

Family Resources Survey Voucher Incentive Trial.

[REDACTED]

Survey Operations Research

1. Introduction

The Survey Operations Research team carried out a small scale trial on the Family Resources Survey (FRS) of leaving a £5 incentive (Love2shop voucher) with a calling card on the first call to an address if it was a non-contact.

Research has shown that giving an unconditional incentive is more effective than conditional incentives or none at all. This trial was designed to investigate if leaving a voucher with a calling card has a positive impact on response. Additionally, the practicalities of implementing this in the field were explored. This is primarily qualitative research; focused on gathering feedback on interviewer experiences and respondent reactions.

A small number of interviewers from the local areas surrounding Titchfield were asked to take part with the aim of assessing how this works on a small scale first. The trial took place over March and April only. Interviewers were selected to take part if they had been allocated an FRS quota (or split quota) in either of these months.

2. Summary of Findings

- 2.1. *Interviewer Experience*: interviewers felt that the voucher did improve contact with respondents and the speed in which they got in contact, but did not seem to have an effect on co-operation.
- 2.2. *Effect on Response*: the percentage of fully co-operating cases was higher for the households where a voucher was left compared to the percentage of fully co-operating cases for households where a non-contact for the first call and no voucher was left (February FRS national data). There has also been a positive impact on contact rate for the trial quotas. This is also reflected in the lower average number of calls to first contact.

3. Methodology

Three FRS quotas in March and three FRS quotas in April were chosen for the trial based on their location being close to the Titchfield office. Seven interviewers worked on these quotas in total (one quota was split between two interviewers). A small briefing session was held at the Titchfield office on the 26th February 2014 to provide all the necessary information to interviewers including the vouchers.

Interviewers were instructed to leave a voucher with a 'Called Today' card on the first call to an address where they do not make contact. They were told to enclose the voucher and 'Called Today' card within an envelope and hand write the address on the front with the guidance that only one voucher must be left per household. Custom made 'Called Today' cards were provided to leave with the vouchers; these had amended wording which referenced the voucher (Appendix A).

Interviewers were asked to keep an accurate record of the vouchers used; a 'Voucher Record Sheet' was provided which required the serial number of the address where a

voucher has been left and the issue number of the voucher against the relevant address to be recorded (Appendix B). Once the quota was complete, interviewers returned this sheet plus any unused vouchers via recorded delivery to the Titchfield office.

A focus group session was held on the 7th May 2014 following the trial for interviewers to come back into the office to evaluate the trial, discuss any feedback they had about their experiences in the field and any thoughts on how it might work on a larger scale. The calls data was analysed to assess if leaving a voucher had any effect on response.

4. Results

4.1. Focus Group Outcomes

Key finding;

Overall, interviewers felt that the voucher did not seem to have an effect on co-operation, but it did improve contact with respondents and the speed in which they got in contact – respondents often calling back on the same day – efficiency saving for interviewers. Individual experiences were:

- One interviewer noticed that within her quota her contact rate improved which she thought was a result of the vouchers: she only had 1 non-contact case. However co-operation did not seem to be affected. Several households where the voucher was left, the respondent phoned back on her mobile to refuse and offered to send the voucher back. It was felt that respondents felt more obliged to get in touch because of the voucher whereas previously they had not. She commented that this was positive because at least respondents were getting in touch, and that it had saved her several visits back to the household to try and make contact.
- Another interviewer left 6 vouchers and 5 of these respondents phoned back *the same day* and left a number to call back on. The remaining one was later confirmed as a vacant property. This interviewer wrote the SEL number on the called today card and not his mobile as he thought people were less likely to call a mobile as it's more expensive.
- An interviewer that had a mixed area of socio-economic status and said that out of the 11 vouchers left, 7 of these resulted in interviews with several respondents phoning him within 25 hours of receiving the voucher to make an appointment.
- On one quota an interviewer left 12 vouchers and 9 of these resulted in an interview. One of the addresses which did not result in an interview was later confirmed as vacant. When probed if she felt that the voucher had contributed to the respondents co-operation she felt that it hadn't in the majority of cases, but one person she believes was 'guilt-tripped' into taking part because on returning to the house, she was told the children had already spent the voucher so felt respondent was obliged to do the survey.

Other findings;

- Interviewers felt that the voucher may have emphasised the importance of the study for respondents which compelled them to get in contact. Lots of respondents who refused offered to send the vouchers back.

- It was agreed that there were very few vouchers 'wasted' on ineligible households.
- When probed on whether they had any security concerns on carrying the vouchers there was none voiced.
- Interviewers commented that they did not think £5 for a household was enough of an incentive and that respondents might even be insulted. However when probed if they had received any negative reactions from respondents about the value of the voucher they hadn't received any.

Recommendations for methodology and further trials;

- All interviewers felt the plain brown envelopes looked unofficial and unprofessional. They wanted the white envelopes with the pre-printed crest to be used in any future trials.
- It was suggested that the method should be changed to leave the voucher on the 2nd or 3rd call to a household once an attempt to make contact had been made in the day and evening. As a lot of interviewers make their first call in the day – even if though they are unlikely to make contact – just to establish the location of addresses and therefore we could be wasting money on households where we were likely to make contact anyway. However we discussed the trade off of making these additional calls to a household and then leaving a voucher vs leaving it on the first attempt and then the respondent getting in touch with us.
- When exploring how this could work on a larger scale, one interviewer suggested that vouchers could be delivered with their monthly packs which are delivered by UPS and have to be signed for. No extra cost for this as done anyway.
- When probed how interviewers found the audit process of recording the vouchers there was mixed feedback. Some interviewers didn't have any difficulty whilst others said it was a problem when outside in all weather conditions trying to write down long serial numbers. It would be easier if the voucher numbers were pre-printed on the form so that it was only the household details that had to be provided. Another suggestion was to investigate if it was possible to enter the voucher numbers electronically against the case.
- Use the voucher as a conditional incentive; inform respondents when making contact that they will be given a voucher when they complete the survey. Mention on advance letter and called today card that they will receive the voucher on completion of the survey. There was some discussion about whether this should come from the office as happens on other surveys, or from the interviewer. Mainly interviewers felt it should come from the office for less admin and negating them having to carry vouchers around, but one or two would like the opportunity to have the vouchers so they can give them to respondents there and then.

- The majority of interviewers thought it would be a good idea if running a new voucher trial for FRS to include the same interviewers as they will be able to offer the perspective of having participated in both versions.

4.2 Analysis of Response

This study was too small to find statistically significant results therefore this section is just a description of the outcomes found which wouldn't necessarily be replicated on a larger scale.

Both response rate and contact rate were higher for the six quotas involved in the trial than the rest of the FRS quota (Table 1). The refusal rate was also lower for these quotas.

Table 1. Comparison of Response for Six Trial Quotas vs National Figures

	Six Quotas In Trial	National FRS Rates for March and April
Full Response Rate¹	60%	53%
Contact Rate²	95%	93%
Refusal Rate³	26%	33%

The two tables below breakdown the household outcomes for the six trial quotas (Table 2) and then specifically the outcomes for those household where a voucher was left (Table 3). Of the 63 households where a voucher was left, only 5 remained a non-contact (8%). This was compared to the outcomes for all of FRS cases in February where the first call to a household was a non-contact, 10% of these resulted in a non-contact outcome (Figure 1).

Table 2. Summary of Household Outcomes for All Six Quotas

Final Outcome	Frequency	Percent %
Fully cooperating	79	55
Partially cooperating	5	3
Non-contact	5	3
Other non-response (other)	1	1
Refusal to HQ	11	8
Refusal to Interviewer	29	20
Not Eligible	13	9
Unknown Eligibility	1	1
Total	144	100

¹ Taken from the MIS. Calculated as fully co-operating cases / total cases – ineligible cases.

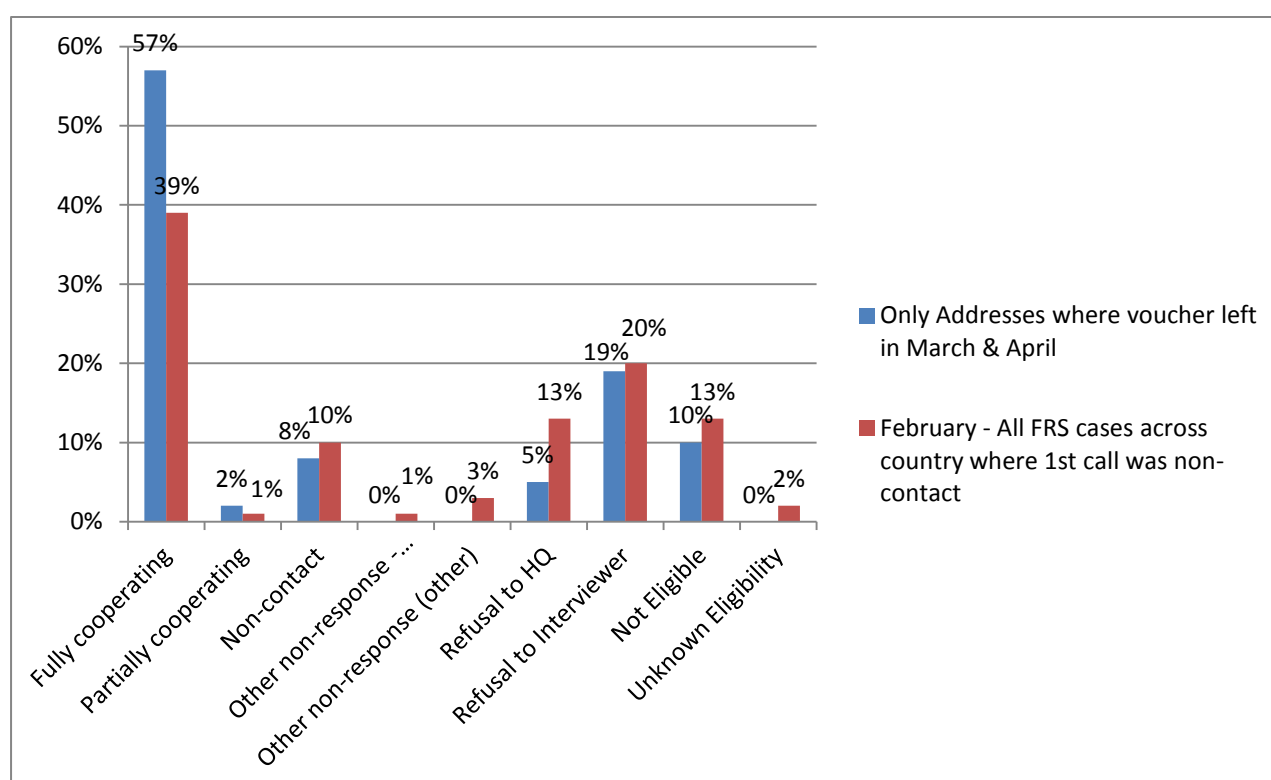
² Taken from the MIS. Calculated as total contact cases / total cases – ineligible cases and HQ refusals.

³ Taken from the MIS. Calculated as total refusal cases / total cases – ineligible cases – non contact cases and HQ refusals.

Table 3. Summary of Household Outcomes for Cases Where a Voucher Was Left

Final Outcome	Frequency	Percent %
Fully cooperating	36	57
Partially cooperating	1	2
Non-contact	5	8
Refusal to HQ	3	5
Refusal to Interviewer	12	19
Not Eligible	6	10
Total	63	100

Figure 1 – Comparison of Household Outcomes



A noticeable difference in the percentage of fully co-operating cases can be observed in Figure 1, with the percentage of fully co-operating cases 18% higher in the six trial quotas compared to February FRS quota outcomes where the first call was a non-contact.

In order to assess if less effort was required by interviewers to achieve contact after a voucher had been left, the average number of calls were analysed and compared to February FRS quotas again. The average number of calls to first contact for the addresses where a voucher was left was 2.98 which is lower than the average for February FRS addresses where the first call was a non-contact 3.44 calls.

The SEL database was checked to find out if any households which received the voucher then made contact with us to make an appointment. Within the six March and April quotas involved in the trial, 21 respondents contacted the SEL to make an appointment, nine of these (43%) of these were from households that had received a voucher.

5. Conclusions

It is worth exercising some caution when interpreting the results and making judgements due to the very small number of cases involved in this trial.

Contrary to the interviewers observations that the voucher didn't have an impact on co-operation, the percentage of fully co-operating cases was higher (57%) for the households where a voucher was left compared to the percentage of fully co-operating cases for households where a non-contact for the first call and no voucher was left (39%, February FRS national data).

There has also been a positive impact on contact rate for the trial quotas which was corroborated by interviewer feedback that households where a voucher was left often got into contact with either themselves directly or via HQ within a short amount of time of the voucher being left. This is also reflected in the lower average number of calls to first contact.

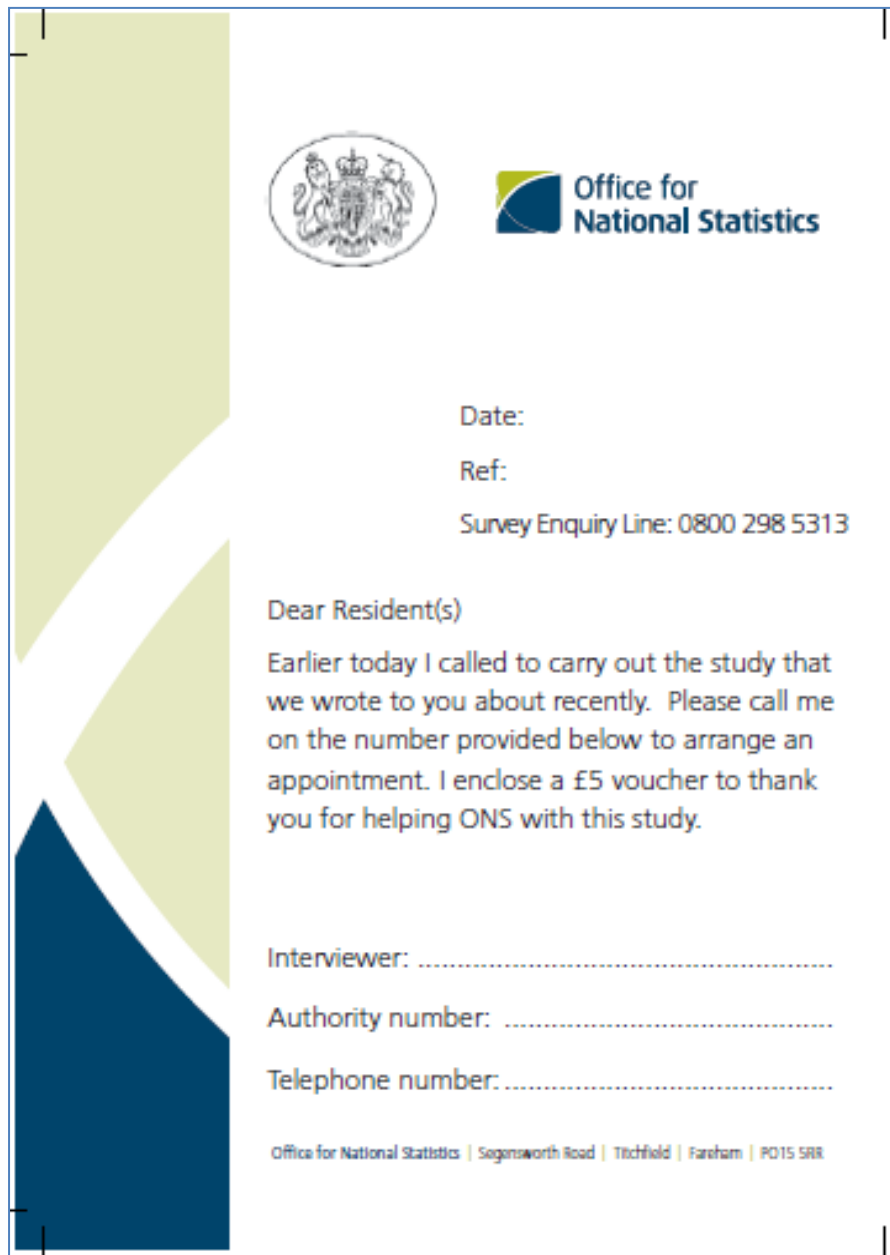
There do seem to be some practical issues when thinking about applying this methodology on a larger scale. The delivery of vouchers to interviewers does not seem to be a problem because they can be included with the monthly packs which are securely delivered already to their homes. It is the audit process and how to deal with left over vouchers where there could be difficulties. It is worth exploring if there is an option for interviewers to electronically record the voucher used on each case on their laptop. The remaining concern is how interviewers should return their unused vouchers each month to HQ. There would be higher costs if recorded delivery services are required, and also extra time required by HQ staff to check each voucher has been accounted for.

At the interviewer focus group, it was suggested that the voucher is used as a conditional incentive; inform respondents when making contact that they will be given a voucher when they complete the survey. This would be mentioned on the advance letter and called today card that they will receive the voucher on completion of the survey. There was some discussion about whether this should come from the office as happens on other surveys or the interviewer but perhaps both options could be explored for future trials.

We may need to consider the incentives NatCen offer on FRS and if this has any implications for what we do.

6. Appendices

Appendix A – Called Today Card



The card features a vertical decorative bar on the left with a light green upper section and a dark blue lower section. At the top right, it displays the Royal Coat of Arms and the Office for National Statistics logo. The text is as follows:

Date: _____
Ref: _____
Survey Enquiry Line: 0800 298 5313

Dear Resident(s)


Earlier today I called to carry out the study that we wrote to you about recently. Please call me on the number provided below to arrange an appointment. I enclose a £5 voucher to thank you for helping ONS with this study.

Interviewer: _____
Authority number: _____
Telephone number: _____

Office for National Statistics | Segensworth Road | Trichfield | Fareham | PO15 5RR

Appendix B – Voucher Record Form

Family Resources Survey
Voucher Record Sheet for
Trial

 Office for
National Statistics

Name		Auth		Quota Number:	
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Please enter the serial numbers of the cases that you used a voucher for AND the issue number of the voucher left.

Serial Number	Voucher Issue Number

Return this sheet with any unused vouchers to Lucy Wedeman (4100N, Survey Operations Research Team) at the Titchfield Office.

Number of vouchers returned