



Department  
for Work &  
Pensions



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Social Research

# Impact Assessment of Support for Mortgage Interest Loans

Technical Annex

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February 2025

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# Introduction

This technical annex provides additional detail on the Impact Assessment of Support for Mortgage Interest Loans.

(DWP research report no. 1094; ISBN 978-1-7865-9834-9)

The results from the impact assessment and a top-level summary of the methodology employed, including the rationale, are provided in the main report.

The technical annex covers details of research scoping, research design, sampling methodology, research tool design, analytical procedures and copies of the topic guides and research tools utilised in fieldwork.

# 1 Annex: Methodology

This annex provides a comprehensive overview of the methodologies used to draw conclusions within this research.

## 1.1 Research elements and timeline

The research had several key elements, each of which are summarised in this chapter:

- Depth interviews with 25 SMI recipients in Cohort 1 (eligible for the loan under the pre-April 2023 rules) – **March 2024**
- Quantitative telephone survey of 1,408 SMI recipients of all types – **July to October 2024, including pilot**
- Depth interviews with 20 SMI recipients in Cohort 2 (eligible for the loan under new April 2023 rules) – **September to October 2024**
- Depth interviews with six mortgage lenders, including banks, building societies and specialist lenders – **February to September 2024**

## 1.2 Policy structure

### 1.21 Theory of Change

A Theory of Change was developed from a DWP base to assist with the structure of the evaluation, providing the team with understanding of the SMI policy and how it works to support the evaluation. It considered five stages:

- Inputs
- Activities
- Outputs
- Outcomes
- Impacts

Several contextual factors were identified relevant for the design:

- Mortgage market
- House prices
- Political context
- Cost of living

- Social attitudes
- Global economy

## 1.22 Process for receiving SMI

Once borrowers in arrears are made aware of SMI as a source of support, the process is intended to operate as follows<sup>1</sup>:

- Recipients seek information about how to apply for SMI.
- Recipients contact their benefit office or are pro-actively contacted by them.
- They then are sent the MI12 form from DWP (e.g., via their UC journal, by telephone<sup>2</sup>).
- The applicant then collates information about their household and their mortgage to complete their parts of the form and sends it by post to their lender.
- The lender then completes their section of the form and send it to DWP.
- DWP then process the claim, and make an offer to the recipient, who must then accept it.
- Money is then transferred directly to the lender on the same date the recipient receives their qualifying benefit. For UC this is monthly and for legacy benefits this is every 4 weeks.

## 1.3 Evaluation questions

Ten evaluation questions were devised, triangulating between DWP initial research aims, and the Theory of Change. These are listed below, together with the key elements of the Theory of Change identified as relevant for each.

### **RQ1. What are the main reasons recipients apply for SMI in the first place?**

There were three links in the theory of change identified as relevant to answer this research question:

- [Assumption] Recipients are unable to pay their mortgage without support
- [Assumption] Lenders are aware of the SMI scheme
- [Mechanism] Recipients are aware of the SMI loan scheme

### **RQ2. To what extent does SMI impact on lenders' forbearance practices?**

There were three links in the theory of change identified as relevant to answer this research question:

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<sup>1</sup> Citizens' Advice Bureau (2019) *Apply for SMI*. 2 January 2019.

<sup>2</sup> DWP. *Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI)*.

- [Mechanism] Lenders identify recipients who are struggling with their repayments
- [Activity] Lenders offer recipients alternative support
- [Mechanism] Lenders are motivated to engage with SMI

### **RQ3. Do lenders understand SMI, and what is their experience of the scheme?**

There were three links in the theory of change identified as relevant to answer this research question:

- [Assumption] Lenders understand SMI and its aims
- [Activity] Lenders discuss the scheme with recipients
- [Activity] DWP pays the SMI loan

### **RQ4. What are recipients' experiences of navigating the SMI system?**

There were three links in the theory of change identified as relevant to answer this research question:

- [Activity] Recipients access guidance to understand the scheme
- [Activity] Eligible recipients complete physical MI12 form and send it to lender

### **RQ5. Are SMI loans seen as a temporary or long-term solution to financial difficulties?**

There were two links in the theory of change identified as relevant to answer this research question:

- [Activity] Eligible recipients apply for an SMI loan
- [Activity] Lender completes section of the MI12 to support recipient's application.

### **RQ6. Does the current level of SMI provide sufficient support?**

There were six links in the theory of change identified as relevant to answer this research question:

- [Mechanism] Recipients continue to receive SMI payments
- [Outcome] Recipients lose SMI eligibility
- [Outcome] Recipients pay off their mortgage and SMI loan
- [Mechanism] SMI is paid towards interest on mortgage
- [Outcome] Increased financial stability
- [Outcome] Improved recipient wellbeing

### **RQ7. To what extent does the removal of the zero earnings rule incentivise work for current recipients?**

There were two links in the theory of change identified as relevant to answer this research question:



- [Assumption] Legacy recipients motivated them to migrate to UC and find work due to removal of zero earnings rule, as they would continue to be eligible if/when the move to UC.
- [Assumption] UC recipients motivated to find work due to removal of zero earnings rule.

**RQ8. Are the current capital limits sufficient to provide the protection needed by recipients?**

There were two links in the theory of change identified as relevant to answer this research question:

- [Mechanism] Capital limit for claiming SMI on a mortgage is £200k for all recipients apart from pension credits recipients. Payments can be made on mortgages above this amount, but SMI will only be paid up to the capital limit.
- [Mechanism] Capital limit for claiming SMI on a mortgage is [usually] £100k for pension credits recipients. Payments can be made on mortgages above this amount, but SMI will only be paid up to the capital limit.

**RQ9. Should the criteria for eligibility be altered/extended?**

There was one link in the theory of change identified as relevant to answer this research questions:

- [Mechanism] SMI only available to claimants that fall within a set of criteria.

**RQ10. Are the current capital limits sufficient to provide the protection needed by recipients?**

There were three links in the theory of change identified as relevant to answer this research question:

- [Mechanism] The qualifying period for SMI was reduced from 9 months to 3 months in April 2023
- [Mechanism] Removal of the 'zero-earnings' rule in April 2023, meaning that recipients could now access work and still be eligible for SMI
- [Mechanism] Rule changes have expanded the number of eligible recipients

**RQ11. How, and to what extent, does the scheme prevent arrears and possessions?**

There were four links in the theory of change identified as relevant to answer this research question:

- [Activity] DWP pays interest direct to the lender
- [Outcome] Reduced possession and mortgage arrears
- [Outcome] Reduced mortgage arrears
- [Outcome] Reduced possessions

## 1.4 Evaluation Framework

Based on the Research Questions above, an Evaluation Framework was devised in consultation with DWP, to attach each Research Question to a series of measures and evidence sources. The evaluation framework is shown below; the internal evaluation framework further connected specific survey or topic guide questions and report sections to individual theory of change links.

**Table 1.1 Evaluation Framework**

<b>Theory of Change link (within RQ)</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Evidence sources</b>
Recipients are unable to pay their mortgage without support (RQ1)	Recipient view on why they claimed SMI	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Recipients are unable to pay their mortgage without support (RQ1)	Did the recipient consider accessing any alternative support?	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Lenders are aware of the SMI scheme (RQ1)	Lender insight on the extent to which they are aware of the scheme, and how they found out about it	Lender interviews
Borrowers are aware of the SMI scheme (RQ1)	How recipients became aware of the scheme	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Lenders identify borrowers who are struggling with their repayments (RQ2)	Why do lenders refer recipients to SMI?	Lender interviews
Lenders identify borrowers who are struggling with their repayments (RQ2)	Which recipients do lenders refer to SMI? Lender insight on who they refer for SMI	Lender interviews
Lenders offer borrowers alternative support (RQ2)	Which recipients do lenders refer to SMI? Lender insight on who they refer for SMI	Lender interviews
Lenders are motivated to engage with SMI (RQ2)	What do lenders see as the potential benefits of SMI for themselves?	Lender interviews
Lenders are motivated to engage with SMI (RQ2)	What do lenders see as the potential benefits of SMI for recipients?	Lender interviews

<b>Theory of Change link</b> (within RQ)	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Evidence sources</b>
Lenders understand SMI and its' aims (RQ3)	Lender understanding of the purpose of SMI	Lender interviews
Lenders discuss the scheme with recipients (RQ3)	What do lenders tell recipients about the scheme?	Lender interviews
Lenders discuss the scheme with recipients (RQ3)	Do lender offer recipients any resources or guidance about SMI?	Lender interviews
DWP pays the SMI loan (RQ3)	How easy do lenders find navigating the SMI process?	Lender interviews
DWP pays the SMI loan (RQ3)	What, if anything, do lenders like about the SMI process?	Lender interviews
DWP pays the SMI loan (RQ3)	Lender view on how the SMI process could be improved?	Lender interviews
DWP pays the SMI loan (RQ3)	Lender experience of communicating with DWP	Lender interviews
DWP pays the SMI loan (RQ3)	Lender view on SMI payment timelines	Lender interviews
Recipients access guidance to understand the scheme (RQ4)	Recipient understanding of the scheme	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Recipients access guidance to understand the scheme (RQ4)	Whether recipients accessed any guidance about the scheme, what that looked like, and where they got it	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Recipients access guidance to understand the scheme (RQ4)	Whether recipients accessed third sector organisations for support and advice	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Eligible recipients complete physical MI12 form and send it to lender (RQ4)	Recipients experience of MI12 form, whether any differences between Cohorts 1 and 2	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Eligible recipients complete physical MI12 form and send it to lender (RQ4)	Recipient opinion on length of SMI application process timeline	Cohort 2 recipient interviews, recipient survey

<b>Theory of Change link (within RQ)</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Evidence sources</b>
Eligible recipients apply for an SMI loan (RQ5)	Reasons for applying for SMI (including whether seen as a path to home ownership for some recipients)	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Eligible recipients apply for an SMI loan (RQ5)	Recipient perception of SMI as long- or short-term solution	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Eligible recipients apply for an SMI loan (RQ5)	How does SMI impact financial planning	Recipient interviews
Lender completes section of the MI12 to support claimant's application (RQ5)	Lender perception of whether the scheme is a long- or short-term solution	Lender interviews
Recipients continue to receive SMI payments (RQ6)	How long recipients have been receiving SMI (broken down by demographics, perception of SMI, reasons for claiming etc)	Recipient survey
Recipients lose SMI eligibility (RQ6)	Impact of losing access to SMI loan	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Recipients lose SMI eligibility (RQ6)	Recipients lose SMI eligibility	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Recipients pay off their mortgage and SMI loan (RQ6)	Recipient perception of SMI impact on ability to pay off mortgage	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
SMI is paid towards interest on mortgage (RQ6)	Whether SMI covers sufficient level of interest on mortgage	Recipient survey
Increased financial stability (RQ6)	Recipient perception of impact on overall financial wellbeing	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Improved recipient wellbeing (RQ6)	Recipient perception of the impact of SMI on non-financial areas of wellbeing, e.g. mental health, lifestyle choices.	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Cohort 1 recipients motivated to migrate to UC and find work due to removal of zero earnings rule, as they would	Was the zero earnings rule preventing recipients accessing work, who otherwise would have (i.e. no other reason why not in work)	Recipient interviews, recipient survey

<b>Theory of Change link (within RQ)</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Evidence sources</b>
continue to be eligible if/when the move to UC. (RQ7)		
Cohort 1 recipients motivated them to migrate to UC and find work due to removal of zero earnings rule, as they would continue to be eligible if/when the move to UC (RQ7)	Proportion of recipients who have migrated and found work since rule was removed	Recipient survey
UC recipients motivated to find work due to removal of zero earnings rule (RQ7)	Recipient view on whether removal of zero earnings rule motivates them to access work or keep working	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
UC recipients motivated to find work due to removal of zero earnings rule (RQ7)	Does the ability to work impact the effectiveness of SMI as a form of support?	Cohort 2 recipient interviews
Capital limit for claiming SMI on a mortgage is £200k for all recipients apart from pension credits recipients. Payments can be made on mortgages above this amount, but SMI will only be paid up to the capital limit (RQ8)	Recipient view on the impact of the capital limit on their ability to avoid possession or arrears	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Capital limit for claiming SMI on a mortgage is £200k for all recipients apart from pension credits recipients. Payments can be made on mortgages above this amount, but SMI will only be paid up to the capital limit (RQ8)	Lender view on the impact of the capital limit on recipients' ability to avoid possession or arrears	Lender interviews
Capital limit for claiming SMI on a mortgage is [usually] £100k for	Pension credit recipient view on the impact of the capital	Cohort 1 recipient interviews, recipient survey

<b>Theory of Change link</b> (within RQ)	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Evidence sources</b>
pension credits recipients. Payments can be made on mortgages above this amount, but SMI will only be paid up to the capital limit (RQ8)	limit on their ability to avoid possession or arrears	
Capital limit for claiming SMI on a mortgage is [usually] £100k for pension credits recipients. Payments can be made on mortgages above this amount, but SMI will only be paid up to the capital limit (RQ8)	Lender view on the impact of the capital limit on pension credit recipients' ability to avoid possession or arrears	Lender interviews
SMI only available to recipients that fall within a set of criteria (RQ9)	Lender perception on whether there are any particular groups being missed out by the current eligibility criteria	Lender interviews
SMI only available to recipients that fall within a set of criteria (RQ9)	Lender opinion on whether SMI eligibility impacts lending decisions	Lender interviews
The qualifying period for SMI was reduced from 9 months to 3 months in April 2023 (RQ10)	Recipient view on the impact of reducing the qualifying period on their decision to apply	Cohort 2 recipient interviews, recipient survey
The qualifying period for SMI was reduced from 9 months to 3 months in April 2023 (RQ10)	Lender perception of the impact of reducing the qualifying period on recipients' decision to apply	Lender interviews
Removal of the 'zero-earnings' rule in April 2023, meaning that recipients could now access work and still be eligible for SMI (RQ10)	Recipient view on whether removal of the zero-earnings rule affected their decision to apply	Cohort 2 recipient interviews, recipient survey
Removal of the 'zero-earnings' rule in April 2023, meaning that	Lender perception of whether removal of the zero-earnings	Lender interviews

<b>Theory of Change link (within RQ)</b>	<b>Measure</b>	<b>Evidence sources</b>
recipients could now access work and still be eligible for SMI (RQ10)	rule has affected recipients' decision to apply	
Rule changes have expanded the number of eligible recipients (RQ10)	Lender perception of whether rule changes have led to fewer possessions and arrears	Lender interviews
DWP pays interest direct to the lender (RQ11)	Lender opinion of impact of scheme on possession and arrears	Lender interviews
Reduced possession and mortgage arrears (RQ11)	Lender view on how helpful SMI is for recipients	Lender interviews
Reduced possession and mortgage arrears (RQ11)	Does SMI benefit lender costs associated with possession	Lender interviews
Reduced possession and mortgage arrears (RQ11)	Does SMI have any impact on lenders' willingness to lend to lower income homeowners	Lender interviews
Reduced mortgage arrears (RQ11)	Recipient perception of whether SMI loans have prevented them falling (further) into mortgage arrears (and reasons why / why not)	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Reduced mortgage arrears (RQ11)	Lender perception of whether SMI loans prevent recipients falling (further) into mortgage arrears (and reasons why / why not)	Lender interviews
Reduced possessions (RQ11)	Recipient perception of whether SMI loans have prevented the possession of their home (and reasons why / why not)	Recipient interviews, recipient survey
Reduced possessions (RQ11)	Do newly eligible recipients think they would have avoided possession without SMI, if so, how?	Cohort 2 recipient interviews, recipient survey
Reduced possessions (RQ11)	Lender perception of whether SMI loans prevent the possession of recipients'	Lender interviews

Theory of Change link (within RQ)	Measure	Evidence sources
	homes (and reasons why / why not)	

*Source: SMI policy Theory of Change, IFF Research and DWP*

## 1.5 Recipient survey

### 1.51 Timescales

The recipient survey design and fieldwork periods were split over a pilot and a mainstage. The initial pilot survey design period took place between March and May 2024 with the launch of the pilot survey taking place in July 2024 after sampling and mailing had been completed. There was also a delay due to the pre-election period which led to pilot survey fieldwork dates of 18<sup>th</sup> July to 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024.

Once pilot fieldwork was completed, work began on updating the questionnaire and conducting the sample draw ahead of the mainstage survey fieldwork period, which took place from 27<sup>th</sup> August to 6<sup>th</sup> October 2024.

Data reduction, analysis, and weighting of both survey results began towards the end of mainstage fieldwork, in late September 2024, with the final unweighted data being delivered on 30<sup>th</sup> October 2024, and the final weighted data being delivered to DWP on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

### 1.52 Survey design

Both the pilot and mainstage recipient survey were designed collaboratively between the DWP and IFF Research. The survey was designed to be conducted over the phone with current and former SMI recipients across both Cohorts. The survey was designed to take around 20 to 25 minutes to complete.

The survey was designed in such a way that it would aim to answer the following research questions:

- What are the main reasons recipients apply for SMI in the first place?
- What are recipients' experience of navigating the SMI system?
- Are SMI loans seen as a temporary or long-term solution to financial difficulties?
- To what extent does the removal of the zero earnings rule incentivise work for current recipients?
- Are the current capital limits sufficient to provide the protection needed by recipients?
- Should the criteria for eligibility be altered/extended?



- To what extent have the recent changes to SMI eligibility affected recipients' decisions to apply?
- How, and to what extent, does the scheme prevent arrears and possessions?

In order to answer these questions, the survey was split into the following sections:

- Section A: Details of SMI claim
  - Covers what benefits respondents were in receipt of, when recipients first applied, details of mortgage and homeownership, and reasons why recipients applied for SMI
- Section B: Motivations
  - Covers how respondents first heard about SMI, and actions taken prior to first SMI payment
- Section C: Application process
  - Covers recipient views on application process and role of DWP and lender in this
- Section D: New Rules
  - Covers recipient awareness and views on April 2023 changes to SMI and whether this influenced behaviour
- Section E: Impact of SMI
  - Covers impact of SMI on current financial situation and situations recipients may find themselves in without access to SMI
- Section F: Personal Information
  - Covers household and demographic information

## 1.53 Sampling frame

The sampling frame was sourced from DWP records of SMI recipients, based on SMI claims paying to recipients across Great Britain (England, Scotland and Wales) in a six-month period running from July to December 2023.

The full population comprised 12,625 unique SMI recipients and included both active claims and all those ending payment since July 2023.

## 1.54 Sampling method

### Random Probability Sampling (RPS)

To minimise sources of bias in the survey, this was an RPS (Random Probability Sampling) survey. This means all sample records for recipients were treated equally (contacted an equal number of times, unless a definite outcome is achieved such as a refusal or completed survey). This approach prohibited setting quotas for individual types of interviewees, for prioritisation by interviewers. However, varying quantities of

sample for sub-groups or across the population were uploaded (used for telephone fieldwork) to match the desired profile of survey completions.

This RPS approach removes bias effects which may occur in conventional telephone survey sampling with targets set for specific groups, where sub-groups which are targeted for additional calling may have a different profile of response simply due to being more likely to reach those more reluctant to take part within those groups.

The survey results must address a range of research questions, most of which apply at a whole-population level. It is therefore important the design of the dataset is not excessively skewed, since this would reduce the accuracy of whole-population results. Some questions, however, apply at sub-population level:

- RQ7. To what extent does the removal of the zero earnings rule incentivise work for current claimants? (requires Cohort 1 analysis).
- RQ10. To what extent have the recent changes to SMI eligibility affected claimants' decisions to apply? (requires Cohort 2 analysis).

There is also a need at DWP to understand differences by sub-groups, in particular those claiming different benefits, and those benefiting from the new rules. Our aim was therefore to produce a dataset which is primarily representative of the population of SMI claimants in the July 2023 – December 2023 period, for maximising the usefulness of the data at an overall level, but does over-represent certain groups to achieve specific goals.

To this end, taking into account likely response rates and sample availability, the following groups were oversampled from the outset, from the first upload of sample for telephone fieldwork:

- Cohort 2; all available sample was uploaded for telephone fieldwork, given the small sample for this group and need for detailed analysis;
- Income Support; to allow separate analysis with >100 completes, all available sample was uploaded for telephone fieldwork;

Table 1.2 to Table 1.5 below show the distribution of the sample by the sub-groups used for oversampling at mailout stage, and for later selective uploading of sample for interview:

**Table 1.2 Sample, split by household type and age of SMI recipient**

Household type and age combined	Sampled for pilot	Sampled for mainstage	Total sampled	Total sample supplied
Single – younger	30	267	297	459
Single - children	124	1,495	1,619	2,080
Single - middle age	305	2,913	3,218	4,451
Single - older	163	1,348	1,511	1,696
Couple - younger	1	27	28	41
Couple - children	58	713	771	1,124
Couple - middle age	48	652	700	1,040
Couple - older	51	395	446	545
<b>Total</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>7,810</b>	<b>8,590</b>	<b>11,436</b>

IFF Research survey system, DWP sample supplied for fieldwork. Younger: Under 45, Middle Age: 45-64, Older: 65 and older.

**Table 1.3 Sample, split by SMI monthly payment size**

SMI monthly payment size	Sampled for pilot	Sampled for mainstage	Total sampled	Total sample supplied
Small (£100 or less)	289	2,328	2,617	3,001
Average (£100.01 to £300)	359	3,710	4,069	5,752
Large (£300.01 or more)	132	1,772	1,904	2,683
<b>Total</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>7,810</b>	<b>8,590</b>	<b>11,436</b>

IFF Research survey system, DWP sample supplied for fieldwork.

**Table 1.4 Sample, split by primary benefit**

Primary Benefit (IS oversampled)	Sampled for pilot	Sampled for mainstage	Total sampled	Total sample supplied
ESA	360	2,684	3,044	4,426
IS*	10	569	579	625
JSA	0	0	0	72
PC	200	1,537	1,737	1,933
UC	210	3,020	3,230	4,330
<b>Total</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>7,810</b>	<b>8,590</b>	<b>11,436</b>

IFF Research survey system, DWP sample supplied for fieldwork. \*for this group, all sample with valid contact details not used for Cohort 1 qualitative interviews was sampled.

**Table 1.5 Sample, split by cohort**

<b>Cohort (Cohort 2 oversampled)</b>	<b>Sampled for pilot</b>	<b>Sampled for mainstage</b>	<b>Total sampled</b>	<b>Total sample supplied</b>
Cohort 1	770	6,450	7,220	9,879
Cohort 2*	10	1,360	1,370	1,557
<b>Total</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>7,810</b>	<b>8,590</b>	<b>11,436</b>

IFF Research survey system, DWP sample supplied for fieldwork. \*for this group, all sample with valid contact details was sampled.

**Table 1.6 Sample, split by ONS region**

<b>ONS region</b>	<b>Sampled for pilot</b>	<b>Sampled for mainstage</b>	<b>Total sampled</b>	<b>Total sample supplied</b>
East Midlands	65	571	636	823
East of England	66	654	720	936
London	64	886	950	1,302
North East	35	371	406	534
North West	135	1,175	1,310	1,732
South East	75	882	957	1,309
South West	69	690	759	1,017
West Midlands	70	737	807	1,130
Yorkshire and the Humber	75	685	760	986
Scotland	70	599	669	848
Wales	56	560	616	819
<b>Total</b>	<b>780</b>	<b>7,810</b>	<b>8,590</b>	<b>11,436</b>

IFF Research survey system, DWP sample supplied for fieldwork.

### **Sample uploaded**

Sample was not all uploaded for use at survey start, since this could have resulted in too many completed surveys overall, or for a particular sub-group, since response rates were unknown at survey start.

Instead, an initial tranche of sample was uploaded (5,466 records), and then two subsequent adjustment tranches were uploaded during fieldwork (of 701 records and 616 records respectively), totalling 6,783 records. Some of the first tranche of sample (780 records) was initially used for pilot fieldwork, although calling continued with this sample (treating it equally so it received six calls overall) into mainstage fieldwork. Sample for pilot was selected to provide a cross-section of recipient types, rather than to represent the population, since part of the purpose of the pilot was to assess response rates for a range of sub-groups.

The two additional survey sample uploads mid-fieldwork included an additional element of oversampling; corrections to bring the profile of responses in line with the population profile (to minimise weighting) were applied at this point, based on a combined age / household type variable and claim size, based on evidence from the pilot that these would affect response rate.

As shown in Table 1.4, JSA claimants, whose primary benefit claim was identified as JSA via DWP sample generation were excluded from the sample in error<sup>3</sup>, due to their exclusion from the qualitative interview sample (where exclusion was necessary to ensure they did not receive incentive payments which might jeopardise their benefit claim). However, even if all JSA claimant records had been uploaded, this would not have produced a sample sufficient for analysis (an estimated maximum of c.15 even if a census approach were taken).

## **1.55 Fieldwork technique**

Respondents were first sent advanced letters giving notice of the survey on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2024, allowing for an opt-out period.

For respondents based in Wales, all communication, including advanced letters and the administration of the survey itself was offered in Welsh as well as English. No surveys were carried out in Welsh, since none were requested. If respondents wished to opt out of the survey or future IFF communications, they were able to do so either via email or telephone.

All fieldwork was conducted with respondents in a computer assisted telephone interview (CATI) manner. In a small number of cases (n=46) interviews were conducted through a proxy; this is recorded on the dataset and tables. IFF Research's interviewing team operated both daytime shifts during working hours (09:00-17:00) and evening shifts (17:00-19:00) across both weekdays and weekends in order to maximise response rates and include recipients with a variety of working patterns.

Under the agreed RPS protocol, all valid sample uploaded was called six times (excluding any further requested appointments).

## **1.56 Response rate**

Table 1.7 shows the number of people receiving the survey mailing, that were called by telephone, and which completed the survey. Overall, the response rate relative to the sample uploaded for telephone fieldwork was 21%, and 1,408 completed surveys were achieved.

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<sup>3</sup> In the survey data, 7 individuals state that they are concurrently claiming JSA with another primary benefit.

**Table 1.7 Recipient Survey response rate**

	Population (N)	Population in scope of study (%)	Population in scope of fieldwork (%)
<b>Number sampled, receiving mailing</b>	<b>8,590</b>		
Sample not used (not required)	1,805		
<b>Sample used</b>	<b>6,785</b>		
Opt-outs	1		
Business Number	1		
<b>In scope of fieldwork (contacted)</b>	<b>6,783</b>	<b>79%</b>	<b>100%</b>
Non-contacts after agreed number of calls	4,650		
Refusals	550		
Broken appointment	87		
Not available during fieldwork	54		
Wrong numbers	33		
<b>Completes (response rate)</b>	<b>1,408</b>	<b>16%</b>	<b>21%</b>

This sampling approach was successful, in that 1,408 surveys were completed, closely in line with the target of 1,400, and 273 surveys were achieved with Cohort 2, providing a good population for analysis.

The tables below (Table 1.8 to Table 1.11) show the distribution of the sample by the sub-groups used for oversampling at mailout stage, and for later selective uploading of sample for interview:

**Table 1.8 Sample utilisation and response, split by household type and age of SMI recipient**

Household type and age combined	Number sampled	Sample contacted	Responses	Response rate
Single – younger	297	296	50	17%
Single - children	1,619	1,332	260	20%
Single - middle age	3,218	2,369	531	22%
Single - older	1,511	1,149	240	21%
Couple - younger	28	20	8	40%
Couple - children	771	733	127	17%
Couple - middle age	700	535	126	24%
Couple - older	446	349	66	19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,590</b>	<b>6,783</b>	<b>1,408</b>	<b>21%</b>

IFF Research survey system. Younger: Under 45, Middle Age: 45-64, Older: 65 and older.

**Table 1.9 Sample utilisation and response, split by SMI monthly payment size**

SMI monthly payment size	Total sampled	Sample contacted	Responses	Response rate
Small (£100 or less)	2,617	2,084	423	20%
Average (£100.01 to £300)	4,069	3,076	668	22%
Large (£300.01 or more)	1,904	1,623	317	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,590</b>	<b>6,783</b>	<b>1,408</b>	<b>21%</b>

IFF Research survey system.

**Table 1.10 Sample utilisation and response, split by primary benefit**

Primary Benefit	Total sampled	Sample contacted	Responses	Response rate
ESA	3,044	2,180	457	21%
IS*	579	579	153	26%
JSA	0	0	0	n/a
PC	1,737	1,313	262	20%
UC	3,230	2,711	536	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,590</b>	<b>6,783</b>	<b>1,408</b>	<b>21%</b>

IFF Research survey system.

**Table 1.11 Sample utilisation and response, split by cohort**

Cohort	Total sampled	Sample contacted	Responses	Response rate
Cohort 1	7,220	5,413	1,135	21%
Cohort 2*	1,370	1,370	273	20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,590</b>	<b>6,783</b>	<b>1,408</b>	<b>21%</b>

IFF Research survey system.

**Table 1.12 Sample utilisation and response, split by ONS region**

Region	Number sampled	Sample contacted	Responses	Response rate
East Midlands	636	511	122	24%
East of England	720	558	122	22%
London	950	737	148	20%
North East	406	329	59	18%
North West	1,310	1,036	180	17%
South East	957	760	184	24%
South West	759	580	124	21%
West Midlands	807	648	138	21%
Yorkshire and the Humber	760	617	124	20%
Scotland	669	532	103	19%
Wales	616	475	104	22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,590</b>	<b>6,783</b>	<b>1,408</b>	<b>21%</b>

IFF Research survey system. Younger: Under 45, Middle Age: 45-64, Older: 65 and older.

## 1.57 Data processing and analysis

Following data collection, verbatim responses to open ended questions were coded thematically and ‘backcoded’ where possible, or new codes were created. For fully open-ended questions, completely new codes had to be created. The codeframes were developed by IFF Research’s coding team and were subject to QA by the research team. DWP also fed back on and amended codeframes.

Data specifications for both the microdata files (produced using SPSS) and the data tables (produced using MERLIN) were created in collaboration with IFF Research and the DWP. Data tables include cross-breaks for analysis and are annotated with the results of automated significance testing (taking into account weighting effect) as explored further below.

Data files were programmed by IFF Research’s in-house Data Services team and subject to QA by both researchers in the IFF team and DWP.



## 1.58 Weighting

### Approach

As explored above, the raw data produced by the survey is not representative of the population as a whole, both due to variation in non-response, and due to oversampling. To be representative of the population, the data therefore required weighting.

The approach used was a two-stage weight:

- Non-response weight
- Sampling weight

Both weights were rim weights, produced through iterative fitting, as explained below.

### Non-response weight

Non-response was explored by all variables available on the sample, calculated simply by comparing the sample used (i.e., where a contact attempt was made) with the survey result. For example, for claimants whose primary benefit was ESA, a total of 2,181 records were used (contact was attempted) and 457 surveys were completed, producing a raw response rate of 21%.

Throughout, sample variables have been used, without applying any 'correction' using survey variables. This is in line with best practice; weighting variables should be kept consistent throughout, and survey variables are not available for the population.

- Primary Benefit – this was used for simplicity, rather than flags for each individual benefit
- SMI Cohort – including reason for qualification for Cohort 2
- SMI Amount Band (£0 to £100, £100.01 to £300, more than £300 per month)
- ONS Region
- Sex
- Household Type – a combined classification of age and household type, since survey response usually varies by a combination of these, more so than each separately.

It was observed that response rate varied by all of the variables above, and they were therefore all included in the non-response weight, which was applied as a rim weight through iterative fitting. The weight was applied by our programming team, using MERLIN data processing software.

After application, tests showed that the target profile was successfully achieved for all variables. If applied alone, this non-response weight would produce a dataset which represented the sample used, correcting for response rate, but it would not represent the population.

**Table 1.13 Non-response weight: household type and age of SMI recipient**

Household type and age combined	Responses	Profile of responses	Target profile (based on sample used)
Single – younger	50	3.6%	4.4%
Single – children	260	18.5%	19.6%
Single – middle age	531	37.7%	34.9%
Single – older	240	17.0%	16.9%
Couple – younger	8	0.6%	0.3%
Couple – children	127	9.0%	10.8%
Couple – middle age	126	8.9%	7.9%
Couple – older	66	4.7%	5.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,408</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

IFF Research weighting specification.

**Table 1.14 Non-response weight: SMI monthly payment size**

SMI monthly payment size	Responses	Profile of responses	Target profile (based on sample used)
Small (£100 or less)	423	30.0%	30.7%
Average (£100.01 to £300)	668	47.4%	45.3%
Large (£300.01 or more)	317	22.5%	23.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,408</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

IFF Research weighting specification.

**Table 1.15 Non-response weight: Primary Benefit**

Primary Benefit	Responses	Profile of responses	Target profile (based on sample used)
ESA	457	32.5%	32.2%
IS*	153	10.9%	8.5%
JSA	0	0.0%	0.0%
PC	262	18.6%	19.4%
UC	536	38.1%	40.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,408</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

IFF Research weighting specification. JSA excluded from target profile due to exclusion from survey.

**Table 1.16 Non-response weight: SMI Cohort and rules group**

SMI Cohort / Rules group	Responses	Profile of responses	Target profile (based on sample used)
Cohort 1: old rules	1,135	80.6%	79.8%
Cohort 2: qualifying period only	77	5.5%	4.8%
Cohort 2: income only	155	11.0%	11.9%
Cohort 2: qualifying period and income	41	2.9%	3.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,408</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

IFF Research weighting specification.

**Table 1.17 Non-response weight: ONS region**

ONS region	Responses	Profile of responses	Target profile (based on sample used)
East Midlands	122	8.7%	7.5%
East of England	122	8.7%	8.2%
London	148	10.5%	10.9%
North East	59	4.2%	4.9%
North West	180	12.8%	15.3%
South East	184	13.1%	11.2%
South West	124	8.8%	8.6%
West Midlands	138	9.8%	9.5%
Yorkshire and the Humber	124	8.8%	9.1%
Scotland	103	7.3%	7.8%
Wales	104	7.4%	7.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,408</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

IFF Research weighting specification.

**Table 1.18 Non-response weight: Sex**

Sex	Responses	Profile of responses	Target profile (based on sample used)
Male	615	43.7%	41.2%
Female	793	56.3%	58.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,408</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

IFF Research weighting specification.

## Sampling weight

After applying the non-response weight, it was necessary to adjust the weight to match the population profile provided by DWP. This was done using most of the variables available on the sample. This stage took into account two differences – the extent to which DWP could supply sample (which varied depending on the availability of contact details and usage for other research) and the extent to which sample within each stratum was used, for example due to oversampling.

The variables considered were:

- Primary Benefit – this was used for simplicity, rather than flags for each individual benefit
- SMI Cohort – including reason for qualification for Cohort 2
- SMI Amount Band (£0 to £100, £100.01 to £300, more than £300 per month)
- ONS Region
- Sex
- Age Band<sup>4</sup>
- Household Type<sup>4</sup>

After application, tests showed that the target profile was successfully achieved for all variables, creating (after multiplication with the non-response weight) a weight which, when applied to the dataset, produced results representative of the population provided by DWP.

If a grossing weight were required (to estimate actual numbers of claimants), a flat-rate multiplier could be applied to the sampling weight.

**Table 1.19 Sampling weight: household type of SMI recipient**

Household type	Profile of sample used	Population	Target profile (based on population)
Single – no children	56.2%	7,491	59.3%
Single – children	19.6%	2,188	17.3%
Couple – no children	13.3%	1,729	13.7%
Couple – children	10.8%	1,217	9.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>12,625</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

*IFF Research weighting specification. DWP population data, SMI recipients in last six months, January 2025.*

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<sup>4</sup> Unlike for the sampling weight, age band and household type were considered separately here, since population data combining these was not available.

**Table 1.20 Sampling weight: age of SMI recipient**

Age	Profile of sample used	Population	Target profile (based on population)
Under 35	1.6%	249	1.9%
35 to 44	12.7%	1,506	11.9%
45 to 54	30.0%	3,845	30.5%
55 to 64	33.4%	4,591	36.4%
65 to 74	11.0%	1,232	9.8%
75 to 84	9.2%	964	7.6%
Over 85	2.2%	246	1.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>12,625</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

IFF Research weighting specification. DWP population data, SMI recipients in last six months, January 2025.

**Table 1.21 Sampling weight: SMI monthly payment size**

SMI monthly payment size	Profile of sample used	Population	Target profile (based on population)
Small (£100 or less)	30.7%	3,264	25.9%
Average (£100.01 to £300)	45.3%	6,475	51.3%
Large (£300.01 or more)	23.9%	2,886	22.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>12,625</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

IFF Research weighting specification. DWP population data, SMI recipients in last six months, January 2025.

**Table 1.22 Sampling weight: Primary Benefit**

Primary Benefit	Profile of sample used	Population	Target profile (based on population)
ESA	32.2%	5,112	40.8%
IS*	8.5%	642	5.1%
JSA	0.0%	91	0.0%*
PC	19.4%	2,086	16.6%
UC	40.0%	4,694	37.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>12,625</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

IFF Research weighting specification. DWP population data, SMI recipients in last six months, January 2025. \*JSA excluded from target profile due to exclusion from survey.

**Table 1.23 Sampling weight: SMI Cohort and rules group**

SMI Cohort / Rules group	Profile of sample used	Population	Target profile (based on population)
Cohort 1: old rules	79.8%	10,972	86.9%
Cohort 2: qualifying period only	4.8%	391	3.1%
Cohort 2: income only	11.9%	978	7.7%
Cohort 2: qualifying period and income	3.5%	284	2.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>12,625</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

IFF Research weighting specification. DWP population data, SMI recipients in last six months, January 2025.

**Table 1.24 Sampling weight: ONS region**

ONS region	Profile of sample used	Population	Target profile (based on population)
East Midlands	7.5%	921	7.3%
East of England	8.2%	1,071	8.5%
London	10.9%	1,419	11.2%
North East	4.9%	583	4.6%
North West	15.3%	1,882	14.9%
South East	11.2%	1,458	11.5%
South West	8.6%	1,198	9.5%
West Midlands	9.5%	1,255	9.9%
Yorkshire and the Humber	9.1%	1,062	8.4%
Scotland	7.8%	890	7.0%
Wales	7.0%	886	7.0%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>12,625</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

IFF Research weighting specification. DWP population data, SMI recipients in last six months, January 2025.

**Table 1.25 Sampling weight: Sex**

Sex	Profile of sample used	Population	Target profile (based on population)
Male	41.2%	5,515	43.7%
Female	58.8%	7,110	56.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>12,625</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

IFF Research weighting specification. DWP population data, SMI recipients in last six months, January 2025.

## Results

The resulting weight had an acceptable range, from 0.31 to 2.95, representing a weighting effect of 1.17, reducing the effective sample size by 17%, from 1,408 to 1,205. This was deemed an acceptable reduction, given the need to compensate for oversampling, so no cap was applied to weight values.

This weight was used for the tables, and for analysis in the final report and presentation.

### 1.59 Significance testing

All significant differences were tested to a 95% confidence level, utilising z-testing for subset vs. total sample testing, and t-testing for independent percentage testing. All testing takes into account the weighting effect referred to above.

The maximum margin of error for the results on all SMI recipients is  $\pm 2.7\%$ . So, if the weighted survey data indicated that 50% of recipients were happy with an element of SMI, we could be 95% certain that the true result if the whole population were surveyed would be between 47.3% and 52.7%. This is a maximum error margin; for results closer to 0% or 100% (e.g., if 90% of recipients were happy with an element of SMI) the error margin would be narrower.

For results regarding sub-groups, error margins are wider. Effective weighted sample sizes are provided in the data tables for the calculation of error margins and significance tests. For results regarding recipients in Cohort 1 the maximum error margin is  $\pm 3.0\%$  and for recipients in Cohort 2 the margin is  $\pm 5.6\%$ .

In reporting, data is not presented if the unweighted sample size is less than 50, in line with DWP guidelines. Differences between sub-groups are not reported on in the text of the report unless statistically significant.

## 1.6 Recipient interviews: Cohort 1

### 1.61 Topic Guide design

Cohort 1 recipients had applied for a loan before April 2023 when UC claimants were required to complete a nine-month waiting period, and the zero-earnings rule was still in place. By definition, this group had applied for SMI some time ago and so IFF expected some issues with recalling their experiences.

The guide was designed by IFF Research and reviewed by DWP. It sought to capture the reasons why recipients had applied for SMI. A 45- to 60-minute interview was used to focus on the outcome aspects of the evaluation framework, capturing recipient perspectives on the role SMI had played in keeping them in their home and avoiding further arrears. The guide was split into three main sections:

- Overview of current family/household circumstances, any changes in recent years

- SMI first impressions, and how they receive SMI
- Reflections on their SMI experience

## 1.62 Sampling

A total of 25 interviews took place. The sample plan was drawn based on key characteristics such as the benefits recipients were on, their life stage and family circumstances, and their mortgage type.

A purposively selected sample of 149 records (to match the desired profile of interviews) was drawn on this basis from the list of contacts initially supplied by DWP. Sample was selected to achieve targets as shown in Table 1.26 to Table 1.30. Nearly all targets were achieved, other than by region, which was deprioritised in final interviewing to ensure other targets were reached.

**Table 1.26 Cohort 1 interviews: recruitment targets and achieved profile by household type and age**

	Target	Achieved
Single – younger	2	3
Single – children	3	3
Single – middle age	4	5
Single – older	3	4
Couple – younger	0	0
Couple – children	2	3
Couple – middle age	3	5
Couple – older	3	2

*IFF Research qualitative interviewing targets and statistics.*

**Table 1.27 Cohort 1 interviews: recruitment quotas and achieved profile by SMI monthly payment size**

SMI monthly payment size	Target	Achieved
Small (£100 or less)	4	4
Average (£100.01 to £300)	10	15
Large (£300.01 or more)	4	6

*IFF Research qualitative interviewing targets and statistics.*



**Table 1.28 Cohort 1 interviews: recruitment quotas and achieved profile by primary benefit**

Primary benefit	Target	Achieved
ESA	7	13
IS	2	4
UC	4	5
PC	4	5

*IFF Research qualitative interviewing targets and statistics.*

**Table 1.29 Cohort 1 interviews: recruitment quotas and achieved profile by ONS region**

ONS region	Target	Achieved
East Midlands	1	0
East of England	1	4
London	3	2
North East	1	0
North West	2	8
South East	1	0
South West	1	2
West Midlands	1	4
Yorkshire and the Humber	2	2
Scotland	3	1
Wales	3	2

*IFF Research qualitative interviewing targets and statistics.*

**Table 1.30 Cohort 1 interviews: recruitment quotas and achieved profile by sex**

Sex	Target	Achieved
Male	8	11
Female	8	14

*IFF Research qualitative interviewing targets and statistics.*

## 1.63 Fieldwork technique

All of the Cohort 1 qualitative interviews took place via telephone with one of IFF's team of trained telephone interviewers, as well as members of the research team.

In Cohort 1, MicroSIP software was used to conduct and record all interviews.

Precautions were taken for data security and to maintain confidentiality. All recipients were emailed a consent form to read through before their interview, detailing aspects such as how their data would be used and stored, and that the interview would be recorded with their consent. At the start of the interview, the moderator checked that the recipient had read the consent form, and ran through some yes/no questions to confirm consent. If the recipient had not read their consent form, the moderator would

read this out to them before running through the same yes/no questions to confirm consent.

As the nature of recipients' experience had often been of a sensitive nature (falling into financial hardship, and the reasons why they had fallen on hard times), strict safeguarding processes were also in place, to signpost recipients to resources such as the Samaritans should they need them, and to log any instances of safeguarding concerns for escalation.

Targets were set for interviews by the following variables:

- Benefit type (ESA, IS, UC and PC)
- Sex
- Household type and age, in a combined variable
- Claim length
- Region
- Claim Size

A total of 25 interviews were completed between 4<sup>th</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> March 2024.

## **1.64 Response rate**

A total of 16 records (11%) of the 149 chosen could not be contacted due to invalid contact details. A total of 25 interviews were completed in Cohort 1, out of 133 records IFF were able to contact, making the response rate 19%.

## **1.65 Analysis techniques**

Throughout the interviews, researchers continually weighed up the implications of what recipients said, and asked appropriate prompt questions (where useful to draw out additional insight). Through this process of active listening and 'weighing-up' feedback, the researcher ensured they were clear on the implications of the discussion.

Researchers used the recording and their own notes to review their initial view on the implications of the discussion. This involved triangulating feedback from different sections of the interview.

Researchers then organised and coded this textual data in a bespoke excel-based analysis framework. The framework was structured around thematic headings relating to the research objectives. Individual interviews could then be compared to determine the commonality of experiences. The framework contained coded 'classification' variables, to allow the qualitative data to be ordered/'cut' in different ways to explore any sub-group differences. A senior researcher checked the framework coding of at least one interview per researcher, providing feedback to improve the specificity and clarity.

Researchers then processed the findings vis-a-vis the research questions and took part collectively in an analysis session, where the Research team synthesised all analysis, and developed agreed understanding of the findings and implications.

Throughout the report, we have made clear that findings from the qualitative research represent the experiences and views of participants, not researchers. Because qualitative interviewing is not designed to be statistically representative, instead providing insights, they cannot be taken to be numerically representative of the population; counts of interviewees giving a particular view are therefore not provided.

## 1.7 Recipient interviews: Cohort 2

### 1.71 Topic Guide design

The key differences of we wanted to draw out from Cohort 2 compared to Cohort 1 were the 'new rules' regarding eligibility, which came into effect in April 2023. These new rules allowed people on Universal Credit who were in employment to apply for SMI, in addition to the existing groups of recipients. They also introduced a shorter 'wait period' on benefits before households become eligible for SMI. They also removed the re-serving period for UC claimants who transitioned off and back onto UC within a six-month period; this third group could not be detected by DWP or IFF and therefore could not be targeted for interview.

The guide for Cohort 2 followed the same structure as the Cohort 1 guide, but some amends were made to allow for exploration of these key aspects, along with how SMI had impacted on household finances and security for this group.

The guide was designed for a 45- to 60-minute interview, and included the same broad sections as the Cohort 1 guide (see above).

### 1.72 Sampling

As with Cohort 1, the sample was drawn based on key characteristics such as life stage and family circumstances, and their mortgage type. For Cohort 2, sample came from the quantitative survey of recipients, drawing on those who agreed to recontact.

For Cohort 2, the sampling profile was bolstered by data available from the survey. Targets were set by:

- Size of claim
- Sex
- Household type and age (combined variable)
- Region
- Mortgage type
- Employment
- Awareness that UC claimants can now work

- Awareness of the change in waiting period
- Disability
- Reason for entering Cohort 2

The targets set and achieved interviews are shown below (Table 1.31 to Table 1.39). Due to limited available sample, not all targets were achieved.

**Table 1.31 Cohort 2 interviews: recruitment targets and achieved profile by household type and age**

	Target	Achieved
Single – younger	2	1
Single – children	2	7
Single – middle age	2	5
Single – older	2	1
Couple – younger	2	0
Couple – children	2	4
Couple – middle age	2	2
Couple – older	2	0

*IFF Research qualitative interviewing targets and statistics.*

**Table 1.32 Cohort 2 interviews: recruitment quotas and achieved profile by SMI monthly payment size**

SMI monthly payment size	Target	Achieved
Small (£100 or less)	3	2
Average (£100.01 to £300)	6	10
Large (£300.01 or more)	6	8

*IFF Research qualitative interviewing targets and statistics.*

**Table 1.33 Cohort 2 interviews: recruitment quotas and achieved profile by Cohort 2 qualifying criteria**

Cohort 2 qualifying criteria	Target	Achieved
Income only	4	11
Qualifying period only	8	4
Both income and qualifying period	3	5

*IFF Research qualitative interviewing targets and statistics.*

**Table 1.34 Cohort 2 interviews: awareness of April 2023 changes**

<b>Awareness of April 2023 changes</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
UC claimants can now work	8	8
Change in waiting period	4	6

*IFF Research qualitative interviewing targets and statistics.*

**Table 1.35 Cohort 2 interviews: recruitment quotas and achieved profile by employment status**

<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
In work	9	8
Not in work	6	12

*IFF Research qualitative interviewing targets and statistics.*

**Table 1.36 Cohort 2 interviews: mortgage type**

<b>Employment status</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Fixed rate	5	7
Variable rate	5	3
Interest-only	5	8

**Table 1.37 Cohort 2 interviews: recruitment quotas and achieved profile by ONS region**

<b>ONS region</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
East Midlands	1	1
East of England	1	2
London	1	2
North East	1	1
North West	1	2
South East	1	3
South West	1	1
West Midlands	1	2
Yorkshire and the Humber	1	2
Scotland	1	0
Wales	1	4

*IFF Research qualitative interviewing targets and statistics.*

**Table 1.38 Cohort 2 interviews: recruitment quotas and achieved profile by sex**

<b>Sex</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Male	6	5
Female	9	15

*IFF Research qualitative interviewing targets and statistics.*

**Table 1.39 Cohort 2 interviews: disability status**

<b>Disability status</b>	<b>Target</b>	<b>Achieved</b>
Disability or long-term physical or mental health condition	8	7
Others	8	13

*IFF Research qualitative interviewing targets and statistics.*

## 1.73 Fieldwork technique

In Cohort 2, by agreement with DWP, Zoom Phone was used to conduct and record all interviews via telephone. This was because of changes to ICT arrangements at IFF Research. No video recordings were made.

A total of 20 interviews took place between 19<sup>th</sup> September and 8<sup>th</sup> October 2024.

## 1.74 Response rate

In total, 116 records were made available for fieldwork, of which 87 were tried. 20 interviews were completed in Cohort 2, out of the 87 records contacted, making the response rate 23%. This higher response rate reflects that participants had already been asked if they were in principle willing to take part in a further interview at the end of the quantitative survey.

## 1.75 Analysis techniques

The same analysis techniques that had been used in Cohort 1 were employed in Cohort 2. This time, particular attention was paid in the analysis framework write-up as well as the analysis session regarding the key aspects for Cohort 2.

As with Cohort 1, the analysis framework was put together with reference to the research questions, in line with the approach required for a theory-based evaluation.

# 1.8 Lender interviews

## 1.81 Topic Guide design

The guide was designed to capture mortgage lenders' views and perceptions on SMI, looking into how they work with the policy, if they recommend it to recipients and the impact on their business. The guide also aimed to find out if lenders felt that SMI

helped recipients to avoid arrears and possessions, and how they felt SMI could be improved for the recipients.

The interviews were designed to last 45 to 60 minutes, and were conducted via Microsoft Teams, utilising the transcript function only. The guide was split into five main sections:

- Profile or organisation
- Changing mortgage market context and SMI take up
- Support for customers and role of SMI
- Effectiveness of SMI
- Provider reflections on current situation and the future

## **1.82 Sampling**

A total of six interviews took place, with all available lenders. A list of contacts was supplied by the Building Society Association and UK Finance, who were asked to target a cross-section of lenders, including:

- Larger and smaller banks
- Building Societies
- Specialist lenders

Specific named banks were identified by DWP and IFF Research for UK Finance and the Building Society Association to target, based on the top UK mortgage lenders, and DWP records regarding smaller banks likely to have significant numbers of customers using SMI.

While within the six interviews all of the groups listed above were represented, sample availability and recruitment challenges significantly delayed the research, and the original target of 10 interviews was not achieved.

For this reason, while individual interviews may provide insight to the behaviour of lenders and the reasons for that, they should not be taken as a representation of the mortgage-lending sector as a whole.

## **1.83 Fieldwork technique**

All of the Lender qualitative interviews took place via Microsoft Teams with one of IFF's experienced research team.

Precautions were taken for data security. All recipients were emailed a consent form to read through before their interview, detailing aspects such as how their data would be used and stored, and that the interview would be recorded with their consent. At the start of the interview, the moderator checked that the recipient had read the consent form and ran through some yes/no questions to confirm consent. If the recipient had not read their consent form, the moderator would read this out to them before running through the same yes/no questions to confirm consent.

In total, six interviews took place between February and September 2024.

### **1.84 Response rate**

Six interviews were completed for the lenders strand, out of seven records IFF was provided with (all were contacted), making the response rate 86%. One respondent refused to take part. This response rate was high due to prior consent for contact and interview being sought by UK Finance and BSA.

### **1.85 Analysis techniques**

Throughout the interviews, researchers continually weighed up the implications of what lenders said, and asked appropriate prompt questions where useful, to draw out additional insight. Through this process of active listening and 'weighing up' feedback, the researcher ensured they were clear on the implications of the discussion.

Researchers used the recording and their own notes to review their initial view on the implications of the discussion. This involved triangulating feedback from different sections of the interview.

Researchers then organised and coded this textual data in a bespoke excel-based analysis framework. The framework was structured around thematic headings relating to the research objectives. Individual interviews could then be compared to determine the commonality of experiences. The framework contained coded 'classification' variables, to allow the qualitative data to be ordered/'cut' in different ways to explore any sub-group differences. A senior researcher checked the framework coding of at least one interview per researcher, providing feedback to improve the specificity and clarity.

Researchers then processed the findings comparing to the research questions and took part collectively in an analysis session, where the Research team synthesised all analysis, and developed agreed understanding of the findings and implications.



## 2 Annex: Research Materials

This Annex provides copies of the research materials used during the project, for the quantitative questionnaire with SMI recipients, the qualitative interviews with SMI recipients, and the qualitative interviews with lenders.

## 2.1 Cohort 1 Recipient interviews

Recipient's topic guide – Cohort 1  
c.45-60 minutes

Date 2/5/25

In-depth interview – Tele

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### Interview purpose and principles

This guide is for use for an in-depth interview with recipients of Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI) who claim pension credit or legacy benefits (Income Support, Employment and Support Allowance or Job Seekers Allowance) and Universal Credit claimants who took out a loan under pre-April 2023 Universal Credit eligibility rules. Findings will allow us to look at how SMI has impacted on household finances and security, using the longer term view many of these recipients will have, regarding what they think might have happened without the SMI loan.

This guide does not contain pre-set questions, but rather lists the key themes and sub-themes to be explored with participants in each group. Words or short phrases are instead used to indicate the study issues and allows the researcher to determine the formulation of questions and how to follow up. This encourages the researcher to be responsive to the situation and most crucially to the terms, concepts, language and behaviours used by the participants.

It does not include all possible follow-up questions like 'why', 'when', 'how', etc. as participants' contributions will be fully explored in response to what they tell us throughout in order to understand how and why views and experiences have arisen. The order in which issues are addressed and the amount of time spent on different themes will vary between interviews but the key areas for discussion are the same.

Questioning and probing will be framed to ensure we understand participants' situations as they view them. Researchers will adapt the approach, as much as possible, to suit the needs of each group of participants. The prompts provided are not exhaustive, but rather indicate the types of content we would expect to be covered – this may vary across groups of participants with different characteristics.

For any specialist terms used, please prompt for definitions.

## Researcher introduction (c.5 mins)

Thanks & introduction: Introduce yourself and IFF Research – independent research agency – explain not part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

About the client: The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for welfare, pensions and child maintenance policy.

About the research and purpose of the interview: The DWP commissioned IFF to conduct an evaluation of Support for Mortgage Interest loans (SMI). SMI loans provide support to out of work and retired mortgage holders claiming income-based benefits. It aims to prevent possession by making a contribution towards mortgage interest payments. We are looking to understand your experiences of the Support for Mortgage Interest loans you accessed, and how this may have helped you, or not.

Anonymity and confidentiality: Anything you say during the interview will be treated as confidential. The only exception to this would be if something was disclosed about risk of harm to self or others. The findings from interviews will be anonymised so that they cannot be linked back to you. This means that we don't report what you said in a way that someone could find out who said it – including the DWP. Your name is not included in our report and we don't even keep a copy of your name because we don't need to know it.

How their information will be used: IFF Research operates under the strict guidelines of the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct. Only the core members of the research team will have access to any of your details. We will not pass any of your personal details on to the DWP or any other organisations and all the information we collect will be kept in the strictest confidence and used for research purposes only.

Right to data: Until the point data is anonymised (after which point we will not be able to identify which is your data), you have the right to request access to any personal data held on you. You will also have the right to request that your data is withdrawn from the research project and not included in any future analysis. If you would like to do this, you must inform IFF Research by 18<sup>th</sup> March at the following contact details: #####. They will then follow the relevant steps with you to ensure this happens.

Anonymised notes and recordings will be destroyed six months after completion of the evaluation.

Reminder about audio recording: the discussion will be recorded so that we can accurately capture views, and so researchers can listen back when we write our reports. We will store the record what you have said safely and will not share it with anyone else. We may want to include something you say during interview in our report, but we will not mention your name or anything that could identify you. If you do not want us to include anything you say, then that's ok too. Anonymised notes and recordings will be destroyed following completion of the evaluation.

Confirm happy to proceed on this basis of recording.

Check qualitative consent form: When we invited you for this discussion, we attached a consent form which detailed what taking part would involve, what we do with information you share and data protection. May I check that you have seen and understood this form?

IF YES: Great. I just need to run through a few questions to confirm that you're clear.

MODERATOR READ OUT THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

I have read the information sheet, or had it explained to me?

YES NO

I have had time to ask questions, and am happy with the answers?

YES NO

I understand what taking part in the project will involve?

YES NO

I agree that the interview can be recorded?

YES NO

I agree you can mention things that I say during interview, but not my name, in your report?

YES NO

I agree that I am content to provide the following special category data: information about any disabilities:

YES NO

I understand that I can stop taking part at any time (and do not have to say why I want to stop)?

YES NO

I have been told how I can withdraw from this research?

YES NO

I agree to take part in this interview?

YES NO

**IF NOT SEEN CONSENT FORM:** MODERATOR READ THROUGH FORM, INCLUDING READING OUT ALL THE QUESTIONS AT THE END REQUIRING A YES/NO ANSWER (AS SHOWN ABOVE).

**Reassurances:** No right or wrong answers - we are simply asking for your views and opinions; you may not know or have a view on something – just let me know and we can move on; comfort – let me know if you'd like a break at any time. You can also stop the interview at any stage without giving a reason.

**Duration:** 45-60 minutes

**Any questions/concerns?**

## **A Family, household & financial circumstances (5 mins)**

I'd like to start by understanding a bit about you and your situation, to add some context to what we're talking about today.

A1 What are you doing day-to-day at the moment? Find out if they're working, if so, what do they do? If they're not working, what (broadly) is their main source of income?

A2 Do you live with anyone else?

- Who do you live with?
- Do you have any children living with you? How old are they?
- IF HAVE CHILDREN: Are they contributing financially or dependent?
- Who is the main earner in your household?

A3 What kind of mortgage did you have in place when you applied for the SMI loan? (e.g. fixed rate, tracker)

- Have you always had that kind of mortgage? Why / why not?
- Do you have the same kind of mortgage now?

A4 Thinking back to when you last changed your mortgage, when you were making decisions about types of mortgage, what were your priorities? (e.g. *interest rate, length, type – fixed/tracker*)

A5 Has your home situation changed since the SMI loan application in any way? How so? (i.e. financially, who lives there, any changes in family structure e.g. divorce/separation).

IF NOT MENTIONED: Is your property currently on the market, or are you intending to put it on the market?

IF YES: May I ask if you want to sell at this point, or if the decision to sell was out of financial necessity?

A6 We are keen to understand the perspectives of people with disabilities. May I ask, if you consider yourself to have a disability?

IF YES: **Thanks for confirming. We are keen to understand your perspective on this aspect of your experience, as we go through the discussion today. May I also ask, have you made any adaptations to your home because of your disability?**

## **B SMI first impressions and how they receive it (8 mins)**

**B1** How did you first hear about the SMI loan?

- Thinking back, what was your initial impression of the SMI scheme?
- Did anyone tell you about it?

**B2** Why did you apply for the SMI loan?

**B3** Did you apply for SMI when you bought your home, or later on?

Can you talk me through why you applied for SMI at the point you did?

**B4** **Receiving the SMI loan is dependent on already being in receipt of certain benefits. We are aware of the benefits that you received when you applied for SMI, but need to check if a few scenarios may apply to you, as we are keen to explore the experience of people from a variety of situations.**

MODERATOR: CHECK BOOKING SHEET TO SEE IF HAVE DISABILITIES OR ARE ON UNIVERSAL CREDIT (UC).

ESSENTIAL CHECK: **May I just check if any of the following situations apply to you?**

- IF THEY HAVE DISABILITIES: CHECK IF THEY ARE ALSO RECEIVING ESA
- IF THEY'RE ON UNIVERSAL CREDIT: CHECK IF THEY HAVE LIMITED WORK CAPABILITY OR ALSO RECEIVE PENSION CREDIT
- IF THEY'RE ON ESA: CHECK IF THEY HAVE LIMITED WORK CAPABILITY
- CHECK IF THEY HAVE MOVED BENEFITS SINCE APPLYING FOR SMI
- CHECK IF THEY HAVE STOPPED AND RESTARTED CLAIMING SMI AT ANY POINT, FOR EXAMPLE DUE TO THEIR INCOME CHANGING, OR A BENEFIT SANCTION

**B5** **IF UNIVERSAL CREDIT CLAIMANT: How long had you been claiming the eligible benefits before you applied for SMI?**

**B6** **Thinking back to when you applied for SMI, can you recall and briefly talk me through the steps you took?**

- Can you remember anything about this application process working particularly well?
- Can you remember anything about this application process being difficult? NOTE: IF PARTICIPANT HAS MENTIONED DISABILITY HERE, LISTEN OUT FOR ANY LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES OR PROBLEMS E.G. WITH FILLING IN FORMS

IF NOT MENTIONED: Do you remember filling in the form? How did you find it?

**B7** **Did anyone help you with your application? Who? What did they help with? Was it useful?**

IF NOT MENTIONED: Did your lender provide any advice / guidance? Was it useful?

**B8 How long did you have to wait for your SMI payment?**

- What did you think about how long this took?
- Were there any impacts on having to wait for payment?

**B9 We understand that most SMI payments are made directly to your lender, and the SMI loan amount is deducted from the amount you owe from your mortgage (IF NECESSARY: e.g. you normally pay £400 for your mortgage repayment but as the SMI amount is £100, you now pay £300). Is that how the SMI loan has worked for you?**

IF YES: On getting the SMI loan approved, was there any communication between you and your lender regarding how much you would pay, taking into account the SMI payment?

IF NOT: How do you receive the SMI payment? *(How is this paid to them, e.g. bank transfer, money off mortgage payments)*

**B10 How, if at all, does having the SMI in place affect your household budgeting?**

- Do you take any action when the SMI payment is made to you?

**B11 FOR THOSE NOT ON TRACKERS: You may be aware that an annual review takes place, to understand if there have been any changes to your mortgages (e.g. mortgage renewals or rate changes), which could result in changes being made to your SMI loans. Were you aware of this?**

**B12 FOR ON TRACKERS: You may be aware that people with tracker mortgages can manually message the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) about changes to their costs, and this could result in changes being made to their SMI loans. Were you aware of this?**

IF YES (TO EITHER OPTION ABOVE): What do you think about this annual review process?

## C Reflections on their experience (40 mins)

I'd like to spend a bit of time now, reflecting on your experiences recently, to get a sense of what has been helpful to you where you've experienced financial difficulty.

MODERATOR: REMIND RESPONDENT THAT THEIR PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY, AND WE CAN STOP OR TAKE A BREAK AT ANY TIME, SHOULD THEY FIND IT DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES.

### C1 We're going to do a short exercise now, so I can understand your experience over the course of receiving the SMI payment. Could I just check:

- If it's correct that it was <DATE FROM SAMPLE> when you received your first SMI payment? (*Get rough date if possible – month/year*)

- That you are still getting the SMI payments? / date their payment ended

MODERATOR: ON THE POWERPOINT SLIDE, FILL IN THE MONTHS, THEN FILL IN THE DETAILS FOR EACH MONTH AS YOU TALK THROUGH THE BULLET POINTS BELOW. FILL THIS IN YOURSELF BUT EXPLAIN WHAT YOU'RE DOING AND GO THROUGH EACH MONTH IN TURN.

- Thinking back to [first month received payment], what was going on for you at that time?
  - With your finances? (*e.g. any large outgoings e.g. if in December, or a holiday over the summer*)

IF NOT COVERED:

- Were you affected by the raise in interest rates which increased mortgage payments for a lot of people?
- Did the uprating of the Standard Interest Rate paid for SMI, which happened twice in 2023, in May and December, impact you in any way? EXPLAIN IF NECESSARY: This is different to the interest rate of your mortgage, it is a standard rate for SMI. With the uprating, you should be receiving higher payments than at the start of 2023.
- In your personal or working life that could have impacted your finances?
- With the people you live with? (*e.g. people moving out/in, changes to employment status*)
- Was anything else going on for you at that time [first month] that impacted your financial situation, or your ability to deal with your financial situation? (*e.g. stress, health, caring responsibilities etc.*)
  - MODERATOR: IF THEY MADE HOME ADAPTIONS/HAVE A DISABILITY [SEE QUESTION ABOVE], CHECK IF THIS HAD ANY IMPACT ON THEIR EXPERIENCE.

MODERATOR: REPEAT FOR EACH MONTH, UNTIL HAVE ALL MONTHS FILLED IN.

- I'd like to plot the ups and downs of your experience over this period, so that we can then reflect on any challenging times, and what helped you at that point. This will help us to understand what helped you at these points, and what would have been helpful. MODERATOR: DRAW A LINE CHART TO REFLECT THE HIGHS AND LOWS THE RESPONDENT HAS DESCRIBED, CHECKING WITH RESPONDENT THAT THIS MATCHES HOW THEY SEE THEIR EXPERIENCE.



- Now we can see this simple line chart about your experience, it looks like [month/s] were more challenging periods. Could you tell me a little about how you coped during these times [go through each challenging period separately], in terms of:

- What helped you (e.g. social support, financial advice, financial schemes they took part in etc. Listen out to see if SMI mentioned)

- IF DECEMBER UPDATING APPLIED TO THEM (SEE ABOVE), EXPLORE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BEFORE AND AFTER THIS UPDATING

- IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED: What about SMI, was that helpful to you at that point?

C2 MODERATOR: ASK THE RESPONDENT TO REFER TO THE HANDOUT THAT WAS EMAILED TO THEM, OR TALK THEM THROUGH THIS. FILL IN THE HANDOUT YOURSELF AS YOU TALK THROUGH, BUT EXPLAIN WHAT YOU'RE DOING TO THE PARTICIPANT AND GET THEM TO INPUT AS YOU GO.

**We have another short exercise to do now. I'd like you to spend a couple of minutes reflecting on your current financial situation.**

**Have a look at the handout we sent attached to your invite. We'll talk about each of the five sections in turn, about what this is like for you at the moment, and I'll note down some points here.**

MODERATOR: IF THEY INDICATED THAT THEIR SMI LOAN HAD ENDED, PLEASE ASK THE FOLLOWING TO IDENTIFY WHY.

- You previously mentioned that your SMI loan payments had ended, please could I ask, why did these payments end?

TALK THROUGH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING:

- In terms of budgeting (e.g. *Do they have a budget? How often do they refer to this? Do they feel confident about it? Does having a budget make them feel more in control? Do they feel they can stick to a budget? Do they find their current budget restrictive in terms of what they can afford to do?*)

- In terms of your finances more broadly (*How are they feeling about their finances overall? Are they in debt other than mortgage difficulties? If so, do they have a repayment plan in place? Anything they're worrying about RE any aspects of their finances?*)

- In terms of your stress and wellbeing (*How are they feeling day to day at the moment with regards to stress, their general wellbeing? To what extent is this impacted by their current financial situation?*)

- On your health, or health of those living with you

- Anything else?

FOR EACH OF THE ABOVE, TALK THROUGH ANY POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE ASPECTS AND NOTE ALL POSITIVE ASPECTS MENTIONED. FOR ANY POSITIVE ASPECTS, ASK:

- You mentioned [positive outcome/s] about your current experience. Has anything been helpful to you in getting to that outcome? (e.g. *financial schemes/benefits they've benefitted from, any financial advice*)

- IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED: Do you feel that the SMI loan helped you achieve [positive outcome/s]? How so?
  - To what extent has the SMI loan been helpful compared to any other schemes or help you've had?

**C2A We're going to move on to the second part of this exercise now.**

**Going back to the handout we sent attached to your invite, we'll again talk about each of the five sections in turn, but this time reflecting on what you think might have happened had you not taken out an SMI loan.**

GIVE THEM A COUPLE OF MINUTES TO DO THIS, THEN TALK THROUGH WHAT THEY THINK MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED:

- In terms of budgeting
- In terms of your finances more broadly
- In terms of your stress and wellbeing
- On your health, or those living with you (MODERATOR: PAY CLOSE ATTENTION IF THEY FALL INTO MADE HOME ADAPTIONS/DISABILITY GROUP)
- Anything else?

IMPORTANT PROBE IF NOT ALREADY COVERED:

- Reflecting on your situation now, and what you think would have happened without having SMI in place:
  - To what extent, if at all, do you think the SMI loan is helping you to avoid (further) arrears on mortgage payments?
    - What would you have done if you had not had the SMI loan in place?
  - To what extent, if at all, do you think having SMI in place prevented possession of your home?
    - Do you think the amount of SMI paid is sufficient to prevent possession?

**Thank you for talking me through your experiences. It would now be helpful to hear your reflections on taking up the SMI loan, and any suggestions for improvement.**

**C3 Do you see the SMI loan as a temporary or long-term solution for you, in terms of helping with finances?**

Do you think it will help you to pay off your mortgage in the long term?

**C4 Are you aware of how SMI loans are paid back?**

IF NOT, EXPLAIN: loans aren't payable until the claimant dies, or sells their property. If selling their property, there is the option to port the loan to the new property.

- What are your thoughts about how the SMI loan is paid back?

**C5 Do you feel the current level of SMI provides enough support to homeowners who are also in receipt of benefits? Why/why not?**

**C6 IF UNIVERSAL CREDIT CLAIMANT: Do you intend to take advantage of the income rule change?**

IF NECESSARY: THE RULE CHANGE MEANS THAT YOU CAN STILL RECEIVE A SMI LOAN WHILST EARNING INCOME FROM WORK, PROVIDING YOU'RE STILL ELIGIBLE TO CLAIM UNIVERSAL CREDIT (I.E. YOUR EARNINGS ARE LOW ENOUGH THAT YOU REMAIN ELIGIBLE FOR UNIVERSAL CREDIT). PRIOR TO APRIL 2023 ANY EARNED INCOME MEANT YOU COULDN'T MAKE A CLAIM, OR IF YOU STARTED EARNING AFTER YOU STARTED CLAIMING A SMI LOAN, YOU WOULDN'T RECEIVE SMI LOAN PAYMENTS DURING THE PERIOD YOU WERE EARNING.

**C7 May I ask, since it has an impact on how SMI works, whether the amount outstanding on your mortgage is more than [IF ON PENSION CREDIT: £100,000] [ALL OTHERS: £200,000]?**

IF YES:

- Are you aware that most people only receive SMI up to a certain amount [IF ON PENSIONS CREDIT: £100,000] [ALL OTHERS: £200,000] of your mortgage?
  - IF NO: This is due to a cap on the amount of SMI that can be paid to one household.
- What difference would it make to you, if any, if you received SMI on all of your mortgage? Would it affect the answers you gave about arrears, possession or paying off your mortgage in the long term?

**C8 Would you make any changes to the SMI payment or how it works to improve it for people claiming it in future?**

## D Final comments and wrap-up (2 mins)

D1 To sum up, how helpful (or not) has the SMI loan been to you?

- What do you see as the main benefits of the SMI?
- Do you feel there are any negative aspects to SMI?

D2 Anything else they want to say about what we've been talking about today?

D3 Any questions?

D4 As previously mentioned, there is a ### thank you for your time today in the form of a retail gift voucher.

D5 We may need to recontact you to check something about this research. There is also the possibility that we could ask you about taking part in further research about SMI loans. You would have the option of saying no if we were to recontact you. Would you be happy to be recontacted about future research on this basis?

YES / NO

THANK RESPONDENTS AND CLOSE

## Sign-posting to advice / DWP

MODERATOR NOTE: If respondents express a need for financial advice during the interview, here are some sources of advice:

The Money and Pensions Service – <https://maps.org.uk/en>

Money Saving Expert - <https://www.moneysavingexpert.com>

Citizens Advice - <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk>

The Department for Work & Pensions – <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions>

## 2.2 Cohort 2 Recipient interviews

### Recipient's topic guide – Cohort 2 ('New rules')

Date

2/5/25

c.45-60 minutes

In-depth interview – Tele

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### Interview purpose and principles

This guide is for use for an in-depth interview with recipients of Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI) who took out a loan under the 'new rules' regarding eligibility, which came into effect in April 2023. These new rules allowed people on Universal Credit who are in employment to apply for SMI, in addition to the existing groups of recipients. They introduced a shorter 'wait period' on benefits before households become eligible for SMI. They also removed the re-serving period for UC claimants who transitioned off and back onto UC within a six month period. Findings will allow us to look at how SMI has impacted on household finances and security for this group.

This guide does not contain pre-set questions, but rather lists the key themes and sub-themes to be explored with participants in each group. Words or short phrases are instead used to indicate the study issues and allows the researcher to determine the formulation of questions and how to follow up. This encourages the researcher to be responsive to the situation and most crucially to the terms, concepts, language and behaviours used by the participants.

It does not include all possible follow-up questions like 'why', 'when', 'how', etc. as participants' contributions will be fully explored in response to what they tell us throughout in order to understand how and why views and experiences have arisen. The order in which issues are addressed and the amount of time spent on different themes will vary between interviews but the key areas for discussion are the same.

Questioning and probing will be framed to ensure we understand participants' situations as they view them. Researchers will adapt the approach, as much as possible, to suit the needs of each group of participants. The prompts provided are not exhaustive, but rather indicate the types of content we would expect to be covered – this may vary across groups of participants with different characteristics.

For any specialist terms used, please prompt for definitions.

### Researcher introduction (c. 5 mins)

READ OUT ALL OF THIS FOR ALL

Thanks & introduction: Introduce yourself and IFF Research – independent research agency – explain not part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

About the client: The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for welfare, pensions and child maintenance policy.

About the research and purpose of the interview: The DWP has asked IFF Research to study Support for Mortgage Interest loans (SMI), to understand if the policy is working and how it could be improved. Today, we are looking to understand your experiences of the Support for Mortgage Interest loan you accessed, and how this may have helped you, or not.

Check qualitative consent form: When we invited you for this discussion, we attached a consent form which detailed what taking part would involve, what we do with information you share and data protection. May I check that you have seen and understood this form?

*IF HAVE NOT READ THE FORM: Read out the form, and then skip to B8 (audio recording reminder).*

*IF HAVE READ THE FORM: Great, thank you. Continue to B5.*

Anonymity and confidentiality: Just to summarise, what you tell us will be reported anonymously, meaning you will not be identifiable to people reading our reports, or to DWP. What you say today will not affect your dealings with DWP, or your benefits, in any way. We may want to include something you say during interview in our report, but we will not mention your name or anything that could identify you. If you do not want us to include anything you say, then that's OK too.

If during the interview for some reason I become concerned about your physical safety or the safety of others around you, I have a duty to act to make sure you and others are protected; for example, if you had a medical emergency. If this were to happen, I would talk to you about what I would do first; for example, I might tell my Project Director or the emergency services. That's the only exception to confidentiality. Otherwise, the interview will stay confidential.

Until your responses are anonymised (after which point, we will not be able to identify which is your data), you have the right to request access to any personal data held on you. You will also have the right to request that your data is withdrawn from the research project and not included in any future analysis.

You must inform IFF Research by 10<sup>th</sup> October 2024 if you wish to do this, by contacting us at #####. Anonymised notes and recordings will be destroyed six months after the completion of the evaluation.

Reminder about audio recording: the discussion will be recorded so that we can accurately capture views, and so researchers can listen back to help us write our reports. We will store the recording of what you have said safely and will not share it with anyone else.

Do you have any questions before we start?

IF YES: Great. I just need to check you agree with the following. You can answer no if you prefer, although we do need to record the interview:

MODERATOR READ OUT THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

**That you agree that the interview can be recorded. IF NO, TERMINATE INTERVIEW. IF YES, START RECORDING.**

YES NO

**That you have read the information sheet, or had it explained to you? IF NO, TERMINATE INTERVIEW.**

YES NO

**That you have had time to ask questions, and are happy with the answers? IF NO, ASK IF HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.**

YES NO

**That you understand what taking part in the project will involve? IF NO, ASK IF HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.**

YES NO

**That you agree we can mention things that you say during the interview, but not your name, in our report? THIS IS OPTIONAL, WE MAY CONTINUE IF NO.**

YES NO

**That you agree that you are content for us to ask about the following special category data: information about any disabilities. THIS IS OPTIONAL, WE MAY CONTINUE IF NO, BUT DO NOT ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT DISABILITIES.**

YES NO

**That you understand that you can stop taking part at any time (and that you do not have to say why you want to stop)? IF NO, ASK IF HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.**

YES NO

**That you have been told how you can withdraw from this research? IF NO, ASK IF HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.**

YES NO

**That you agree to take part in this interview? IF NO, TERMINATE INTERVIEW.**

YES NO

**Reassurances *if necessary*:** No right or wrong answers - we are simply asking for your views and opinions; you may not know or have a view on something – just let me know and we can move on; comfort – let me know if you'd like a break at any time. You can also stop the interview at any stage without giving a reason.

**Duration:** The interview will last around 45-60 minutes

## A Family, household & financial circumstances (5 mins)

I'd like to start by understanding a bit about you and your situation, to add some context to what we're talking about today.

A1 **What are you doing day-to-day at the moment?** ESTABLISH IF THEY ARE WORKING OR NOT. If so, what do they do? If they're not working, what (broadly) is their main source of income?

A2 **Do you live with anyone else?**

- Who do you live with?
- Do you have any children living with you? How old are they?
- IF HAVE CHILDREN: Are they contributing financially or dependent?
- Who is the main earner in your household?

A3 What kind of mortgage did you have in place when you applied for the SMI loan? (*e.g. fixed rate, tracker*)

- Have you always had that kind of mortgage? Why / why not?
- Do you have the same kind of mortgage now?

A4 Thinking back to when you last changed your mortgage, when you were making decisions about types of mortgage, what were your priorities? (*e.g. interest rate, length, type – fixed/tracker*)

A5 Has your home situation changed since the SMI loan application in any way? How so? (i.e. financially, who lives there, any changes in family structure e.g. divorce/separation).

IF NOT MENTIONED: Is your property currently on the market, or are you intending to put it on the market?

IF YES: May I ask if you want to sell at this point, or if the decision to sell was out of financial necessity?

A6 We are keen to understand the perspectives of people with disabilities. May I ask, if you consider yourself to have a disability?

IF YES: Thanks for confirming. We are keen to understand your perspective on this aspect of your experience, as we go through the discussion today. May I also ask, have you made any adaptations to your home because of your disability?



## **B SMI first impressions and how they receive it (8 mins)**

B1 How did you first hear about the SMI loan?

- Thinking back, what was your initial impression of the SMI scheme?
- Did anyone tell you about it? *Listen out for any mentions of third sector organisations*

B2 Why did you apply for the SMI loan?

B3 Did you apply for SMI when you bought your home, or later on?

Can you talk me through why you applied for SMI at the point you did?

B4 Receiving the SMI loan is dependent on already being in receipt of certain benefits. We are aware of the benefits that you received when you applied for SMI, but need to check if a few scenarios may apply to you, as we are keen to explore the experience of people from a variety of situations.

*MODERATOR: CHECK BOOKING SHEET TO SEE IF HAVE DISABILITIES OR ARE ON UNIVERSAL CREDIT (UC) OR ESA.*

**ESSENTIAL CHECK: May I just check if any of the following situations apply to you?**

- **IF ON UC OR ESA, AND HAVE DISABILITIES: Are you classified by DWP as having 'limited work capability'?** This would mean DWP were requiring you to work, or to look for work.
- **Have you changed the benefits you receive since you last applied for SMI?**
- **Have you stopped or restarted claiming SMI at any point?**

*IF THE RESPONDENT HAS CHANGED BENEFITS OR STOPPED / STARTED CLAIMING SMI SINCE APPLYING FOR THE SMI LOAN, PLEASE INFORM RESEARCH – THEY MAY HAVE CHANGED COHORT.*

B5 How long had you been claiming the eligible benefits before you applied for the SMI loan?

ASK ALL

B6 Thinking back to when you applied for SMI, can you recall and briefly talk me through the steps you took?

- Can you remember anything about this application process working particularly well?
- Can you remember anything about this application process being difficult? **NOTE: IF PARTICIPANT HAS MENTIONED DISABILITY HERE, LISTEN OUT FOR ANY LOGISTICAL CHALLENGES OR PROBLEMS E.G. WITH FILLING IN FORMS**

IF NOT MENTIONED: Do you remember filling in the form? How did you find it?

B7 Did anyone help you with your application? Who? What did they help with? Was it useful? *Listen out for any mentions of third sector organisations who may have helped*

IF NOT MENTIONED: Did your lender provide any advice / guidance? Was it useful?

B8 How long did you have to wait for your SMI payment?

- What did you think about how long this took?
- Were there any impacts on having to wait for payment?

B9 Were you aware that in April 2023, there was a reduction in the wait time for SMI? Working-age claimants must receive Universal Credit for a three-month qualifying period before they qualify for SMI. This was reduced from nine months in April 2023.

IF YES:

- How did you become aware of these changes?
- Did this reduction in wait time have any bearing on your decision to apply?

ASK ALL: If you'd had to wait nine months instead of three months for SMI, would this have affected your financial situation?

B10 There was another change made to how SMI works – the removal of the zero earnings rule. This meant that people on Universal Credit were able to work and still claim SMI. Were you aware of this change?

IF YES: Did this have any bearing on your decision to work, or not to work?

IF NO: If you had known you could work whilst still on UC, and still claim SMI, would this have made any difference to whether you looked for work or not? (*Check if they are able to work, as this may not apply to them*).

B11 We understand that most SMI payments are made directly to your lender, and the SMI loan amount is deducted from the amount you owe from your mortgage (*IF NECESSARY: e.g. you normally pay £400 for your mortgage repayment but as the SMI amount is £100, you now pay £300*). Is that how the SMI loan has worked for you?

IF YES: On getting the SMI loan approved, was there any communication between you and your lender regarding how much you would pay, taking into account the SMI payment?

IF NOT: How do you receive the SMI payment? (*How is this paid to them, e.g. bank transfer, money off mortgage payments*)

B12 **FOR THOSE NOT ON TRACKERS:** You may be aware that an annual review takes place, to understand if there have been any changes to your mortgages (e.g. mortgage renewals or rate changes), which could result in changes being made to your SMI loans. Were you aware of this?

**FOR THOSE ON TRACKERS:** You may be aware that people with tracker mortgages can manually message the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) about changes to their costs, and this could result in changes being made to their SMI loans. Were you aware of this?

IF YES (TO EITHER OPTION ABOVE): **What do you think about this annual review process?**

B13 **Have you received any communications from DWP related to your SMI loan at any point?** (*Listen out for mentions of update letters*).

## C Reflections on their experience (40 mins)

I'd like to spend a bit of time now, reflecting on your experiences recently, to get a sense of what has been helpful to you where you've experienced financial difficulty.

MODERATOR: REMIND RESPONDENT THAT THEIR PARTICIPATION IS VOLUNTARY, AND WE CAN STOP OR TAKE A BREAK AT ANY TIME, SHOULD THEY FIND IT DIFFICULT TO TALK ABOUT FINANCIAL DIFFICULTIES.

C1 We're going to do a short exercise now, so I can understand your experience over the course of receiving the SMI payment. Could I just check:

- Is it correct that it was <DATE FROM SAMPLE> when you received your first SMI payment?  
(Get rough date if possible – month/year)

- That you are still getting the SMI payments? / date their payment ended

*MODERATOR: On the PowerPoint slide, fill in the details as you talk through the bullet points below. Fill this in yourself, but explain what you are doing to the respondent.*

- I'd like to plot the ups and downs of your experience over this period, so that we can then reflect on any challenging times, and what helped you at that point, and what would have been helpful.
- Thinking back to the start of your SMI payments, what was going on for you at that time?
  - With your finances? (e.g. any large outgoings, major changes in life circumstances)
  - In your personal or working life that could have impacted your finances?
  - With the people you live with? (e.g. people moving out/in, changes to employment status)
  - *OPTIONAL EXTRA PROMPT IF LITTLE TO SAY:* Was anything else going on for you at that time that impacted your financial situation, or your ability to deal with your financial situation? (e.g. stress, health, caring responsibilities etc.)
- How did this change over time? What major things changed?

*IF NOT COVERED:*

- Has your work situation changed since you started receiving SMI payments? (i.e. they may now be in work)
  - *IF NOW IN WORK/WORKED WHILST CLAIMING SMI:* To what extent has the SMI loan been a help, alongside being able to earn money from work?
- Were you affected by the rise in interest rates, which increased mortgage payments for a lot of people?
- Did the uprating of the Standard Interest Rate paid for SMI, which happened twice in 2023 (in May and December) impact you in any way? *EXPLAIN IF NECESSARY:* This is different to the interest rate of your mortgage, it is a standard rate for SMI. With the uprating, you should be receiving higher payments than at the start of 2023.
- *IF HAS DISABILITY:* You mentioned earlier you had a disability *IF RELEVANT:* and disability adaptations to your home? What impact do you think that had on your experience?

*MODERATOR: Draw a line chart to reflect the highs and lows the respondent has described, checking with the respondent that this matches how they see their experience.*

- It looks like these times were more challenging periods. Could you tell me a little about how you coped during these times [go through each challenging period separately], in terms of:

- What helped you (e.g. social support, financial advice, financial schemes they took part in etc. Listen out to see if SMI mentioned, or uprating of SMI in May or December)
- *IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED:*

- Did you have to cut back on your spending? To what extent did you have to cut back?
- What about SMI, was that helpful to you at that point?

*MODERATOR: Note on framework if you have to prompt regarding SMI, or if it is spontaneous.*

C2 MODERATOR: Ask the respondent to refer to the handout that was emailed to them, or talk them through this if they do not have it.

**We have another short exercise to do now. I'd like you to spend a couple of minutes reflecting on your current financial situation.**

**Have a look at the handout we sent attached to your invite. We'll talk about each of the five sections in turn, about what this is like for you at the moment, and I'll note down some points here.**

- *IF SMI PAYMENTS ENDED (ASKED AT E1):* You previously mentioned that your SMI loan payments had ended, please could I ask, why did these payments end?

*TALK THROUGH POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE ASPECTS FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING:*

- In terms of budgeting (e.g. *Do they have a budget? How often do they refer to this? Do they feel confident about it? Does having a budget make them feel more in control? Do they feel they can stick to a budget? Do they find their current budget restrictive in terms of what they can afford to do?*)
- In terms of your finances more broadly (e.g., *How are they feeling about their finances overall? Are they in debt other than mortgage difficulties? If so, do they have a repayment plan in place? Anything they're worrying about RE any aspects of their finances?*)
- In terms of your stress and wellbeing (e.g., *How are they feeling day to day at the moment with regards to stress, their general wellbeing? To what extent is this impacted by their current financial situation?*)
- On your health, or health of those living with you
- Anything else?

*FOR EACH OF THE ABOVE, TALK THROUGH ANY POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE ASPECTS AND NOTE ALL POSITIVE ASPECTS MENTIONED. FOR ANY POSITIVE ASPECTS, ASK:*

- You mentioned [positive outcome/s] about your current experience. Has anything been helpful to you in getting to that outcome? (e.g. *financial schemes/benefits they've benefitted from, any financial advice*)
- *IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED:* Do you feel that the SMI loan helped you achieve [positive outcome/s]? How so?

C2A We're going to move on to the second part of this exercise now.

**Going back to the handout we sent attached to your invite, we'll again talk about each of the five sections in turn, but this time reflecting on what you think might have happened had you not taken out an SMI loan.**

GIVE THEM A COUPLE OF MINUTES TO DO THIS, THEN TALK THROUGH WHAT THEY THINK MIGHT HAVE HAPPENED:

- In terms of budgeting
- In terms of your finances more broadly
- In terms of your stress and wellbeing
- On your health, or those living with you (*MODERATOR: PAY CLOSE ATTENTION IF THEY FALL INTO MADE HOME ADAPTIONS/DISABILITY GROUP*)
- Anything else?

**C3 Reflecting on your situation now, and what you think would have happened without having SMI in place:**

- To what extent, if at all, do you think the SMI loan is helping you to avoid (further) arrears on mortgage payments?
  - What would you have done if you had not had the SMI loan in place?
- To what extent, if at all, do you think having SMI in place prevented possession of your home?

**Thank you for talking me through your experiences. It would now be helpful to hear your reflections on taking up the SMI loan, and any suggestions for improvement.**

**C4 Do you see the SMI loan as a temporary or long-term solution for you, in terms of helping with finances?**

Do you think it will help you to pay off your mortgage in the long term?

**C5 Are you aware of how SMI loans are paid back?**

IF NOT, EXPLAIN: loans aren't payable until the claimant dies, or sells their property. If selling their property, there is the option to port the loan to the new property.

- What are your thoughts about how the SMI loan is paid back?

**C6 Do you feel the current level of SMI provides enough support to homeowners who are also in receipt of benefits? Why/why not?**

**C7 May I ask, since it has an impact on how SMI works, whether the amount outstanding on your mortgage is more than [IF ON PENSION CREDIT: £100,000] [ALL OTHERS: £200,000]?**

IF YES:

- Are you aware that most people only receive SMI up to a certain amount [IF ON PENSIONS CREDIT: £100,000] [ALL OTHERS: £200,000] of your mortgage?
  - IF NO: This is due to a cap on the amount of SMI that can be paid to one household.
- What difference would it make to you, if any, if you received SMI on all of your mortgage? Would it affect the answers you gave about arrears, possession or paying off your mortgage in the long term?

- C8 Would you make any changes to the SMI payment or how it works to improve it for people claiming it in future?

## **D Final comments and wrap-up (2 mins)**

- D1 To sum up, how helpful (or not) has the SMI loan been to you?

- What do you see as the main benefits of the SMI?
  - To what extent has the SMI loan been helpful compared to any other schemes or help you've had?
  - Have there been any other support/schemes you were using but you replaced with the SMI loan?
- Do you feel there are any negative aspects to SMI?

- D2 Anything else they want to say about what we've been talking about today?

- D3 Any questions?

- D4 As previously mentioned, there is a #### thank you for your time today in the form of a retail gift voucher.

INTERVIEWER: This will be an eVoucher – please collect email address, or check if the email we booked using is valid (see booking sheet). If they say they do not want / say they cannot use an online voucher, a paper Love2Shop voucher is possible – please collect postal address, including postcode.

- D5 We may need to recontact you to check something about this research. There is also the possibility that we could ask you about taking part in further research about SMI loans. You would have the option of saying no if we were to recontact you. Would you be happy to be recontacted about future research on this basis?

YES / NO

### **THANK RESPONDENTS AND CLOSE**

For the recording, I need to state that this interview has been carried out under IFF instruction, and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct.

## **Sign-posting to advice / DWP**

### **Sources of financial advice**

If the respondent is struggling and needs help, some of the following services may be of assistance:

The Money and Pensions Service – <https://maps.org.uk/en/>

Money Saving Expert - <https://www.moneysavingexpert.com>

Citizens Advice - <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk>

The Department for Work & Pensions – <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-work-pensions>

## Mental or physical health emergency

Please consult the **safeguarding documents for interviewers** – you should call 999 for immediate help, and inform the project directors and qualitative project control. If you have difficulty locating the name or address of a participant in this situation, contact the research project team (####) who have access to the sample.

## Urgent mental health support

If they need to talk right now, there are people ready to listen. You don't have to be suicidal to use these services –they are for anyone who's struggling.

- Call Samaritans any time for free: **116 123**
- Shout also offers a free 24/7 crisis text service. Text SHOUT to **85258**
- **NHS helpline:** visit the NHS website to speak to a professional on Mental Health Helpline for Urgent Help -NHS ([www.nhs.uk](http://www.nhs.uk))

**If they don't need urgent help, but things don't feel quite right either, there are other options.**

- **Mind helpline:** call the Mind helpline where you can ask about mental health problems, where to get help near you and treatment options, on **0300 123 3393** or via online chat at <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/>.
- **Gov.uk:** For Government guidance for the public on mental health and wellbeing, visit Every Mind Matters - NHS ([www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/](http://www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/))

## 2.3 Lender interviews

Mortgage lenders topic guide  
c.45 minutes

Date 2/5/25

In-depth interview – online

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### Interview purpose and principles

This guide is for use for an in-depth interview with mortgage lenders regarding Support for Mortgage Interest loans.

This guide does not contain pre-set questions, but rather lists the key themes and sub-themes to be explored with participants in each group. Words or short phrases are instead used to indicate the study issues and allows the researcher to determine the formulation of questions and how to follow up. This encourages the researcher to be responsive to the situation and most crucially to the terms, concepts, language and behaviours used by the participants.

It does not include all possible follow-up questions like 'why', 'when', 'how', etc. as the stakeholders contributions will be fully explored in response to what they tell us. The order in which issues are addressed and the amount of time spent on different themes will vary between interviews but the key areas for discussion are the same. Prompts provided are not exhaustive, but rather indicate the types of content we would expect to be covered – this may vary across groups of participants with different characteristics.

For any specialist terms used, please prompt for definitions.



## Researcher introduction (c.3 mins)

Thanks & introduction: Introduce yourself and IFF Research – independent research agency – explain not part of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).

About the client: The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) is responsible for welfare, pensions and child maintenance policy.

About the research and purpose of the interview: The DWP commissioned IFF to conduct an evaluation of Support for Mortgage Interest loans (SMI). SMI loans provide support to eligible mortgage holders claiming income-based benefits. It aims to prevent possession by making a contribution towards mortgage interest payments.

*READ OUT ALL OF THIS FOR ALL*

Check qualitative consent form: When we invited you for this discussion, we attached a consent form which detailed what taking part would involve, what we do with information you share and data protection. May I check that you have seen and understood this form?

*IF HAVE NOT READ THE FORM: Read out the form, and then skip to B8 (audio recording reminder).*

*IF HAVE READ THE FORM: Great, thank you. Continue to B5.*

Anonymity and confidentiality: Anything you say during the interview will be treated as confidential. In reporting findings, we may use quotes or describe opinions or situations from individual interviews – these will not be attributed to an individual or organisation but may be described in terms of the characteristics of the organisation (e.g. a large mortgage lender) and/or job role (e.g. policy manager). We may want to use quotes from your interview in our report, but we will not mention your name or anything that could identify you. If you do not want us to include any quotes, then that's OK too.

Until your responses are anonymised (after which point, we will not be able to identify which is your data), you have the right to request access to any personal data held on you. You will also have the right to request that your data is withdrawn from the research project and not included in any future analysis.

You must inform IFF Research by 4<sup>th</sup> October 2024 if you wish to do this, by contacting us at #####. Anonymised notes and recordings will be destroyed six months after the completion of the evaluation.

The discussion will be recorded so that we can accurately capture views, and so researchers can listen back to help us write our reports. We will store the recording of what you have said safely and will not share it with anyone else.

**Do you have any questions before we start?**

**IF YES: Great. I just need to check you agree with the following. You can answer no if you prefer, although we do need to record the interview:**

MODERATOR READ OUT THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS:

**That you agree that the interview can be recorded. IF NO, TERMINATE INTERVIEW. IF YES, START RECORDING.**

YES NO

**That you have read the information sheet, or had it explained to you? IF NO, TERMINATE INTERVIEW.**

YES NO

**That you have had time to ask questions, and are happy with the answers? IF NO, ASK IF HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.**

YES NO

**That you understand what taking part in the project will involve? IF NO, ASK IF HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.**

YES NO

**That you agree we can mention things that you say during the interview, but not your name or your organisation's name, in our report? THIS IS OPTIONAL, WE MAY CONTINUE IF NO.**

YES NO

**That you understand that you can stop taking part at any time (and that you do not have to say why you want to stop)? IF NO, ASK IF HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.**

YES NO

**That you have been told how you can withdraw from this research? IF NO, ASK IF HAVE ANY QUESTIONS.**

YES NO

**That you agree to take part in this interview? IF NO, TERMINATE INTERVIEW.**

YES NO

Reassurances if necessary: No right or wrong answers - we are simply asking for your views and opinions; you may not know or have a view on something – just let me know and we can move on; comfort – let me know if you'd like a break at any time. You can also stop the interview at any stage without giving a reason.

Duration: The interview will last around 45-60 minutes

**Reassurances:** No right or wrong answers - we are simply asking for your views and opinions; you may not know or have a view on something – just let me know and we can move on; comfort – let me know if you'd like a break at any time. You can also stop the interview at any stage without giving a reason.

## A Profile of organisation (5 mins)

I'd like to start by talking about your organisation.

A1 Can you tell me briefly about your role?

A2 Can you tell me about the nature of the mortgage lending at your organisation? How does it compare to other lenders?

- What is the profile of your mortgage book / customers?
  - What are the most common types of mortgage held? (e.g. *residential vs buy-to-let, high/low loan to value, trackers, fixed rates etc*).
  - In what way (if any) do you think this differs from the wider mortgage market?
  - Thinking about households on lower incomes or in receipt of benefits:
    - Do you have mortgage products targeted at these customers?
    - Do you treat applications from households claiming benefits differently?
- Probe on:
  - Demographics – including proportion over pension age
  - Awareness of whether customers have disabilities, including home adaptations IF SO: Roughly what proportion/how many?
  - *demographics, including proportion over pension age, risk*

A3 Approximately how many of your mortgage customers are claiming SMI?

- What is the profile of customers claiming SMI compared to other customers?

## **B Changing mortgage market context and SMI take-up (5 mins)**

**I'd now like to talk about the current mortgage market context, arrears and possessions, and SMI take-up.**

**B1** Thinking about the last nine months (since April 2023) have you seen any change in the number of customers in mortgage arrears?

- In what way has it changed? (probe: number of customers in arrears, extent of arrears)
- Are any types of customers more/less likely to be struggling to meet their mortgage payments?

**IF NOT ALREADY MENTIONED:**

- What about low-income claimants / those in receipt of benefits
- What do you think is driving any change?

**B2** Have you seen any change in possessions?

- What has changed and why do you think this is? Note: end of COVID moratorium on possessions / clearing of court backlog may be a factor in recent rising possessions.

Probe:

- Changes in economic environment
- Changes to lender's policy/practice towards possession
- Impact of SMI (*note this and move on rather than discuss at length here*)

**B3** Have you seen any change in customers claiming SMI?

- What has changed and why do you think this is?

## C Support for Customers and role of SMI (15 mins)

I'd like to talk more about support for customers and the extent to which SMI is a part of that

C1 How would you describe awareness and understanding of SMI loans within your organisation?

- Do you feel there is potential to improve understanding of SMI loans within your organisation?
  - IF SO: How? What would good look like?

C2 How would you describe the role of SMI?

C3 Can you talk me through what happens when a customer is struggling to meet payments, or gets into arrears?

- How do you typically find out they are struggling? (e.g. before or after a missed/late payment?)
- What do you do as the lender at this point?
  - What support do you offer?
- Is there any action you take before they get into difficulty?
  - IF SO: Is this communication to everyone, or targeted at customers they think are more at risk?
- Does this action depend on the duration or extent of a customer's challenges?
- Do you make customers aware of SMI?

IF YES:

- How do you do this?
- How do you decide who to speak to about SMI?

C4 Is the process of applying for and receiving SMI payments currently effective for lenders?

- Could the application process be improved?
- Have you experienced delays between application and payment?

IF SO:

- What impact do any delays have?

C5 *IF NOT COVERED*: Where does SMI sit among the potential options people can take when they experience difficulty paying their mortgage?

- What other behaviours, products or resources are being used instead of/in addition to SMI?
- What support/behaviour do you think is most effective?

C6 How do you think customers view the SMI loan?

- Probe:
  - Awareness
  - Understanding

- Level of trust

C7 What do you see as main challenges in discussing SMI with customers?

C8 What factors do you think influence whether customers do or don't take up a SMI loan if they are eligible?

- Has this changed since April 2023?
- IF YES: In what way?

C9 Do you think claimants see SMI as a temporary or long-term solution to financial difficulties?

C10 Are you aware of the changes that were made to SMI eligibility in April 2023?

- Tell me what changes you are aware of?
- How did you hear about them?

IF UNAWARE SUMMARISE ELIGIBILITY CHANGES

C11 **Since the changes were introduced have you noticed any impacts** *(for example, change in uptake, effectiveness).*

IF NOTICED IMPACTS: **What do you think has brought about these impacts?** *(clarify whether they think changes are a result of SMI vs other contextual change)*

## D Effectiveness of SMI (10 mins)

I'd now like to explore some details about how effective you think SMI is in preventing arrears and possessions

D1 To what extent do you feel SMI is of benefit to customers?

- What do you see as the main benefits of SMI?
  - How would you compare the benefits of SMI before April 2023, compared to afterwards?
- What do you think are the main drawbacks or challenges to SMI in its current form?
  - How does this compare to any issues present before April 2023?

D2 To what extent do you think the scheme is currently effective at preventing arrears and possessions?

- Do claimants tend to access SMI when they're already in arrears, or does it prevent them getting into arrears in the first place?
- Does SMI help claimants get out of arrears?
- How does this compare to similar customers who do not claim SMI?
- Do you feel the changes made since April 2023 have had a positive or negative impact on this?

D3 What impact do you think SMI has on the likelihood of possession proceedings occurring?

- Do you review these cases of customers claiming SMI at a different interval to those who are not?
- Does it change any other aspect of your interaction with them?

D4 Overall, how much of a role is SMI currently having supporting your mortgage customers?

D5 Thinking about the different aspects of SMI, do you think it currently provides an appropriate amount of support? (*consider prevention/minimisation of arrears, preventing possession*)

ENSURE PROBE ON:

- **Capital limits** (including those impacted by the 200k limit and 100k limit)
- **Interest rates used to calculate payments**
- **Eligibility** (including reduction in waiting time, removal of zero earnings rule)
- Is there a justification for changing any of these aspects of SMI? In what way would you change them? Do you think SMI eligibility should extend to any households who currently cannot claim?
  - PROBE: do you think households who are not claiming UC or other eligible benefits should be able to apply for a SMI loan?

## **E Provider reflections on current situation, and considering the future (5 mins)**

I'd now like you to think about how the situation may change in the future.

**E1 Do you expect to see any change to the uptake or use of SMI in the coming year?**

- How do you expect this to change?
- How does this relate to wider changes *e.g. to the mortgage landscape, economic environment*

**E2 Do you expect the effectiveness of SMI in preventing arrears and possessions to change in the coming year?**



## F Summing up (3 mins)

To sum up...

F1 What do you think the general opinion of the SMI is at the moment, within your organisation?

F2 How would you summarise how effective SMI is at the moment?

F3 Outside SMI, what else do you think could change to reduce the number of possessions taken place?

F4 If you could send one message to DWP about SMI, what would it be?

F5 As previously mentioned, there is a ### thank you for your time today in the form of a charity donation. Please choose from the following where you would like your ### to be donated to:

- Great Ormond Street Hospital
- British Heart Foundation
- Macmillan Cancer support
- Shelter
- Celia Hammond Animal Trust
- Mind
- Centrepont

INTERVIEWER WRITE IN CHOSEN CHARITY

F6 **We may need to recontact you to check something about this research. There is also the possibility that we could ask you about taking part in further research about SMI loans. You would have the option of saying no if we were to recontact you. Would you be happy to be recontacted about future research on this basis?**

YES / NO

THANK RESPONDENT AND CLOSE

**For the recording, I need to state that this interview has been carried out under IFF instruction, and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct.**

## 2.4 Recipient Survey

### SMI Claimant Survey

J12772 Date 2/5/25

CATI

## S Screener

ASK PERSON WHO ANSWERS PHONE

- S1 **Good morning/afternoon/evening. My name is <INTERVIEWER> and I'm calling on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions. I'm looking to speak to <NAME> please?**

Speaking / Transferred	1	CONTINUE
Hard appointment	2	MAKE APPOINTMENT
Soft Appointment	3	
Would prefer to complete in Welsh	4	SEND TO LANGUAGE QUEUE
Engaged	5	CALL BACK
Refusal	6	CLOSE
Refusal – taken part in recent survey	7	
Not available in deadline	8	
No answer	9	
Answer phone	10	
Unobtainable / dead line	11	
Business Number	12	
Wrong number for NR – no new number provided	13	
New number provided for NR – enter on next screen	14	TAKE NUMBER AND CALL BACK
Show reassurances on screen	15	SHOW REASSURANCES AND RETURN
Request reassurance email	16	COLLECT EMAIL ADDRESS THEN CONTINUE OR MAKE APPOINTMENT (SEE APPENDIX FOR EMAIL TEXT)
<i>TERMINATE INTERVIEW – breakdown during survey</i>	17	CLOSE

ASK ALL

S2 **Good morning/afternoon/evening, my name is <INTERVIEWER>, calling on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions, from IFF Research.**

**The reason for my call is we are supporting the DWP in understanding more about the experiences of people claiming a Support for Mortgage Interest, or 'SMI', loan. Sharing your experiences can provide valuable insights that help other claimants in the future & a rare opportunity for individuals to provide direct input into government programs. It would be really helpful to run through these questions together now please?**

*INTERVIEWER NOTE: If the named respondent is unable to complete the survey themselves then a proxy, such as a partner or other household member, can help them to answer the questions. The named respondent must be present.*

**ADD IF NECESSARY:**

- The call today will take 15-20 minutes to complete.
- This is a loan that benefits claimants can obtain from the DWP to help cover the interest on their mortgage.
- The information you provide will be used to help improve how SMI loans work for claimants in the future.
- The survey will cover some questions about your experience of an SMI loan and some questions about your own personal circumstances.

Continue – with <NAME> alone	1	CONTINUE
Continue – with proxy interviewee <i>Interviewer: Note named respondent must be present.</i>	2	
Hard appointment	3	MAKE APPOINTMENT
Soft appointment	4	
Refusal	5	THANK AND CLOSE
Refusal – taken part in recent survey	6	
Not available in deadline	7	
Show reassurances on screen	8	SHOW REASSURANCES AND RETURN
Request reassurance email	9	COLLECT EMAIL ADDRESS THEN CONTINUE OR MAKE APPOINTMENT (SEE APPENDIX FOR EMAIL TEXT)

IF WALES (REGION = 11)

**S2A Would you prefer to carry out the interview in Welsh or English?**

*PROMPT AS NECESSARY.*

Continue in English	1	CONTINUE
Continue in Welsh	2	CONTINUE
Call back in Welsh	3	GO TO S2B

DS: IF S2A = 2, SWITCH INTERVIEW LANGUAGE TO WELSH AND CONTINUE. IF S2A = 1, SWITCH INTERVIEW LANGUAGE TO ENGLISH AND CONTINUE. IF S2A = 3, SHOW S2B.

IF CLOSING FOR RECALL IN WELSH (S1 = 4 OR S2A = 3)

**S2B Thank you. An interviewer who can speak Welsh will call you back within the next few days.**

DS: SWITCH INTERVIEW LANGUAGE TO WELSH AND CLOSE TO LANGUAGE QUEUE, TO REOPEN AT S1 IN WELSH.

**GDPR Before we begin, I need to read out a quick statement about General Data Protection Regulations.**

**I want to reassure you that all information collected will be treated in the strictest confidence. You have the right to a copy of your data, change your data or withdraw from the research at any point. In order to guarantee this, and as part of our quality control procedures, all interviews are recorded. Is that OK?**

Yes – agree to continue	1	
Refuse to continue	2	CLOSE

IF PROXY (S2 = 2)

**S6 First, could I ask what is your (interviewer note: proxy interviewee's) relationship to <NAME>?**

<i>WRITE IN</i>
-----------------

IF PROXY (S2 = 2)

S7 **Did you** (*interviewer note: proxy interviewee*) **help** <NAME> **to fill out the SMI application?**

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

IF PROXY (S2 = 2)

S8 **From this point on, we'll be asking questions as if we were talking to <NAME>, and I'd like you to answer on their behalf. They do need to be able to hear the questions and, if they can, contribute to the answers.**

#### REASSURANCES

- The interview will take around 20-25 minutes to complete.
- Your details were provided to us by the Department for Work and Pensions for the purposes of this research as someone who is either currently claiming SMI or has done in the past.
- Participation is voluntary and any information you give us will be used for research purposes only. Participation will not impact your benefits, your SMI loans, or any other dealings with you have with the DWP in any way.
- IFF Research will anonymise your answers to the survey by removing your name and other details that could identify you from the data. This means that it will not be possible to tell who the information is from or about.
- You have the right to have a copy of your data, change your data, or withdraw from the research. If you'd like to do this, you can consult our website at [iffresearch.com/gdpr](http://iffresearch.com/gdpr).
- All your identifiable information will be kept securely on our servers and deleted within 6 months after the completion of the project.
- IFF Research is a member of the Market Research Society, and as such has to comply with its Code of Practice, which is available to view on the MRS website ([www.mrs.org.uk](http://www.mrs.org.uk))
- If you wish to confirm the authenticity of this research or get more information about the research, you can contact:
  - **MRS: Market Research Society on ###**
  - **IFF: ### or ###**

**INTERVIEWER INSTRUCTION:** If the participant asserts that they wish to contact DWP directly about the research they can email #####. This team does not have access to their SMI or other claim details.

ASK ALL

S5 Thank you for your interest in participating in this research.

I would like to reassure you that the answers you give here will not affect any current or future support you may receive from the DWP.

Information you share with us will be anonymised so that you cannot be identified.

Before we continue any further, I just want to check, are you currently claiming an SMI loan or have done so in the past?

*SINGLE CODE. PROMPT AS NECESSARY.*

Yes – Currently claiming	1	
Yes – Previously claimed	2	
No – Have never claimed	3	SCREEN OUT
Don't know	4	DNRO SCREEN OUT

READ OUT IF S5 = 3 OR 4

S9 Unfortunately, we are looking to talk to people who are with experience of claiming Support for Mortgage Interest and were given your details by the DWP as a current or previous recipient. But as you have said you have never claimed SMI, you are not eligible to participate in the remainder of this research. On behalf of the DWP, we thank you for your time.

## A Details of SMI claim

ASK ALL

- A1 **Can you remember when you first applied for Support for Mortgage Interest payments?** If you have been on SMI more than once, please refer to when you first claimed.

SMI may have been a benefit at the time you first applied.

*READ OUT. SINGLECODE.*

*IF DON'T KNOW ENCOURAGE ESTIMATE AS IT DETERMINES ROUTING.*

<b>Up to and including March 2018</b>	1	
<b>Between April 2018 and March 2023</b>	2	
<b>From April 2023</b>	3	
Don't know	4	DO NOT READ OUT

ASK ALL

- A2 **Are you personally currently receiving any of these benefits?**

*MULTICODE: READ OUT*

<b>Universal Credit</b>	1	
<b>Personal Independence Payment (PIP)</b>	2	
<b>Employment Support Allowance (ESA)</b>	3	
<b>Income Support (IS)</b>	4	
<b>Pension Credit</b>	5	
<b>Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)</b>	6	
<b>Any other state benefit</b> (please specify) <i>Interviewer: do not use this box for any of the benefits shown in the list above.</i>	7	
Don't know	8	DO NOT READ OUT
Prefer not to say	9	DO NOT READ OUT

ASK ALL

- A3 **Thinking back to when you bought this home, did you know at the time that you would need to claim SMI to help pay the mortgage?**

*DO NOT READ OUT. SINGLECODE.*

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

ASK ALL

- A4 **And for how many years have you owned your current home?**

*PROMPT AS NECESSARY. SINGLECODE.*

Up to 2 years (since April 2022)	1	
More than 2 years, up to 4 (April 2020 to March 2022)	2	
More than 4 years, up to 6 (April 2018 to March 2020)	3	
More than 6 years, less than 10 (April 2014 to March 2018)	4	
More than 10 years, less than 15	5	
More than 15 years	6	
Don't know	7	



ASK ALL

**A5 Why did you originally need to apply for an SMI loan?**

*PROMPT AS NECESSARY. MULTICODE.*

I lost my job	1	
My partner lost their job	2	
I/my partner had to stop working due to a disability or long-term health problem	3	
I had to stop working to care for a family member with a disability or long-term health problem	4	
My partner stopped working to care for me	5	
My pension does not cover my mortgage interest	6	
My mortgage rate went up	7	
Rising cost of living meant I could not afford the mortgage	8	
Applied for SMI in order to pay for disability adaptations to home	9	
Used SMI as a route to home ownership	10	
Another reason (specify)	11	
Don't know	12	
Prefer not to say	13	

IF S5 = 2 (NO LONGER CLAIMING SMI)

**A6 What would you say is the main reason you are no longer receiving SMI?**

*PROMPT IF NECESSARY. SINGLE CODE.*

The mortgage term came to an end/the mortgage is paid off.	1	
I/we borrowed money from friends and family	2	
I/we borrowed money from a bank/building society	3	
I/we borrowed money from a payday loan company	4	
I/we sold the home because I/we could not afford the mortgage repayments	5	
I/we sold the home for other reasons	6	
I/we reduced our spending to manage without SMI	7	
I/we increased our earnings and chose to manage without SMI	8	
I am no longer entitled to the benefit that qualifies for me SMI	11	
SMI has been paused whilst I migrate from my previous benefit to Universal Credit	12	
My/our home has been repossessed or I/we are in the process of repossession	13	
Another reason (specify)	14	
Don't know	15	DO NOT READ OUT
Prefer not to say	15	DO NOT READ OUT

IF S5 = 1 (CLAIMING SMI NOW)

**A7 What kind of mortgage do you have in place?**

*READ OUT. SINGLE CODE.*

<b>A variable rate repayment mortgage –</b> <i>IF NECESSARY:</i> where your mortgage payments cover interest and some of the original loan following either your lender's rate or tracking Bank of England base rate	1	
<b>A fixed rate repayment mortgage –</b> <i>IF NECESSARY:</i> where your mortgage payments cover interest and some of the original loan at a fixed rate of interest.	2	
<b>An interest only mortgage –</b> <i>IF NECESSARY:</i> where you pay the interest only every month and will repay the capital at the end of the term either using an investment or by selling your home.	3	
Other (specify)	4	
Don't know	5	DO NOT READ OUT

IF S5 = 1 (CLAIMING SMI NOW)

**A8 Is your mortgage in your name only or jointly with a spouse/partner?**

*DO NOT READ OUT. SINGLECODE.*

Mortgage in your name only	1	
Joint mortgage with a spouse/partner	2	
Other (specify)	3	
Don't know	4	DO NOT READ OUT

IF S5 = 1 (CLAIMING SMI NOW)

A9 How much do you think you have outstanding on your mortgage? Not including any arrears.

*PROMPT IF NECESSARY. AN ESTIMATE IS ACCEPTABLE SINGLECODE.*

Up to £24,999	1	
£25,000 - £49,999	2	
£50,000 - £99,999	3	
£100,000 to £149,999	4	
£150,000 to £199,999	5	
£200,000 or more	6	
Don't know	7	
Prefer not to say	8	

IF CLAIMING SMI NOW AND HAPPY TO DISCUSS MORTGAGE (S5 = 1 AND A9 ≠ 8)

A10 **Excluding the SMI payment made by DWP to your lender, how much, if anything, is your household currently paying each month towards your mortgage?**

<i>WRITE IN</i>		
Don't know	1	
Refused	2	

## B Motivations

ASK ALL

### B1 How did you first hear about SMI?

PROMPT AS NECESSARY. MULTICODE.

DWP	1	
Your mortgage lender	2	
A social worker or support worker	3	
A support organisation (for example, Citizen's Advice)	4	
Jobcentre Plus	5	
Gov.uk	5	
Another online source (for example, Money Saving Expert, online forum)	7	
A family member	8	
Other word of mouth (for example, a friend)	9	
Other (Specify)	10	
Don't know	11	DO NOT READ OUT

ASK ALL

- B2 **Prior to your first SMI payment being made, did you try any of the following to try to make your mortgage payments?**

READ OUT. MULTICODE.

INTERVIEWER: Renegotiating the mortgage could include extending the term, switching to interest-only, or taking a payment holiday.

<b>Borrow money</b> (INTERVIEWER: including from family, banks, loan companies etc.)	1	
<b>Run down savings</b>	2	
<b>Postpone or not pay other bills</b>	3	
<b>Reduce spending on other things</b>	4	
<b>Seek help from lender</b>	5	
<b>Look for work</b>	6	
<b>Another way</b> (SPECIFY)	7	
Don't know	8	

IF B2=5 (SEEKING HELP FROM LENDER)

- B2A **Did you receive any of the following help from your lender?**

INTERVIEWER: This is whether the help was received or not, rather than whether they consider the renegotiation to have had a generally good outcome.

READ OUT. MULTICODE.

<b>Extending mortgage term to reduce payment</b>	1	
<b>Switching to interest only payments</b>	2	
<b>Mortgage Holiday</b>	3	
<b>Payment concession</b>	4	
<b>Part interest - part repayment</b>	5	
Other	6	

IF B2=1 (BORROWING MONEY)

**B2B Who did you try to borrow money from?**

*PROMPT AS NECESSARY. MULTICODE.*

Family or friends	1	
Bank or building society (including credit card)	2	
Specialist loan company	3	
Another source (SPECIFY)	4	
Don't know	5	

IF B2=1 (BORROWING MONEY)

**B2C Did you successfully borrow money?**

*INTERVIEWER: This is whether the money was successfully borrowed, rather than whether they consider the borrowing to have had a generally good outcome.*

*PROMPT AS NECESSARY. SINGLECODE.*

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

IF B2=4 (REDUCED SPENDING ON OTHER THINGS)

**B2D What kind of things did you reduce spending on?**

*PROMPT AS NECESSARY. MULTICODE.*

<b>Food</b>	1	
<b>Energy or water</b>	2	
<b>Other essentials</b> (e.g., clothes, shoes)	3	
<b>Something else</b>	4	
Don't know	5	

## C Application process

ASK ALL

- C1 **Thinking about the process of applying for an SMI loan, how easy or difficult would you say this was?**

*READ OUT. SINGLECODE.*

<b>Very difficult</b>	1	
<b>Difficult</b>	2	
<b>Neither easy nor difficult</b>	3	
<b>Easy</b>	4	
<b>Very easy</b>	5	
Don't know / Cannot remember	6	DO NOT READ OUT.

IF C1 = 1 OR 2 (DIFFICULT TO APPLY)

- C2 **What did you find difficult about the SMI application process?**

*PROMPT IF NECESSARY. MULTICODE.*

Understanding the forms	1	
Knowing what information I needed to supply	2	
Getting information from my lender	3	
Getting information from DWP	4	
Supplying the information needed for my application	5	
Filling in the form correctly	6	
Sending and/or receiving the form for completion	7	
Waiting for an outcome	8	
Having to apply again because of issues with the application	9	
Other (specify)	10	
Don't know	11	



ASK ALL

- C6 **Do you feel you received all the support or guidance you needed in order to apply for SMI?**

*DO NOT READ OUT. SINGLECODE.*

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

ASK ALL

- C8 **To what extent would you agree or disagree that the time it took from your application to your first SMI payment to be paid was acceptable?**

*READ OUT. SINGLECODE.*

<b>Strongly disagree</b>	1	
<b>Tend to disagree</b>	2	
<b>Neither agree nor disagree</b>	3	
<b>Tend to agree</b>	4	
<b>Strongly agree</b>	5	
Don't know	6	DO NOT READ OUT

ASK ALL

- C9 **Overall, how helpful have you found DWP in making your claim for an SMI loan?**

*READ OUT. SINGLECODE.*

<b>Very helpful</b>	1	
<b>Somewhat helpful</b>	2	
<b>Neither helpful nor unhelpful</b>	3	
<b>Somewhat unhelpful</b>	4	
<b>Very unhelpful</b>	5	
Don't know	6	

ASK ALL

C10 Overall, how helpful have you found your lender in making your claim for an SMI loan?

READ OUT. SINGLECODE.

Very helpful	1	
Somewhat helpful	2	
Neither helpful nor unhelpful	3	
Somewhat unhelpful	4	
Very unhelpful	5	
Don't know	6	
Did not speak to lender about SMI application	7	DO NOT READ OUT

## D New Rules

ASK ALL

D1 I'm now going to ask some questions about some changes made to SMI rules in April 2023. How these changes affect claimants depends on whether they are in work, so could I ask what your current working status is?

PROMPT AS NECESSARY. SINGLE CODE.

Full-time paid work (30+ hours per week)	1	
Part-time paid work (8 – 29 hours per week)	2	
Part-time paid work (Under 8 hours per week)	3	
Self-employed	4	
Retired	5	
Maternity, paternity or parental leave	6	
Long term out of work due to sickness or disability	7	
School or education	8	
Not currently working (seeking work)	9	
Not in paid employment, including looking after family or home (not seeking work)	10	

Full-time carer	11	
Don't know	12	DO NOT READ OUT
Prefer not to say	13	DO NOT READ OUT

ASK ALL

- D2 **Were you aware that Universal Credit claimants are now able to work without losing their SMI eligibility?**

*DO NOT READ OUT. SINGLECODE.*

Yes, was aware	1	
No, was not aware	2	
Don't know	3	

IF AWARE OF CHANGE, APPLIED FOR SMI FROM APRIL 2023 AND UC CLAIMANT (D2 = 1 AND A1 = 3 AND A2 = 1)

- D3 **Did extending SMI eligibility to in-work Universal Credit claimants encourage you to apply for SMI?**

*DO NOT READ OUT. SINGLECODE.*

Yes, it did	1	
No, it made no difference	2	
Don't know	3	

IF IN-WORK AND AWARE OF RULE CHANGE AND UC CLAIMANT (D1 = 1 TO 4 AND D2 = 1 AND A2 = 1)

- D4 **Would you say that knowing you will not lose your SMI loan if you are in work, has helped you take up work or keep working?**

*READ OUT. SINGLECODE.*

<b>Yes</b>	1	
<b>No</b>	2	
Don't know	3	DO NOT READ OUT

IF OUT OF WORK, NOT RETIRED AND UC CLAIMANT (A2=1 AND D1 = 7, 9, 10 OR 11)

D5 **Does now knowing that you would not lose your SMI eligibility encourage you to find work?**

*PROMPT AS NECESSARY. SINGLE CODE.*

Yes	1	
No	2	
Not applicable – you are unable to work	3	
Don't know	4	DO NOT READ OUT

ASK IF MIGHT SEEK WORK (D5 = 1)

D5A **Would you seek employment or self-employment?**

*READ OUT. SINGLE CODE.*

<b>Employment</b>	1	
<b>Self-employment</b>	2	
Don't know	3	

ASK UC CLAIMANTS (A2 = 1)

D6 **Were you aware that the period of time a claimant needed to be on Universal Credit to qualify for SMI was reduced from 9 months to 3 months in April 2023?**

*DO NOT READ OUT. SINGLECODE.*

Yes – was aware	1	
No – was not aware	2	
Don't know	3	

IF APPLIED FOR SMI FROM APRIL 2023 AND UC CLAIMANT (A2 = 1 AND A1 = 3)

- D7 What impact, if any, do you think waiting 9 months for SMI instead of 3 months would have had on your financial situation?**

*PROMPT AS NECESSARY. MULTICODE.*

I would have fallen into mortgage arrears, or further into mortgage arrears	1	
My home would have been repossessed	2	
I wouldn't have been able to afford to pay my council tax bill	3	
I wouldn't have been able to pay for essential utilities (e.g. gas, electric, water)	4	
I wouldn't have been able to afford to pay for food	5	
I would have fallen into other forms of debt (e.g. credit card debt)	6	
Other (specify)	7	
There would have been no impact	8	
Don't know	9	

ASK LEGACY CLAIMANT OR DK/PNTS BENEFIT AND OUT OF WORK OR RETIRED (D1 = 5, 7, 9, 10 OR 11, AND A2 ≠ 1)

- D8 Some benefits allow claimants to work whilst retaining their SMI eligibility, if this was the case for you, do you think you'd seek employment or become self-employed?**

*DO NOT READ OUT. SINGLECODE.*

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

## E Impact of SMI

IF S5 = 1 (CLAIMING SMI NOW)

- E1 Which of these statements best describes how long you think you will need to claim SMI for?

READ OUT. SINGLECODE.

Until you or your partner are in work or no longer receiving the benefit which entitles you to SMI	1	
Until the mortgage is paid off (without selling the home)	2	
For the rest of your life	3	
Until you sell the home	4	
Don't know	6	DO NOT READ OUT

IF S5 = 1 (CLAIMING SMI NOW)

- E4 To reassure you, there is no plan to remove SMI, but if you lost your eligibility, how likely or unlikely do you feel it is that the following financial situations might happen to you...

READ OUT. SINGLECODE.

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Neither likely nor unlikely	Likely	Very likely	Don't Know (DO NOT READ OUT)
_1 I would fall into mortgage arrears, or further into mortgage arrears.	1	2	3	4	5	6
_2 I would have to sell my home	1	2	3	4	5	6
_3 My home would be repossessed by my lender	1	2	3	4	5	6
_4 I wouldn't be able to pay afford my council tax bills or been able to pay for essential utilities (e.g. gas, electric, water)	1	2	3	4	5	6
_6 I wouldn't have been able to afford to pay for food	1	2	3	4	5	6
_7 I would fall into other forms of debt (e.g. credit cards, pay day loans)	1	2	3	4	5	6

ASK ALL

- E5 [IF S5=1 (CLAIMING SMI NOW):**Since your SMI payments first started, have you used, or tried to use**][IF S5=2 (FINISHED CLAIMING SMI):**While you were claiming SMI, did you use, or try to use**], any of the following to try to make your mortgage payments?

READ OUT. MULTICODE.

<b>Borrowing money</b> (INTERVIEWER: including from family, banks, loan companies etc.)	1	
<b>Running down savings</b>	2	
<b>Postponing or not paying other bills</b>	3	
<b>Reducing spending on other things</b>	4	
<b>Seek help from lender</b>	5	
<b>Look for work</b>	6	
<b>Another option</b> (SPECIFY)	7	
Don't know	8	

IF SOUGHT HELP FROM LENDER (E5 = 5)

- E5B Did you receive any of the following help from your lender?

INTERVIEWER: This is whether the help was received or not, rather than whether they consider the renegotiation to have had a generally good outcome.

READ OUT. MULTICODE

<b>Extending mortgage term to reduce payment</b>	1	
<b>Switching to interest only payments</b>	2	
<b>Mortgage Holiday</b>	3	
<b>Payment concession</b>	4	
<b>Part interest - part repayment</b>	5	
Other	6	

IF BORROWED (E5 = 1)

**E5C Who did you try to borrow money from?**

*PROMPT AS NECESSARY. MULTICODE.*

Family or friends	1	
Bank or building society (including credit card)	2	
Specialist loan company	3	
Another source (SPECIFY)	4	
Don't know	5	

IF BORROWED (E5 = 1)

**E5D Did you successfully borrow money?**

*INTERVIEWER: This is whether the money was successfully borrowed, rather than whether they consider the borrowing to have had a generally good outcome.*

*PROMPT AS NECESSARY. SINGLECODE.*

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

IF CUT SPENDING (E5 = 4)

**E5E What kind of things did you reduce spending on?**

*PROMPT AS NECESSARY. MULTICODE.*

Food	1	
Energy or water	2	
Other essentials (e.g., clothes, shoes)	3	
Something else (SPECIFY)	4	
Don't know	5	



IF S5 = 1 (CLAIMING SMI NOW)

E6 **If you didn't have an SMI loan, do you think you would seek to do any of the following to try to make your mortgage payments?**

*READ OUT. MULTICODE.*

<b>Borrow money</b> ( <i>INTERVIEWER: including from family, banks, loan companies etc.</i> )	1	
<b>Run down savings</b>	2	
<b>Postpone or not pay other bills</b>	3	
<b>Reduce spending on other things</b>	4	
<b>Seek help from lender</b>	5	
<b>Look for work</b>	6	
<b>Another option</b> (SPECIFY)	7	
Don't know	8	

IF WOULD BORROW (E6 = 1)

E6A **Who would you seek to borrow money from?**

*PROMPT AS NECESSARY. MULTICODE.*

Family or friends	1	
Bank or building society (including credit card)	2	
Specialist loan company	3	
Another source (SPECIFY)	4	
Don't know	5	

IF WOULD CUT SPENDING (E6 = 4)

E6B What kind of things would you reduce spending on?

PROMPT AS NECESSARY. MULTICODE.

Food	1	
Energy or water	2	
Other essentials (e.g., clothes, shoes)	3	
Something else (SPECIFY)	4	
Don't know	5	

ASK ALL

E7 How would you describe the impact that SMI has had on...

READ OUT. MULTICODE.

	Very negative	Somewhat negative	Neither positive nor negative	Somewhat positive	Very positive	Don't Know [DO NOT READ OUT]
_1 Your long-term financial planning (e.g. for retirement)	1	2	3	4	5	6
_6 Your ability to adapt your home to the needs of a disability, if you have one	1	2	3	4	5	6
_7 Your mental health and wellbeing	1	2	3	4	5	6

## F Personal information

SAY TO ALL

Thank you for your help with this survey so far. We'd like to end by collecting some information about you.

You can select prefer not to say at any or all of these questions when you get to them.

Your answers to these questions will be used for research purposes only. They will not be shared with DWP in any way that would identify you.

ASK ALL

F1 How many people live in your household?

Please include yourself and anyone else who lives with you, whether or not they are related to you.

DS: ALLOW 1 TO 20.

WRITE IN		
Don't know	1	
Prefer not to say	2	

ASK IF HOUSEHOLD SIZE PROVIDED AT F1 (F1 ≠ CODE 1 OR 2)

**F2 Please provide details of age and gender of the people living in your house, starting with yourself. For the other members of your household, could you also tell us their relationship to you, and their working status.** [IF F1>10 (MORE THAN 10 PEOPLE): *If you have more than 10 people in your household, please include only the oldest 10 people.*]

DS: PROGRAM AS LOOP. SHOW UP TO 10 ROWS.

<b>You</b>	IF NOT RESPONDENT_1: Drop-down relationship status:	IF RESPONDENT OR COHABITING SPOUSE OR PARTNER_2: Drop-down age ranges:	IF RESPONDENT OR COHABITING SPOUSE OR PARTNER_3: Drop-down gender:	IF RESPONDENT OR COHABITING SPOUSE OR PARTNER_4: Drop-down working status:
Person 2				
Person 3	<b>Cohabiting spouse or partner</b>			<b>Full-time paid work (30+ hours per week)</b>
Person 4				<b>Part-time paid work (8 – 29 hours per week)</b>
Person 5	<b>Child or step- child under 18 in full time education/training</b>	<b>18 – 24</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Part-time paid work (Under 8 hours per week)</b>
Person 6		<b>25 – 34</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Retired</b>
		<b>35 – 44</b>	<b>Prefer to self- describe</b>	<b>Maternity, paternity or parental leave</b>
	<b>Child or step- child over 18</b>	<b>45 – 54</b>	Prefer not to say	<b>Long term sick leave</b>
		<b>55 – 64</b>		<b>School or education</b>
		<b>65 – 74</b>		<b>Unemployed (seeking work)</b>
	<b>Other adult</b>	<b>75 – 84</b>		<b>Not in paid employment (not seeking work)</b>
Person ...		<b>85+</b>		<b>Don't know</b>
		Prefer not to say		<b>Prefer not to say</b>

IF DO NOT LIVE ALONE (F1 >1)

F2C You told me earlier that you were receiving the following benefits.

<A2 ANSWERS>

Is anyone else living with you in your household currently receiving any of these other benefits?

READ OUT. MULTICODE.

IF A2 ≠ 1: <b>Universal Credit</b>	1	
IF A2 ≠ 2: <b>Personal independence Payment (PIP)</b>	2	
IF A2 ≠ 3: <b>Employment Support Allowance (ESA)</b>	3	
IF A2 ≠ 4: <b>Income Support (IS)</b>	4	
IF A2 ≠ 5: <b>Pension Credit</b>	5	
IF A2 ≠ 6: <b>Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)</b>	6	
<b>Any other state benefit</b> (please specify)	7	
Don't know	8	
Prefer not to say	9	

ASK ALL

F3 Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more that limits your or their day-to-day activities?

*Normal day to day activities include everyday things like eating, washing, walking and going shopping.*

READ OUT. SINGLE CODE.

<b>Yes – It limits my activities all of the time</b>	1	
<b>Yes – It limits my activities some of the time</b>	2	
<b>Yes – but it does not limit my activities</b>	3	
<b>No – I do not have any long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses</b>	4	
Don't know	5	
Prefer not to say	6	

ASK ALL

- F4 **Next I would like to ask you four questions about your feelings on aspects of your life. There are no right or wrong answers. For each of these questions I'd like you to give an answer on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 is "not at all" and 10 is "completely".**

*READ OUT. SINGLECODE PER ROW.*

												Prefer not to say
<b>_1 Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?</b>	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>_2 Overall, to what extent do you feel that the things you do in your life are worthwhile?</b>	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>_3 Overall, how happy did you feel yesterday?</b>	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>_4 On a scale where 0 is "not at all anxious" and 10 is "completely anxious", overall, how anxious did you feel yesterday?</b>	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11

IF F1 >= 2 (ANYONE ELSE IN HOUSEHOLD)

- F5 **Does anyone else in your household have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more that limits your or their day-to-day activities?**

*Normal day to day activities include everyday things like eating, washing, walking and going shopping.*

*SINGLE CODE. READ OUT.*

<b>Yes – It limits their activities all of the time</b>	1	
<b>Yes – It limits their activities some of the time</b>	2	
<b>Yes – but it does not limit their activities</b>	3	
<b>No – other household members do not have any long-term physical or mental health conditions or illnesses</b>	4	
Don't know	5	
Prefer not to say	6	

ASK ALL

**F6 What is your ethnic group? Please only answer in relation to yourself and not anyone else in your household.**

*DO NOT READ OUT. SINGLE CODE*

English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	1	White
Irish	2	
Gypsy or Irish Traveller	3	
Any other White background (please specify)	4	
White and Black Caribbean	5	Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups
White and Black African	6	
White and Asian	7	
Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background (please specify)	8	
African	9	Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
Caribbean	10	
Any other Black / African / Caribbean background (please specify)	11	
Indian	12	Asian / Asian British
Pakistani	13	
Bangladeshi	14	
Chinese	15	
Any other Asian background (please specify)	16	
Arab	17	Other ethnic group
Any other ethnic group (please specify)	18	
Prefer not to say	19	

ASK ALL

F7 **We would now like to ask you about your household's total income, before tax.**

*Please include the income of all adults living in your household in your answers.*

*Please include income from benefits*

**Would you prefer to answer about your household's income...**

*SINGLE CODE. READ OUT.*

<b>In a usual week</b>	1	
<b>In a usual month</b>	2	
<b>Each year</b> (e.g., annual wage or salary)	3	
Receive no income	4	
Prefer not to answer	5	



ASK IF ABLE TO GIVE INCOME (F7 = 1 TO 3)

**F8 How much, together, is your household's income <F7 ANSWER>, before tax?**

**If your hours vary, please give the amount you are paid <F7 ANSWER>.**

*PROMPT AS NECESSARY. SINGLE CODE*

IF F6 = 1: Less than £100 per week IF F6 = 2: Less than £450 per month IF F6 = 3: Less than £5,000 per year	1
IF F6 = 1: £100 to £299 IF F6 = 2: £450 to £1,299 IF F6 = 3: £5,000 to £15,999	2
IF F6 = 1: £300 to £499 IF F6 = 2: £1,300 to £2,099 IF F6 = 3: £16,000 to £24,999	3
IF F6 = 1: £500 to £699 IF F6 = 2: £2,100 to £2,999 IF F6 = 3: £25,000 to £34,999	4
IF F6 = 1: £700 to £849 IF F6 = 2: £3,000 to £3,749 IF F6 = 3: £35,000 to £44,999	5
IF F6 = 1: £850 to £1,049 IF F6 = 2: £3,750 to £4,599 IF F6 = 3: £45,000 to £54,999	6
IF F6 = 1: £1,050 or more IF F6 = 2: £4,600 or more IF F6 = 3: £55,000 or more	7
Don't know	9
Prefer not to say	10

## G Close and recontact

ASK IF UNIVERSAL CREDIT (A2=1)

- G1 **As part of the same research, IFF Research will be carrying out in-depth interviews to understand people's experiences of SMI in more detail.**

**The interview would take place over the phone or video call and would last about 45 minutes.**

**If you were selected to take part, you would receive a £35 voucher as a thank you for your time.**

**Would you be happy for us to recontact you about taking part in an in-depth interview over the next few weeks?**

*DO NOT READ OUT. SINGLE CODE*

Yes	1	
No	2	
Prefer not to say	3	

ASK IF G1=1

- G2 **Can you please confirm your name, telephone number, and email, if you use one?**

*DO NOT READ OUT. SINGLE CODE*

Name <i>WRITE IN</i>	1	
Telephone <i>WRITE IN</i>	2	
Email <i>WRITE IN</i>	3	

SHOW TO ALL

- G3 **Thank you for completing this survey. To confirm, we'll be keeping your anonymised responses for analysis purposes only. If you'd like a copy of your responses, to change your responses or for your responses to be deleted then please go to <http://www.iffresearch.com/gdpr/> for more information.**

THANK RESPONDENT AND CLOSE INTERVIEW

**Finally, I would just like to confirm that this survey has been carried out under IFF instructions and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct. Thank you very much for your help today.**

## 2.5 Recipient Survey: Reassurance Email

**Subject line: More information from IFF Research about DWP SMI research study**

ID: <REFERENCE NUMBER>

Dear <NAME>,

We recently contacted you about taking part in a 15-20 minute survey about your experience claiming a Support for Mortgage Interest (SMI) loan either currently or in recent years. If you are no longer claiming SMI, we're still keen to hear about your experience.

### **Who we are and why we are contacting you?**

IFF Research is an independent research company who are conducting this research on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). The DWP want to understand more about the experiences and support needs of people who are claiming SMI or have done so in the past.

The survey will ask about applying for the loan, the impact of the payments made and your own personal circumstances. All your answers will be entirely confidential, and DWP will not be able to identify you in any results that are delivered to DWP or published.

### **How did you contact me?**

You have been chosen at random to take part in this survey from a customer database held by DWP. IFF Research, working as a contractor for DWP is permitted to receive and collect customer data to enable DWP to fulfil its public duty to carry out research that is in the public interest.

Taking part in the research is entirely voluntary and will not affect your dealings with the DWP and the benefits you may be claiming will not be affected in any way.

### **What will you do with my answers?**

Your answers to the survey will be used for research purposes only and DWP will not be able to identify you in any results that are produced. IFF will store your personal information securely and keep it confidential. Your personal details will not be passed on to any other organisation. You can find out more about your rights under the new data protection regulations on the [IFF website](#) or on the [DWP Personal information charter](#).

### **I would like more information:**

- To verify the authenticity of this research with the Department for Work and Pensions, please contact ###.
- You can contact IFF Research at ### or call ### to speak to one of the IFF Research team. If you do not wish to participate in the research, please email ###, stating your name and the reference number at the top of this email.

Taking part will provide us with useful information that will help DWP to evaluate the effectiveness of the SMI loans. We hope that you decide to take part.

####

Associate Director, IFF Research

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SMI Research Project Manager, Department for Work and Pensions