

# The Labour Force Survey in the UK

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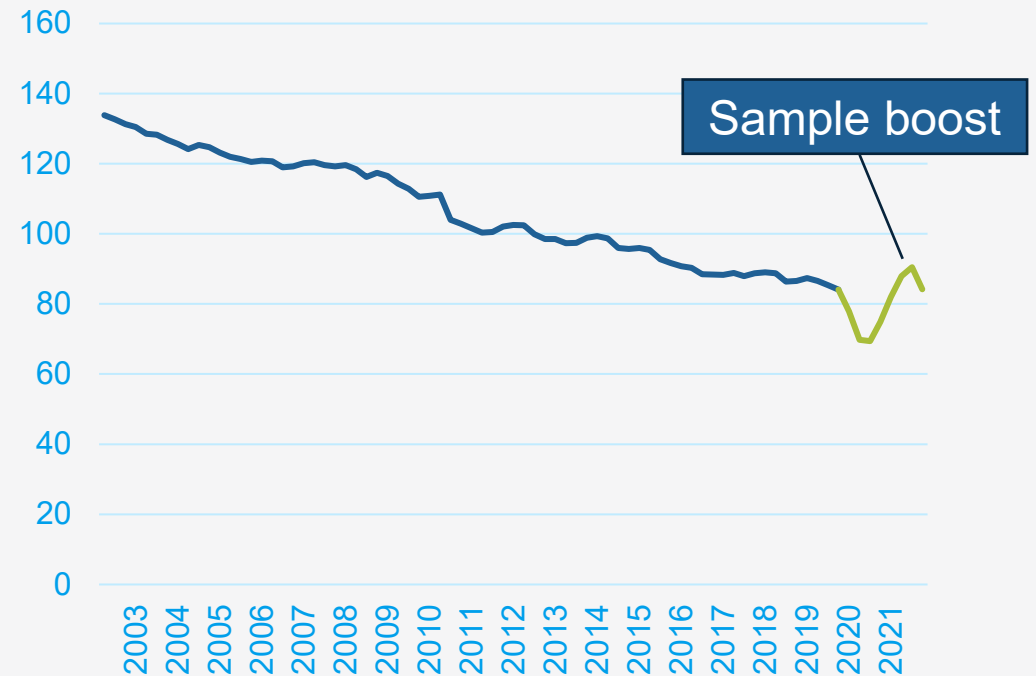
# LFS Design

- Sample of c. 100,000 households each quarter
- Every three-month period provides a representative sample (e.g. Jan-Mar, Feb-Apr etc.)
  - Compare non-overlapping periods for changes
- Longitudinal design
  - Households interviewed five times, three months apart
  - First interview face-to-face
  - Subsequent interviews on telephone
- Voluntary to complete

# Labour Force Survey response

- We have seen a steady decline in response rates over the last 20 years, for a variety of reasons including:
  - confidentiality concerns
  - mistrust in government
  - increase in gated communities
  - increasing single person, temporary households
  - public fatigue with taking surveys and calls
  - increasing use of rental properties and second homes
  - global move to online interactions
- COVID pandemic
  - Moved to telephone only collection
  - Brought in sample boost
  - Increase in bias

**Achieved number of LFS interviews, UK**  
(in thousands, includes imputation)



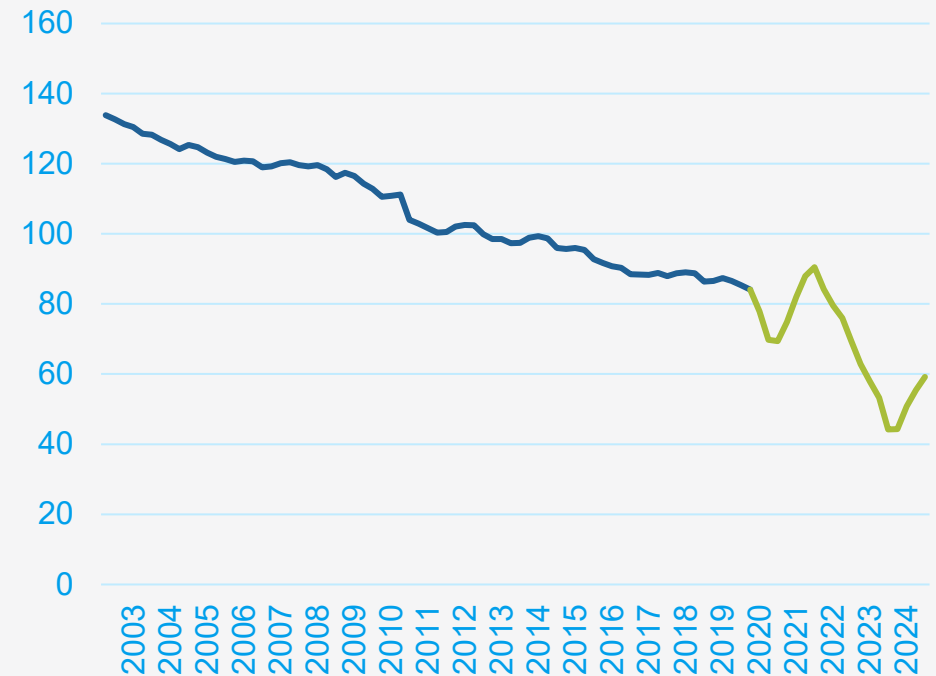
# Bias and mitigations during COVID

| Issue   | Mitigation  |
|---|---|
| <p><b>Proportion of responses from rented properties fell from 31% to 23%</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Increase for owned-outright from 37% to 44%</li><li>• Employment measure not showing similar fall as administrative sources</li></ul>   | <p><b>Included housing tenure in weighting calibration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Used average tenure proportions from 2019</li></ul>  |
| <p><b>Proportion of non-UK nations responding decreased</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Implied annual fall in population of non-UK nationals of over 1.2 million</li><li>• Implied annual increase of UK nationals of over 1.5 million</li></ul> | <p><b>Used tax data by nationality in calibration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Projected growth for UK and non-UK population</li><li>• Agreed regular updates with HMRC</li><li>• Moved away from ONS population projections</li></ul> |

# LFS suspension and recovery

- October 2023
  - Response reach a low point
  - Suspended LFS publication
  - Resumed face-to-face interviews
  - Increased incentives
- January 2024
  - Introduced sample boost
- February 2024
  - Applied new population weights
  - Updated tenure adjustment
  - Removed non-UK adjustment
  - Restarted publication
- December 2024
  - Further reweighting using increase in migration

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# Moving to a transformed LFS

- On-line first collection
  - Telephone follow up
  - “Knock-to-nudge”
- Started developing in 2016
- Put into field during pandemic
- Full dual run with LFS since October 2023
- Survey redesigned to work on-line
  - Not “lift-and-shift” of current LFS

# Benefits of transforming the LFS

- Larger overall sample size
  - Similar cost
  - Higher response rate than current LFS
  - Greater number of useable responses
- Updated and upgraded questions and responses
- More flexible and able to respond faster to change
- Modular design to integrate more question blocks

# Challenges of on-line collection

- Differences in results
- More missing data
- Less household data
- More partial responses
- Complex variables (occupation, earnings)



# Issue - Headline employment data

## Issue

- New survey results show lower levels of employment and self-employment compared with both LFS and admin data

## Cause

- Fewer self-employed people answering initial employment question

## Resolution

- Question added to better identify people who indicate they did not have a 'paid job' in the reference week but are self-employed because they operate a business.

# Issue - Missing data

## Issue

- New survey results show approximately 10% of responses for disability status questions are “don’t know/prefer not to say” (cf. 1% for LFS)

## Cause

- Increased number of people selecting “don’t know/prefer not to say” option

## Resolution

- The placement of ‘don’t know/prefer not to say’ is no longer an upfront option, and early results indicate this has reduced some missingness

# Issue - Household data

## Issue

- Increase in the number and proportion of single person households

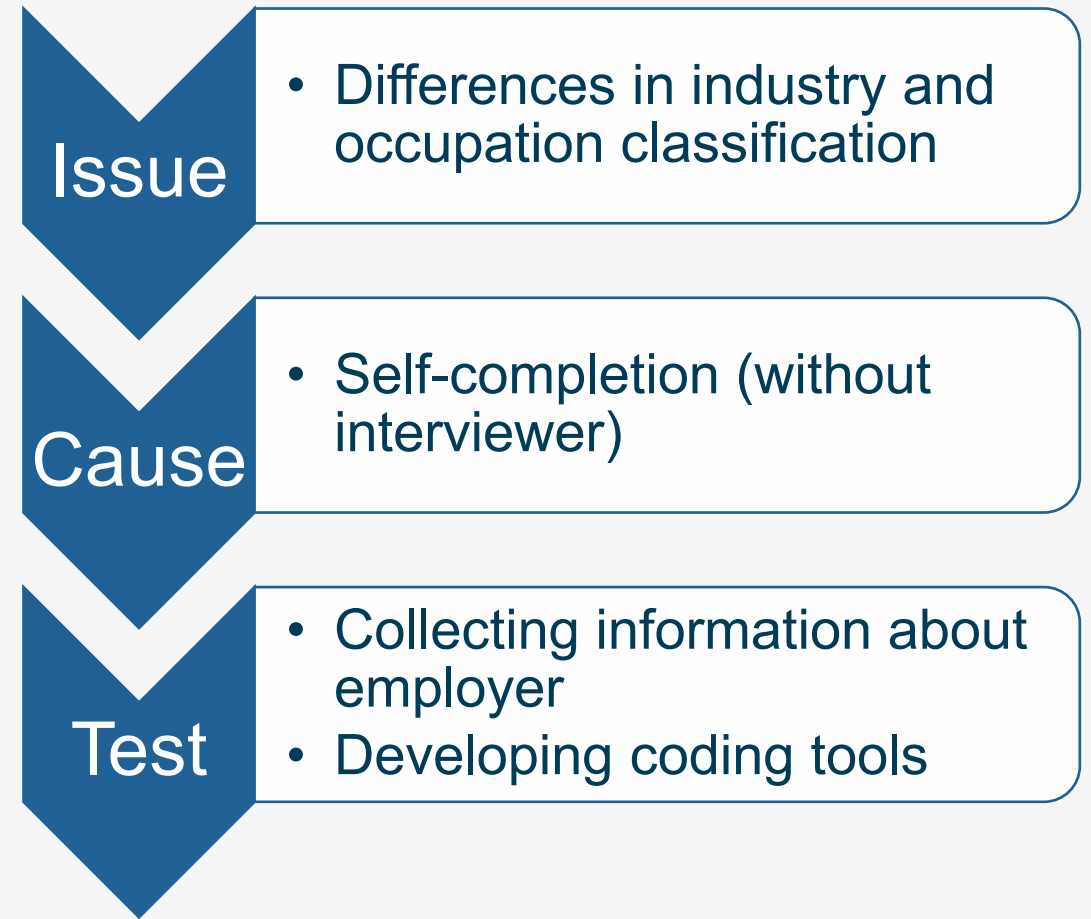
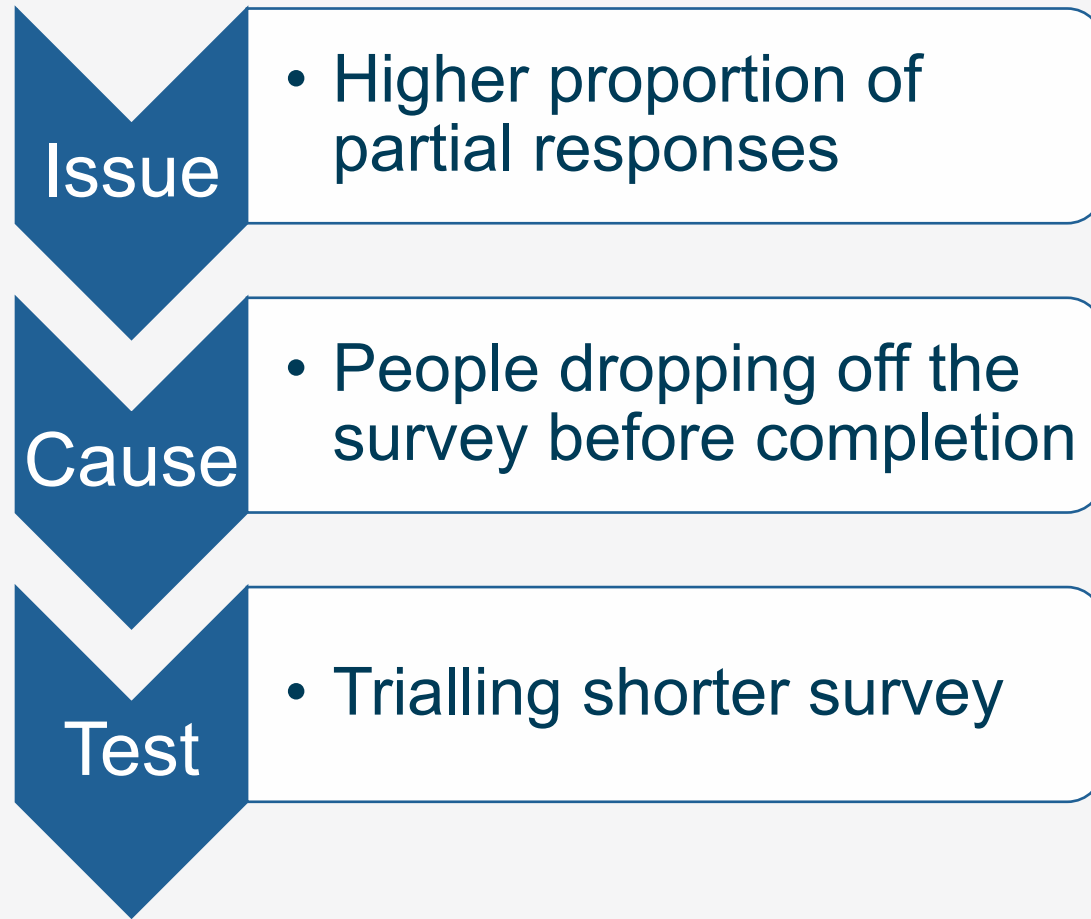
## Cause

- Respondents dropping off survey before they provide information about other people in the household

## Resolution

- Moved collection of household information closer to start of the survey
- Allows imputation for “missing” household members

# Outstanding issues



# Thank you for listening!