

## **PAPER 06/18**

### **SCOTTISH POPULATION SURVEY CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE**

#### **INTEGRATED HOUSEHOLD SURVEY PROGRESS REPORT**

##### Background

1. The Integrated Household Survey development team have continued preparatory work toward the creation of an integrated household survey, to encompass the LFS and associated boosts, GHS, EFS and Omnibus Surveys. The new integrated survey is due to be launched in the field in January 2008.

2. The IHS will have an unclustered design and a common core questionnaire asking census-type variables to the whole sample, with a number of modules which provide the detailed information collected by the existing surveys, to sub-sets of the whole sample. Field operations and management at ONS are being re-engineered at the same time, to provide the necessary infrastructure to support the new survey. The major benefits which flow from this integration and re-engineering are:

- operating efficiency in the fieldwork;
- statistical efficiency through using unclustered samples and methodologies such as two-phase weighting. This leads to precision improvements and/or sample size reductions;
- further harmonisation and standardisation of concepts, questions and outputs;
- flexibility in terms of module content.

3. There will be scope to incorporate other household surveys into the IHS in the future. The statistical efficiency of the IHS offers significant cost savings and/or precision gains. ONS will consider the inclusion of an extra survey if it can be readily accommodated; ONS has the interviewer capacity and if there would be no undue effect on other IHS elements through the survey's inclusion.

##### Field trials

4. Main findings from three small-scale experimental field tests conducted during 2005 have been summarised and compiled together in a single article that appeared in the June Survey Methodology Bulletin. In brief, these indicated that i) interviewers from both former field forces (GFF and LFF) are able to administer the survey to a similar standard ii) that the integrated modular questionnaire and Blaise instrument were acceptable to both respondents and interviewers and iii) that in certain key areas quality was either maintained or improved in comparison with the existing surveys i.e. detailed income information and respondent self-completion expenditure and consumption diaries.

5. These trials were successful within their limited parameters. A larger full-scale trial of the IHS, known as 'Pilot One', took place over a 6-week field period from February to March 2006. The pilot involved around 40 interviewers working over a two month period, predominantly face to face interviewers working across Great Britain but also with a small team covering re-issues in the Telephone Unit at Titchfield. The pilot sample was designed to produce a number of quality measures, broadly comparable to the existing four survey's for integration, including some measure of response. The Pilot was also the first IHS trial to include completely new

interviewers, together with a completely revised and modernised learning strategy. The Pilot did not mirror the live survey in all aspects of design, preparation and operation, and certain factors are likely to have impacted on response rates. The main findings from the pilot indicated that:

- The revised and modernised training strategy was successful  
The strategy included some 'e-learning'. This allowed interviewers to be tested on the survey content and procedures before going into the field. Interviewers were well supported by an electronic 'searchable' help facility (Q-by-Q). The system was held on the interviewers' laptops. It gave quick and easy access to a wealth of survey information. The Q-by-Q system is now being rolled out to the ONS household surveys ahead of the implementation of the IHS.
- The new interviewers coped well with the IHS design  
Their average response rates compared favourably with those from the more experienced interviewers used in the Pilot.
- The integrated design of the questionnaire had improved since previous field trials
- Final response rates were similar to the existing surveys for integration in most cases.  
Although, the IHS fell short of the average response rate achieved for the equivalent Expenditure and Food Survey. Overall, the response appeared improved on previous field trials.
- Quality improved in some areas  
In certain key areas quality was either maintained or improved in comparison with the existing surveys. Examples included the detailed income information and respondent self-completion of expenditure and consumption diaries.

6. Results from Pilot One will also feed into and shape a second pilot of the new survey planned for next year which will make use of significant improvements to the Survey Case Management System (SCMS), to better manage field operations, which are being made alongside the IHS. A summary of Pilot One findings have been posted onto the NS website at: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/articles/nojournal/IHSPilotOne.pdf>.

#### Continuity of time series

7. The continuity of time series used to monitor government PSA targets is a sensitive issue and ONS recognises the importance that customers place on these. A working group was established within ONS during 2005, to consider in more detail the continuity issues associated with making the switch from the existing surveys to the IHS, and to develop contingency options in the event of discontinuities arising. This group includes representatives from Labour Market Division, Social and Vital Statistics, and Methodology as well as the IHS design team. The aims of the continuity work programme are to:

- provide a practicable transition from the LFS to the IHS, enabling users to interpret movements in the series and minimising production risks;
- detect whether there has been a discontinuity from the introduction of the IHS and measure it, within as short a time as possible after the introduction of the IHS;
- use appropriate opportunities before the introduction to evaluate/estimate discontinuities.

8. A paper on progress in planning continuity of LFS time series over the period of the IHS introduction in early 2008, and short-listed options for measuring discontinuity at the time of the switch, will be presented to the IHS Steering Group meeting on 6th November 2006.

#### Future IHS costs and funding arrangements

9. A discussion paper on future funding arrangements and charging mechanism for the IHS was due to be circulated to the IHS Steering Group members by the end of June (as set out in the Stakeholder Engagement Plan). The plan was to set out options, issues and recommendations regarding future costs and charges, for future IHS modules and interview types, for discussion with stakeholders over the summer. This work has not yet been completed for several reasons:

- concern about drawing conclusions about future IHS costs based on Pilot 1 evidence alone, since Pilot 1 did not benefit from improvements to the survey case management system and expected fieldwork efficiencies arising from its implementation (better management control and greater flexibility in fieldwork operations, management and support);
- the need for more work within ONS to consider how best to estimate and apportion fieldwork costs given the new integrated approach to data collection - this does not just affect the IHS;
- the need to be 'joined-up' with other financial reviews ongoing within ONS which may influence future costs for ONS household surveys.

10. For the purposes of financial planning for 2007/8, which will need to take into account funding of the IHS in Jan-March 2008 as well, ONS has provided stakeholders with the following advice:

- where Departments expect to continue to sponsor a current boost sample, or set of questions, with similar requirements as on the current survey, it would be appropriate at this time to assume that the IHS will be 'cost neutral' during 2007/8, as if the current arrangements were ongoing in Jan-March 2008.
- where Departments expect their requirements to be quite different to current survey arrangements (e.g. looking to fund new or existing questions as part of the whole sample core module, or introduce a new part sample topic module, or reduce sample size to achieve same level of precision as on current survey outputs), the IHS team will work with each Department to provide an indicative estimate of cost which will allow the Department to move forward with 2007/8 budgetary requirements.

11. ONS are still developing a cost model to be used in the future which will be discussed at the next IHS Steering Group meeting in November 2006.

## Key milestones for stakeholders

12. To launch the new survey in January 2008, ONS is dependent on the SCMS improvements and the development of a new processing and output system, as part of the wider statistical modernisation programme underway in ONS. The new survey, based on an unclustered design, also requires considerable reorganisation and re-engineering of fieldwork operations to provide an integrated interviewer fieldforce capable of administering the new modular survey in small geographical areas. The timetable for the IHS development and launch is shown below:

Key dates	Activity
September 2003 - September 2004	Project initiation - build up of team, business case, project plans
October 2004	Publication of formal consultation document
October 2004 - February 2005	Development of prototype modular questionnaire for field testing
March 2005	Small scale field trial
September 2005	Small scale field trial
Feb/March 2006	First large-scale pilot
April/September 2006	Further work on IHS modular design and content options
April/September 2006	Formulate a practical contingency plan for identifying and dealing with potential discontinuities in estimates from switch to IHS
September 2006 - December 2007	Integration of fieldforces, work allocation and management of fieldwork
October 2006	Short list of questionnaire modules and topics for IHS2008
November 2006	Recommendations on IHS processing and output strategy
December 2006	Agree sample design and weighting strategy
February 2006 - August 2007	System test and second large-scale pilot
March 2007	Agree plans for the IHS parallel run and detailed plans for identifying and dealing with discontinuities
March 2007	Final list of questionnaire modules, topics and questions for IHS2008
April 2007	Delivery of improvements to SCMS
May 2007	Discussion and assessment of IHS quality, performance and delivery
June 2007	Delivery of end-to-end processing and output system
August 2007	Confirmation regarding IHS go ahead in January 2008
July 2007 - January 2008	Transition to, and implementation of IHS, including organisational change and staff training
January 2008	Launch of IHS and parallel run exercise

13. There have been a number of changes to the timetable in recent months that will be discussed in more detail at the forthcoming IHS Steering Group meeting. The key change is the decision to run a 'system, processing and outputs' test in February/March 2007 instead of a second field pilot that has now been put back until May/June

2007, to fit with the implementation of the SCMS in April 2007. This will allow us to do a thorough test of the end-to-end process through these two tests and ensure that outputs can be delivered to time and quality as well as data collection being successful operationally.

Designing Sources

Office for National Statistics

October 2006