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Multimode summary report

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Executive summary

Introduction and summary

The English Housing Survey (EHS) is a rolling, repeated cross sectional survey that gives the government valuable information about housing circumstances and the condition and energy efficiency of English homes. It pairs a household interview with a physical survey. It is commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and currently carried out by a consortium of the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), Building Research Establishment (BRE) and CA Design Services (CADS).

The EHS traditionally consists of a face-to-face interview followed by an external and internal physical survey of selected dwellings, including vacant dwellings, carried out by a trained surveyor.

As part of the restrictions related to the COVID-19 pandemic, the methodology of the survey had to rapidly change, and the team had to make decisions about data collection, without the knowledge of what these changes could do to the data quality and representativeness of the survey. The interview survey was carried out by telephone followed by a socially-distanced external-only physical survey. In 2022-23, the interview returned to the pre-COVID approach with most interviews completed face-to-face.

The methodological changes implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic were reactive to the social distancing requirements at the time and led to a large reduction in response rates and associated impact on sample profile. MHCLG therefore commissioned a strand of development work as part of the current EHS contract, to help us understand the implications of moving to mixed mode data collection going forwards. Throughout the 2023-24 and 2024-25 fieldwork periods, we developed three development experiments to test the impact of a mixed face-to-face and online approach to data collection.

Methodology

NatCen's REMoDEL method was used to provide a systematic approach to transitioning surveys to multimode.

The EHS development work included three multimode experiments to test the multimode approach, all using a combination of online, face-to-face and telephone modes. They aimed to assess the: interview response and physical survey agreement rates for different modes, the sample profile, any data quality issues including non-response and online dropouts and collect feedback from interviewers.

1. The **first EHS multimode survey** was a small-scale survey with 1,000 issued addresses designed to test the feasibility of a multimode approach to the EHS and to collect high level response information. It adopted a concurrent approach, with the online survey remaining available throughout interviewer fieldwork, and included an interview and a physical survey.
2. The **second EHS multimode survey** had a larger issued sample of 2,000 addresses and included split sample experiments to compare two incentive types and to compare two

approaches to data linkage consent; it also tested a sequential approach to online and interviewer-led modes where the online survey closed before interviewer fieldwork started. It did not include a physical survey.

3. The **third EHS multimode survey**, was designed as a large-scale test of the preferred multimode approach to test response rates and sample profile for the preferred design, and to explore issues around data quality. It included 17,000 issued addresses and had a concurrent approach.

Response rates

The interview survey response rates for the three multimode experiments varied from 33% to 35%, similar to the 32% for the EHS 2024-25 mainstage survey. For the first multimode survey (the only one with a physical survey) the physical survey agreement rate was 50%, lower than 63% in EHS 2024-25. However, this varied from 67% to 44% for multimode experiments two and three respectively, when asked about provisional physical survey agreement rates. For multimode three in particular (44% agreement rate) this is due to the agreement rate being considerably lower for online interviews (31%) than for face-to-face (71%) or telephone (55%) interviews. In addition, for multimode three, just over two thirds (67%) of respondents completed the interview online rather than face-to-face.

The ratio of interviews to physical surveys is an important consideration for the design as physical surveys are a key component of the EHS. For the large-scale multimode three experiment, around 3,013 interviewed respondents would need to be offered a physical survey to support 1,000 physical surveys, compared with around 2,002 interviewed respondents per 1,000 physical surveys for EHS 2024-25, although in practice this may vary due to subsampling rates of interviewed respondents.

Two incentive approaches were also compared in multimode experiment two which found that interview response rates were similar for unconditional (33%) and conditional (34%) incentives. Similarly, interview response rates were similar for assumed (33%) and explicit (34%) data linkage approaches.

Sample profile

When comparing the large-scale multimode three experiment to EHS 2024-25, overall, the two studies had similar responding sample profiles at interview, with only slight differences in proportions by tenure, age, accommodation, house type and household size. Compared with EHS 2024-25, EHS multimode 3 had a slightly higher proportion of owner occupiers, a higher proportion of respondents aged 35-64 years, a higher proportion of respondents living in semi-detached houses, and a lower proportion of respondents living in houses or bungalows, a lower proportion of respondents living in terraced houses and a lower proportion of respondents living in one person households. In terms of respondent employment, the profiles of the two study samples were similar.

In addition, when comparing the tenure types in online and interviewer led (face-to-face and telephone) modes, the online sample profile tended to include a higher proportion of owner occupiers (outright owners and mortgagors) and a lower proportion of private renters and social renters (housing association and local authority housing). The online sample also had a higher proportion of owner occupiers and a

lower proportion of private and social renters agreeing to a physical survey appointment. Sample profile at interview also differed by mode for age, accommodation and house type, household size and employment status. Compared with the interviewer led sample, the online sample had: a higher proportion of households living in detached houses, a higher proportion of two and four person households, and a higher proportion of retired households. The online sample had a lower proportion of those living in semi-detached and terraced houses, one-person households, households not working due to sickness or disability, and households with an HRP aged over 65.

Data quality

Among the key variables examined, rates of item non-response were broadly comparable for EHS multimode three and EHS 2024-25, with low item non-response for age and gender (around 0.2% of responses) and higher, but comparable, rates for other key variables examined (12-13% for rent questions, 14-15% for mortgage). Item non-response for income related questions was lower in the multimode three experiment than EHS 24-25 (16% vs 20%).

Overall, around 29% of respondents dropped out of the online survey: 6% after partly completing the survey and 23% before that stage. Higher dropout rates appeared to be associated with particular modules: 40% of dropouts occurred at the landing page and initial demographic sections, 15% in the housing cost modules, and 13% during the income related questions. Based on the available demographic data, characteristics of respondents who dropped out were similar to those who completed interviews (although no demographic is available for early dropouts).

Key estimates for the two surveys were broadly similar. The additional key estimates explored here – mean age, mean household size, rent and mortgage – showed very few differences.

Interviewer feedback

Interviewers were asked for their feedback about delivering the EHS multimode survey, through feedback surveys and a face-to-face debrief with selected interviewers. Their feedback will allow us to make informed decisions on aspects of the interview survey including: introducing the survey, survey materials, incentives, reminder access codes and conducting the survey either online or face-to-face.

Chapter 1

Introduction and summary

1.1 Background

The English Housing Survey (EHS) is an annual survey, designed to collect information about housing circumstances and the condition and energy efficiency of housing in England through a household interview and physical survey. It is commissioned by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) and currently carried out by a consortium of the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), Building Research Establishment (BRE) and CA Design Services (CADS). Information collected by the EHS is invaluable to understanding issues related to housing and for policy development, monitoring and evaluation. Key areas covered by the survey include: housing tenure; demographic characteristics of households; affordability and arrears; satisfaction and complaints; fire safety; energy efficiency and fuel poverty.

Different survey modes have been used in recent EHS years, although primarily as a necessary response to the COVID-19 pandemic and related social distancing restrictions. Before 2020, the EHS consisted of a face-to-face interview followed by an internal and external physical survey of selected dwellings, including vacant dwellings. The survey approach was amended in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and reflected restrictions in place at the time. In the 2020-21 survey, the EHS interview was carried out by telephone and respondents were sent a letter inviting them to opt-in to the survey (called a 'push-to-telephone' approach). This brought about a large reduction in response rates and associated impact on sample profile.¹ In the 2021-22 survey, the advance letter was followed by a socially-distanced interviewer visit and the EHS interview was carried out by telephone (referred to as a 'knock-to-nudge' approach).² In both years the physical survey was amended to a socially-distanced external-only physical survey, with a small number of questions added around key internal measures.³ The interview returned to the pre-COVID approach in 2022-23 with most interviews completed face-to-face, although telephone interviews were retained as an option to allow respondents who could not or did not want to complete the interview face-to-face to take part.⁴ The physical survey also returned to the usual approach where a full visual inspection of the interior and exterior of the property was carried out by a trained surveyor.

While it was difficult to have foreseen the changes required in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not ideal to make the methodological changes necessary without proper investigation of the impact. MHCLG therefore commissioned a strand of development work as part of the current EHS contract, to help us understand the implications of moving to mixed mode data collection. Throughout the 2023-24 and 2024-25 fieldwork periods, we developed and undertook two small-scale and one large sample experiments to test the impact of a mixed face-to-face and online approach to data collection. As part of these experiments, we aimed to understand the mode impact on response rates, respondent profile, physical

¹ Full details of the EHS 2020-21 approach are described in the technical report [here](#)

² Full details of the EHS 2021-22 approach are described in the technical report [here](#)

³ Full details of the EHS 2021-22 approach are described in the technical report [here](#)

⁴ Full details of the EHS 2022-23 approach are described in the technical report [here](#).

survey agreement rates and response differentiation, among other factors. The results of these experiments are discussed in the remainder of this report.

1.2 Overview of multimode experiments

The EHS development work was designed to examine the feasibility of using a multimode approach to the EHS in future with a view to maintaining or improving survey response in the face of a general decline in survey response rates (beyond the EHS), and to future-proof the survey to protect it from unforeseen events such as the Covid-19 pandemic that could prevent or hinder the use of face-to-face interviewing. NatCen’s REMoDEL method was used to provide a systematic approach to transitioning surveys to multimode. This is an iterative process where results of each stage are considered before moving onto the next, and it may be necessary to return to an earlier stage of development:

NatCen’s REMoDEL Approach

Review the research and information needs, and any design parameters

Evaluate the feasibility of moving the survey to an alternative methodological design by considering a range of quality dimensions

Model a new prototype design to be further developed

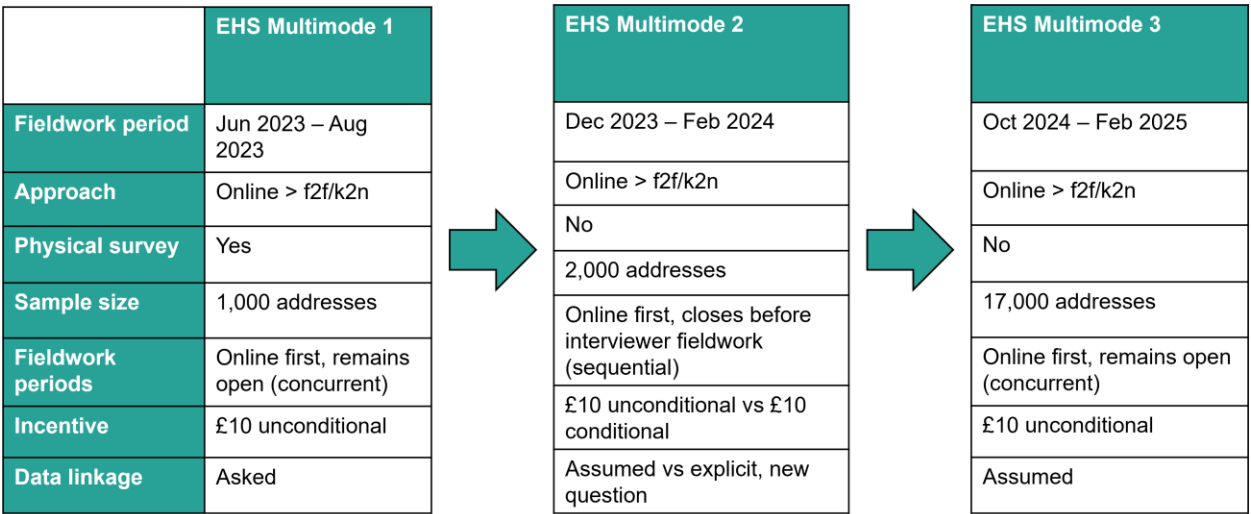
Design and develop the new methodological approach and questionnaire

Experiment by testing the new design in a quantitative setting

Launch the new survey

The EHS development work included three multimode experiments to test the multimode approach, all using a combination of online, face-to-face and telephone modes.

Figure 1: Overview of EHS multimode experiments



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- 1) The **first EHS multimode survey** was a small-scale survey with 1,000 issued addresses designed to test the feasibility of a multimode approach to the EHS and to collect high level response information. It adopted a concurrent approach, with the online survey remaining available throughout interviewer fieldwork, and included an interview and a physical survey.
 - 2) The **second EHS multimode survey** had a larger issued sample of 2,000 addresses and included split sample experiments to compare two incentive types and to compare two approaches to data linkage consent; it also tested a sequential approach to online and interviewer-led modes where the online survey closed before interviewer fieldwork started. It did not include a physical survey.
 - 3) The **third EHS multimode survey**, was designed as a large-scale test of the preferred multimode approach to test response rates and sample profile for the preferred design, and to explore issues around data quality. It included 17,000 issued addresses and had a concurrent approach.

1.3 Key aims

Across the three multimode experiments, the key aims were to assess:

- interview response and physical survey agreement rates for different household interview modes
- the profile of the responding sample, including tenure, housing type and demographics
- high-level data quality issues: online dropouts; item non-response in the online survey; comparing selected estimates for the multimode and existing main stage approach, and
- to collect feedback from interviewers involved in the EHS multimode fieldwork.

Chapter 2

Methodology

This chapter explores the survey design including questionnaire development for the three multimode experiments, followed by an overview of the fieldwork and sample design for each experiment and finally the survey approach, incentives and communications.

2.1 Survey design

The multimode experiments of the EHS included the same components as the standard EHS – an interview survey (and for multimode 1 only a physical survey as well). However, the multimode approach allowed respondents to complete the interview online, face-to-face or by telephone, compared to the face-to-face (with additional telephone option) approach used in the mainstage EHS.

The same questionnaire was used in the online, face-to-face and telephone interviews – a ‘unimode’ approach was adopted, whereby the questionnaire was designed as far as possible to be the same across all modes with some minor amendments for different modes.

For multimode experiments 1 and 2, the multimode interview questionnaire was based on EHS 2019-20, and development involved a desk review of the questionnaire and workshop to agree the approach, followed by questionnaire conversion and usability testing to test key aspects of the multimode questionnaire. This was updated for EHS multimode 3 to reflect question changes made since 2019-20 so that the core multimode questions reflected those asked in EHS 2024-25.

2.2 Fieldwork and sample design

2.2.1. Multimode 1 experiment

For the first multimode experiment, the three interview modes were offered in sequence with the online survey offered first, as this is the most cost-effective approach and reduces the sample issued to interviewers, followed by face-to-face and then telephone interviews.

Interviewer fieldwork took place between mid-June and August 2023 and consisted of an initial three-week fieldwork period exclusively for online surveys, followed by six weeks of interviewer fieldwork. The online survey remained open throughout the interviewer fieldwork period, so respondents could still complete the interview online after the interviewer visit. The physical survey took place after the interview: physical survey fieldwork started midway through the interviewer fieldwork period and took place over several weeks. The majority of physical surveys were carried out in August and September however a small number of physical surveys were carried out in October and November.

A sample of 1,000 addresses was selected from the small-user Postcode Address File. Addresses were clustered into 30 points with an average of 33 addresses in each and covered a mixture of locations throughout England. The full sample was first issued to the online survey and, at the end of the online fieldwork period, outstanding addresses were issued to field interviewers.

2.2.2. Multimode 2 experiment

The second multimode survey builds on the findings of the EHS multimode 1 experiment. EHS multimode 2 is the second survey and is a relatively small-scale study, based on an issued sample of 2,000 addresses. EHS multimode 2 is designed to test a sequential approach to online and face-to-face fieldwork, to compare different incentive approaches, and to test different approaches to data linkage consent.

Interviewer fieldwork took place between December 2023 and mid-February 2024 and consisted of an initial three-week fieldwork period exclusively for online surveys, followed by six weeks of interviewer fieldwork.

EHS multimode 2 included an interview but no physical survey, although we asked about provisional agreement to the physical survey to establish an estimated response rate. The interview survey could be completed online, face-to-face or by telephone. A sequential approach was used so the fieldwork period was split into an initial online-only fieldwork period, followed by a six-week fieldwork period where the survey could be completed face-to-face or by telephone with interviewers.

Half of addresses also received an unconditional incentive – a £10 Post Office voucher that could be exchanged for cash – in their initial advance letter. The other half of points were told in the advance letter they would receive a £10 Love2Shop high street shopping voucher upon completion of the survey. Two reminder letters were used. After the initial online-only fieldwork period, interviewers visited all outstanding addresses to provide further information about the survey and to attempt to carry out an interview, either face-to-face or by telephone. The online survey was closed before interviewer fieldwork started.

2.2.3 Multimode 3 experiment

The third EHS multimode survey included an interview that could be completed online, face-to-face or by telephone, but did not include the physical survey which typically forms part of the EHS. The three interview modes were offered in sequence with the online survey offered first, followed by face-to-face and, if the respondent was reluctant to take part face-to-face, telephone interviews. The online survey remained open throughout interviewer fieldwork. Field interviewers carried out the face-to-face interviews and telephone surveys so although offered in sequence, these took place over the same fieldwork period.

Interviewer fieldwork took place between November 2024 and February 2025 and involved three waves of fieldwork. Each wave consisted of an initial four-week fieldwork period exclusively for online surveys, followed by six weeks of interviewer fieldwork to carry out face-to-face and telephone interviews. The

online survey remained open throughout the interviewer fieldwork period, so respondents could complete the interview online even after the interviewer visit.

The sample design was similar to the mainstage EHS, with adjustments to reflect the smaller sample size in the multimode survey. The EHS has a bespoke 'half England' design with England divided into 1,808 EHS merged areas. The merged areas are allocated to year 1 or year 2, with 904 areas covered in each survey year. For the multimode survey 300 areas were selected at random from the same 904 areas selected for EHS 2024-25.

Within these 300 areas, a sample of 17,000 addresses was selected from the small-user Postcode Address File (PAF). Each EHS merged area was then split in half geographically to form 600 interviewer assignments with an average of 28 addresses in each. The full sample was first issued to the online survey and, at the end of the online fieldwork period, outstanding addresses were issued to field interviewers.

Subsampling was used to increase the proportion of rented addresses in the issued sample. This was based on the 'predicted tenure' of the sampled addresses derived from the predominant tenure within the postcode that contained that address. Predominant tenure was identified using Experian's Residata classification and attached to the address records.

2.3 Survey approach, incentive and communications

2.3.1. Multimode 1 experiment

All issued addresses were sent a letter inviting them to take part in the EHS survey online, along with a survey leaflet showing key findings from the English Housing survey. An unconditional incentive – a £10 Post Office voucher – was included in the advance letter for all issued addresses. A reminder letter was sent to outstanding addresses around 10 days later to remind respondents about the online survey and to let them know about the interviewer visit.

At the end of the initial online-only fieldwork period all outstanding addresses were issued to field interviewers and invited to take part face-to-face or, if respondents were unable or preferred not to take part face-to-face, via a telephone interview. Respondents could also choose to take part online as the online survey remained open throughout fieldwork.

The physical survey was introduced at the end of the interview and all interviewed households were invited to take part. A similar approach to physical survey recruitment was used for all interview modes. In the online survey, respondents were asked if they would be willing to take part in the physical survey and then invited to select an appointment day or time, or to provide contact details so the CADS Helpline – a team responsible for supporting physical survey appointments, responding to queries and resolving issues - could contact them to arrange an appointment. For respondents interviewed face-to-face or by telephone, interviewers made an appointment with the surveyor based on surveyor and respondent

availability or, if this was not possible, collected information about respondent availability so that the CADS helpline could arrange the surveyor visit.

The physical survey was the same as for the standard EHS and involved observations inside and outside the property.

2.3.2. Multimode 2 experiment

All issued addresses were sent a letter inviting them to take part in the EHS survey online, along with a survey leaflet showing key findings from the English Housing survey. Two reminder letters were also sent.

A split sample incentive experiment was included to compare unconditional and conditional £10 incentives. Around half of addresses received an unconditional incentive – a £10 Post Office voucher in the advance letter. The other half of addresses were told in their letters they would receive a conditional incentive – a £10 Love2Shop voucher – after completing the survey. This was designed to test two of the most common incentive types and values used on push-to-online and mixed-mode projects, to determine if one or the other will increase response rate and is therefore more preferable for the EHS.

A data linkage consent experiment was also included to compare assumed and explicit approaches to data linkage consent. Around half of addresses were allocated to the assumed consent approach where information was provided on the advance letter about data linkage and use of survey information, and taking part in the survey indicated consent to data linkage. The remaining half of addresses were asked at the end of the survey if they were willing for their survey answers to be linked to information from other sources.

To avoid issues of co-interaction between the two split-sample experiments running at the same time, each half of the sample was selected separately. For practical reasons, the sample was split at the interviewer assignment level to ensure that all addresses in an assignment had the same incentive and data linkage approach. This means that in effect one quarter of the sample received a letter containing a £10 Post Office voucher and standard EHS data use information, one quarter received a £10 Post Office voucher and new data linkage information, one quarter received a letter promising a £10 Love2Shop voucher upon completion of the survey and standard EHS data use information and one quarter received a letter promising a £10 Love2Shop voucher upon completion and new data linkage information.

At the end of the initial online-only fieldwork period, the online survey was closed. All outstanding addresses were issued to field interviewers and invited to take part face-to-face or, if respondents were unable or preferred not to take part face-to-face, a telephone interview. During interviewer-led fieldwork, respondents could only take part in the survey with an interviewer.

The physical survey was introduced at the end of the interview and all interviewed households invited to take part. A similar approach to physical survey recruitment was used for all interview modes. As there were no physical surveys taking place for this study, the question was amended to make it clear that respondents might not be selected at this question. In all modes, respondents were asked “if their

address was selected, would they be willing to take part in the physical survey”. If consent was given, respondents were then immediately informed that they had not been selected to take part in the physical survey. Physical survey consent was asked so we could capture data about likely consent rates. This information is critical in assessing the feasibility of a mixed-mode approach to the EHS.

2.3.3 Multimode 3 experiment

The contact approach for the third experiment was designed to optimise response to the online survey. All issued addresses were sent an advance letter inviting them to take part in the EHS survey online, along with a survey leaflet showing key findings from the EHS and an unconditional incentive – a £10 Post Office voucher. The advance letter was designed to provide key information about the survey, including a URL and QR code to access the survey website and a unique access code for each address. Information about data use, including data linkage, was included on the back of the letter along with links to more detailed privacy information. All letters and leaflets were tailored to predicted tenure.

Two reminder letters were sent during the online fieldwork period to addresses where a householder had not yet taken part in the survey, with 7-10 days between successive mailings. The reminder letters provided similar information to the advance letter – all contained a QR code, URL and unique access code for example – but had slightly different calls to action and survey findings. The second reminder introduced the interviewer visit. Additional information about the EHS was available and signposted to on the gov.uk and NatCen websites, and the letters included a freephone number for respondents.

Physical surveys were not carried out, although respondents were asked consent at the end of the interview to determine physical survey agreement rates. The physical survey agreement was asked in the same way as usual, but we did not ask respondents to provide availability or to make an appointment, and respondents were immediately informed that their address had not been selected so they would not be required to complete the physical survey. This was necessary as understanding physical survey agreement rates was critical to the multimode design.

Chapter 3

Response rates

This chapter explores response rates for the multimode approach for the three different experiments compared to the mainstage EHS. It then goes on to discuss the results of the incentive experiments and approaches to data linkage.

To assess response rates to different interview modes, we compared interview and physical survey response to the multimode survey for different interview modes. It should be noted that, for analysis purposes, telephone interviews were grouped with face-to-face interviews (referred to as ‘face-to-face / knock-to-nudge’ or ‘f2f/k2n’) as there were too few telephone interviews to analyse separately and because initial contact and recruitment was carried out face-to-face by field interviewers, even though the EHS interview itself was subsequently carried out by telephone.

Figure 2: Summary of response rates across experiments

	EHS Multimode 1	EHS Multimode 2	EHS Multimode 3	EHS 2024-25
Approach	Online > f2f/k2n	Online > f2f/k2n	Online > f2f/k2n	F2f/k2n only
Fieldwork periods	Concurrent	Sequential	Concurrent	Concurrent
Sample size	1,000 addresses	2,000 addresses	17,000 addresses	17,000 addresses
Incentive	£10 unconditional	£10 unconditional vs £10 conditional	£10 unconditional	£5 unconditional & 2 x £25 discretionary
Overall response				
Interview	35%	33.5%	33%	32%
PS agreement	50%	67%	44%	63%
PS completion	83%	N/A	N/A	78%

3.1 Multimode 1 experiment

For the first multimode experiment, the EHS multimode response was compared with two recent survey years: EHS 2019-20 and EHS 2022-23. Both are interviewer-led surveys with EHS 2019-20 carried out as face-to-face only, and EHS 2022-23 as a face-to-face interview with the option for a telephone interview by field interviewers (knock-to-nudge).

Overall, we achieved 338 interviews from an issued sample of 1,000 addresses, a 35% response rate based on in-scope addresses. Just over half (188) of interviews were completed online (online response of 19% of in-scope), 141 were face-to-face interviews and 9 were telephone interviews completed with a

field interviewer. The most common unproductive categories were refusals (28% of in-scope addresses), respondents who intended to take part online but did not do so before the end of the study (18%), and non-contacts (11%).

Interview response in the multimode survey (35%) was similar to response in EHS 2022-23 with a face-to-face/knock-to-nudge approach (32%). Although overall response was lower than that achieved in EHS 2019-20 (51%) this is likely to reflect several factors including a decline in response to surveys in general since the COVID-19 pandemic as well as inclusion of different interview modes.

In addition, physical survey appointment rates were lower in the EHS multimode (50%) than EHS 2019-20 (63%) and EHS 2022-23 (59%). The majority (84% to 86%) of appointments resulted in fully completed physical surveys with no difference in 'completed appointments' between the multimode survey and earlier years.

3.1.1 Estimated ratio of interviews to physical surveys

The ratio of physical surveys to interviews is an important consideration in designing the multimode approach as it determines the number of physical surveys that can be achieved given a certain number of interviews, and the degree of selection that is possible for the physical survey.

The ratio of completed physical surveys to interviews was lower for the multimode study (0.42 physical surveys per completed interview) than for the EHS 2019-20 (0.54 physical surveys per completed interview) or EHS 2022-23 (0.50). To put this in a survey context, we can estimate the number of interviews needed to achieve 1,000 physical surveys given the observed ratios. The initial ratios suggest the EHS multimode approach for experiment 1 would need around 2,381 completed interviews to support 1,000 physical surveys, compared with around 1,999 for EHS 2022-23.

3.2 Multimode 2 experiment

Overall, 34% of eligible households took part in the second multimode survey. Interview response was comparable with the first EHS multimode survey (32%) despite the slight differences in design. For both multimode surveys, interview response was higher than for the EHS 2023-24 main stage (30%).

Refusals in field were higher in the current survey (42%) than the first EHS multimode study (28%), although this is likely to reflect the survey design. In the first study, the online survey remained open throughout interviewer fieldwork creating a different way for respondents to politely refuse and 18% of respondents intended to take part online but did not do so within the fieldwork period. Including some or all of these responses as 'polite refusals' would increase the refusal rate for the first experiment.

Non-contact rates were higher in the current multimode study (15%) than in the first EHS multimode survey (11%) or the main stage EHS 2023-24 (6%).

Despite there being no physical survey in this experiment, the physical survey agreement rate (67%) was higher than first multimode survey (50%) and higher than for the main stage EHS 2023-24 (56%).

3.2.1 Estimated ratio of interviews to physical surveys

Using a conservative estimate of 75% of appointments leading to a completed physical survey, completed physical surveys were expected for 48% interviewed addresses. This compares with 42% for the first EHS multimode survey and 46% for EHS 2023-24.

A related measure is the estimated number of interviews needed to support 1,000 physical surveys: 2,065 interviews for the current EHS multimode survey, 2,381 for the first EHS multimode survey and 2,165 for EHS 2023-24.

3.3 Multimode 3 experiment

Interview response rates to the EHS multimode 3 (33%) were marginally higher than those for EHS 2024-25 (32%).

The provisional physical survey agreement rate among those offered a physical survey was lower in the EHS multimode 3 (44%) than the EHS 2024-25 survey (63%). This is the agreement rate at the end of the interview and does not take into account the number of completed physical surveys.

Interview response rates varied across interview mode and were highest for the online survey: 22% response for online, 13% for face-to-face and 1% for telephone. Online surveys remained open throughout fieldwork and a proportion of the online responses were prompted by interviewer visits. Overall, just over two thirds (67%) of respondents completed the interview online.

In EHS multimode 3, physical survey agreement rates varied across interview mode. Physical survey agreement rates were considerably lower for online interviews (31%) than for face-to-face (71%) or telephone (55%) interviews.

Low physical survey agreement rates for online interviews are likely to be the key driver for lower overall physical survey agreement rates to the multimode survey.

3.3.1 Estimated ratio of interviews to physical surveys

The ratio of interviews to physical surveys –the number of interviews required to support a completed physical survey – is an important consideration for the design as physical surveys are a key component of the EHS. As EHS multimode 3 did not have a physical survey, physical survey completion rates were estimated, based on 75% of appointments leading to a physical survey, and this estimate was used to calculate the ratio of interviews to physical surveys. The assumed completion rate was a conservative estimate based on EHS multimode 1 (which included physical surveys) and EHS more generally, where completion rates are typically around 78%.

The ratio of interviews to physical surveys was higher for the EHS multimode than the EHS 2024-25, which suggests more interviews are needed to support a given number of physical surveys when moving to multimode data collection.

Among interviewed respondents offered a physical survey, the ratio of interviewed respondents offered a physical survey to physical surveys was 3:1 in EHS multimode, and 2:1 in EHS 2024-25. Based on the current multimode approach and response profile, we estimate that around 3,013 interviewed respondents would need to be offered a physical survey to support 1,000 physical surveys, compared with around 2,002 interviewed respondents per 1,000 physical surveys for EHS 2024-25

However, on EHS not all interviewed respondents are offered a physical survey due to subsampling of interviewed respondents to increase the proportion of renters at the physical survey stage, and due to partially completed interviews. Depending on the level of subsampling required, the number of interviews would need to increase to accommodate subsampling by tenure. In EHS multimode 3 the ratio was around 3.3 completed interviews: 1 physical survey. In EHS 2024-25, where subsampling was used, the ratio was around 2.6 interviews per physical survey.

Overall, interview response rates to the EHS multimode 3 survey were comparable with the current approach used in EHS 2024-25. However, because of the low physical survey agreement rate for online interviews, the multimode approach has a lower physical survey agreement rate than the standard approach and therefore requires more interviews to support a given number of physical surveys.

3.4 Incentive experiments

In multimode experiment two, a split sample experiment was used to compare two incentive approaches:

- an unconditional £10 incentive - a £10 Post Office voucher included in the advance letter and sent to everyone invited to take part
- a conditional £10 incentive - a £10 gift card on completion of the interview.

Interview response rates were similar for unconditional (33%) and conditional (34%) incentives. Rates of non-contact were also comparable for the two incentive conditions, although refusals were higher for unconditional (45%) than conditional (40%) incentives. In addition, physical survey agreement rates were similar for unconditional incentives (65%) and conditional incentives (69%).

3.5 Data linkage consent

In multimode experiment one, respondents were asked consent for data linkage around energy use. The majority of respondents (74%) agreed to data linkage, with agreement higher for face-to-face (80%) than online (68%) surveys.

In multimode experiment two, a second split sample experiment was used to compare two approaches to data linkage consent:

- an assumed consent approach where information about data linkage was provided in the advance letter and taking part in the survey indicated consent
- an explicit data linkage approach where respondents were asked a question to gain consent to link their survey data to information from other sources.

Interview response rates were similar for assumed (33%) and explicit (34%) data linkage approaches.

There were some differences in the pattern of non-response. Assumed data linkage was associated with a lower rate of refusals (39%) than explicit data linkage consent (45%) and a higher rate of non-contact (19% with assumed and 11% with explicit data linkage consent).

Physical survey response rates were similar for assumed and explicit approaches to data linkage consent (67% for both).

Chapter 4

Sample profile

This section compares key characteristics of the responding EHS multimode 3 sample at interview to mainstage EHS from 2024-25. Analysis of the sample profile focused on six key measures: housing tenure, age of HRP, accommodation type, house type, household size and employment status of HRP. It also focused on understanding the profile of respondents who agreed to take part in the physical survey.

Due to the larger scale of the EHS multimode 3 experiment (17,000 addresses compared to 1,000-2,000 for multimode experiments 1 and 2), we have just focused on the findings from the third experiment in this section.

This section then goes on to show the profile of respondents to the household interview across the different interview modes in EHS multimode 3, comparing online with interviewer-led (face-to-face and telephone) modes combined.

4.1 Sample profile

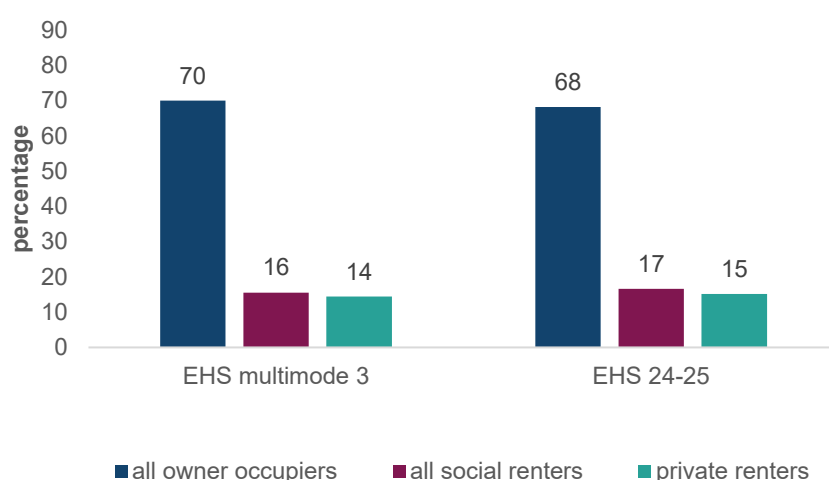
4.1.1 Tenure profile

It is important to note the differences here are likely to reflect the composition of the issued sample and the accuracy of predicted tenure, as well as response rates to the survey. Both EHS multimode 3 and EHS 2024-25 had the sample 'sifted' before it was issued to reduce the proportion of predicted owner occupiers in the issued sample and increase the predicted proportion of renters. The proportion of owner occupier and rented addresses sifted out of the issued sample varies from year to year and can be amended during fieldwork as subsample design is reviewed on a quarterly basis.

Figures 4.1 shows the overall tenure profile of the responding sample at interview for the multimode survey and EHS 2024-25.

In EHS multimode 3, over two thirds (70%) of interviewed respondents were owner occupiers, 16% were social renters and 14% were private renters, Figure 4.1.1. On EHS 2024-25, just over two thirds (68%) of interviewed respondents were owner occupiers, 17% were social renters and 15% were private renters. Compared with EHS 2024-25, the sample profile of EHS multimode 3 had a higher proportion of owner occupiers in the interviewed sample – although the two studies had similar levels of outright owners (42% and 41%) and mortgagors (28% and 27%).

Figure 4.1: Tenure profile of the responding sample at interview

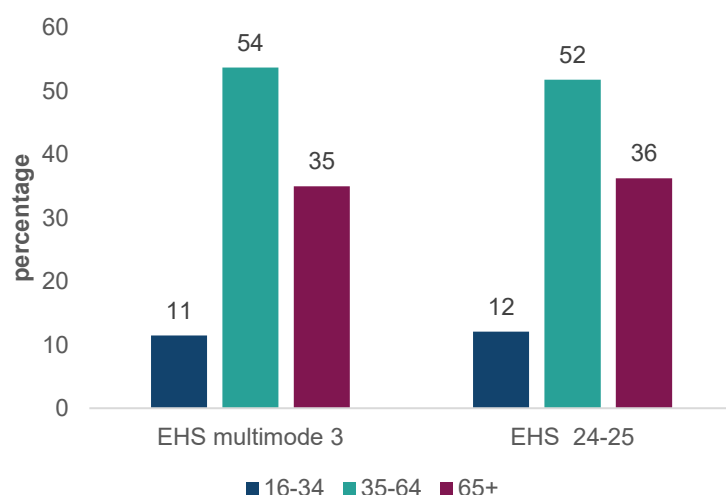


4.1.2 Age profile

Figure 4.2 shows the age profile of respondents for the two surveys.

Overall, around a tenth (11-12%) of respondents had a HRP aged 16 to 34 years, just over half had a HRP aged 35-64 years (54% on EHS multimode 3, 52% on EHS 2024-25) and a third had a HRP aged over 65 (35-36%), Figure 4.2. Compared with EHS 2024-25, the sample profile for EHS multimode 3 had a slightly higher proportion of respondents aged 35 to 64.

Figure 4.2: Age profile of the responding sample at interview



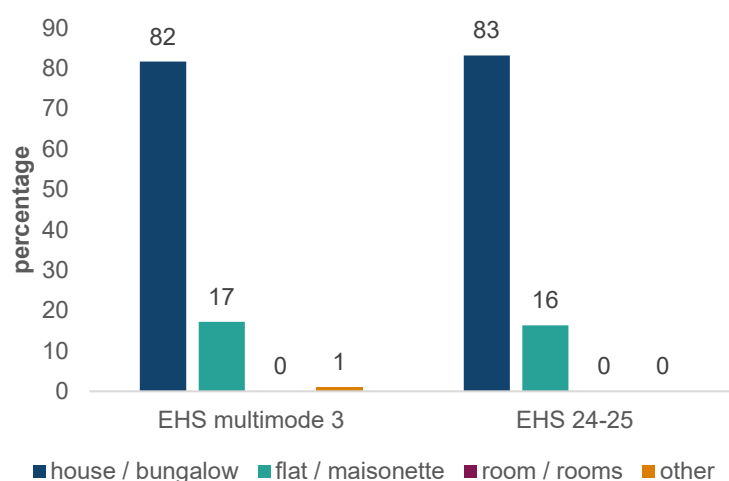
4.1.3 Accommodation and housing type

Figure 4.3 shows accommodation type for the responding sample at interview, for EHS multimode 3 and EHS 2024-25.

Overall, four in five households lived in a house or bungalow (82% in EHS multimode 3 and 83% in EHS 2024-25, slightly higher compared to multimode) and around one in five households lived in flats

(17% in EHS multimode 3, 16% in EHS 2024-25), Figure 4.3. Less than 1% lived in rooms or other types of accommodation in both survey years.

Figure 4.3: Accommodation type of the responding sample at interview



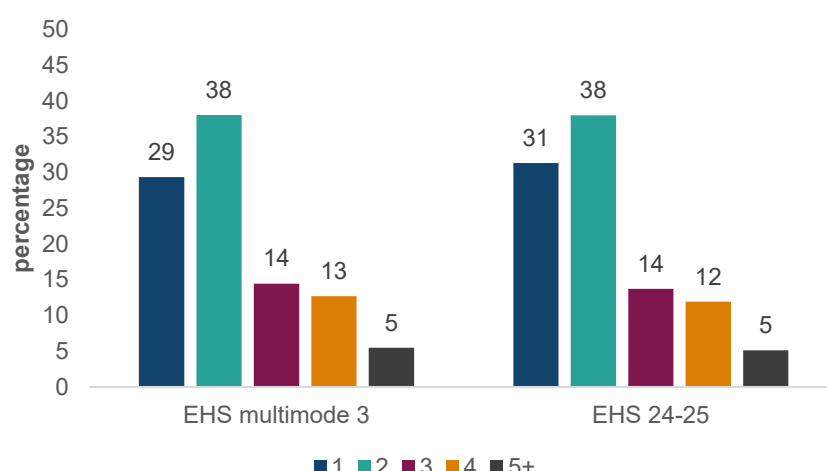
In addition, in EHS multimode 3, around one third of responding households lived in detached houses (33%), just over a third lived in semi-detached houses (38%) and just under a third lived in terraced houses (29%). In EHS 2024-25, the sample profile included a higher proportion of households living in terraced houses (31%) and a lower proportion living in semi-detached houses (36%). Similar to EHS multimode 3, a third (32%) of households lived in detached houses in EHS 2024-25.

4.1.4 Household size

Figure 4.4 shows household size of the responding sample at interview for the multimode survey and EHS 2024-25.

Overall, the profile of household size in the two studies was similar, but the sample profile of EHS multimode 3 had a lower proportion of one-person households compared to EHS 2024-25, Figure 4.4. Around a third of the responding sample lived in one-person households (29% in multimode 3 vs. 31% in EHS 2024-25), over a third lived in two-person households (38% in both), over a fifth lived in three-person (14% in both) and four-person (13% and 12% respectively) households and the remainder (5% in both) lived in in households with 5 or more persons.

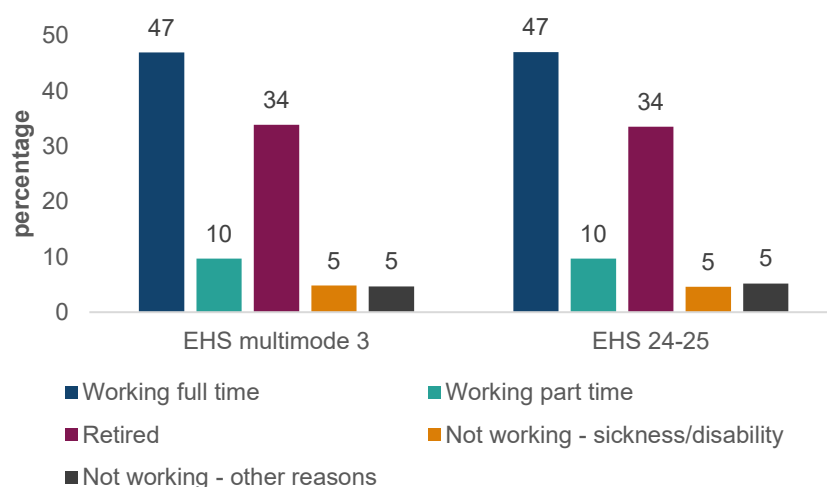
Figure 4.4: Household size of the responding sample at interview



4.1.5 Employment status

Figure 4.5 shows the employment status of the respondents in EHS multimode 3 and EHS 2024-25. The sample profile of the two surveys was similar in terms of the employment status of the respondents. Around half of respondents worked full-time (47% in both), a third were retired (34% in both), a tenth worked part-time (10% in both), while the remaining households did not work due to sickness or disability (5% in both) or due to other reasons (5% in both), Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5: Employment status of the responding sample at interview



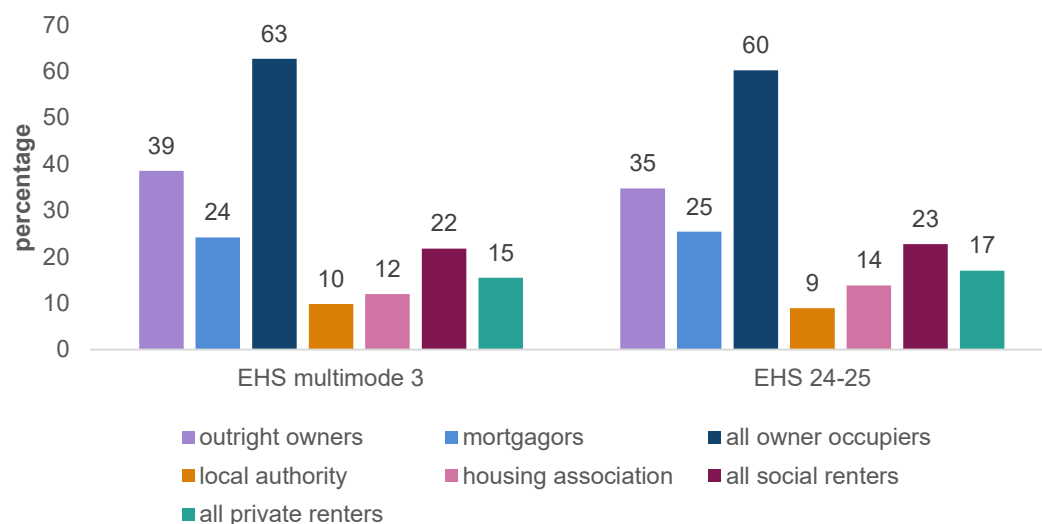
4.1.6 Tenure profile of agreement to the physical survey

Figure 4.6 shows the sample profile of respondents who agreed to take part in the physical survey by tenure, for EHS multimode 3 and EHS 2024-25.

Overall, EHS multimode 3 and EHS 2024-25 had similar proportions of owner occupiers, private renters and social renters among the respondents who agreed to take part in the physical survey, Figure 4.6. Around two-thirds of respondents were owner occupiers (63% in EHS multimode 3, 60% in EHS 2024-25), a fifth were social renters (22% and 23% respectively) and just under a fifth were private renters (15% and 17% respectively). However, EHS multimode 3 physical survey sample had higher proportions of outright owners and lower proportions of housing association renters compared

with EHS 2024-25 (39% vs. 35% outright owners and 12% vs. 14% housing association renters). Subsampling for the physical survey in EHS 24-25 partly explains the lower proportion of owners, as not all owners were invited to take part in the physical survey. In the multimode subsampling was not used.

Figure 4.6: Tenure profile of respondents agreeing to the physical survey by survey



Overall, the two studies had similar responding sample profiles at interview, with only slight differences in proportions by tenure, age, accommodation, house type and household size. Compared with EHS 2024-25, EHS multimode 3 had a slightly higher proportion of owner occupiers, a higher proportion of respondents aged 35-64 years, a higher proportion of respondents living in semi-detached houses, and a lower proportion of respondents living in houses or bungalows, a lower proportion of respondents living in terraced houses and a lower proportion of respondents living in one person households. In terms of respondent employment, the profiles of the two study samples were similar. When comparing the tenure profile of the two studies for those agreeing to a physical survey appointment, the sample profiles were broadly similar but EHS multimode 3 had a slightly higher proportion of owner occupiers and a slightly lower proportion of housing association renters.

4.2 Sample profile by mode

This section shows the profile of respondents to the household interview across the different interview modes in EHS multimode 3, comparing online with interviewer-led (face-to-face and telephone) modes combined. Face-to-face and telephone surveys were grouped here due to the small number of telephone surveys carried out in the EHS multimode survey.

Understanding the sample profile associated with different interview modes is an important consideration for survey design as we expect differences by mode. However, the overall profile of the responding EHS multimode sample is more important for analysis as it is the full sample of all respondents that will be used for analysis and reporting if the multimode approach is adopted for the main survey.

Overall, the proportion of owners was higher for online surveys (76%) than for interviewer-led surveys (57%). Conversely, the proportion of social renters was lower for online (10%) than interviewer-led (26%) surveys, as was the proportion of private renters (13% online, 17% interviewer-led).

Considering the tenure groups in more detail, the online sample had higher proportions of both outright owners (44%) and mortgagors (32%) compared to the interviewer-led sample (39% and 18%). The online sample had lower proportions of local authority and housing association homes (both 5%) compared to the interviewer-led sample (12% and 14% respectively).

Overall, when comparing the tenure types in online and interviewer led (face-to-face and telephone) modes, the online sample profile tended to include a higher proportion of owner occupiers (outright owners and mortgagors) and a lower proportion of private renters and social renters (housing association and local authority housing). Moreover, the online sample had a higher proportion of owner occupiers and a lower proportion of private and social renters agreeing to a physical survey appointment. Sample profile at interview also differed by mode for age, accommodation and house type, household size and employment status. Compared with the interviewer led sample, the online sample had: a higher proportion of households living in detached houses, a higher proportion of two and four person households, and a higher proportion of retired households. The online sample had a lower proportion living in semi-detached and terraced houses, a lower proportion of one-person households, a lower proportion of households not working due to sickness or disability, and a lower proportion of households with an HRP aged over 65.

Chapter 5

Data Quality

A key consideration for a mixed-mode EHS is the quality of the data it can provide. This section starts with a discussion of item non-response (“don’t know” and “refusal” answers), including comparisons to EHS 2024-25 where appropriate for context. It then moves on to provide an overview of dropout rates to the online survey.

Due to the larger scale of the EHS multimode 3 experiment (17,000 addresses compared to 1,000-2,000 for multimode experiments 1 and 2), we have focused on the findings from the third experiment.

5.1 Item non-response

Item non-response occurs when respondents in a survey fail to provide an answer to specific questions, leaving those items incomplete. This can happen for various reasons, such as the respondent's unwillingness to answer or misunderstanding the question. Item non-response can affect the quality and reliability of the data collected, potentially leading to biases if the missing responses are systematically different from the provided ones. On the current mainstage EHS we employ a variety of techniques to handle item non-response, particularly through imputation, to mitigate its impact on the study's findings.

For this report, we calculate rates of item non-response as the number of don’t know or refusal answers given, divided by the total number of answers (including don’t know or refusals) to generate a proportion.

Table 1: Item non-response for EHS Multimode 3 compared to EHS 2024-25

Item non-response*	EHS Multimode 3			EHS 2024-25		
	N	Total	%	DK / RF	Total	Non-resp %
Age	2	5,015	0.0	0	16,550	0.0
Sex	0	5,015	0.0	0	16,550	0.0
Tenure (ten1)	0	5,109	0.0	0	16,448	0.0
Landlord (Llord)	0	1,533	0.0	10	5,254	0.2
Rent amounts	297	2,202	13.5	829	7,097	11.7
Mortgage amounts	564	3,916	14.4	2,103	13,629	15.4
HRP income variables	863	5,515	15.6	3,836	19,288	19.9

Tenure

Housing tenure data are critical to the EHS. Tracking tenure over time and reporting this accurately is a key analytical output. Two tenure questions, the initial tenure recording (variable "ten1") and the details defining the type of renter ("Llord"), have further importance: they are extensively used in the routing used in the rest of the questionnaire and they are primary inputs for deriving a final tenure variable for use in weighting and reporting.

Item non-response to these questions could significantly impact the overall data quality of the survey. Non-response here can also lead to further non-response, as questions that rely on these answers are not asked, resulting in missing data. For example, if the respondent does not provide their tenure status, questions on housing costs will not be asked. Additionally, inaccuracies in the final tenure variable result in less effective weighting, and a loss of confidence in the final tenure variable undermines the reliability of analyses conducted using these variables. Tenure is the most common cross-break used in detailed reporting and analysis of EHS data. Therefore, it is crucial to minimise item non-response to these questions as much as possible.

Historically, item non-response to these two questions has been rare on EHS. In EHS 2024-25, there were no refusals or don't know responses to the initial tenure recording and ten don't know or refusal answers (of a total 5,254 responses) to the question identifying the type of landlord (0.2%). Indications from EHS multimode 3 suggest rates of non-response to these two questions would remain the same. There were nine instances of non-response to the initial tenure observation (of a total 5,109 responses, 0.2%) and no item non-response to the question identifying the type of landlord.

Gender and age

Like tenure, gender and age are important data for weighting. Without a gender or a final derived age for the HRP, the case would need to be dropped. The current mainstage EHS deals with this in two ways: 1) through the questions asked in the questionnaire, where the interviewer codes the respondent's gender and where, if multiple refusal or don't know answers are given to age, require the interviewer to estimate the respondent's age; and 2) through imputation of age where an implausible age is then provided. This approach is taken to minimise item non-response to age and to ensure all people have an age in the data.

EHS multimode 3 takes a slightly different approach as the online element cannot make use of the interviewer's observations. Respondents are asked for their gender, while for age respondents are first asked their date of birth, if this is not responded to then they are asked their current age and if this is not responded to, they are asked to code themselves to an age band. Additional people in the household are simply asked their age. This difference means that it is possible to have item non-response to gender and age in EHS multimode 3, something previously not possible in the mainstage EHS.

Fortunately, item non-response to age is rare, with two (0.03%) don't know or refusal answers provided for HRP age (from a total of 5,015 observations). There was no item non-response to gender in EHS multimode 3.

Housing costs

Data about rent and mortgage costs and housing support are vital information for EHS and used in assessing affordability. Missing data from non-response requires imputation before modelling of housing costs can take place.

Overall, EHS multimode 3 had a similar rate of item non-response to EHS 2024-25. Across all nine rent questions asked in EHS multimode survey, 297 of the 2,202 total responses received were don't know or refusal answers, representing a rate of item non-response of 13%. For EHS 2024-25, the rate of item non-response to the 11 questions asked about rent was 12%.

Similarly, EHS multimode 3 had a similar rate of item non-response to EHS 2024-25 for mortgage cost questions. Across the six mortgage cost questions assessed for non-response, 564 of the total 3,916 responses received were don't know or refusal answers, representing a rate of item non-response of 14%. For EHS 2024-25, the rate of item non-response to the same questions was 15%.

Income

Like housing costs, income is a piece of vital information, used in assessing affordability and in fuel poverty analysis. Missing data from non-response requires imputation before modelling of housing costs can take place.

Overall, in multimode 3, 863 responses received to the gross income questions of a total 5,515, representing 16% of responses, were don't know or refusal answers. EHS 2024-25, for the same questions, had a rate of item non-response of 20%. The overall rate of item non-response to the income questions was lower for EHS multimode than EHS 24-25.

Among the key variables examined, rates of item non-response were broadly comparable for EHS multimode 3 and EHS 2024-25 with low item non-response for age and sex (around 0.2% of responses) and higher, but comparable, rates for other key variables examined (12-13% for rent questions, 14-15% for mortgage). Item non-response for income related questions was lower in the multimode than EHS 24-25 (16% vs 20%).

5.2 Dropout analysis

Dropout analysis is important when understanding self-completion questionnaires for three key reasons. Firstly, it helps identify patterns and points within the questionnaire where respondents are more likely to discontinue, allowing researchers to pinpoint sections that may be confusing, too lengthy or sensitive. Alongside analysis of item non-response, dropout analysis indicates where adjustments could be made to improve questionnaire design.

Secondly, dropout analysis provides insights into the characteristics of respondents who are more likely to drop out. This information is crucial for assessing potential biases in the data, as certain groups may be underrepresented if they are more prone to discontinuing the questionnaire. Addressing these biases is essential for ensuring the validity and generalisability of the survey findings.

Lastly, dropout analysis contributes to the overall reliability and robustness of the research. By reducing dropout rates, we can ensure a more comprehensive dataset, which in turn leads to more accurate and reliable conclusions.

Dropout to interviewer-led modes

Dropouts for interviewer-led data collection are typically low, with under 5% being standard. Despite their rarity, dropouts to interviewers are worth discussing briefly. Fewer than 1% of respondents dropped out to interviewer-led interviews in EHS multimode 3. With dropout rates so low, we have therefore focused on dropouts to the online element only.

Dropout online

For this analysis, dropouts were defined as interviews that were started but not fully completed. There are two types of dropouts: 'partial productives' where respondents completed at least three quarters of the questions, and 'dropouts' where respondents completed less than three quarters of the interview. Ineligible screen outs are not included in our definition of a dropout – this is because these respondents are forced to leave the survey because they have confirmed they are aged under 16 and so we cannot interview them.

Dropout rates online vary, with key determining factors being the complexity and length of the questionnaire and the types of questions asked during the interview. At EHS multimode 3, 29% of respondents who started the online questionnaire dropped out before fully completing it (23% before achieving any outcome at all, 6% after completing a partial interview). This was similar to the dropout rates seen for EHS multimode 1 (30%) and multimode 2 (32%). For a survey of the length and complexity of EHS, and which asks detailed income and housing cost related questions, this dropout rate is not out of the ordinary, but it does suggest that there is scope for improvement.

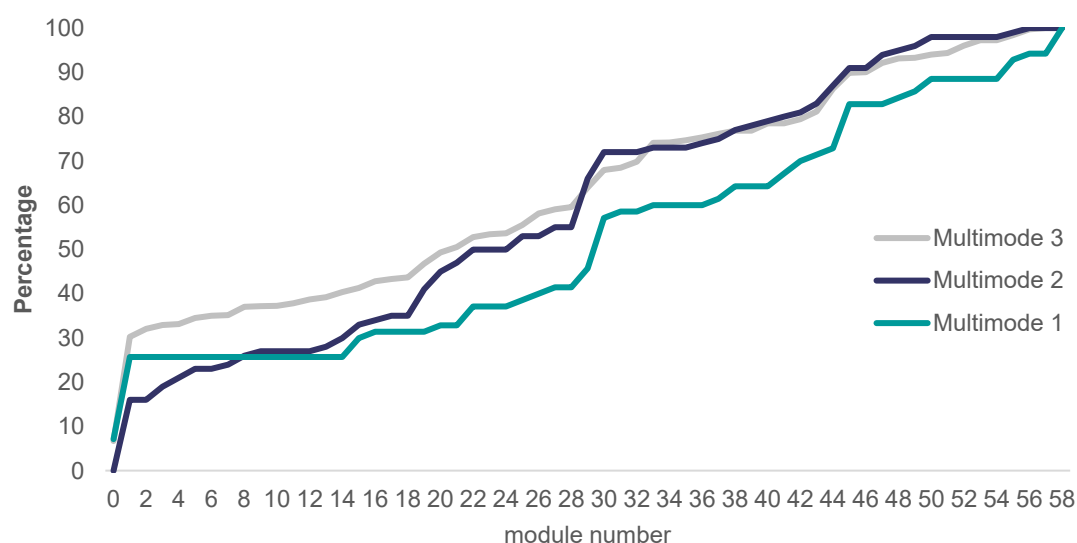
Dropout online: questionnaire modules

By looking at where respondents are dropping out within the questionnaire, we can begin to assess whether there are patterns or common themes to the questions where respondents drop out.

Overall, EHS multimode 3 saw a similar pattern of dropouts to earlier EHS multimode surveys. A substantial proportion, 40%, of those who dropped out did so early, during the opening demographic questions (modules 0 to 14). While modules 0 to 14 is a numerically large number of modules, in terms of time in interview this represents just the first ten to 20 minutes, depending on respondent familiarity with surveys and the internet.

The bulk of respondents who dropped out over these modules did so very early: 7% dropped out during the landing page and introduction to the survey while 24% of those who dropped out did so in the first substantial demographic module. It is unclear whether these dropouts simply reflect that these are the least motivated respondents, or if respondents are finding these questions off putting or a combination of the two.

Figure 5.1: Cumulative dropouts by questionnaire module*



*Please note that the base for this graph is all online interviews with a dropout.

EHS multimode 3 also saw similar patterns to EHS multimode 1 and 2 for further dropouts later in the questionnaire. A second further point of dropout came during the housing cost modules (29 to 33), where a further 15% of dropouts occurred, in particular at the ownership details (4%), mortgages (4%) and rent and housing benefit (4%) modules. A final relatively large number of dropouts came during the job details, economic status and income modules (44 to 50), with a further 13% of dropouts. The job details (5%) and subjective economic status (4%) in particular resulted in relatively high proportions of dropouts as individual modules.

Dropout online: demographics

By looking at who is dropping out in the survey, we can begin to understand if dropouts are systematically biasing the online component of the EHS in some way. When assessing dropouts, it is important to consider them within the wider context of the online responding sample, as dropouts are likely to reflect who is taking part more generally.

Analysis of the demographics of dropouts is limited by when those respondents dropped out. For example, if a respondent dropped out at the landing page, their demographic characteristics were not collected and therefore unknown. As such, these figures should be treated as indicative only.

Broadly, the demographic characteristics of those who dropped out compared to those who fully completed were similar. Nevertheless, there were some significant differences that are worth noting. A higher proportion of those who fully completed owned their accommodation outright at 36% compared to 29% of those who dropped out.

A lower proportion of those who fully completed were aged 16 to 34 (13%) compared with those who dropped out from the same age group (20%), while a higher proportion of those who fully completed were aged 65 or over (28%) compared to those who dropped out (23%).

A higher proportion of those who dropped out (21%) than those who went on to fully complete the interview (12%) were from a minority ethnic group.

Continuing to monitor dropouts, and to further consider what can be done to mitigate them, would be recommended should the EHS become a mixed-mode online-first survey in the future.

Overall, around 29% of respondents dropped out of the online survey: 6% after partly completing the survey and 23% before that stage. Higher dropout rates appeared to be associated with particular modules: 40% of dropouts occurred at the landing page and initial demographic sections, 15% in the housing cost modules, and 13% during the income related questions. Based on the available demographic data, characteristics of respondents who dropped out were similar to those who completed interviews (although no demographic is available for early dropouts). Monitoring and minimising item non-response and dropout rates is an important consideration for multimode development.

5.3 Comparing key estimates

A small number of key estimates were compared for the two surveys, based on simple derived variables from the available interview data – the multimode survey did not include a physical survey needed for complex derived variables, and imputation was not used to compensate for missing rent or mortgage data. We used selection weights only for these comparisons – non-response weighting and calibration were not applied. The comparisons below are therefore designed to provide a broad indicator of differences between the two surveys building on the earlier sample profile comparisons.

Age of HRP

The age distribution was broadly similar, although the EHS multimode had slightly higher proportion of respondents aged 35 to 64 (54%) than EHS 24-25 (52%). There was no difference in mean age of HRP in multimode and EHS 24-25 (both 57 years).

Household size

The profile of household size was similar for the two surveys. However, there was a small but significant (95%) difference in mean household size, with multimode estimates of household size (2.3) slightly larger than EHS 24-25 (2.2).

Households with children

The proportion of households with children was similar in the two surveys: no children (77%-78%), one child (10-11%), two children (9% for both), three children (3% for both).

Tenure

The proportion of owner occupiers was higher with the multimode approach (70%) than EHS 24-25 (68%), although outright owners (42% vs 41%) and mortgagers (28% vs 27%) were similar. Overall, homes owned by housing associations were lower in the multimode (8%) than the main stage (10%). There were no significant differences for private renters (14% vs 15%).

Mortgage costs

In both surveys, just over a quarter (27% for both) of owner occupiers had an outstanding mortgage or loan. Mean monthly mortgage payment among those with a valid response was comparable in the two surveys: £1,013 per month in the multimode survey and £1,021 per month in EHS 24-25.

Rent costs

A simple derived variable was used to compare monthly rent, based on renters who did not receive assistance from housing benefit, local housing allowance or universal credit. In both surveys just over half (56%) of renters did not receive assistance with their rent. Average monthly rent was comparable across the two surveys: £903 per month in the multimode survey and £895 per month in EHS 24-25.

Employment Status

HRP employment status was also comparable across the two surveys.

Accommodation and house type

Pattern of accommodation type was comparable for the two approaches.

Key estimates for the two surveys were broadly similar. The additional key estimates explored here – mean age, mean household size, rent and mortgage – showed very few differences. For mortgages, the proportion with an outstanding mortgage and mean monthly mortgage payments were similar in the two surveys. Similarly, the proportion of renters without assistance (no housing benefit, local housing allowance or Universal Credit) and the mean monthly rent paid by this group were also comparable across surveys. However, mean household size was larger in the multimode (2.29) than EHS 24-25 (2.24) survey.

Chapter 6

Interviewer feedback

Interviewers were asked for their feedback about delivering the EHS multimode survey, through feedback surveys and a face-to-face debrief with selected interviewers. Due to the larger scale experiment, this chapter mainly focuses on feedback from interviewers delivering the third multimode experiment.

6.1 Introducing the survey

Some interviewers introduced the survey in the same manner as they would have done for the mainstage EHS survey. The interviewers' methods of introducing the survey varied: some stated that they were there to assist the respondent in completing the survey online, while others indicated that they were there to complete the survey face-to-face but could offer the online option as a secondary choice. Many interviewers mentioned they preferred to offer the face-to-face option first and present the online option as a secondary alternative.

Several interviewers expressed they preferred not to mention the online survey, as it often became a hindrance. They also found that the letter mentioning the online option made it more difficult to secure a completed survey. Some interviewers regretted their initial approach of offering the online survey first and wished they had reserved that option as a last resort.

Conversely, some interviewers instead found it easier to convince respondents to participate if there was an online survey available allowing respondents to use that as the method of completion. However, this advantage was potentially outweighed by instances of 'polite refusals' or 'soft refusals,' where respondents claimed they would complete the survey online but ultimately never did. Additionally, some interviewers found it challenging to introduce the survey due to the multimode approach, which they felt was confusing both for the respondents and for themselves.

6.2 Survey materials

Sampled addresses were sent an initial advance letter inviting them to take part online, along with a survey leaflet. There were up to three letters sent with seven to ten days between each letter.

Several interviewers felt that the letters were too 'wordy' and would benefit from being more engaging. This concern was linked to instances where respondents did not remember receiving the letters or were unaware of their delivery; around one third of the interviewers had respondents who did not recall the letters even after being reminded. A small number of interviewers said respondents mentioned they thought the letters were a scam, with one stating that the volume of letters sent without being personally addressed made the respondent more concerned it was a scam. Additionally, interviewers also raised concerns over the volume of letters, stating that some

respondents felt like the letters were harassment. In particular, the second and third letters were noted as discouraging respondents.

6.3 Incentives

On EHS multimode 3 the incentive given was an unconditional £10 post office voucher that was sent with the first advance letter to all respondents.

The feedback given on the incentive by interviewers was that in general respondents liked the incentive and were happy with this amount. Although the feedback from interviewers themselves was mixed, many of the interviewers found the amount given this time (£10) was more effective than the standard amount given on EHS mainstage (£5) as this is more valuable to respondents. However, other interviewers still found that some respondents thought £10 was too low. Despite this, there were many who provided positive feedback and said the amount given to respondents was the right amount.

A small number of interviewers encountered respondents who did not believe the voucher was real or alternatively thought the voucher was a scam. Additionally, some interviewers mentioned that respondents did not remember receiving the voucher.

6.4 Reminder access codes

All respondents are sent an access code for their household on their advance letter. If the respondent misplaces this letter or doesn't remember receiving it, then interviewers are instructed to collect the respondent's email address for the office to email them a replacement access code. These access codes were sent automatically by email to the respondent. Replacement access codes were only sent out if respondents provided a valid email address, however the face-to-face and telephone surveys remained available to respondents who chose not to provide this.

Although this seemed to work in the majority of cases, with 77% of interviewers stating they did not have an issue, there were still many interviews who mentioned the method of requesting access codes was not as effective as they would have liked. They cited difficulties in knowing whether the access code had been sent to the respondent, as well as whether the respondent had received it and the time taken to send the replacement codes. Interviewers suggested that it would be helpful to have access codes available so that interviewers can give these codes out directly to respondents when introducing the survey.

If interviewers are not able to have access codes for all addresses readily available to hand out directly to respondents when needed, then interviewers recommended having the option for them to call the office to request a code to give to the respondent. Alternatively, if access codes could only be distributed by the office, interviewers would find it helpful to receive more frequent updates about when the access codes are sent out and if there were any issues in the codes being delivered. This would address the issue of knowing whether their request was successfully sent and whether the respondent received the code.

6.5 The Survey

Some technical issues prevented respondents from completing the survey either online or face-to-face, such as the system incorrectly indicating the respondent had already completed it, and difficulties with replacement access codes not going through.

Online

Some respondents told interviewers that they stopped doing the online survey because they found the questions too intrusive, required too much private information, and were too long. Interviewers believed respondents might have continued with the survey if it had been conducted face-to-face, as they could explain the purpose behind any questions.

Interviewers found that only a few respondents who said they would complete the survey online actually did so, with many more using the online survey as a way to politely refuse interviewers at the doorstep. Interviewers mentioned that notifications of completed surveys were not working consistently as they did not always receive updates when their respondents had completed the survey.

Face-to-Face

When conducting in-person interviews, some interviewers found the survey seemed to take longer compared to the EHS mainstage. There was a general consensus that this might be due to the technical side of using the multimode questionnaire program, e.g. manually selecting option on the touch screen instead of using the keypad, and not due to the questions in the survey themselves. Otherwise, the survey was mostly the same as mainstage and there was very little feedback given on the face-to-face survey on the whole.

6.6 Feedback on specific questions

The questionnaire was designed to be as similar as possible across the different modes with only minor adaptations where necessary, for example in the use of showcards for face-to-face interviews.

One of the adaptations to make the face-to-face and online survey work in both modes was the use of staggered questions where the original question had a long lists of possible responses. This involved respondents first being asked for a broad response and secondarily being asked for a more specific response. Overall, there were few comments on these questions from interviewers, however some did mention that the questions were repetitive and an unnecessary duplication of questions which can make the interview take longer than expected in comparison to the mainstage EHS survey. In particular, the household demographic questions e.g. household grid and ethnicity questions, were felt to be time-consuming and more complicated than necessary.

Another struggle interviewers experienced was found in the income questions. Respondents were first asked directly for their income and then if refused, were offered banded answer options instead. Some interviewers said they would have preferred to just have banded answers to the question as the non-banded questions were seen as being too intrusive by respondents. Additionally, one interviewer

observed that if a respondent refused to answer the initial income questions, then they would likely go on to refuse the banded question as well.

Although there were no physical surveys taking place there was still a need to test the agreement statement to understand physical survey agreement rates. Many interviewers reported that they would introduce the physical survey just as they would during the mainstage, reading the text as it is written. One interviewer mentioned that they appreciated the shorter introduction compared to the main survey, as they found it helpful in maintaining respondents' concentration. However, some interviewers experienced difficulties in introducing the survey, primarily due to the knowledge that there would not actually be a physical survey appointment, rather than issues with the introduction itself.

Interviewer feedback is an important consideration as moving to a multimode approach affects the interviewer role, including survey introductions, new procedures such as reminder access codes and the interview itself. Interviewer feedback is invaluable in shaping these processes.

Sources for further information or advice on the EHS

- Headline report
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-housing-survey>
- Annual reports
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-housing-survey>
- Technical reports
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/english-housing-survey-technical-advice>
- Data security strategy
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-housing-survey-data-security-strategy-and-arrangements>

- Open data standards
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-data-white-paper-unleashing-the-potential>
- Guidelines for Quality, published by the Government Statistical Service Quality Centre
<https://gss.civilservice.gov.uk/guidances/quality/>
- Official Statistics Release Calendar
<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/announcements>
- Code of Practice for Statistics
[Code of Practice for Statistics \(statisticsauthority.gov.uk\)](https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice-for-statistics/)
- Further information email
ehs@communities.gov.uk

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