



Understanding Society

THE UK HOUSEHOLD LONGITUDINAL STUDY

Progress against the ESRC Benefit Realisation Plan

2009 - 2020



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Key features of Understanding Society, the UK Household Longitudinal Study

- It covers all ages, allowing us to understand the experiences of the whole population over time.
- The whole household contributes, meaning that relationships between generations, couples and siblings can be explored.
- There is continuous data collection, so that short- and long-term changes in people's lives can be investigated.
- All four countries of the UK are included, allowing researchers to compare the experiences of people living in different places and in different policy contexts.
- We have an Ethnic Minority Boost sample and an Immigrant and Ethnic Minority Boost sample, allowing more detailed research on the experiences of different ethnic minorities across migrant generations in the UK.
- The Study is multi-topic and covers a range of social, economic and behavioural factors, making it valuable to a wide range of policymakers and researchers.
- Geographical data linkage is possible, allowing researchers to investigate the role of neighbourhoods and regions on individual lives.
- It can be linked to administrative data to build a richer picture of households.
- Our participants have contributed biomarker and genetic data. This health and genetic information enables researchers to investigate the links between social and economic circumstances and health.
- The Study is underpinned by world-leading methodological research.





In the original business case for Understanding Society, the ESRC set out its rationale and expectations for the UK Household Longitudinal Study to be achieved in its first ten years. The nine benefits areas the ESRC identified have informed the design of the Study and are used to measure the success of the data collection as a whole, how users interact with the Study data, and how Understanding Society is used by researchers and policymakers.

The benefits of Understanding Society

- Benefit 1: Promotes new waves of inter- and multi-disciplinary research.
- Benefit 2: Promotes and develops new forms of methodology.
- Benefit 3: The number and breadth of data users increases over time.
- Benefit 4: Recognition of the UK's reputation as an international centre of social science excellence.
- Benefit 5: Contributes to capability in quantitative methods and use of interdisciplinary data.
- Benefit 6: New insights into interactions between social and biological data.
- Benefit 7: Enables new forms of science over time.
- Benefit 8: Informs development of new policy over time.
- Benefit 9: Informs development of business practice in private and Civil Society sectors.

The benefits set out in this report try to capture the breadth of use of Understanding Society and the outputs from it; the opportunities the Study creates for new kinds of research in a range of ways, and the impact of the research scientifically, for capacity building and for policy impact, and based on all of this, the ways it should enhance the reputation of UK social science internationally. The ESRC recognised that it would take time for a longitudinal study to reach its first date for review and the key date for reviewing the achievement of these benefits was set for 2020, 10 years after the start of the Study.

In recognition of this decade milestone, this report presents evidence on the achievements of the Study up to the end of 2020. In this time, 10 waves of Understanding Society have been released and a further three waves are in the field. 11 waves of the Innovation Panel have been released, two are currently being prepared for final release and one is in the field. The Study, with its users, has had a major impact on science and policy in its first ten years. But, like all longitudinal investments, it is evident that its impact is growing and accumulating with age. At the end of the report we briefly highlight the innovations we are currently adopting, so that the Study continues to create cutting edge research opportunities for the next decade and beyond. The number of users is increasing steeply and among a wide range of different sub-groups of users. Research from the Study is being widely published, and its quality can be demonstrated by the proportion of papers published in high impact journals and, as a group, the papers having over double the average citation rate of similar disciplines. Data from the Study are being used in new fields, opening up new opportunities for research.



Measuring the benefits

This report outlines progress against the benefits to the end of 2020 for both Understanding Society (UKHLS) and its predecessor the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS). We recognise that evidence may apply across several benefits, not just a single one. The benefits are often complex to define and measure, and we have debated how best to measure them on a number of occasions at the (previous) Understanding Society Governing Board. This report reflects the approach agreed with the Governing Board at the time.

It should be noted that many of the benefit measures rely on us identifying and capturing users' outputs, and activities based on the data, effectively. For usage we report on downloads of the dataset from the UK Data Service. It is not possible for us to know if these data downloaded are used, or alternatively if they are used by multiple people and/or for multiple projects. For publications we are reliant on searching of electronic databases to identify outputs. It is not possible for us to know how well we do this, and hence how comprehensive this evidence is. There is a clear need to improve the salience of effective data citation among users (across studies) so that studies and their funders can better understand the ways in which their investments are being used and hence their value to research and society.

This report includes information on BHPS use from 2002 and BHPS publications are included back to 1991; Understanding Society data use and publishing began in 2011.



Downloads from UK Data Service

Figure 1 shows the steep increase in downloads of any BHPS or UKHLS dataset from the UK Data Service (UKDS); over time a total of over 53,000 since information on downloads was recorded. These downloads have been carried out by over 24,000 individuals.

Figure 2 breaks our users down by whether they are new or repeat users, both are increasing year-on-year. While the high number of new users shows how well we are continually reaching new audiences, the number of repeat users demonstrates the value of the data to existing users who download new waves of data for further research.

Figures 3 to 7 present the download information by the different datasets available from Understanding Society. [Note: the different start years reflect when the datasets were first released] Most of the datasets show an upward trend in use, although this has flattened off for the nurse and biomarker data, which has only been issued once. The Secure version of the dataset, for the most disclosive data, is relatively small but has been increasing steeply as more linked datasets are made available. Additional biomarkers and proteomics data will be released in 2021, which should expand the use of this existing resource again. For the Innovation Panel, the upward trend flattened in 2020, reflecting the delay in releasing the IP12 data until 2021, due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, a significant number of users continued to download IP data in 2020.

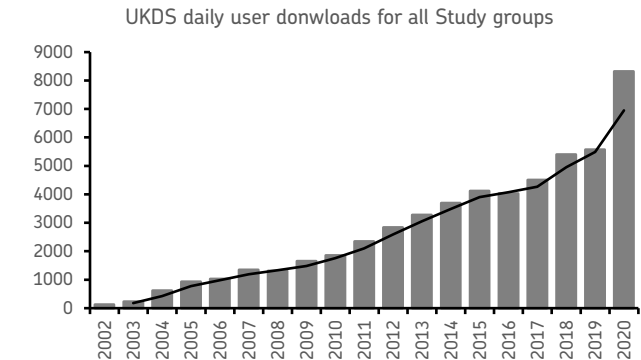


Figure 2

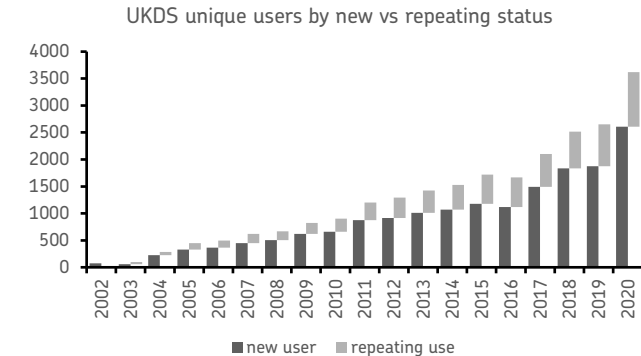
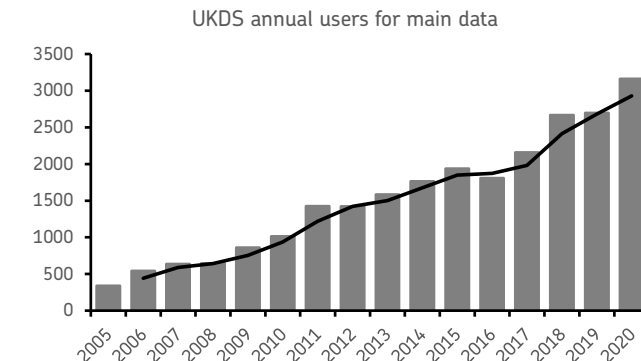


Figure 3



Downloads from the UK Data Service

Figure 4

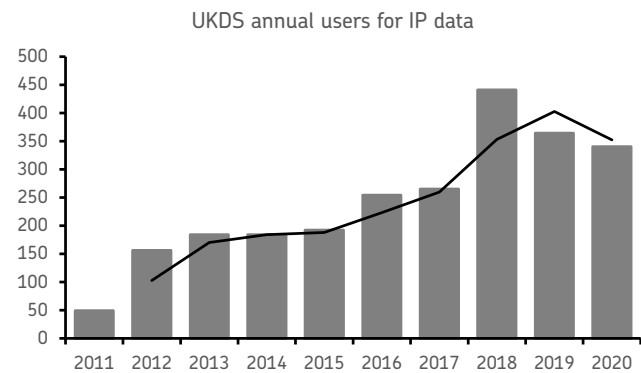


Figure 5

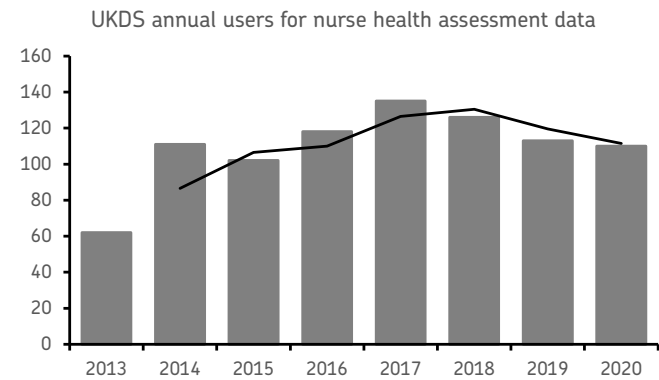


Figure 6

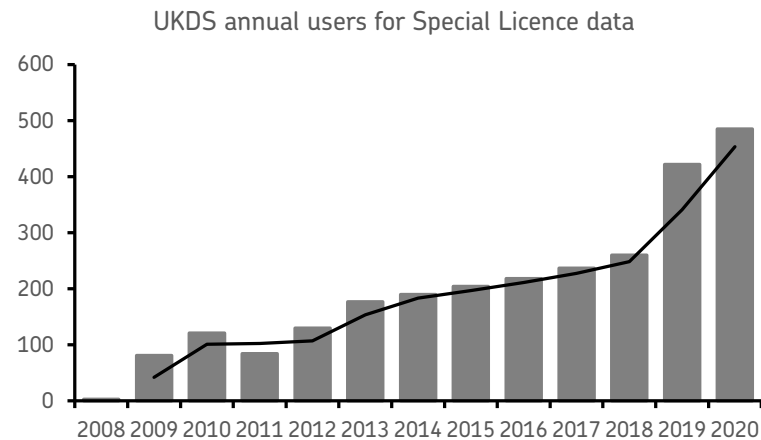
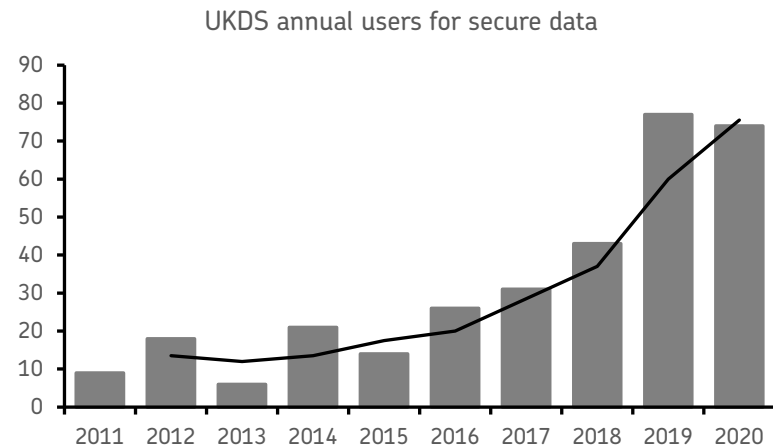


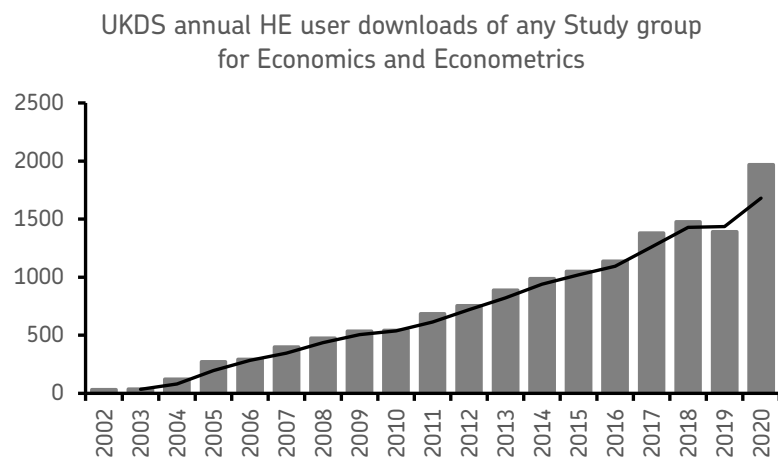
Figure 7



Data downloads by subject area

This next section breaks down higher education usage by users' own definition of their discipline, using a list to demonstrate the breadth of use among academic researchers. The largest user group are economists, who are about double the size of the next largest group from sociology and social policy. These groups were the traditional users of BHPS. However, across the disciplines the stepped increase as UKHLS data came on stream from 2011 onwards is visible. The growing use of the Study by new disciplines, such as biology and computer science, can also be seen. Unsurprisingly, there was a steep increase in the use of the Study by health sciences in 2020.

Figure 8



Data downloads by
subject area

Figure 9

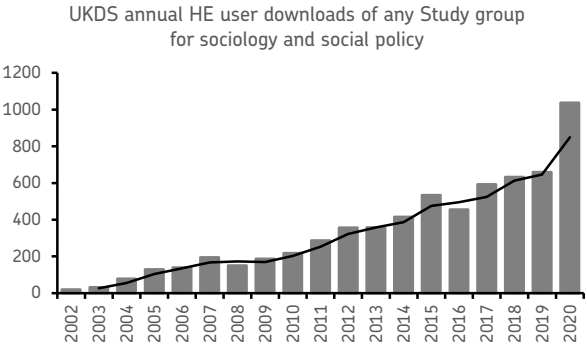


Figure 12

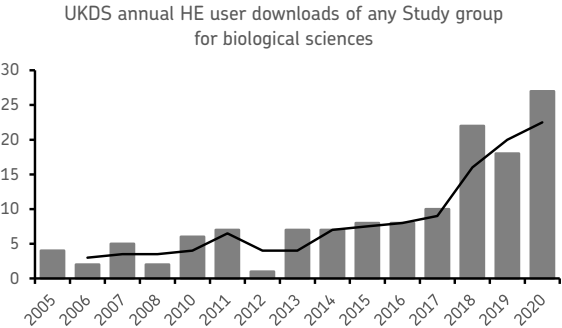


Figure 15

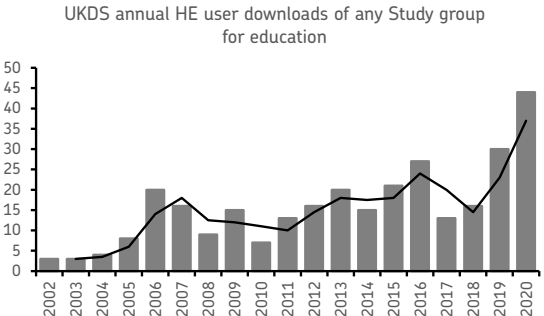


Figure 10

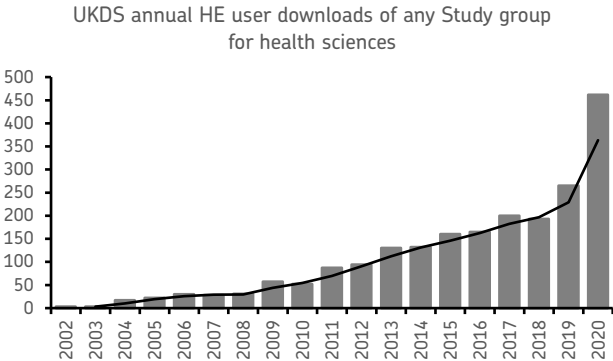


Figure 13

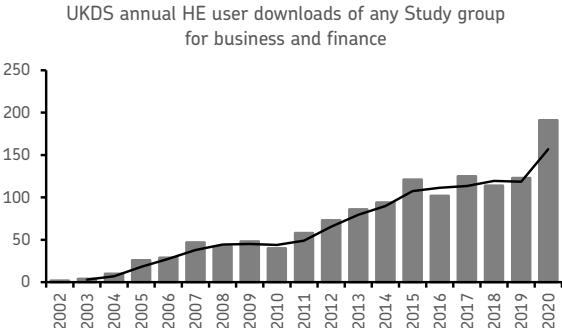


Figure 16

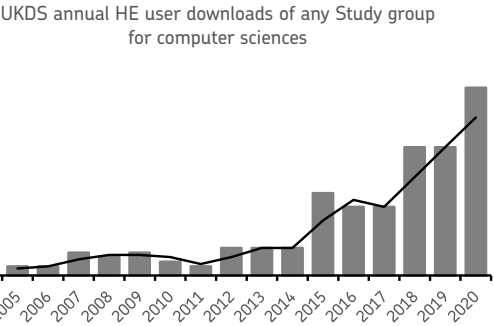


Figure 11

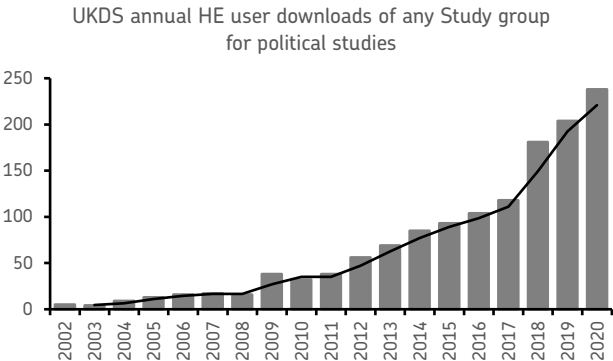


Figure 14

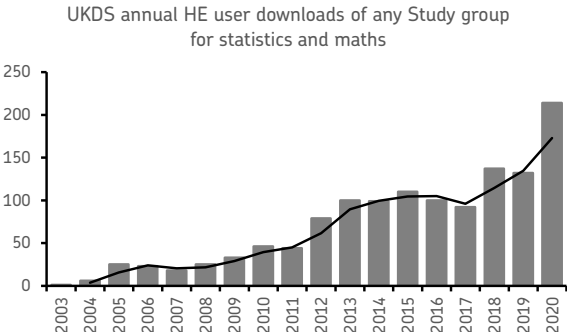
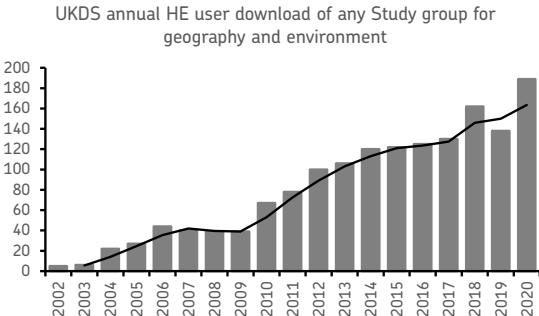


Figure 17





Downloads by sector

Figure 18 shows data downloads by sector across the whole time period. Higher education dominates use of Understanding Society data, with modest direct data use by government, third sector and commercial organisations.

However, it is important to note that much of the policy community make use of findings from researchers' analysis of the Study rather than directly use the data, although we do have a number of initiatives to try to improve data use outside academia, where appropriate.

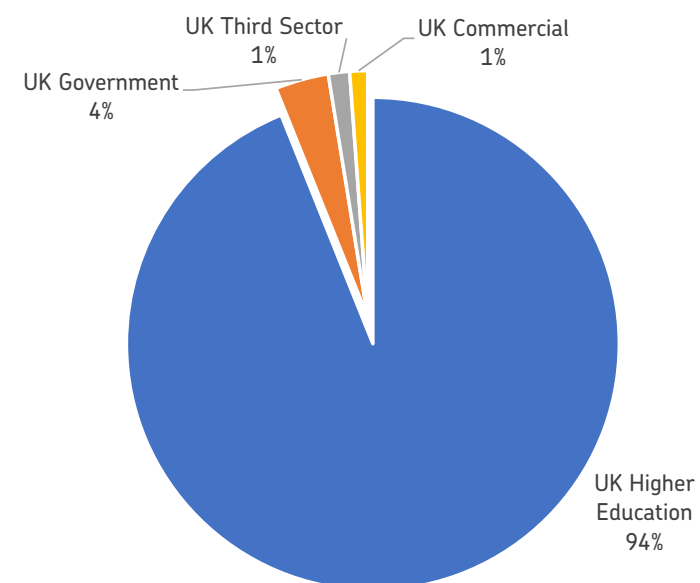


Figure 18

Benefit 7: Enables new forms of science over time with particular benefits to science looking at:

Ethnic minority groups

Smaller sub-populations

The changing lives and behaviours of individuals in their household context

The interface between social and biological sciences

Publications

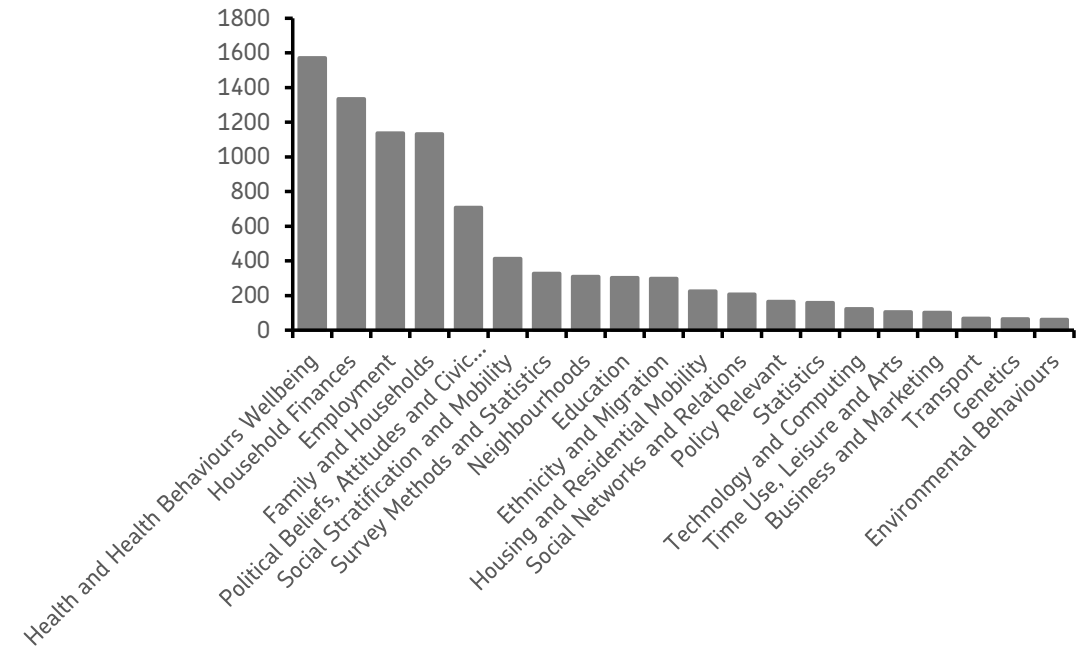
We have identified and recorded over 4,600 publications drawing on data from the Study. Figure 19 gives some indication of the focus of publications.

Unsurprisingly, our key domains of health, employment, income, family, politics and social mobility, are the most common foci, followed by survey methods. Although currently smaller in number, one can see emerging research in new areas such as genetics and environmental behaviour.

Specifically in relation to the new forms of science that the Study was set up to facilitate, the publication topics suggest that family and households is a key area of research, with ethnicity research also a growing topic. It is not possible to identify research on 'smaller sub-populations' in an automated way. Research at the interface of social and biological sciences is also covered in Benefit 6 below.

This section gives an overview of publication numbers in topic areas. We have also included a selection of recent research papers using Understanding Society data, which our Topic Champions have identified as recent examples of some of the most important or innovative research from their discipline.

Figure 19



Publications

Table 1 shows the spread of peer-review journals in which BHPS and Understanding Society papers are published. We have identified high impact journals within this using the journal h-index from the SJR website (ranking downloaded March 2021), which supports Scopus. While the largest number of papers is to be found in economics journals, it is in health sciences, sociology and public policy where the highest proportion of the papers published have appeared in high impact journals.

An alternative way of considering quality is to investigate the citation rate of individual articles which used Understanding Society in peer reviewed journal articles, books and book chapters included in Scopus, and published between 2014 and 2020, we identified 555 publications. Of these publications:

- 51.4% were in social sciences and the remainder from a broad range of disciplines, including 27% in medicine.
- 34.5% included international collaboration.
- 52.7% are in the top 10% of journals (based on CiteScore metrics).
- 26.5% are in the top 10% most cited publications worldwide.
- There were 3,410 authors from 722 different institutions (both UK-based and international). Many of the authors are repeat data users; 464 have published at least four times using the data.

Table 1

Discipline Group	High	Grand Total	% HI
Economics	117	415	28.2%
Sociology and Political Science	199	276	72.1%
Survey Methods	135	210	64.3%
Public Policy	97	129	75.2%
Health and Social Science	97	129	75.2%
Demography	60	116	51.7%
Public Health and Epidemiology	89	93	95.7%
Environmental Science	59	90	65.6%
Psychiatry, Mental Health, Psychology and Neuroscience	44	81	54.3%
Biology and Genetics	45	60	75.0%
Business, Management and Accounting	0	56	0.0%
Statistical Methods	2	33	6.1%
Life Span and Lifecourse	2	33	6.1%
Education	8	31	25.8%
Geography	17	29	58.6%
Humanities	7	13	53.8%
Multidisciplinary	8	13	61.5%
Other	6	9	66.7%
Social Psychology	4	4	100.0%
Total	1039	1959	53.0%

Publications

From the 555 publications there had been 7,739 citations by March 2021 (a rate of 13.9 citations per publication). Academic publications using Understanding Society data are more highly cited than expected for their subject fields, receiving 2.25 times the rate of expected citations. A score of one indicates the publication is being cited as many times as would be expected compared to similar publications in the same subject area; scores above one indicate that the publication is being cited more often than expected. The field-weighted score varies considerably by discipline (see Table 2) with the field-weighted citation impact ranging from 4.75 for biological papers to 1.85 for those in economics (which is still above the average for other similar publications). All of these field-weighted citation rates have improved since a similar analysis carried out at the end of 2019.

One final comparison we have investigated (by checking websites) is the volume of papers for Understanding Society compared with similar studies internationally.

We identified 460 publications published in 2020 based on Understanding Society data: 173 academic articles, 86 reports, 23 book/chapters, 26 working papers and 4 parliamentary papers. In comparison, PSID (the household panel study in the USA) reported 253 publications overall in 2020; SOEP (the German Panel study) reported 50 publications in 2020, and HILDA (the Australian panel study) reported 135 journal articles published in 2020.

Table 2

Discipline Group	Number of publications	Field-weighted citation impact
Social Sciences	285	1.85
Medicine	150	2.45
Economics, Econometrics and Finance	71	1.85
Arts and Humanities	70	1.90
Psychology	66	1.55
Biochemistry, Genetics and Molecular Biology	56	4.75
Business, Management and Accounting	40	1.80
Environmental Science	35	1.05

Household travel behaviour

Intra-household commuting choices and local labour markets

“Commuting is the conduit between two markets: labour and housing. While the job search literature recognizes the importance of the spatial distribution of employment, local labour market conditions have been a notable omission from the commuting literature. In the first study of its kind, we introduce local labour market conditions into a model of spouses’ commuting behaviour in the UK. We find male commute times are more sensitive to local unemployment rates than women’s, although both effects are inelastic, and are of a similar magnitude to that of labour income. The more conducive the local labour market is to female employment opportunities, the less time women spend commuting.”

Using the household and longitudinal nature of UKHLS, this paper provides new insights on commuting behaviour. The paper used local level geographical linked data.

Roberts J., Taylor K. (2017), Intra-household commuting choices and local labour markets, *Oxford Economic Papers*, 69 (3): 734–757, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oep/gpw037>

Families

Housework, gender role attitudes and couples’ fertility intentions: reconsidering men’s role in gender theories of family change.

“We present an integrated set of analyses that test the interrelationships among partners’ gender egalitarianism, housework hours, and fertility intentions over the life course... We find evidence that men’s housework increases with each additional child, and that more egalitarian men increase their housework more with each child. However, we do not find evidence that men’s contributions to housework carry over into consensus concerning partners’ intentions to have at least one more child.”

Understanding Society was ideal for testing this theory, as it collects information from each household member, enabling consensus and differences within couples to be identified.

Okun, B.S. and Raz-Yurovich, L. (2019), Housework, Gender Role Attitudes, and Couples’ Fertility Intentions: Reconsidering Men’s Roles in Gender Theories of Family Change. *Population and Development Review*, 45: 169–196. <https://doi.org/10.1111/padr.12207>

Household finances and politics

Did austerity cause Brexit?

“Documents a significant association between the exposure of an individual or area to the UK government’s austerity-induced welfare reforms begun in 2010, and the following: the subsequent rise in support for the UK Independence Party, an important correlate of Leave support in the 2016 UK referendum on European Union membership; broader individual-level measures of political dissatisfaction; and direct measures of support for Leave. Leveraging data from all UK electoral contests since 2000, along with detailed, individual-level panel data, the findings suggest that the EU referendum could have resulted in a Remain victory had it not been for austerity.”

This paper is possible due to the continuous data collection on the Study, enabling researchers to identify circumstances and attitudes before and after events. This paper also makes use of geo-coded neighbourhood information at small scales.

Fetzer, T. (2019), “Did Austerity Cause Brexit?” *American Economic Review*, 109 (11): 3849–86. <https://doi.org/10.1257/aer.20181164>

Recent research
insights generated by
Understanding Society

Social-biological pathways: housing

Housing and health: new evidence using biomarker data

“The link between housing and health is well established and long-standing, however much of the evidence relies on self-reported health measures. While these are useful, the availability of biomarker data allows us to add to this evidence using objective indicators of health. In this paper, we use C-reactive protein (CRP), a biomarker associated with infection and stress, alongside information relating to housing details, demographic characteristics and health behaviours. Results indicate that housing tenure, type, cost burden and desire to stay in current home are associated with CRP.”

In this field, this paper is a novel use of biomarker data to examine how housing characteristics are associated with an indicator of stress and illness.

Clair, A. and Hughes, A. (2019), Housing and health: new evidence using biomarker data, *J Epidemiol Community Health* 2019;73: 256-262. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jech-2018-211431>

Social-biological pathways: employment

Re-employment, job quality, health and allostatic load biomarkers: prospective evidence from UKHLS.

“We examined associations of job transition with health and chronic stress-related biomarkers among a population-representative cohort of unemployed British adults. Formerly unemployed adults who transitioned into poor quality work had greater adverse levels of biomarkers compared with their peers who remained unemployed... Job quality cannot be disregarded from the employment success of the unemployed, and may have important implications for their health and well-being.”

This paper use UKHLS biomarker data and has enabled a better understanding of the relationships between work, employment and aspects of working conditions and physical and mental health.

Chandola T., Zhang N. (2018), Re-employment, job quality, health and allostatic load biomarkers: prospective evidence from the UK Household Longitudinal Study, *International Journal of Epidemiology*, 47(1): 47–57, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ije/dyx150>

Genetics

Leukemia-associated somatic mutations drive distinct patterns of age-related clonal hemopoiesis

“Clonal hemopoiesis driven by leukemia-associated gene mutations can occur without evidence of a blood disorder. To investigate this phenomenon, we interrogated 15 mutation hot spots in blood DNA from 4,219 individuals using ultra-deep sequencing. Using only the hot spots studied, we identified clonal hemopoiesis in 0.8% of individuals under 60, rising to 19.5% of those ≥ 90 years, thus predicting that clonal hemopoiesis is much more prevalent than previously realized.”

This paper found that there are mutations in genes that are found in ever-increasing numbers with increasing age. However, leukaemia is only clinically apparent if the mutations happen in ‘gatekeeper genes’.

McKerrell, Thomas et al. (2015), Leukemia-Associated Somatic Mutations Drive Distinct Patterns of Age-Related Clonal Hemopoiesis, *Cell Reports*, 10 (8): 1239 - 1245. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.celrep.2015.02.005>

Ethnicity and social inclusion

British and disengaged: national identification and political engagement before and after naturalisation

“Political engagement and national identity are... salient but understudied dimensions of citizenship... before naturalisation those who acquire citizenship are more likely to identify as British, be familiar with the British political system and are less interested in politics compared to those who do not. After naturalisation, the importance new citizens give to their British identity is higher than before, but their interest in politics is lower.”

This paper makes use of the longitudinal nature of UKHLS and exploits the rich content on individual characteristics. The large ethnic minority sample size in UKHLS enables this analysis. This research is an important contribution to understanding the role of citizenship in migrants' lives and has been carried out by a PhD student, showing its role in capacity building as well.

Donnaloja V. (2020), British and disengaged: national identification and political engagement before and after naturalisation, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 46:13, 2723-2741. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2020.1715791>

Family and education

Sibling similarity in education across and within societies

“The extent to which siblings resemble each other measures the omnibus impact of family background on life chances. We study sibling similarity in cognitive skills, school grades, and educational attainment in Finland, Germany, Norway, Sweden, the UK, and the United States. We also compare sibling similarity by parental education and occupation within these societies. Across countries, we find larger population-level differences in sibling similarity in educational attainment than in cognitive skills and school grades. In general, sibling similarity in education varies less across countries than sibling similarity in earnings.”

This paper requires data on all household members to compare the impact of family background on education across several countries. This international comparison research contributes important findings to answer a central question in social research.

Grätz M., Barclay J J., Wiborg Ø N., Lyngstad T H., Karhula A., Erola J., Präg P., Laidley T., Conley D. (2021), Sibling Similarity in Education Across and Within Societies. *Demography*, 58 (3): 1011–1037. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1215/00703370-9164021>

Small sub-populations

The educational aspirations and psychological well-being of adopted young people in the UK

“Much is hypothesised but little is known about the effects of early adversity on school experience, academic attainment and career aspiration for children and young people adopted from care. This study explored differences between young people adopted and a matched comparison group on measures of educational and occupational aspirations and psychological well-being. Adopted young people reported higher externalising and total difficulties scores than the general population comparison group, but equivalent internalising symptoms. Adopted children were more likely to show an intention to seek full-time work at the end of compulsory schooling.”

Using UKHLS to explore a small sub-population of adopted young people, this paper contributed new knowledge about the aspirations of young people adopted from care.

Brown A., Waters C S., Shelton K H. (2019) The educational aspirations and psychological well-being of adopted young people in the UK. *Adoption & Fostering*, 43(1):46–59. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0308575919826900>

Recent research
insights generated by
Understanding Society

Families, inequality and social policies

His and her earnings following parenthood in the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom

“Advances a couple-level framework to examine how parenthood shapes within-family gender inequality by education in three countries that vary in their normative and policy context... Our results show steep declines in her share of couple earnings following first birth across the three countries that persist over several years of follow-up. Results shed light on how parenthood plays into gender inequality within couples, and how country context shapes couple dynamics and inequality across households.”

This research uses the household structure and longitudinal nature of UKHLS and the rich individual data available. An international comparison that provides information on an important policy issue.

Musick K., Bea M D., Gonalons-Pons P. (2020), His and Her Earnings Following Parenthood in the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom. *American Sociological Review*. 85(4):639-674. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420934430>

Income inequalities and economic policy

A method for decomposing the impact of reforms on the long-run income distribution, with an application to universal credit

“We show that the long-run distributional impact of ... the introduction of ‘Universal Credit’, the most important reform to the UK benefit system in decades. We show that Universal Credit is less regressive on a long-run basis than a snapshot one, partly because of income dynamics but also because it reduces entitlements for (or ‘negatively tags’) those who are more likely to find a period of low income to be temporary, rather than persistent.”

The paper makes use of the high-quality income data in UKHLS to examine the impact of a key UK benefit reform on inequalities. It demonstrates that the timescale considered alters the conclusion about the impact of reform. This would not be possible without long-run consistent data collection.

Brewer M., Joyce R., Waters T., Woods J. (2020), ‘A method for decomposing the impact of reforms on the long-run income distribution, with an application to universal credit, *Economics Letters*, Volume 192: 109-230, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2020.109230>.

Later Life

Work-family lifecourses and later-life health in the UK

“Socio-economic inequalities in physical and mental health persist at older ages and previous studies have shown that partnership and parenthood histories are also associated with differentials in later-life health... we identify classes of lifecourse types for a UK cohort born 1933–1945 and investigate differences between the latent classes identified in physical and mental health, and changes in health over a five-year follow-up period... Lifecourses characterised by lower socio-economic position, early parenthood and large family size were associated with worse physical and mental health in later life, with respondents who had combined a high socio-economic position and two children being the most advantaged.”

The whole household and longitudinal nature of UKHLS and detailed socioeconomic data over time were used in this paper which examined inequalities in health in later life.

Tosi, M., & Grundy, E. (2021), Work-family lifecourses and later-life health in the United Kingdom. *Ageing and Society*, 41(6), 1371-1397. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X19001752>

Benefit 2: Promotes and develops new forms of methodologies

Survey methods

It is crucial for all that we do that the most effective methods underpin the Study. Given this, the team have a continuous programme of research and development to both improve our approach to leading a longitudinal study and to develop innovative approaches to new data collection.

Three key achievements are worthy of note. First, despite declining response rates world-wide, the Study has maintained year-on-year response rates of around 89%, and a number of recent analyses have demonstrated that it remains representative of the general population. Second, the innovation panel enables unique methodological research. Third, we undertook a robust programme on research and evaluation to develop our approach to mixed methods data collection, on which the Study is now based. At the time this was ground breaking, and many other studies are now following our lead.

Figure 4 showed the use of data from the Innovation Panel (IP), our main vehicle for methodological research; overall about two-thirds of these users are students, showing its value in education as well as research. As well as using the data released as part of the IP, researchers can also apply to carry out their own experiments. Since 2012, when we began this initiative, we have received 150 applications to carry IP experiments, and have accepted 54 of them (based on expert reviews of scientific merit and feasibility of implementation).

In 2013/14 we conducted a survey of interviewers who worked on the main sample of Understanding Society, which allows researchers to investigate interviewer effects, which is a concern for survey-based research. To date these data have been downloaded 183 times.

We are also providing new kinds of data; in the last few years we have released school codes (27 downloads), linked education records (47 users) and, more recently, genetics and epigenetics data (92 applications).



Analytical and methodological insights from Understanding Society

The rich data provide opportunities for the use of advanced statistical, econometric and mathematical models to answer a wider range of research questions than is possible in most other studies. The focus here is on the methodological insights obtained by addressing the challenges that the study design presents to conventional methods in terms of its unique panel design, a design incorporating a household scope that captures the formation of new households over time. These developments not only facilitate analysis of the study data but also result in methods applicable to data sources beyond Understanding Society.

The household-based design involves the following up of sample members who are initially in the same household but who can join or leave these households. These changes create dynamic social networks which are now leading to ground-breaking methodological research. For example, Davillas and Pudney¹ (2017) developed an econometric model for the cross-sectional correlation between couples' health statuses, as measured by the Study's nurse-administered and blood-based biomarker data, which was used to show that shared lifestyle factors and homogenous choice of partner play equal roles in explaining the concordance between measures.

For longitudinal research focussing on within-household dynamics, the available methodology struggled to allow for changes in household compositions over time. However, Steele et al.² (2019) developed a novel approach which allows the characteristics of the relationships between pairs of study members to be incorporated into the model to allow estimation of how these relationships change over time. Similarly, Skinner and Steele³ (2020) consider the problem of estimating characteristics of the family relationships between non-coresident parents and children when the data collected on the same relationship from the children and parent are discrepant, and show how the study weights can be used to adjust for these differences (which are mainly down to differential non-response).

1 Apostolos Davillas, Stephen Pudney (2017), Concordance of health states in couples: Analysis of self-reported, nurse administered and blood-based biomarker data in the UK Understanding Society panel, *Journal of Health Economics*, 56: 87-102,

2 Steele, Fiona, Clarke, Paul and Kuha, Jouni (2019) Modeling within-household associations in household panel studies. *Annals of Applied Statistics*, 13 (1): 367-392.

3 Skinner, Chris J. and Steele, Fiona (2020) Estimation of dyadic characteristics of family networks using sample survey data. *Annals of Applied Statistics*, 14 (2): 706 - 726.



Analytical and methodological insights from Understanding Society

In terms of panel structure, Steele and Grundy¹ (2021) developed a general methodology for estimating panel models for discrete outcomes for studies where the outcomes are measured less frequently than the predictors. This was motivated by an application to estimate the effects of partnership, employment status and dependent children on individuals' propensities to give practical and financial help to relatives living in other households, where the former are collected annually but the latter are collected at two- and five-year intervals in this study.

The overlapping fieldwork periods of the study have been exploited to identify the impact of important measurement issues and particularly the role of panel conditioning in modifying either respondents' behaviour or reporting behaviour. This feature has been exploited to show the impact of panel conditioning on different income (Fisher² 2019) and other self-reported measures (Van Landeghem³ 2019). The findings are important for all researchers naively analysing self-reported measures in the early waves of panel studies.

The study has also led to the development of statistical software that implements advanced methodology. For example, Hernandez-Alava and Pudney⁴ (2016), motivated by the ordinal/Likert measures of financial wellbeing, develop bicop command for Stata, which allows users to specify bivariate models for the relationships between the two variables while allowing for non-normal residuals with flexible joint distributions specified using copulas: this represents a substantial advance on the more limited bivariate probit model. Another example is given by Pudney⁵ (2019), who shows how the community-written program, intcount, should be used to analyse the study's healthcare variables. These ask respondents the frequency with which they have visited their GPs, hospitals and so on over the last 12 months. Answers are not exact counts but intervals within which the true count lies, and so cannot be analysed using traditional Poisson or Negative-binomial regression.

1 Steele, Fiona and Grundy, Emily (2021) Random effects dynamic panel models for unequally-spaced multivariate categorical repeated measures: an application to child-parent exchanges of support. *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society. Series C: Applied Statistics*, 70 (1). 3 - 23.

2 Fisher, P (2019) Does Repeated Measurement Improve Income Data Quality? *Oxford Bulletin of Economics & Statistics*, 81(5). 989-1011.

3 Van Landeghem, Bert (2019) Stable traits but unstable measures? Identifying panel effects in self-reflective survey questions. *Journal of Economic Psychology*, 72. 83-95.

4 Hernandez-Alava, Monica and Pudney, Stephen (2016) bicop: A command for fitting bivariate ordinal regressions with residual dependence characterized by a copula function and normal mixture marginals *Stata Journal*, 16(1). 159-184.

5 Pudney, Stephen (2019) intcount: A command for fitting count-datamodels from interval data. *Stata Journal*, 19(3). 645-666.



Innovations in methodology

The Understanding Society Innovation Panel is a platform for longitudinal experimental and methodological research. Its purpose is to develop key innovations in survey methods and content that will ensure the future success of the Study and to generate important new knowledge that is of use to other researchers and survey practitioners.

The first wave of the Innovation Panel focussed on the development and testing of aspects of the survey design for the main Understanding Society. Since Wave 4 we have had an open call for proposals for methodological research. From Wave 6 we have broadened the call to include content related experiments.

Early experiments included both survey procedures and the content and format of questions. The Innovation Panel tested the value of incentives offered to participants, how to develop the survey in a mixed-mode format, the optimum length for the survey, and the wording of individual questions and modules.

More recent experiments have informed methods of reducing non-response, for example, the effects of different content, targeted incentives, and the timing and frequency of inter-wave mailings. The Innovation Panel has also been used to test how we ask for consent to data linkage.

In recent waves, experiments have been carried out on using apps to collect information from participants and the role of event-triggered data collection in annual surveys. This work was particularly relevant to delivering our COVID-19 study, as we were able to quickly implement aspects of this experiment for the regular coronavirus survey.

Wave 12 of the Innovation Panel was dedicated to seeing whether participants could collect their own health data. These experiments will feed into our planning for Wave 16 of the main survey.

The Understanding Society team has published 111 methodological working papers based on the Study, as well as a significant number of academic journal papers.

In addition to these published outputs, the team informs methodological developments by providing advice to other studies and groups. Understanding Society is often asked to provide expert advice on survey design, questionnaire design, survey implementation and weighting, to a range of audiences and interested parties, drawing on our extensive knowledge and experience in these areas via Understanding Society.

For example, within the UK, the team has provided advice to:

- The ONS (on constructing wellbeing indicators and the new health index, their Economics Experts working group, their consumer durables group for National Statistics Harmonisation, and their 2020 labour market release)
- The Food Standards Agency
- The Bank of England (on measuring household finances)
- The Government Statistical Service (regarding mental health harmonisation guidance)
- The Money Advice Service (on setting up a longitudinal survey).
- Cancer Research on data collection methods.

The Understanding Society COVID-19 survey and subsequent data releases have led to us providing advice and guidance to:

- HM Treasury
- The Welsh and Scottish Governments
- National Audit Office
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Institute for Fiscal Studies
- Office for National Statistics
- UNICEF

International survey methods

The excellence of the Study's methodological approach internationally is demonstrated by frequent requests for advice and input. For example, we had advised a range of longitudinal and household panel studies (either in progress or planned), including:

- NIDS in South Africa (on questionnaire design)
- HILDA in Australia
- The Keio Household Panel Survey and Japanese Household Panel Survey (on weighting and survey design)

In the international policy arena the team has advised:

- The South African Department for Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (on setting up a longitudinal survey)
- Statistics South Africa and the Department for Home and Health (on survey design and implementation)
- The EU-Fundamental Rights Agency (on survey design for a new international data collection exercise)
- The Singapore Ministry of Social and Family Development
- The Korean Labor Institute
- The Brazilian government (on setting up a new study)
- The Australian government
- The Danish Survey Society and the Danish Evaluation Institute
- The Indian Government (on starting a new longitudinal survey)

The team has also provided methodological advice to Ipsos (France) on sampling methods, MyWEB in Barcelona on a new EU-wide data collection on children's wellbeing, and the World Bank/UN-FAO on measuring food consumption.

Members of the Understanding Society team also provide advice in an official capacity via membership of, for example, the following groups and committees:

- HAGIS Advisory Group, Scotland
- PSID Board of External Overseers, USA
- Scientific Advisory Board of GESIS-Leibniz Institute for Social Science, Germany
- SOEP Advisory Committee, Germany
- Advisory Scientific Board of Statistics Sweden
- Advisory Board of the Consumer Payments Research Centre of the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, USA
- ONS Admin Data Methods Research Advisory Board
- ONS Economic Experts Working Group
- ONS Health Index Expert Advisory Group

Benefit 4: Recognition of UK's reputation as an international centre of social science excellence

International presence

Overall, 14.4% of Understanding Society downloads are from non-UK countries, with over half of these users in Europe. We are involved in a number of harmonisation projects such as Cross National Equivalence File (CNEF) and Generations and Gender Programme (GGP) to help facilitate international comparative research. In 2020 a new open science platform – the Comparative Panel File (CPF) – was launched, which provides open-source code to harmonise panel data from seven countries.

Across all Understanding Society conferences, workshops and training events 10.7% of participants are from outside of the UK. This varies considerably by year, depending on which events have been held. As we increase our online services, this is increasing access to the Study by international users; currently 17% of registered users of Moodle (online) training courses are from outside of the UK.

In addition to the international methodological work outlined above, a key performance indicator suggested by ESRC for this benefit is invitations for members of the Understanding Society team to speak at international conferences, as it demonstrates the recognition of our reputation internationally.

Focusing on keynote lectures only, members of the Understanding Society team have been invited to give keynote lectures including at:

- The main conferences of many other household panel studies internationally, including: SOEP (Germany) HILDA (Australia), KLIPS (South Korea), and the Swiss Household Panel.
- Other methodological conferences: the Dutch Platform for Survey Research; the US “National Academy of Sciences Standing Committee on the Future of NSF-Supported Social Science Surveys Social Research Association” conference; annual conference of the European Social Survey; “Data Quality in Education Surveys” Conference in Taipei, Taiwan; “Design and Analysis of Longitudinal Survey Data” Conference in Lausanne, Switzerland; 4th Baltic-Nordic Conference on Survey Statistics in Helsinki, Finland; The 2nd International Russia Longitudinal Monitoring Survey Users Conference in Moscow, Russia; Technical workshop on longitudinal surveys organised by The Labor Markets and Social Security Unit of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in Bogotá, Colombia; “Design, Collection, and Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Mexico: An Agenda for the Future” Conference in Aguascalientes, México; “The Present and Future of Longitudinal Cross-sectional and Panel Survey Research” Conference in Warsaw, Poland; and at the Danish Survey Research Society conference; CIPHER conference, Washington DC.
- Substantive conferences such as the Portuguese Health Economics Conference; 25th anniversary workshop of the Centre for Health Economics, Monash University, Australia; the Australasian Health Economics Conference, Adelaide, Australia; at the Panel on Household Finances Workshop; and the Deutsche Bundesbank Conference on measuring consumption; National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine Committee on Population (CPOP), Washington DC; Conference of the Inter-American Development Bank, Washington DC; MIMOD Workshop, Rome.

Benefit 6: New insights into interactions between social and biological data

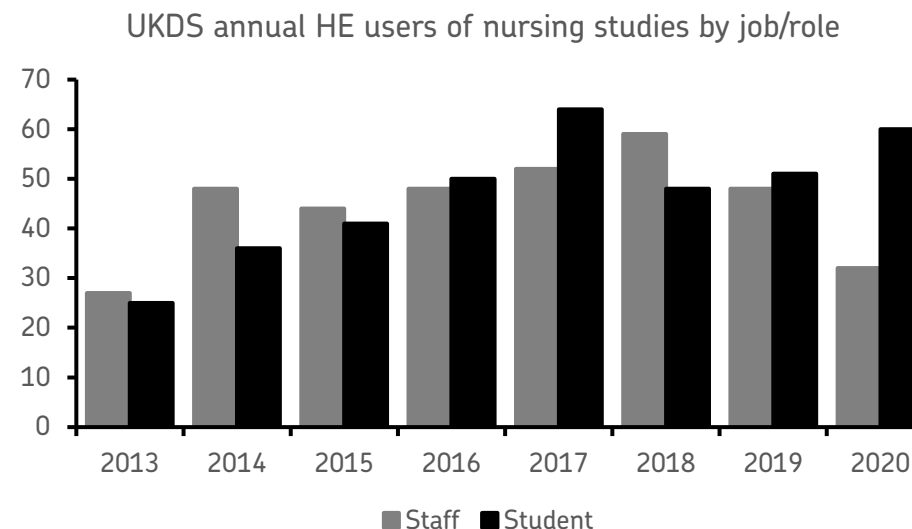
Bio-social data

One specific area of scientific development to which Understanding Society is uniquely placed to contribute is on the interaction of the social and biological across the whole population. In Waves 2 and 3 of the survey we collected a range of biomeasures for researchers to link to our existing rich social and economic data. Subsequently, we analysed blood samples to add genotype, biomarker and methylation data to the Study. Later this year further biomarkers and proteomics data will be added. Over 100 academic papers have been published using these data, half using the genetics information. We have illustrated above some of the novel insights that have been found with the Study.

Figure 20 shows the downloads of the nurse data files by higher education staff and students.

Of the 733 people in higher education who have downloaded the nurse assessment data, about half are students and half are staff. In addition we have now had 92 applications for use of genetics data: 29 to the European Genome-Phenome Archive (EGA, i.e. for genetics and epigenetics data only) and 63 for genetics data combined with survey data.

Figure 20



From 2015 to 2018, the ESRC provided additional support to ISER to promote the use of these data and build capacity. During this period, different events based on the biomarker and genetics data were attended by 480 people; about half of these were attendance at training events and the rest were attending conferences.

In 2019 the Innovation Panel was dedicated to evaluating ways for participants to collect their own biomarker data. The results are currently being evaluated and will inform the way in which biological data collection can cost-effectively be incorporated into social science surveys in the future.

Benefit 5: Contributes to capability in quantitative methods and use of interdisciplinary data

Support and resources for users

Evidence above on the wide ranging use of the data, published in high quality journals, demonstrates how the Study acts as a key foundation for quantitative interdisciplinary research. In addition, we provide specific datasets and support to enhance researchers' capacity to use these data and to help them teach longitudinal survey data analysis to the next generation of researchers.

The user support team run three hands-on, practical workshops each year, teaching new data users how to use the Study. Training takes place in multiple software, so users can choose to receive training in Stata, SAS, SPSS or R. For users wanting to progress with these data, the team also run workshops on specific issues, such as weighting and panel data methods. Bespoke training days are also provided for different audiences.

Researchers are encouraged to share syntax they have created for analysis with other data users. For some of the basic data management tasks users might wish to do with these data, the user support team have created syntax which is available to download from our website.

We are also pleased to note that a number of institutions are basing Q-step programmes on data from the Study and that there is significant postgraduate use.

Figure 21

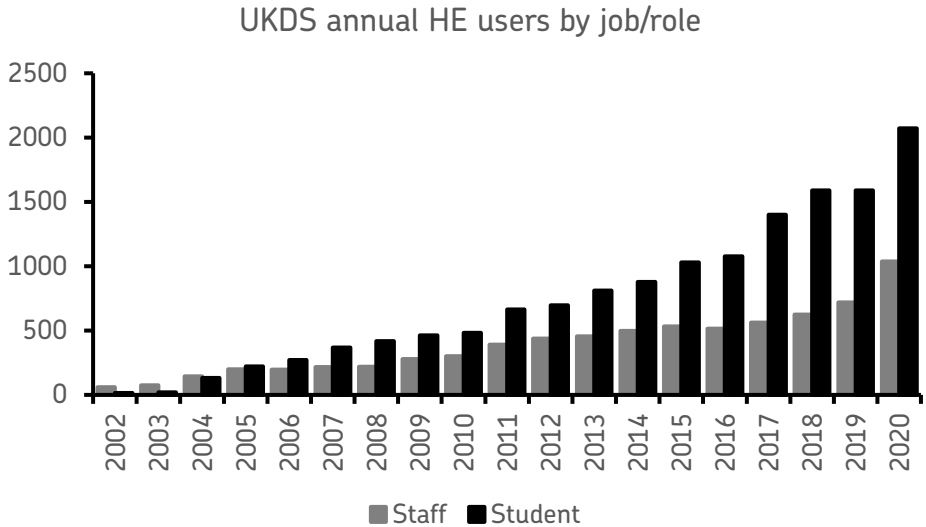


Figure 21 shows that Understanding Society data are increasingly being used by students in Higher Education; with student use driving the increase in downloads over time.

Alongside this growth in student use, an increasing number of teaching datasets have been released. These help students to learn how to work with longitudinal household panel data through shorter, topic-led datasets and accompanying guidance.

For users who have a specific query about the Study, or need help using the dataset, we provide the User Support Forum. The forum enables researchers to directly contact the user support team and use of this facility continues to grow year on year. In 2021 there are currently just over 3,800 active accounts. The User Support team responded to around 200 queries in 2020 from data users around the world.

Online training resources

Understanding Society produces a wide range of training for Study users, including in-person courses to introduce new users to the dataset, online courses for those that want to work at their own pace, webinars on a wide variety of topics and training videos on specific aspects of the dataset. Our training aims to support new users and give expert guidance to more experienced data users. All our training videos and webinars are available on our YouTube channel. Training topics covered include data structure, questionnaire routing, selecting weights and using the COVID-19 study. Our podcasts feature researchers talking about policy relevant research.

In 2019 our training videos were watched 1,408 times. In 2020 they were watched 3,256 times.

4,900 people have accessed our in-person and online training courses and webinars.

Our podcasts have been listened to 973 times in 2019 and 1,243 times in 2020.

Website visits

Our website is designed to provide information on the Study to participants, data users, policymakers and the general public. In particular, considerable effort is put into providing online information about the dataset and how to use it. As can be seen, these pages are very well used.

Our top overview web pages visited in 2020 were:

Webpage Title	Page views in 2020
Understanding Society homepage	80,244
Main survey	22,978
About us	9,560
About the Study	7,136
Survey timeline	4,296
Participants	25,382
COVID-19 topic page	20,188

Visits to the Understanding Society website continue to increase. Our unique page views per year have gone from 494,395 views in 2018 to 786,597 in 2020.

Pages for data users:

Webpage Title	Page views in 2020
Data and documentation	28,267
Questionnaires	14,447
Documentation	13,265
User guides	9,059
Index terms	3,856
Access Understanding Society data	3,797
Questionnaire modules	3,779
Datafiles	3,310
Citation	2,511
Understanding Society key variables	2,470
Data management syntax files	2,309



Events and training

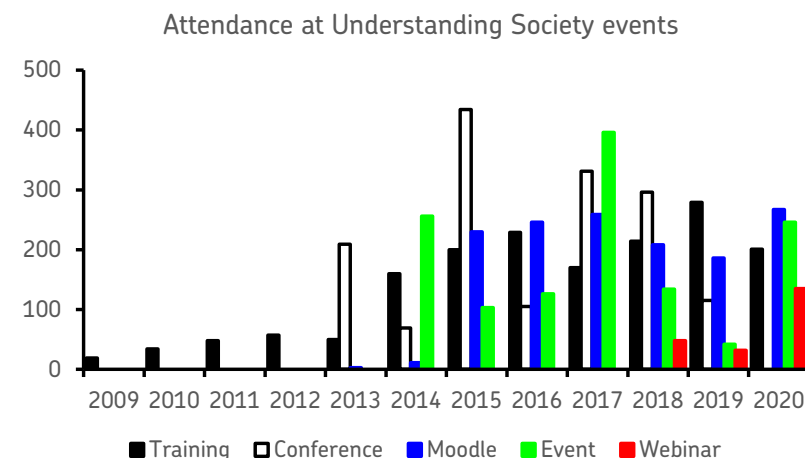
Figure 22 shows the trends in attendance numbers at Understanding Society events since 2013. Numbers of attendees at training events are, in general, increasing, with numbers at their highest in 2020. This reflects the move to virtual training events throughout 2020 (due to the pandemic) which removed the usual limits on numbers in face-to-face courses due to venue capacity. Numbers using our online Moodle-based courses are also steadily high and at their highest in 2020, which reflects the virtual learning environment in 2020.

The bi-annual Scientific Conference is clearly highlighted in Figure 22 by the high numbers of attendees at Understanding Society conferences in 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2019 (with the MOLS2 Conference in 2018) – there were no conferences in 2020, however the Scientific Conference in 2021 will be online as a series of virtual events. High numbers of delegates have registered, with online attendance often easier due to zero costs and more flexibility around attending.

The events category includes consultation events, data launches and policy engagement workshops and events such as Insights. The number of such activities varies considerably by year, dependent on the cycles of our work. Finally, we are running more webinars, often with UKDS or NCRM, on a wider range of topics to reach a more diverse audience.

In terms of sectors, not surprisingly most delegates are academics (staff and students), with government making use of training, conferences and events in similar numbers, while third sector and commercial organisations tend to be more interested in knowledge exchange events and conferences.

Figure 22



Understanding Society Fellowships

A Fellowship programme was established by Understanding Society in 2018, which is ongoing. Aimed at both established and early career researchers, the programme has been successful in attracting well-qualified researchers who helped the Study demonstrate new areas of research and answer specific methodological questions.

Methods Fellowships

Five Fellowships were awarded to researchers who examined a range of survey methods questions. Fellows looked at mode switching and non-response patterns, predictors and corrections for attrition, indicators for representativeness, whether machine learning can improve our understanding of non-response, and reasons for attrition and whether weighting can adjust for it.

Biomarker Fellowships

Six Fellowships were awarded to researchers using UKHLS biomarker data in novel work. The varied research projects explored adverse childhood experiences and allostatic load in later life, lifestyle factors and fertility, the role of active travel for improving cardio-metabolic health, using machine learning to apply biosocial data as predictors of health, and couple relationships and concordant and discordant health.

The Fellows were either social scientists who had not used biological data before, or biologists who had no social science experience. There was a strong capacity building component to the programme and as well as the specific outputs the Fellows produced, they are continuing to use these data in their subsequent research.

Policy Fellowships

The scheme proved popular, with 31 applications received, of which 3 were funded. The Fellowships covered longitudinal research on the effects of screen use on young people's mental health, whether civic participation by young people (an area that has seen significant investment in recent years) was resulting in greater political engagement, and how generational and intergenerational correlations in health and income have been changing.

Overall, the fellows contributed to UK Chief Medical Officers' commentary on screen time and social media, informed volunteering schemes in Wales and Scotland, and developed many new connections with policy audiences from across public health, local government, charities and education.



Benefit 8 and 9: Informs
development of new policy
over time and business
practice in private and Civil
Society sectors

Using UKHLS for policymaking

As noted previously, 6% of downloads of Understanding Society data are by government, third sector and commercial users, and they make up 25% of attendees at our events – this reflects the scope of the events we hold, which cover both data use and science as well as presenting findings and research evidence, and carrying out policy engagement. We have identified 54 parliamentary papers drawing on Understanding Society data; the number per year has been increasing steadily over recent years. To support the use of the Study for policy we established a ground-breaking policy unit, which brings together academic researchers and policymakers in a range of ways to facilitate the development of policy impact from the Study.

We have developed a system of systematically searching for publications and then identifying those which look likely to have policy engagement and following up to try to identify if any impacts have taken place. Below we list impacts we have been able to identify, although we are confident many others exist of which we are unaware. From this research we have produced and shared a number of case studies demonstrating policy and practice impact in Government, civic society and the commercial sector which can be found on our website. A small selection of these are highlighted below.

There is widespread use of Understanding Society in government and the third sector, and this can be seen both in the Study's usage and in policy documents. There is evidence of changes in both policy and practice drawing on Understanding Society research, as well as its frequent use in policy monitoring (including statutory responsibilities), design and evaluation. For central government Areas of Research Interests (ARIs), out of 643 originally identified, ARIs 14% can potentially be addressed through Understanding Society data. For particular departments, such as the DWP, DfE, DHSC, BEIS, DCMS and the HSE, Understanding Society data is relevant to between 17% and 58% of their ARIs.



Understanding Society key policy impact

The Social Metrics Commission: measuring poverty in the UK

The Social Metrics Commission was founded in 2016 to create new poverty measures for the UK.

There are many different types of poverty, and the government needs a range of policy responses to tackle the problem effectively, according to the Social Metrics Commission. The Commission's Measuring Poverty 2020 report showed that rates of poverty have changed little in 20 years, and that 14.4 million people in the UK are living in families in poverty – 33% of children and 22% of all working age adults.

The Commission uses Understanding Society data to examine the persistence of poverty and the experiences of people who live in poverty. Levels of persistent poverty have largely not changed, standing at 11% of the population. This means that 7.1 million people in the UK are in poverty and have been for at least two of the last three years.

The Department for Work and Pensions is now developing experimental statistics on poverty using the Commission's measure, which is the first step towards becoming an official National Statistic.

[Measuring Poverty 2020](#)

The Homeless Monitor

Crisis and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation commissioned an independent study of homelessness in the UK, that contributed to a change in homelessness legislation.

Evidence from the Homeless Monitors of England, Wales and Scotland in 2015 and 2016 was used to inform the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. The Act places a requirement on local housing authorities in England and Wales to help all eligible applicants regarding homelessness. This is a change from the previous situation in England, where these authorities were only required to help people with a 'priority need', such as families with dependent children or care leavers.

The Monitor used Understanding Society and BHPS to examine hidden homelessness, which includes people living in overcrowded, shared or concealed households. This analysis found that concealed households can be persistent, rather than temporary, for single people and families – 57% of concealed families were still in this situation a year later over the period 1992–2008, but the rate had increased to 66% by 2013. Further, the research found that 3% of households in England were overcrowded; a situation that was also persistent.

[The Homelessness Monitor](#)

Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework

Understanding Society forms part of the Home Office's Indicators of Integration framework, designed to help migrants to the UK integrate into their new life here. The framework provides practical ways to design strategies, monitor services and evaluate progress.

Our data is given as a source of information for organisations around the country which want to put together programmes and strategies to help with integration. In particular, Understanding Society is one of the recommended sources of data for organisations wanting to put together a theory of change (TOC) – a description of and plan for what they want to achieve.

The Home Office guidelines say, *"A TOC can help to understand how intended activities will support integration and develop assumptions (hypotheses) about how a project will work ... [and] help to identify outcomes and outputs for measuring impact and evaluation."*

The Home Office developed the Indicators of Integration framework in consultation with other government departments, local authorities, regional Strategic Migration Partnerships, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local service providers from across the UK's four regions, and with refugees themselves.

[Indicators of Integration Framework](#)

Understanding Society key policy impact

The Treasury analysis of household incomes during COVID

HM Treasury has used Understanding Society to calculate the impact of the government's support for people's household incomes during the coronavirus pandemic. The Treasury used data from Understanding Society's COVID-19 Survey to compare employment status, and any change in take-home pay, in May 2020 compared with February, before lockdown was introduced. They also calculated the probability of people at different earning levels losing their job, being furloughed, or (for the self-employed) seeing their earnings/profit drop, again using our Study.

The analysis showed that the government's interventions – such as the furlough scheme, and the increase in Universal Credit – supported the poorest working households the most. The measures were worth an average of around a fifth of incomes for working households, and reduced the scale of losses for working households by up to two-thirds.

It used our data again for its *Impact on households: distributional analysis* to accompany the 2021 Budget 2021. The modelling again showed that government interventions were supporting the poorest working households the most. There were smaller earnings losses for the lower income deciles, and these were “*more than offset by government support, meaning that across all working age households the poorest have been protected the most from income losses*”.

Public Health England: tackling youth smoking

Nearly 8 million people smoke in England, with 90% having started before the age of 19. While smoking amongst young people is falling nationally, there are wide variations in youth smoking levels across local communities in England.

Public Health England and the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence commissioned research on how youth smoking varies across England. National data from Understanding Society were used, alongside data on deprivation and other socio-economic indicators, to model the likely levels of teenage smoking across smaller geographical areas.

For the first time, this research shows that there are large variations in youth smoking across small areas of England. For regular smokers aged 16 to 17 year old, areas with high estimates included Hartlepool (19.6%), Gateshead (19.3%), Plymouth (18.9%), South Tyneside (19.6%) and Kingston upon Hull (20.7%). Areas with the lower estimates were concentrated in Greater London, including Harrow (5.7%), Newham (7.0%), Redbridge (6.5%) and Brent (7.0%).

The findings have been incorporated in PHE's Local Health tool, which helps local government and health services plan health care provision. They have also been included in PHE's Local Tobacco Control Profiles, which help local government assess the effect of tobacco use on local populations.

SAGE: COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy

To understand more about how people in the UK feel about the COVID-19 vaccine, the government's Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) asked Understanding Society to analyse information on the take-up of the COVID vaccines, with a particular emphasis on how different ethnic groups view the vaccination programme. The coronavirus pandemic has particularly affected people from minority ethnic groups, who have experienced higher rates of the disease and higher levels of mortality, making vaccination of these groups particularly important.

The analysis found that overall, there was a high number of people who were planning to be vaccinated, with 82% of participants stating that they were likely or very likely to have the vaccine. The group with the highest intention to have the vaccine were those aged 75 and older, where 96% of people planned to be vaccinated.

When the researchers looked at vaccine uptake by ethnic group they found wide variations in who was thinking of having the vaccine, with 72% of Black or Black British people saying that they were unlikely or very unlikely to be vaccinated against COVID. Pakistani and Bangladeshi groups were the next most hesitant minority ethnic group, with 42% unlikely or very unlikely to be vaccinated.

[Factors influencing COVID-19 vaccine uptake among minority ethnic groups](#)

Understanding Society key policy impact

Scottish Government child poverty delivery plan

The Scottish Government used Understanding Society data in its strategy document *Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022*.

Our data was used to calculate persistent poverty, poverty among lone parents, poverty rates for households with a disabled person, child poverty rates where a household has three or more children, and child poverty rates where the mother is young (under 25).

For example, the plan states that “*Understanding Society data has been used to show that having a third child was linked to poverty entry*”, and that “*households with a disabled person have much higher child poverty rates than the average population*”. The research also showed that people’s chance of entering poverty can be at its highest when they become a lone parent.

The delivery plan sets out how the Scottish Government intends to meet the targets in the Child Poverty (Scotland) Act of 2017. Measures to reduce poverty were also announced, including more support for lone parents and parents on low incomes and investment for children experiencing food insecurity during school holidays.

[Every child, every chance: tackling child poverty delivery plan 2018-2022](#)

Calculating the health effects of Sure Start

Sure Start offers families with children under the age of 5 a central organisation to go to for childcare and early education, health services, parenting support and employment advice. The programme was first introduced in 1999 and rapidly expanded to reach a peak number of centres in 2009-10. In the decade following there has been a reduction in funding and the closing of centres.

Although Sure Start rapidly expanded, there was little evidence on the impact the service had on the health of children and their families. The Institute for Fiscal Studies carried out the first major review of the overall impacts on health of the Sure Start programme. They used a number of datasets, including Understanding Society, which was used to measure the impact of the scheme on maternal mental health.

The analysis found that Sure Start significantly reduced hospitalisations among children by the time they finish primary school and benefits children who live in disadvantaged areas the most. They found no evidence that Sure Start has impacted on child obesity at age 5 or made a difference to maternal mental health.

[The health effects of Sure Start](#)

Health and wellbeing measures for children in Wales

The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 aims to improve the social, economic and cultural wellbeing of Wales. The Act created a legal duty on Welsh ministers to set national indicators to monitor progress. One of the national indicators relies on data from Understanding Society.

Monitoring mental wellbeing, the indicator uses data from the youth self-completion questionnaire completed by children aged 10 to 15.

The analysis shows that the mean mental wellbeing score of children in Wales was fairly stable between 2009 and 2014. Three-quarters of children in Wales have a mental wellbeing score that is deemed close to average, but 13% have a score deemed very high, which could indicate emotional or behavioural difficulties.

The mental wellbeing scores for children in Wales were not statistically significant from the UK average.

[Mean mental wellbeing score for children in Wales – health and wellbeing measures for children for the National Indicators](#)

Benefit 8: Informs the development of new policy over time

We have broadly defined this benefit as being where the outcome achieved from a piece of research using Understanding Society is to develop new policy or enhance existing policy.

New policy developments

HOUSING [The homeless monitor](#), funded by Crisis and JRF used Study data in the 2015 and 2016 monitors of England, Wales and Scotland. Evidence from the monitor has been used to change policy. Findings from the monitor for England were included in the House of Commons Library [briefing paper](#) *The Homelessness Reduction Bill 2016-17*. This Bill received Royal Assent and is not the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. [Shelter is referring to the Act](#) as “the first major piece of homelessness legislation for 15 years”. The academic team (from Heriot-Watt University) who carry out the analysis were awarded runner up in [The Guardian research impact awards](#) for this work.

FAMILIES The DWP [policy paper](#) *Improving lives: Helping Workless Families* used linked Understanding Society and National Pupil Database data (with the analysis carried out by the Understanding Society Policy Unit via the Direct Access arrangements).

WORK The [Demos report](#) *Rising to the top* submitted evidence to the House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee inquiry *Employment opportunities for Muslims in the UK* and was included in the [session report](#). The research was also referenced in [The Casey Review](#): a review into A [research paper](#) *Re-employment, job quality, health and allostatic load biomarkers: prospective evidence from the UK Household Longitudinal Study* challenged the assumption that any job is good for health, compared to unemployment. The findings influenced the narrative of the [Taylor Review](#) of Modern Working Practices.

New policy developments

WORK Evidence from two studies using the British Household Panel Survey (now succeeded by Understanding Society) data contributed to the independent review [Good Work: The Taylor Review of Modern Working Practices](#). The first of these included studies was the Department for Education report [Young people's education and labour market choices aged 16/17 to 18/19](#). The second study was an Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) report [The Gender Wage Gap](#). The Government accepted the majority of the recommendations of the Taylor Review. Following further consultation with stakeholders, the Government produced a policy paper [The Good Work Plan](#) that outlines its future plans. Alongside this policy paper, the Government has made a public statement that it [intends to introduce new legislation](#) with new rights for flexible workers. The Government is positioning the proposed reforms as a key element of its Industrial Strategy, which aims to boost productivity throughout the UK.

FAMILIES The Scottish Government use Study data to report on child poverty, as required by The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017. The [Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan for 2018-22](#) sets out new policies and proposals to help meet the child poverty reduction targets.

CHILDREN Two research papers ([article 1](#), [article 2](#)) have explored the relationship between social media use and wellbeing among young people. The findings have provided much needed evidence on this new topic and the authors have submitted [written evidence](#) to the House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee on children and young people's mental health – the role of education. The findings have also contributed to public debate on young people's screen and social media use through media reports and interviews. (Note: No change to policy or advice yet, but possible).

WORK A [research paper](#) from the IFS examined wage progression and the gender wage gap. This research was referenced by a House of Commons Library [briefing paper](#) 'The gender pay gap'. This research was also included in the [Insights 2018-19](#) report.

FINANCE The DWP uses the British Household Panel Survey in its dynamic microsimulation model Pensim2. The DWP designed Pensim2 to estimate the incomes of future pensioners; samples are 'grown' through time and the life events relevant to each family and individual. Pensim2 therefore allows the DWP to analyse the long-term implications of existing and proposed pension policies. The DWP used Pensim2 in the [development of Automatic Enrolment](#) into workplace pensions, which has led to 6.87 million workers being automatically enrolled into a workplace pension.

New policy developments

WORK The [House of Lords Intergenerational Fairness and Provision Select Committee](#) used evidence from the Study on whether people who stay in work after the State Pension age are relatively less well-off than those who retire. The research quoted shows that '*decisions to continue working after State Pension age 'were not strongly associated with financial difficulty'*' [The report](#) is currently awaiting Government response and debate.

COMMUNITIES [Home Office Indicators of Integration Framework 2019](#) uses Understanding Society as one of its key data sources. The Framework provides practical support for developing strategies, monitoring services and evaluating integration interventions. UKHLS was used for interactions with health services, life satisfaction, access to local services and facilities, GP visits, language spoken in the home and whether people like their neighbourhood.

WORK [Labour Market Enforcement Strategy 2019 to 2020](#), Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy and Home Office, July 2019

HEALTH [COVID-19: Preparing for a challenging winter 2020/21](#), Paper prepared by the Academy of Medical Sciences for Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies, July 2020

FINANCE [Impact of COVID-19 on working household incomes: distributional analysis as of May 2020](#), HM Treasury, July 2020

WORK [A Plan for Jobs](#), HM Treasury and Chancellor of the Exchequer policy paper, July 2020

Informing policy implementation/practice, improvements to existing policy

FINANCE The Commission on Local Tax Reform [report](#) (Study referenced in the technical annex and compendium of evidence) for Scottish Government – the recommendations from the report were acted upon and [changed existing policy](#).

CHILDREN A [research paper](#) ‘Do selective schooling systems increase inequality?’ appeared in media reports and was referenced by the Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology in a [POSTbrief](#) Academic Evidence on Selective Secondary Education. This POSTbrief including this research was then referenced in a House of Commons Library [briefing paper](#) Grammar Schools in England. This briefing was accompanied by a discussion of the policy background relating to grammar schools in England including the recent confirmation that a ban on new grammar schools will remain.

CHILDREN PHE and NICE commissioned research to examine geographical variation in youth smoking across England. The small area estimates on youth smoking have been incorporated into PHE’s Local Health tool, which aims to improve availability and accessibility for health and health-related information in England. The estimates have also been included in PHE’s Local Tobacco Control Profiles, designed to help local government and health services to assess the effect of tobacco use on their local populations. [More information in the impact case study](#).

HEALTH Public Health England draws on research, included research using the Study (notably by Emerson and colleagues – [link 1](#), [link 2](#)), to produce their [People with Learning Disabilities](#) reports. These reports provide concise and high quality information about the health and healthcare of people with learning disabilities to inform healthcare delivery.

FAMILIES [An intergenerational audit for the UK](#), Resolution Foundation, June 2019

WORK [How can the scale and nature of labour market non-compliance in the UK best be assessed?](#) Final report of a scoping study for the Director of Labour Market Enforcement, July 2019 (feeds into Labour Market Enforcement Strategy, July 2019)

Informing policy implementation/practice, improvements to existing policy

HOUSING The mental health charity Mind hosted a parliamentary event at Westminster to discuss the impact of housing on mental health, based on research they carried out using Understanding Society. The event involved people with mental health problems, MPs, Mind volunteers and social housing representatives from around the country. The theme of the event was [Beyond Bricks](#) and aimed to kick-start discussion in Westminster on ensuring that the rights of people with mental health problems are considered in the housing agenda. The event was based on research carried out by Mind using Understanding Society data to explore the links between housing and mental health.

WORK The Social Mobility Commission used the Study for the report on [Adult skills gap and the falling investment in adults with low qualifications](#). The report found that disadvantaged adults with the lowest qualifications are the least likely to access adult training despite being the group who would benefit most and that graduates are three times more likely to receive training than those with no qualifications, while professionals and managers are about twice as likely to receive training as lower-skilled workers.

FINANCE The IFS used UKHLS in their report on [Universal Credit and its impact on household incomes](#). The report looked at the effects of universal credit on people's incomes over eight years of their lives and the impact on those that are persistently, rather than temporarily, low income.

POVERTY [Taking stock: report for the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Commission](#), Resolution Foundation, July 2019

FAMILIES [Gender equality at work: research on the barriers to women's progression](#), Government Equalities Office, October 2019

FAMILIES [Gender and Work in Scotland](#), Analyses data from Understanding Society on mothers returning to work and gender roles and attitudes, Scottish Government research, December 2019

HEALTH [Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On](#), Institute of Health Equity, February 2020

WORK [The Full Monty. Facing up to the challenge of the coronavirus labour market crisis](#), Resolution Foundation, June 2020

WORK [Teacher Labour Market in England Annual Report 2020](#), National Foundation for Educational Research, June 2020

POVERTY [The Living Standards Audit 2020](#), Resolution Foundation, July 2020

Informing policy implementation/practice, improvements to existing policy

WORK [The truth will out, Understanding labour market statistics during the coronavirus crisis](#), Resolution Foundation July 2020

CHILDREN [Home learning during Covid-19: Findings from the Understanding Society Longitudinal Study](#), National Foundation for Educational Research, July 2020

WORK [The Effect of the Great Lockdown on Homeworking in the United Kingdom](#), WISERD (Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods) report, July 2020

CHILDREN [Balancing the Risks of Pupils Returning to Schools](#), Royal Society DELVE Initiative report, July 2020

WORK [Homeworking in the UK: Before and During the 2020 Lockdown](#), WISERD (Wales Institute of Social & Economic Research, Data & Methods) report, August 2020

CHILDREN [Childhood in the time of Covid](#), Children's Commissioner, September 2020

FINANCE [All together now? The impacts of the Government's coronavirus income support schemes across the age distribution](#), Resolution Foundation, September 2020

FINANCE [Low Pay Britain 2020](#), Resolution Foundation, September 2020

FAMILIES [An intergenerational audit for the UK](#), Resolution Foundation, October 2020

HEALTH [COVID-19 National Core Studies](#), Longitudinal Health and Wellbeing, Health Data Research UK

HEALTH Vittal Katikireddi, Understanding Society Topic Champion for Public Health, presented UKHLS vaccine data to SAGE on 17 December as part of their review of vaccine hesitancy and policies to address it. This [evidence was published by Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies \(SAGE\)](#) in January 2021

HEALTH [Why have Black and South Asian people been hit hardest by COVID-19?](#) ONS, December 2020

HEALTH [Coronavirus and the social impacts on different ethnic groups in the UK: 2020](#), ONS, December 2020

HEALTH [Methods used to develop the Health Index for England: 2015 to 2018](#), ONS December 2020

FINANCE [Impact on households: distributional analysis to accompany Budget 2021](#), HM Treasury, March 2021

Enacting statutory requirements

CHILDREN The Scottish Government use Study data to [report regularly on poverty persistence](#); this includes child poverty, as required by The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act 2017.

CHILDREN Welsh Government used Study data on child mental health as part of the [National Indicators](#) requirement of The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

CHILDREN The DWP use Study data on low income as part of their [statutory reporting](#) of child poverty/persistent low income for children under the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016.

CHILDREN DCLG use Study data as underlying evidence in their [reporting of the Troubled Families Programme](#); this is a legal requirement under Section (3) 6 of the Welfare Reform and Work Act 2016.

FAMILIES Public Health England used UKHLS for its 2019 update of the [official statistics of children living with a parent in emotional distress](#). The data taken from Understanding Society showed that mothers were more likely to report symptoms of emotional distress, with one in five children living in a household where the mother was suffering. This compares to around one in eight children living in households where it was the father who was distressed.

CHILDREN [State of the nation 2019: children and young people's wellbeing](#), Department for Education, October 2019

WORK [National Minimum Wage: Low Pay Commission report 2019](#). The Low Pay Commission's 2019 report on the National Minimum Wage, including the analysis and evidence underpinning its recommendations to Government, January 2020

WORK [The employment of disabled people 2019](#), DWP official statistics, March 2020

HEALTH [COVID-19: mental health and wellbeing surveillance report](#), Public Health England, September 2020. [This PHE report was itself used in the Department of Health and Social Care's [Analysis of the health, economic and social effects of COVID-19 and the approach to tiering](#) in November 2020.]

Monitoring (not a statutory requirement)

HEALTH The ONS use Study data as part of their biannual [Measuring National Well-being](#) programme.

ENVIRONMENT The Scottish Government use environmental behaviour measures in the Study in their regular reports as part of the [Low Carbon Scotland: A behaviours framework](#).

FAMILIES DWP use Study data on children living with both parents as part of their family stability indicator in the [Social Justice Outcomes Framework](#).

FAMILIES HM Revenue & Customs uses Study data in its annual publication series 'Child Benefit, Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit Take-up rates' (e.g. see [2016-2017](#)), along with administrative data and The Family Resources Survey.

WORK The Low Pay Commission used the Study in an interim report on the [National Minimum Wage/National Living Wage and progression out of minimum wage jobs in the UK](#).

FAMILIES The DWP used Understanding Society as a comparable data source when drawing up the [Estimates of the separated family population statistics](#).

POVERTY ONS uses our data in its [Persistent poverty in the UK and EU](#).

FINANCE The Bank of England use Understanding Society data in its [Bank of England Financial Stability Report, July 2019, December 2019](#)

FINANCE [Total Reward and Pensions in the UK by Occupation in the Public and Private Sectors](#), Office of Manpower Economics, October 2019

FINANCE [The financial position of British households](#), Bank of England Quarterly Bulletin, December 2019

FINANCE [Interim financial stability report](#), Bank of England's Financial Policy Committee report, May 2020

FINANCE [Monetary Policy Report and Financial Stability Report](#), Bank of England August 2020

FINANCE [Financial stability report](#), Bank of England's Financial Policy Committee report, August 2020

FINANCE [Could Covid-19 lead to higher bank losses on unsecured debt?](#) Bank Overground, Bank of England September 2020

FAMILIES ONS uses our data to measure [Time taken to travel to visit relatives, by regions in England: 2017 to 2018](#).

HEALTH [More information on data sources related to coronavirus \(COVID-19\)](#), ONS, December 2020

Exploring policy options

FINANCE Microsimulation: Pensim2. The DWP uses the British Household Panel Survey in its dynamic microsimulation model Pensim2. The DWP designed Pensim2 to estimate the incomes of future pensioners; samples are 'grown' through time and the life events relevant to each family and individual. Pensim2 therefore allows the DWP to analyse the long-term implications of existing and proposed pension policies.

FINANCE Forecasting: The Scottish Fiscal Commission used Study data to underpin their forecasts of Funeral Expenses Payment benefit; part of their wider [Scotland's Economic and Fiscal Forecasts](#). The Scottish Fiscal Commission is an independent, non-Ministerial Department producing biannual forecasts to time with the Scottish Government's Draft Budget and Medium Term Financial Strategy to the Scottish Parliament.

CHILDREN The Scottish Government conducted a policy evaluation of early learning and childcare in Scotland – see the [Financial Review of early learning and childcare in Scotland: the current landscape report](#).

HEALTH Academics part of the 'Improving Dementia Care' project (funded by ESRC and NIHR) have created the [Population Ageing and Care Simulation model \(PACSim\)](#). PACSim is an epidemiological microsimulation model of population health and care with the aim to produce projections of health and associated care needs of the older English population. The model is based on three data sources – Understanding Society, ELSA and the Cognitive Function and Ageing Study II. The research team has produced two academic papers using the model: [Forecasting the care needs of the older population in England over the next 20 years](#) and [Projections of multi-morbidity in the older population in England to 2035](#).

HEALTH [Active travel: increasing levels of walking and cycling in England](#). Eleventh report of session 2017-19, House of Commons Transport Select Committee on Active Travel

COMMUNITIES [Access to Transport and Life Opportunities](#), Department for Transport, October 2019

WORK [Can training help workers change their stripes? Retraining and career change in the UK](#), Resolution Foundation, August 2020

WORK [Changing gears: understanding downward social mobility](#), Social Mobility Commission, November 2020

Policy evaluation

HEALTH [Curnock and colleagues](#) examined changes in disability benefits (alongside moves to unemployment benefits and employment) on health. They found no health differences in those moving from current disability benefits to new out-of-work disability benefits. Whilst it is uncommon for disability benefit claimants to return to the labour market (unemployment or employment), those who did had improved mental health.

COMMUNITIES [Mohan and colleagues](#) exploited a natural control group in their evaluation of Neighbourhood Renewal in Northern Ireland on health. They found limited evidence of the effect of the neighbourhood renewal programme on health improvements, but suggested this approach could protect areas from widening health inequalities.

WORK [London Economics](#) examined the impact of national minimum wage on young people and remaining in education and training for the Pay Commission. They found a greater gap between average adult wage in the local area and the adult national minimum wage, the higher the probability of young people being in full-time education at 18.

ENVIRONMENT [Thomas and colleagues](#) exploited a staged rollout to compare between population sub-groups. Their research on the impact of the plastic carrier bag charge suggested that people used their own shopping bags more often where the charge existed (Wales, compared to England and Scotland), but that this positive environmental behaviour did not encourage the adoption of further sustainable behaviours

FAMILIES Ipsos MORI uses the Study data in their [National evaluation of the Troubled Families Programme](#). The data is used as a national comparator to a primary survey carried out with clients of the programme.

HEALTH [Katikireddi and colleagues](#) examined the effects of successive restrictions to Income Support for lone parents on their mental health. They found declines in the mental health of lone mothers in the intervention group, compared to the control.

Policy evaluation

HOUSING [Gibbons and colleagues](#) evaluated the effectiveness of the 'bedroom tax' on achieving its policy aims. They found that *'this type of policy has limited power to change housing consumption or employment in the short term'*.

CHILDREN The IFS, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, [reported on the health effects of Sure Start](#). UKHLS was used to study one mechanism by which Sure Start might have achieved health impacts – maternal mental health.

COMMUNITIES The Runnymede Trust used the Study to examine [ethnic minority participation in the 2017 General Election](#).

POVERTY [Measuring Poverty 2019](#), Social Metrics Commission, July 2019

POVERTY [Measuring Poverty 2020](#), Social Metrics Commission, July 2020



Benefit 9: Informs development of business practice in private and Civil Society sectors

We have broadly defined this as being where the benefit is to commercial and third sector groups.

Informing the design or delivery of products

FAMILIES Age UK created an [Index of Wellbeing in Later Life](#) using data from Understanding Society. Age UK intend to update the Index over time. Age UK is using the Index to inform their policy and practical work. Local Age UK branches are using early insights to think about how to target their support services at people at risk of low wellbeing. The Index has already been used successfully to inform a funding bid for services to offer creative and cultural activities to older people in Oxfordshire. There is also interest from local councils who want to understand wellbeing amongst older people in their area. The charity has engaged members of the House of Lords keen to champion evidence-based actions to target resources and effort effectively.

HOUSING Berkeley group commissioned a report, conducted by researchers from academia and a social enterprise, 'Creating strong communities: How to measure the social sustainability of new housing developments'. A measure of social sustainability was developed, which the Berkeley group use as a benchmark for testing their new developments with the aim of demonstrating good practice and learning lessons.

HOUSING CACI uses data from Understanding Society on health behaviours and lifestyle, benefits and environmental groups to enhance its [Acorn](#) classification system. CACI use the Acorn classification system for its own services and provides the compiled codes to Understanding Society for linking in the Understanding Society Acorn dataset (SN 7453) available to researchers via Special Licence.

New products and services

FAMILIES The Social Market Foundation, supported by Post Office Ltd, produced a [report exploring familial financial support](#). Post Office Ltd states *'As a financial services provider we're committed to developing financial products that help solve real problems British consumers are having and are proud to work with the Social Market Foundation to examine the implications of our interconnected financial future'*.

COMMUNITIES The UK Infrastructure Transitions Research Consortium (ITRC) has used UKHLS to develop [PopNation](#), model which projects future demographic changes and the impact this will have on the size and composition of the population and households in the UK. The model will allow policymakers and planners to see where new developments and housing stock might be needed and will be rolled out to planners in the near future and feed into UN work.



Designing strategies/approaches/campaigns

WORK The Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD) commissioned research, undertaken by the consultancy Tooley Street Research and sponsored by the John Lewis Partnership, into barriers to pay progression for low-paid workers. The research was commissioned to inform the CIPD's public policy work and increase the evidence base on progression from low-paid work. The CIPD have cited the findings from this research in their engagement with policymakers and other key stakeholders. The findings from the report attracted significant media coverage, including an article in the Financial Times and in the management trade press.

FAMILIES Sainsbury's have commissioned NatCen to evaluate their 'living well' campaign via a survey; NatCen plan to use Understanding Society as a national benchmark.

CHILDREN The Children's Society use Study data in their annual reporting of child wellbeing [The Good Childhood Report](#). The Children's Society is guided by the principle that "Children's well-being is crucial, not just for their own lives, but for society as a whole. That's why each year we produce our well-being report". Most recent: August 2020

HOUSING The Shelter and National Housing Federation research briefing [Stop DSS Discrimination](#) highlighted the extent of discrimination in the private rented sector. The report used Study data in setting the context for of the likely scale of discrimination against disabled Housing Benefit claimants. This research has led to a campaign by Shelter to end Housing Benefit discrimination in the private rented sector by targeting the policies and practices of letting agents, landlords and mortgage providers.

HEALTH The PwC report [Quality of life: leisure impacts](#), commissioned by the Airports Authority, examined the impacts of leisure travel on own wellbeing. This research was used in the Airport Commission's [final report](#), which recommended the expansion of aviation capacity by building a new runway at Heathrow airport.

FAMILIES The Resolution Foundation set up the [Intergenerational Commission](#) with policymakers, academics and business leaders with the aim of 'repairing the social contract between generations'. This was a [major workstream](#) for the Resolution Foundation across 2017-2018. Some of the research project under this umbrella used Study data (such as '[Home affairs: Options for reforming property taxation](#)' and '[The million dollar be-question: Inheritances, gifts, and their implications for generational living standards](#)').

Designing strategies/approaches/campaigns

POVERTY The Joseph Rowntree Foundation commissioned research into [destitution in the UK](#). This research involved a primary survey of destitution and used Study data as a national comparator for those deemed to be living in 'severe poverty'. This report series has been influential, and was [referenced in the statement](#) on the visit to the UK by Professor Philip Alston, UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights.

FINANCE The Bank of England has used Study data on mortgages in the Inflation report series ([August 2018](#) and [November 2017](#)) and the Financial Stability report series ([November 2017](#) and [June 2017](#)).

CHILDREN The Children's Society uses Study data in reports for their 'Seriously Awkward' Campaign ([Seriously Awkward report](#), [Crumbling Futures report](#)). The campaign focuses on 16 and 17 year olds and the transition to adulthood. The campaign resulted in revised Department for Education guidance around the need to support 16 and 17 year olds in their adulthood transitions ([Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)).

FAMILIES The Social Market Foundation, supported by Vodafone UK, produced a report about parents and work. Vodafone runs schemes to help parents return to work after career breaks and has worked with the Women's Business Council and the Government Equalities Office to produce a Toolkit of best practice in this aim. The report provides policy recommendations on how policymakers and business leaders can support parents to return to work.

FINANCE [Living lagom – Challenging Perceptions of Wealth](#), Barclays, June 2019.

HOUSING Briefing: [How many people need a social rented home?](#) National Housing Federation, September 2019.

FAMILIES [What influences mothers' decisions about returning to work after having a baby?](#) Understanding the role of childcare in returning to employment, Coram Family and Childcare briefing, October 2019.

FAMILIES [AGE UK analysis](#) finds our over 80s save Government £23 billion a year through the unpaid care they give loved ones, December 2019.

Designing strategies/approaches/campaigns

COMMUNITIES [Migration Observatory briefing](#) January 2020 – examines migrants' experiences of discrimination due to their ethnicity, nationality, religion, language or accent. It also presents experimental data on labour market discrimination against migrants and children of migrants

WORK [What the quality of work means for our health](#), The Health Foundation, February 2020

FAMILIES [In focus: experiences of older people](#), Independent Age report exploring the experiences of specific groups of older people, April 2020

POVERTY [Living in poverty was bad for your health long before COVID-19](#), The Health Foundation, July 2020

FAMILIES [Parents in lockdown – Why have cohabiting mums suffered so much?](#) Marriage Foundation, September 2020

WORK [Reforms for a Revolutionary Post-16 White Paper](#), Campaign for Learning, September 2020

COMMUNITIES [The State of our Social Fabric](#): measuring the changing nature of community over time and geography, Onward (think tank) report, September 2020

POVERTY [Local indicators of child poverty after housing costs, 2018/19](#), End Child Poverty, October 2020

HEALTH [Monitoring socioeconomic and mental health trajectories through the COVID-19 pandemic](#), NatCen, November 2020



Understanding Society COVID-19 Study

April 2020 onwards

With the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Understanding Society rapidly implemented a regular additional web survey of the main Understanding Society participants, to enable researchers to explore how the pandemic affected individuals, families and communities across the UK. Five waves of the COVID-19 dataset were made available during 2020, and three more have been released in 2021.

Covid survey wave	Fieldwork month	Data collected	Data released
Wave 1	April 2020	Adult web, including data on children	May 2020
Wave 2	May 2020	Adult web, adult telephone, including data on children	June 2020, telephone Oct 2020
Wave 3	June 2020	Adult web	July 2020, also Special Licence for LA and LSOA codes
Wave 4	July 2020	Adult web, including data on children, paper youth SDQ	Oct 2020. Also released 2019 interview data for participants in the COVID-19 study
Wave 5	Sept 2020	Adult web, including data on children	Dec 2020. Also released school codes for the children
Wave 6	Nov 2020	Adult web, adult telephone, both including data on children, youth self completion questionnaire	Jan 2021, youth data released March 2021
Wave 7	Jan 2021	Adult web, including data on children	March 2021
Wave 8	March 2021	Adult web, including data on children, paper youth SDQ, antibody test results, NHS linkage consent	May 2021 Summer 2021



COVID-19 Study

COVID-19 data usage

There was a large number of downloads for the dataset (1,891 downloads by 1,655 users between May-December) reflecting the value of these timely data for research and policy.

While use of the COVID-19 Study is similarly dominated by researchers in the higher education sector, a higher proportion of users are from government and the third sector than for the main annual survey.

Within higher education, during the first few months that the data were released, a high proportion of users were academic staff and researchers, however as the year progressed, we saw increasing numbers of students also using the Covid-19 datasets.

Figure 23

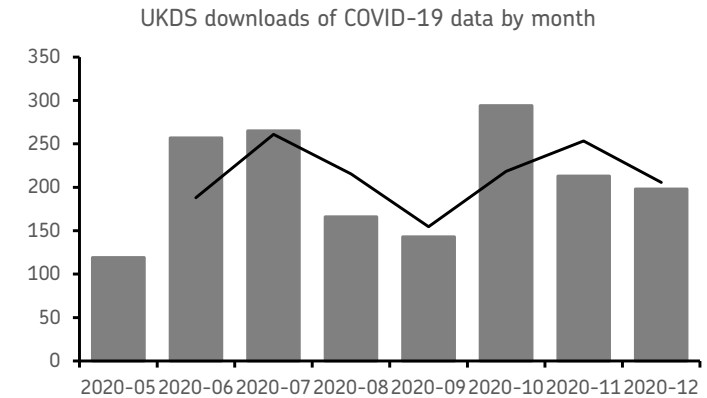


Figure 24

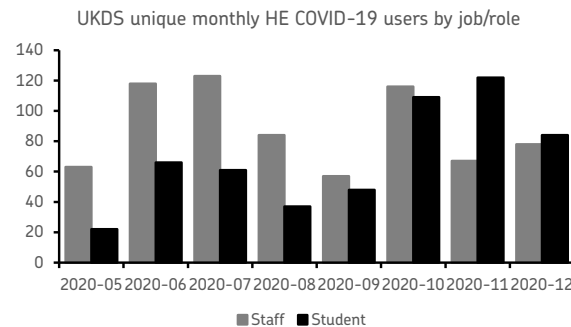
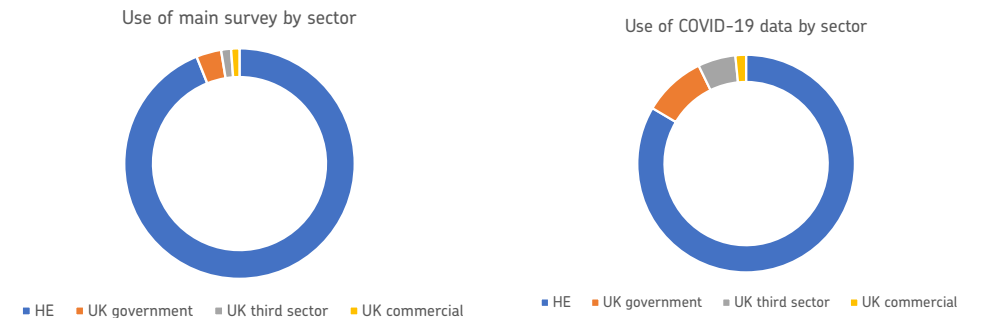


Figure 25



Publications and impact from the COVID-19 data

From our publications database, we have recorded a total of 352 publications that use Understanding Society data and are categorised as being on the subject of Covid-19, from May-December 2020. Of these, 215 are academic papers (journal articles), 81 are reports and 56 are working papers.

This is a high number of publications to be produced in a short time which reflects how rapidly the Understanding Society COVID-19 data are being used to produce evidence about the impact of the pandemic to inform real policy debates. For example, it has been used in the SAGE report on ethnic minorities and vaccine hesitancy, Public Health England's mental health monitor, Public Health Scotland's evaluation of shielding and the Treasury's report on distributional impacts of the pandemic.

In late summer 2020, Understanding Society became a partner in the Longitudinal Health and Wealth National Core Study (LH&W NCS). LH&W NCS brings together leading UK longitudinal studies and administrative datasets, to generate greater understanding of risk factors related to COVID-19 outcomes and both short- and long-term health and wider outcomes related to COVID-19 and interventions. As part of the LH&W NCS, we will also contribute to the UK Longitudinal Linkage Collaboration, a new research platform which will host linked administrative health data from UK longitudinal studies, including Understanding Society, within a Trusted Research Environment.



Understanding Society benefits the UK through research, scientific development and policy decisions.

As we reached our 10-year milestone, the Study team developed a new broader vision for taking Understanding Society forward into the future, which was welcomed by funders and reviewers. Our vision for the Study broadens its remit from face-to-face questionnaire-based data collection to much more multifaceted data provision which balances longitudinal consistency with being flexible and responsive to new policy and scientific needs. Central to our plans are two broad foundations: a Longitudinal Core, by which we mean collecting consistent data on key concepts over time from the Study's probability samples; and New Data Enhancements based on ongoing programmes of innovation and development to create new content, new samples, new methods and new kinds of data. We will continue to underpin both of these dimensions of the Study with significant user support, capacity building and impact generating activities.

Future plans

In the current phase of the Study, we are developing the Longitudinal Core in five key ways:

- At Wave 14 we are adding a significant general population boost sample. In addition, we have a rolling programme of research and development to improve response and reduce response bias.
- We are developing a range of approaches to push the full sample to web-first data collection.
- We are auditing the full set of participants who have ever been sample members to identify those who have valuable characteristics (e.g. were a child in a BHPS household or are part of a separated family) to encourage them to rejoin the Study. To support all of these activities we have set up a Participant Panel to enable us to improve our engagement with participants.
- We have planned a programme of content reviews to ensure we are maximising the value of our data collection for new research priorities.
- Finally, we work continuously to improve the quality and accessibility of the data we release and the resources and the support we provide to users. For example, in our new phase we are developing a data dashboard and code creator to make it easier for novice users to access these data. We are also planning interim data releases to provide data in a more timely manner.

Our New Data Enhancements are multi-dimensional:

- First, we are focusing on developing new content for the Study. We have a number of research and development activities in progress, which if successful will be rolled out to the mainstage. These include for example, developing plans for further biological data collection, more timely data collection with a monthly 'check in' on major life events; a more in-depth focus on pregnancy and early life.
- Second, we are investigating ways to expand the sample of key population groups of crucial relevance to policy. This involves a combination of encouraging lost sample members back into the Study, reviewing the role of temporary sample members, and experimenting with recruiting significant others (e.g. parents who live elsewhere) for additional data collection.
- Third, we are expanding data on the Study through linking to administrative data and adding different kinds of contextual information.
- Fourth, we are innovating with methodological advances by gathering data from new sources such as social media, web scraping and apps.
- We are also developing the ways in which we support policy engagement and impact, by moving from a model of assisting data analysis and knowledge exchange to working in partnership with organisations to develop impactful insights from these data.

We believe that this vision will ensure the Study continues to expand the ways it realises the initial vision ESRC set out for the Study in its benefit plan, and also delivers new kinds of research opportunities and benefits into the future.

Understanding Society

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