on nuclear energy was rephrased in Wave 3 and is not comparable with the question used in Waves 1 and 2.

The smart meters questions (Q8 and Q9) were rephrased in wave 5, including the addition of photograph prompts, to align them with those in the DECC Smart Meters attitudes tracker.

A follow up question on CCS (Q15a) was added to the annual questionnaire in Wave 5.

Question Q15B covers support or opposition to extracting shale gas and was added to the quarterly questionnaire from wave 8 onwards.

A new set of questions on renewable heat (Q7_1, Q7_2, Q7_3, Q7_4, Q7_5, Q7_6, Q7_7a and Q7_7b) were included in the questionnaire at wave 8 and wave 9.

Two new questions (Q26a and Q26b) on the UK’s approach to managing radioactive waste were included in the questionnaire at wave 6 only.

Questions Q11 and Q26 were removed from the annual questionnaire in wave 9.

The final questionnaires used for each wave of the survey are published at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/public-attitudes-tracking-survey>.

Fieldwork

Please refer to the relevant dataset for the fieldwork dates for each wave.

Coding

A small number of questions were included in the questionnaire with an 'other specify' code. Verbatim responses from the 'other' code were reviewed by TNS BMRB during the data collection stage. Based on this a number of responses were back-coded to existing codes and a small number of new codes were added to capture additional common responses.

Data outputs

Following fieldwork at each wave, TNS BMRB provided DECC with a set of data tabulations, an SPSS data set and an Excel data set. Outputs were based on specifications agreed between TNS BMRB and DECC.

At wave 8 a filter issue impacted responses to questions Q7_4, Q7_5 and Q7_6. Respondents who had earlier stated that they did not want to, or will not install, 3 types of renewable heat measures were not asked follow-up questions on them. These questions were repeated at wave 9 with the correct filter. The wave 9 results to questions Q7_4, Q7_5 and Q7_6 are therefore not comparable to those of wave 8. DECC will use the wave 9 results as its baseline.

At wave 9, 72 respondents were not asked question Q16e due to a filter error. A re-contact exercise was carried out and missing data was collected for 25 of these respondents.

Weighting

Results were weighted at the analysis stage to be representative of the UK adult population aged 16+. Data were weighted for the following characteristics: sex, age, social grade, region and tenure. The weighted value is given in the final column of each database and any analysis of the data should be based on the weighted value for each individual.

Analysis notes

- There are some inconsistencies in question numbering between waves so the questionnaires should be used as a guide if merging datasets.
- The data for the number of people reporting that they had installed or were in the process of installing solid wall insulation have been adjusted to remove people who already said they had cavity wall insulation or were in the process of installing this. In order to make the adjustment it has been assumed that people do not have both solid wall and cavity wall insulation and that if people reported having both they were more likely to have cavity wall insulation.
- For questions 5 and 7, in order to minimize the risk of disclosure, we have merged those who have already installed with those who are in the process of installing for the following technologies: air source heat pump, ground source heat pump, solar thermal panels, a micro-CHP (combined heat and power) unit, solid wall insulation, and biomass boilers.
- For Q10 (electric cars/vans), we have merged those who already own an electric car or van with those who are thinking about buying an electric car or van quite soon into those who are thinking about buying an electric car or van quite soon or already own one.

The data sets published also include a number of demographic variables. Most of these are included as standard on the omnibus survey¹. We also asked questions relating to property type, primary heating method², whether there is a pensioner living in the household whether there anyone with a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity in the household and income. For Wave 2, and subsequent waves, a separate variable is included on whether the household income is less than £16,000 per annum in an attempt to capture this information from respondents who did not wish to disclose their actual income bracket.

Confidence intervals

Strictly speaking, sampling errors are only applicable to probability samples and are not applicable to the random location design adopted for this survey. However, it can be assumed that the variance of a random location sample is similar to that of an equally specified probability sample. In practice, the clustering of the sample is likely to inflate the confidence interval by a factor of up to 1.5.

For example, for questions based on the full sample (2,040 for Wave 9) the 95% confidence interval around a measure for 50% of respondents would be +/- 2%, based on the assumption of a simple random sample.

This is illustrated in the tables below which give an indication of the lower and upper bound confidence intervals for two questions in Wave 9.

Level of thought given to saving energy in the home (Q2)	Wave 9 %	Confidence interval (%)	
		Lower	Upper
A lot	27.6	26.1	29.9
A fair amount	49.1	46.9	51.3
Not very much	17.3	15.7	18.9
None at all	5.6	4.6	6.6
Don't know	0.4	0.1	0.7
<i>Base</i>	<i>2,040</i>		

Whether plan to switch energy supplier (Q17b)	Wave 9 %	Confidence interval (%)	
		Lower	Upper
Plan to switch in next year	5.3	4.3	6.3
May or may not switch in next year	32.9	30.9	34.9
Will not switch in next year	55.1	52.9	57.3

¹ We have only included a subset of the full list of standard demographic questions asked on the TNS omnibus. We have included variables which we judged to be most useful in this context.

² A question was asked on whether the property was connected to the gas grid but this is not included in the database to minimize risk of disclosure.

Don't know	6.6	5.5	7.7
<i>Base</i>	2,040		

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