

Addressing Household Non-Response on the British Labour Force Survey

The GB Labour Force Survey (LFS) is a systematic sample covering all areas of GB evenly across every quarter in Interview Areas (IAs). Response rates over time can be directly compared in each IA. Data collection may then be optimised by adapting it for specific IAs, in contrast with the usual approach of modelling aggregate response and adopting general collection strategies.

In 2011, the UK conducted a census with compulsory participation. Non-compulsory surveys, including the LFS, were compared with the census in a Census Non-Response Link Study (CNRLS) to estimate the bias caused by survey non-response. CNRLS concluded that there was no substantial bias caused by non-response to the LFS.

Since 2011, LFS response has continued to fall. Since we were content with LFS representativeness in 2011, we aim to identify IAs where response has fallen consistently or sharply since 2011.

Statistical filters were used to identify IAs where response falls are unlikely to be due to chance but likely to be caused by some internal or external change. If response in those IAs could be returned to 2011 levels, we could be reasonably confident that representativeness of the LFS is adequate.

A series of checks was performed to identify whether the decline in response was caused by changes in, for example:

- Which interviewers are working and their characteristics
- Interviewer working patterns including calling times
- Dwelling type characteristics eg more flats, gated communities
- Demographic characteristics eg inflow of students

In many cases, remedial actions, such as increasing interviewer effort, using different survey materials or establishing links with community groups, are possible. In others, it is necessary to understand the change and to consider more fundamental changes to data collection or to the way the data collected are treated.