

## ESRC Response to the Evaluation of *Understanding Society*

This independent evaluation of *Understanding Society* clearly demonstrates that the users of the study value it incredibly highly. It provides strong qualitative evidence and independent verification of the community's views of the study, complementing the [annual benefit](#) and [case study](#) reports produced by *Understanding Society*.

The report confirms *Understanding Society*'s status as one of ESRC's leading investments, showing that:

- users are overwhelmingly positive about the survey and value it extremely highly
- it has driven a wide range of research outputs many of which would have been weaker or impossible without the study
- it has catalysed and underpinned changes impacting people's lives, informing policy decisions, supporting thirds sector campaigns and facilitating public debate of timely issues.

ESRC recognises the limitations identified in the report which pose challenges for users of the study. As contributors to the report recognised, there is sometimes a careful balance to be struck between competing factors. For example, the data is complex and can be challenging to navigate. Some (not all) of that challenge arises from the richness of data on lives in the UK, which are inherently complex. Different users experience distinct barriers e.g., some with availability of variables and others with limits on sample sizes, which require careful prioritisation of the available resources.

ESRC believes that this report provides strong evidence that the study design remains broadly appropriate and is delivering the key requirements of users from the UK's Household Longitudinal survey highly effectively. There are specific challenges identified by users in the report, notably including but not limited to:

- the complexity of the data set impeding new or irregular users
- the time and resource required to access special licence data
- sample sizes being insufficient for some subgroup analyses
- outdated, dropped, skipped or modified variables impeding longitudinal analysis.

These and the other issues identified are familiar to both ESRC and the study team and are the focus of ongoing programmes of activity. Over the next several months we will review these activities and, if necessary, refine them to ensure they continue to deliver the required improvements and refinements.

ESRC thanks the team at [CFE Research](#) for their work engaging with the stakeholders for *Understanding Society*, and the many participants who contributed their incredibly useful thoughts, insights and impacts which are the foundation of this report.