Evaluation of *Understanding Society*: Impact and views of data users

Technical Appendix

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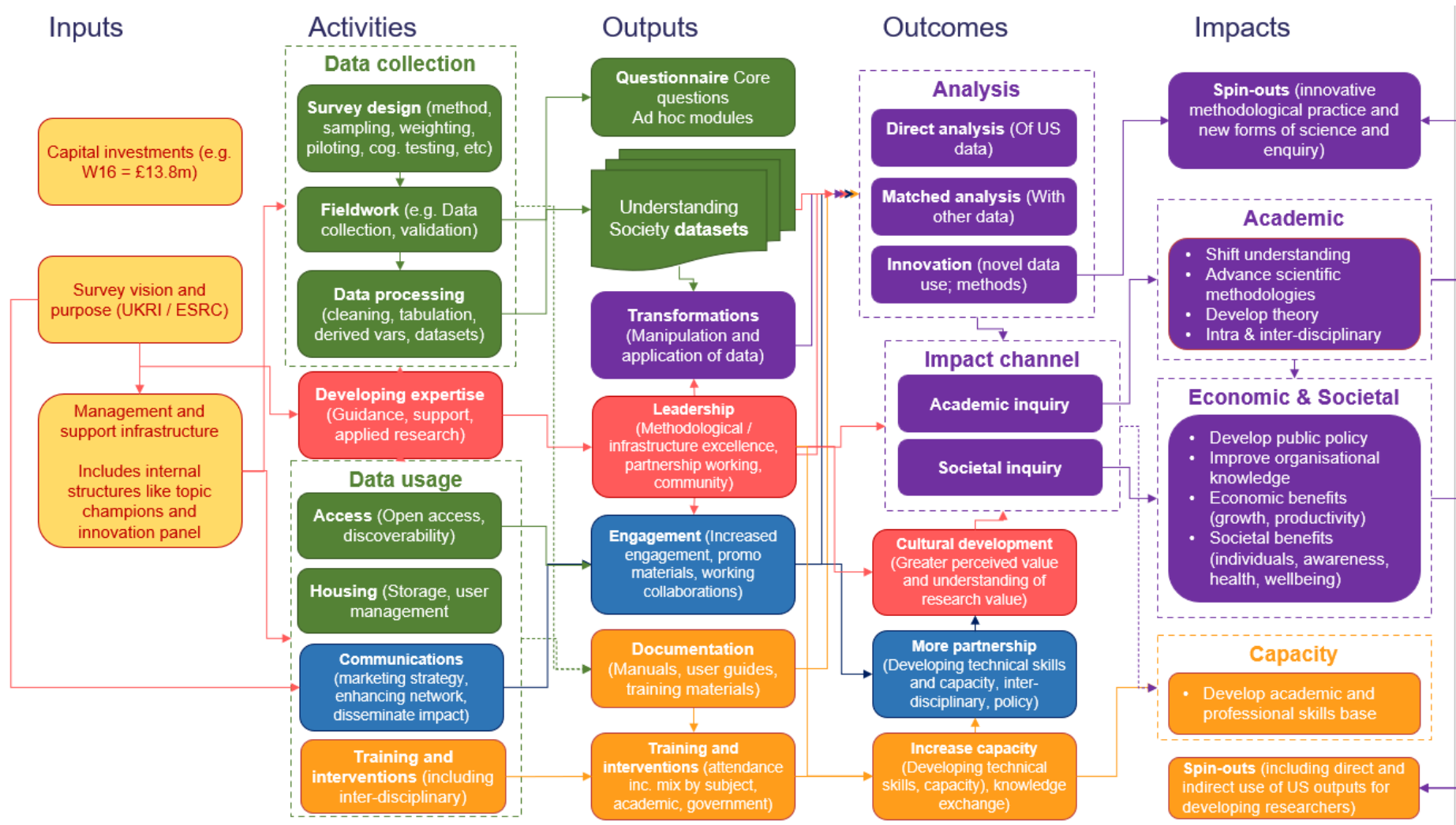Professor Jennifer Roberts
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Contents

Evaluation Framework

Inputs

Capital investments (e.g. W16 = £13.8m)

Survey vision and purpose (UKRI / ESRC)

Management and support infrastructure

Includes internal structures like topic champions and innovation panel

Activities

Data collection

Survey design (method, sampling, weighting, piloting, cog. testing, etc)

Fieldwork (e.g. Data collection, validation)

Data processing (cleaning, tabulation, derived vars, datasets)

Developing expertise (Guidance, support, applied research)

Data usage

Access (Open access, discoverability)

Housing (Storage, user management

Communications (marketing strategy, enhancing network, disseminate impact)

Training and interventions (including inter-disciplinary)

Outputs

Questionnaire Core questions Ad hoc modules

Understanding Society **datasets**

Transformations (Manipulation and application of data)

Leadership (Methodological / infrastructure excellence, partnership working, community)

Engagement (Increased engagement, promo materials, working collaborations)

Documentation (Manuals, user guides, training materials)

Training and interventions (attendance inc. mix by subject, academic, government)

Outcomes

Analysis

Direct analysis (Of US data)

Matched analysis (With other data)

Innovation (novel data use; methods)

Impact channel

Academic inquiry

Societal inquiry

Cultural development (Greater perceived value and understanding of research value)

More partnership (Developing technical skills and capacity, inter-disciplinary, policy)

Increase capacity (Developing technical skills, capacity), knowledge exchange)

Impacts

Spin-outs (innovative methodological practice and new forms of science and enquiry)

Academic
- Shift understanding
- Advance scientific methodologies
- Develop theory
- Intra & inter-disciplinary

Economic & Societal
- Develop public policy
- Improve organisational knowledge
- Economic benefits (growth, productivity)
- Societal benefits (individuals, awareness, health, wellbeing)

Capacity
- Develop academic and professional skills base

Spin-outs (including direct and indirect use of US outputs for developing researchers)

Detailed Methodology

An in-depth, mixed-methods approach was taken to address the five research questions. This comprised a documentation review, stakeholder interviews, case studies and focus groups. Details of each stage are provided below.

Documentation Review

The ESRC provided 28 documents that formed part of the documentation review. These documents included business cases, progress reports, benefit realisation reports and strategic reviews. The documents included in the review ranged in date from 2007 in the initial business case to establish *Understanding Society*, to 2021 which included reports on the first 10 years of *Understanding Society* as well as further insight reports.

All documents were read and reviewed by the CFE Research team. Duplicate documents (n=5) were excluded. Documents were analysed for the type of impact stated (academic/policy/private/public sector), the beneficiaries of the impact, and mapped onto the five key research questions. For a breakdown of the types of documents, see Table 4:

Table 4: Breakdown of documents included in Documentation Review

Document Type	Frequency	Type of Impact	Frequency
Business Case	3	Academic	11
Internal Report (ESRC/UKRI)	18	Policy	11
Progress Report	6	Private	2
Benefit Report	8	Public	4
Supporting Internal Evidence	4		
External Review/Report	2		

Completing the analysis of the documentation review aided the creation of the evaluation framework and the topic guides for the stakeholder interviews.

Stakeholder interviews

57 semi-structured interviews were conducted with stakeholders from across a quota of different research areas and experiences of using *Understanding Society*. The interviews provided the opportunity to explore participants' direct experiences of using *Understanding Society* and their perceptions about the dataset and the impact that has been possible to achieve.

Stakeholders were categorised into 4 groups: academic users, academic non-users, non-academic users, and non-academic non-users. Bespoke topic guides were created for each of these user types and can be found in Appendix C. For the purpose of this evaluation, we differentiated between direct and indirect users. In relation to <u>direct users</u>, this refers to

people who have directly used or benefitted from the activities and outputs that have been delivered/provided by *Understanding Society*. Direct users are individuals who work directly with the data to produce research as well as others who have improved their methodological skills and capacity through training activities. In contrast, <u>indirect users</u> are those who have engaged in secondary/indirect usage outside of academia (e.g. government/public sector). Secondary academic impacts (impacts which have used others' research using *Understanding Society*) have *not* been included in this definition of indirect users.

Participants were recruited through a four-stage recruitment strategy. Initially, an introductory email was sent by ESRC to all individuals who had a current user account with the UKDS and had downloaded *Understanding Society*. This was approximated 5,600 individuals. The recruitment email asked those who were interested in participating in the interviews to email CFE research directly. Secondly, ESRC sent an introductory email to a curated database of key authors who had been identified in the documentation review, through hand searching the Institute for Social and Economic Research website of publications, and from searching 2014 REF Impact Case studies. From this initial contact, a series of screener questions were asked to help elicit key information to help sampling according to pre-defined quotas. The screener questions included information about: self-identified major discipline, job role/career stage, organisation, academic/non-academic background, type of user (regular/lapsed/non-user), measure of how much they use *Understanding Society*. Initial quotas that recruitment worked to are outlined in table 5:

Table 5: Initial Quotas for Interviews

Quota strata	Level of usage (based on downloads)			
	Regular	Irregular	Non-users	Total
User background (Total)	32	13	10	55
Academics, working on topics of…	24	8	8	41
…society, governance and security	5	2	2	9
…health and human behaviour	5	2	2	9
…work, education, skills and technology	5	2	2	9
…environment, climate change, energy, transport and urban	3	2	2	7
…methodological research, statistics, data science	4	2	1	7
Others, of which…	8	5	2	15
…***government and public bodies*** *(including devolved nations)*	4	3	1	8
…***private/commercial, third sector, think tanks***	4	2	1	7

A purposive sampling approach was used that was balanced towards direct *Understanding Society* Users over non-regular and non-users was used to recruit the sample of stakeholders. However, during the recruitment process, it became apparent that some

academic disciplines were more difficult to recruit to than others. Consequently, some of the quota for interviews was shifted to include more non-academic interviews, acknowledging that recruitment to the environment, methodological and work discipline strands (for those in the irregular and non-user categories) proved very difficult. The interviews with non-academic stakeholders were offering key insights into the use and impact of *Understanding Society*, and reallocating interview resources to these groups was fruitful in being able to address key concepts around translating research into impact and policy influence. The final characteristics of the interviewed sample are in table 6:

Table 6: Final characteristics of interviewees

	Regular Users	Irregular Users	Non-Users	TOTAL
ACADEMIC STAKEHOLDERS				
Health & Human Behaviour	5	2	2	9
Society, Governance & Security	5	2	2	9
Work, Education, Skills & Training	4	1	1	6
Environment, Transport & Climate Change	2	0	0	2
Methodological & Statistics	3	1	1	5
TOTAL (Academic)	**19**	**6**	**6**	**31**
NON-ACADEMIC STAKEHOLDERS				
Government & Public Bodies	7	4	1	12
Private/Commercial, Third Sector & Think Tanks	8	4	1	13
TOTAL (Non-academic)	**15**	**8**	**2**	**25**
OVERALL TOTAL	**34**	**14**	**8**	**56**

Further breakdown of these characteristics shows that 54 interviewees used the data in primary format, with only one interviewee using the data once someone else had run the analysis and presented the findings. In relation to the stage of career of respondents, this was split so that 14 were early career, 26 mid-career, and 16 were senior/professorial. Eight interviewees were international researchers – residing in countries including the United States, Canada, Germany and Spain.

The interviews were conducted online, using either telephone, Zoom or Teams meetings between December 2021 and February 2022. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. Interviews ranged in length from 25 minutes to 1hour 20. Interviews were conducted in accordance with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, meaning that they were conducted ethically, and all data was protected.

A coding frame was established based on the evaluation framework, research questions and topic guides to elicit the key themes and ideas from the stakeholder interviews. Coding was conducted using NVIVO qualitative analysis software. Coding occurred iteratively, with regular team discussions to explore the meaning of different codes and to ensure the coding frame accurately represented the content of the interviews.

Case Studies

Twelve case studies have been developed to illustrate the ways in which *Understanding Society* can have impact for users. The case studies were identified through the stakeholder interviews and showcase the key benefits and impacts in a way that walks the reader through the narrative of how *Understanding Society* is used and how this then subsequently translates into impact or outcomes.

Follow up interviews with the case study individuals were held to ensure that the content of the case studies was correct and to plug any gaps requiring further information. The case studies are interspersed into this report to illustrate examples of impact or when *Understanding Society* has been used in an innovative or novel way.

Focus Groups

A series of four focus groups were held in March 2022. The four focus groups each considered a specific concept and topic that emerged as important from the interviews but where more information was needed. A summary of the four focus groups and their topics is in table 7:

Table 7: Summary of Focus Groups

Focus Group	Description of purpose
Focus Group 1: Linking *Understanding Society* to other datasets	To explore users' experience of linking *Understanding Society* to other datasets or using the already linked datasets. To explore the impact and benefits of using linked datasets.
Focus Group 2: Life without *Understanding Society*	To explore the benefits of *Understanding Society* to users and to consider what the UK research environment would look like without *Understanding Society*. To consider the impact this could have on research.
Focus Group 3: The Innovation Panel	To explore the use, experiences, and process of using the Innovation Panel and the impact this has on research.
Focus Group 4: Advancing Methodological Innovation	To explore the methods that *Understanding Society* has enabled, and the way that it can contribute to developing new ways of thinking about social issues.

The purpose of the focus groups was to build on the emerging findings from the stakeholder interviews, and to assist in building strong narratives around impact to inform case studies and the final report. Bespoke guides were created for each focus group, and these can be found in Appendix D.

Focus group participants were recruited using a multi-pronged recruitment strategy. Targeted emails were sent to interviewees who had provided important pieces of evidence relating to one of the focus group topics. Further emails were sent to other interview participants, as well as batched emails to other individuals who had initially responded to the emails requesting participants for the evaluation. The *Understanding Society* team at Essex also provided a list of individuals who had successfully applied to have a study

included in the Innovation Panel, and these individuals were also approached by email to target the focus group on this subject. Participants were given the opportunity to select their preferred time for the focus group (from a choice of two), and the most popular date and time was chosen.

A total of 19 participants attended the four workshops, 12 were academics and seven were non-academic users of *Understanding Society*. Those that attended were from a range of disciplines including health, economics and labour, education, travel, care, plus a mixture of commercial and third sector non-academic organisations. The focus groups were held using the Teams online meeting platform, were recorded, and lasted between 60–90 minutes. The transcripts of the focus groups were thematically coded and analysed in the same way as the interviews.

Stakeholder Interview Topic Guides

Academic Users

This is the topic guide to be used for all interviews with academics who are current and/or frequent users of Understanding Society. Not all topics and questions will be relevant to all interviews, and it is likely that the interviews will not be linear as presented in these guides.

Interview Details

The purpose of the interview today is to understand your experiences of using Understanding Society and the impact that this has had on your work. We are speaking to a number of users and non-users from different disciplines to explore a wide range of views. The interview will be conducted according to the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, meaning it is conducted ethically and your data will be protected. We expect it to last approximately an hour.

Have you read the privacy notice? [If not, summarise the key points: the interview will be audio recorded, transcribed, and anonymised, so everything will be confidential. If we use anything in a report that might identify you, we will ask your permission before using it.]

We are interested in your thoughts and experiences: there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers to any questions. Some questions you may not be able to answer, or may not want to answer, which is entirely your choice. You can stop the interview at any point without giving a reason.

FURTHER DETAIL (IF REQUIRED)

About CFE	CFE are an independent, not for profit, research agency specialising in research and evaluation in the economy, education and wellbeing. CFE, alongside Professors Jenny Roberts and Nigel Rice, are undertaking this research on behalf of the ESRC.
About the research	ESRC need to understand the use and impact of one of their flagship datasets, Understanding Society. The dataset has been in use for just over ten years and the ESRC want to evaluate its use to ensure that future developments of the dataset can have the largest potential benefit to users, and the wider society through its impact. Understanding Society is the largest longitudinal panel study and has had significant investment from ESRC over its duration. This research project will therefore inform the future funding strategy and development of the dataset for future users.
Other elements of the research	As part of the research project, a documentation review has already been conducted. In addition, case study examples and workshops will be conducted. As well as talking with academic users of the dataset from different disciplines, we will also be interviewing users from government, private sector, 3rd sector and think tanks, as well as non-users.

Discussion Guide

Interviewer to check proforma details prior to conducting interview questions (for summary of interviewee area and experience of US)

Priority questions are ==highlighted in yellow==.

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	**Time**
role and use of Understanding Society	20-25 min
==To begin with, it would be useful if you could introduce yourself, including what institution you work for and your subject area.== ==Please can I also check that you do use Understanding Society directly in your work?== ==Please could you tell me a little bit about your research, and in particular, the work that has utilised Understanding Society?== ==In your work, what do you use Understanding Society for?== ==How much do you use Understanding Society?== ==When did you start using Understanding Society?== ==Have you changed how, or how much, you use Understanding Society over time?== ==Why do you choose to use Understanding Society in your work? What does Understanding Society offer over other datasets?== *Is there a specific aspect of Understanding Society that you value most for your work?* ==Which Understanding Society datasets do you tend to use? How? Why?== *[Note for interviewers] key data files include: standard individual and household adult data, youth data files, nurse visit data, BHPS linked data, innovation panel, teaching data set, secure data and special license data.* *Is there a theme that describes the type of data that you use?* *Have you ever used the special license and secure data files?* *How do you use the data? Do you use it cross-sectionally or longitudinally?* *How do you analyse your data? Do you use direct analysis or matched analysis or linked data analysis? Why? [Note for researchers – interest in ascertaining whether a) only using US data, b) matching it to other primary data, c) matching to other secondary data, d) combination of the above]* *Do you use the data for international comparative research? How does the Understanding Society dataset compare to similar international datasets? Have you ever used the cross-national equivalent file and/or the CLOSER consortium?*	

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	Time
Do you use Understanding Society data for teaching purposes or capacity building activities with fellow researchers or research students? *Have you ever applied to do an associated study for Understanding Society? Were you successful?* - Are there any other parts of the dataset that you could use, or would be beneficial to your work? Why do you not use these? ==Have you ever engaged with any of the training materials or workshops that are provided by Understanding Society?== *[Note to researchers – training materials include training courses and workshops, podcasts, videos, resources and user guides]* - Why did you/didn't you choose to access the training materials? - How did the training/materials help you? ==How do you find the process of accessing and using the data in Understanding Society?== - Are there any challenges/limitations with using the data?	
benefits and impacts of UNderstanding SOciety	15-20 min
==What benefit does using Understanding Society have for you and your work?== *[Note to researchers for probing: ESRC Benefits include enabling inter/multidisciplinary research; new insights into interactions between social and biological data; capability in quantitative methods, working collaboratively]* ==What impact(s) has your work using Understanding Society had?== *[Note to researchers for probing: ESRC Impacts include innovative methods, creation and use of datasets, knowledge creation, new forms of science over time, policy impact, changed practice, economic activity, public awareness, public health]* ==How would you categorise the impacts that you have achieved?== *[Note to researchers, the evaluation framework groups the type of impact into academic and economic & societal, plus spin off impacts regarding methodological impact. Would be useful to see if can categorise interviewees impact into one of these types].* ==How can/has Understanding Society help/ed you to achieved your impacts?== ==What other impacts would you like your research to be able to achieve?== ==How could US help you to achieve these impacts?== - Understanding Society has been cited in numerous government policy documents and in private sector companies for influencing practice. Are you aware of the Policy Unit as part of Understanding Society? *Have you ever engaged with the policy unit?*	

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	Time
▪ *Would this be something you would like to know more about?* ▪ *What could help you achieve more impact with your work?* • Would you be able to complete your work if Understanding Society did not exist? ▪ *What impact would this have on your work?*	
limitations and strengths of understanding society	10-15 min
• How important do you view Understanding Society to your work? • What, if any changes could be made to make the Understanding Society dataset to enhance it for users? o Are there any factors that limit the potential of Understanding Society to achieve impact? • Please outline any gaps in the current US dataset(s) that prevent you from carrying out your research. • How would you summarise the overall strengths and limitations of Understanding Society? • In a sentence, please describe your overall perceptions of US. • Do you have any further comments or thoughts about Understanding Society and the areas we have covered that you would like to add?	

Academic Non-Users

This is the topic guide to be used for all interviews with academics who currently do not use Understanding Society (although may have done so in the past). Not all topics and questions will be relevant to all interviews, and it is likely that the interviews will not be linear as presented in these guides.

Discussion Guide

Interviewer to check proforma details prior to conducting interview questions (for summary of interviewee area and experience of US)

Priority questions are highlighted in yellow.

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	Time
role and use of Understanding Society	15-20 min
- To begin with, it would be useful if you could introduce yourself, including what institution you work for and your research area. - Please can I also check that you currently do not use Understanding Society directly in your work? - Please can you tell me a little bit about your research and what sort of data you use in your work? - What sort of data is most useful for your research? *What do you need from the data to allow you to answer your research questions?* - Would using longitudinal household survey data be of benefit to you? - Have you ever considered using longitudinal data? - Have you ever used Understanding Society? *What dataset did you use? Why?* *What analysis did you complete? Why? Did you use direct analysis or matched analysis? [Note for researchers – interest in ascertaining whether a) only using US data, b) matching it to other primary data, c) matching to other secondary data, d) combination of the above]* *Why did you choose to use Understanding Society in this instance?* *Did using Understanding Society have any benefit to your research project?* *How did you find the process of accessing and using data in Understanding Society? Were there any difficulties or*	

Questions *(Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion)*	Time

limitations with using the data? What might make the data easier to use?
    o Are there any reasons why you don't use Understanding Society more in your work?
        ▪ *Is there anything about Understanding Society that puts you off using it?*
        ▪ *Are there any gaps in the Understanding Society dataset that if filled would help your work?*
• Have you ever accessed or engaged with any of the training materials or workshops that are provided by Understanding Society? *[Note to researchers – training materials include training courses and workshops, podcasts, videos, resources and user guides]*
    o Why did you choose to engage? Why have you not engaged with these materials?
    o How did the training/materials help you?	

benefits of UNderstanding SOciety	10 min

• What impacts do you wish your research to achieve?
    o Have you achieved these impacts?
        ▪ *Can longitudinal data such as Understanding Society help you with achieving these impacts? Why/Why not?*
        ▪ *How has Understanding Society helped you?*
        ▪ *What could help you achieve more impact with your work? Have you ever engaged with the policy unit as part of Understanding Society? Would this help you be able to translate your research into impact?*	

Potential limitations of understanding society	10-15 min
• Are there any factors that would mean that you would use Understanding Society more frequently? • What, if any, changes could be made to the Understanding Society dataset to enhance it for users? o Are there any factors that limit the potential of Understanding Society to achieve impact? • Do you have a sense of the strengths and limitations of Understanding Society? • In a sentence, please describe your overall perception of Understanding Society. • Do you have any further comments or thoughts about Understanding Society and the areas we have covered that you would like to add?	

Non-Academic Users

This is the topic guide to be used for all interviews with non-academics who are current and/or frequent users of Understanding Society. Not all topics and questions will be relevant to all interviews, and it is likely that the interviews will not be linear as presented in these guides.

Discussion Guide

Interviewer to check proforma details prior to conducting interview questions (for summary of interviewee area and experience of US)

Priority questions are <mark>highlighted in yellow</mark>.

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	Time
ROLE AND USE OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY	20-25 min
- To begin with, it would be useful if you could introduce yourself, including what institution you work for and your subject area. - Please can I also check that you do use Understanding Society data in your work? - Please can you tell me a little bit about your work, what you do and how you use research or data in it? - What experience of Understanding Society do you have? - What do you use Understanding Society for? - When did you start using Understanding Society data? Has how much, or how, you use Understanding Society changed over time? - Why do you choose to use Understanding Society data in your work? What does Understanding Society offer over other datasets? *Is there a specific aspect of Understanding Society that is most valuable for your work?* - In what form do you use Understanding Society? Do you analyse the data yourselves, or do you use the data in secondary formats, such as reports written by other people that use the data? *What do you need from data to allow you to use it in your work?* *How do you analyse the data?* - Which Understanding Society datasets do you tend to use? Why? How do you use them? *[Note for interviewers] key data files include: standard individual and household adult data, youth data files, nurse visit data, BHPS linked data, innovation panel, teaching data set, secure data and special license data.* *Have you ever used the special license and secure data files?* *How do you use the data? Do you use it cross-sectionally or longitudinally?*	

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	Time

- ▪ *How do you analyse your data? Do you use direct analysis or matched analysis or linked data analysis? Why? [Note for researchers – interest in ascertaining whether a) only using US data, b) matching it to other primary data, c) matching to other secondary data, d) combination of the above]*
  - ▪ *Do you use the data for international comparative research? How does the Understanding Society dataset compare to similar international datasets? Have you ever used the cross national equivalent file and/or the CLOSER consortium?*
  - ▪ *Do you use Understanding Society data for capacity building activities with fellow researchers?*
  - ▪ *Have you ever applied to do an associated study for Understanding Society? Were you successful?*
- Have you ever engaged with the training materials or workshops that are provided by Understanding Society? *[Note to researchers – training materials include training courses and workshops, podcasts, videos, resources and user guides]*
  - o Why did you/didn't you choose to access the training materials?
  - o How did the training/materials help you?
- How do you find the process of accessing and using the data in Understanding Society?
  - o Are there any challenges/limitations with using the data?

BENEFITS OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY	15-20 min

- What benefit does Understanding Society have for you and your work?
  - ▪ *[Note to researchers for probing: ESRC Benefits include enabling inter/multidisciplinary research; new insights into interactions between social and biological data; capability in quantitative methods, working collaboratively]*
  - o What would happen if Understanding Society no longer existed? Would you still be able to do the work that you want to do?
- What impact(s) has Understanding Society had for you and your work?
  - ▪ *[Note to researchers for probing: ESRC Impacts include innovative methods, creation and use of datasets, knowledge creation, new forms of science over time, policy impact, changed practice, economic activity, public awareness, public health]*
  - o How would you categorise the impacts that you have achieved? ESRC consider there to be two main types of impact – academic and economic & societal, plus spin off impacts regarding methodological impact. Where would you say your impact sits in this categorisation?
  - o How can/has Understanding Society help/ed you to achieve your intended impacts?
  - o What other impacts would you like your research to be able to achieve?
    - ▪ How could Understanding Society help you to achieve these impacts?
- Understanding Society has been cited in numerous government policy document and in private sector companies for influencing practice. Are you aware of the Policy Unit as part of Understanding Society? *[Note for interviewers – this is an important question for non-academic users, especially those from government co-funded departments]*

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	Time
▪ *Have you ever engaged with the policy unit? Would this be something you would like to know more about?* ▪ *What could help you achieve more impact with your work?* • Would you be able to complete your work if Understanding Society did not exist? ▪ *What impact would this have on your work?*	
POTENTIAL STRENGTHS & LIMITATIONS OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY	10-15 min
• How important do you view understanding Society to your work? • What, if any, changes could be made to the Understanding Society dataset to enhance it for its users? ○ Are there any factors that limit the potential of Understanding Society to achieve impact? • Please outline any gaps in the current Understanding Society dataset(s) that prevent you from carrying out your research. • How would you summarise the strengths and limitations of Understanding Society? • In a sentence, please describe your overall perceptions of Understanding Society. • Do you have any further comments or thoughts about Understanding Society and the areas we have covered, that you would like to add?	

Non-Academic Non-Users

This is the topic guide to be used for all interviews with non-academics who currently do not use Understanding Society (participants may have used the dataset in the past). Not all topics and questions will be relevant to all interviews, and it is likely that the interviews will not be linear as presented in these guides.

Discussion Guide

Interviewer to check proforma details prior to conducting interview questions (for summary of interviewee area and experience of US)

Priority questions are highlighted in yellow.

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	**Time**
ROLE AND USE OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY	20-25 min
- To begin with, it would be useful if you could introduce yourself, including what institution you work for and your subject area. - Please can I also check that you currently do not use Understanding Society in your work? - Please can you tell me a little bit about your work and what sort of research or data you use in your work? - What sort of data is most useful for your work? *Do you use data in primary form, or do you typically use reports or outputs where other people have done the data analysis?* *What are the reasons for using this form of data?* *What do you need from data to allow you to use it in your work?* - Would using longitudinal or household panel data be of benefit to you? - Have you ever considered using data longitudinally? - Have you ever used Understanding Society?[i] *Why/why not?* *Have you ever used research based on Understanding Society?* *What dataset did you use or was used in the research that you have used? Why?* *What analysis did you complete? Why? Did you use direct analysis or matched analysis? [Note for researchers – interest in ascertaining whether a) only using US data, b) matching it to other primary data, c) matching to other secondary data, d) combination of the above]*	

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	Time
- o *Why did you choose to use Understanding Society in this instance?* - o *Did using Understanding Society have any benefits to achieving your work project objectives?* - o *How did you find the process of accessing and using data in Understanding Society? Were there any difficulties or limitations with using the data? What might make the data easier to use?* - Are there any reasons why you don't use Understanding Society more in your work? ▪ *Is there anything about Understanding Society that puts you off using it?* ▪ *Are there any gaps in the Understanding Society dataset that if filled would help your work?* - Have you ever accessed or engaged with any of the training materials or workshops that are provided by Understanding Society? *[Note to researchers – training materials include training courses and workshops, podcasts, videos, resources and user guides]* - o Why did you choose to engage? Why have you not engaged with these materials? - o How did the training/materials help you?	
BENEFITS OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY	10 min
- What impacts do you or your organisation wish to achieve from your work? - o Have you achieved these impacts? ▪ *Can longitudinal data such as Understanding Society help you with achieving these impacts?* ▪ *How has Understanding Society helped you?* ▪ *Could you see how Understanding Society could help you?* ▪ *What could help you achieve more impact with your work? Have you ever engaged with the policy unit as part of Understanding Society? Would this help you to be better able to translate your research into impact?*	
POTENTIAL LIMITATIONS OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY	10 min
- Are there any factors that would mean that you would use Understanding Society more frequently, either directly or indirectly through others' work? - What, if any, changes could be made to the Understanding Society dataset to enhance it for users? - o Are there any factors that limit the potential of Understanding Society to achieve impact? - Do you have a sense of the strengths and limitations of Understanding Society? - In a sentence, please describe your overall perception of Understanding Society. - Do you have any further comments or thoughts about Understanding Society and the areas we have covered that you would like to add?	

Life without Understanding Society

This topic guide will be used for the focus group to explore the benefits of using Understanding Society and what the research environment would look like without it.

FOCUS GROUP DETAILS

The purpose of today's focus group is to understand your experiences of using Understanding Society specifically in relation to when you have linked Understanding Society to other datasets, and the impact that this has had for you and your work.

The focus group will be conducted according to the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, meaning it is conducted ethically and your data will be protected. We expect the session to last for approximately 1-1.5 hours. Have you read the privacy notice? [Key points: the focus group will be audio recorded, transcribed, and anonymised, so everything will be confidential. If we use anything in a report that might identify you, we will ask your permission before using it.]

We are interested in your thoughts and experiences: there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers to any questions. Some questions you may not be able to answer, or may not want to answer, which is entirely your choice.

HOUSE RULES

- During the focus group, it would be helpful if you could mute your microphone when you are not speaking.
- Please use the chat function during the focus group for any specific links and any other comments that you may want to add.
- There are various topics that we would like to cover and to keep to time we will limit the time for each question.
- The session will be audio recorded to assist us in understanding your responses in more detail and transcribed for analysis.
- Please respect others in the focus group and contribute fully where you feel you can. If you particularly want to say something about a topic, please use the functions to raise your hand and we will ensure that everyone can contribute. You can withdraw and leave the focus group at any point without giving a reason.

Topic Guide

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	Purpose/Time
INTRODUCTION – ALL PARTICIPANTS	10 minutes
1) Introduction – outline the purpose of the session 2) To begin, it would be helpful if you could briefly introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about your work with Understanding Society. [*Limit to 1-minute per participant*]	To help contextualise experiences
IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY	30 minutes

3) How important is Understanding Society to your work? Can you provide some examples of why it is important? *PROMPT – Explore the following ideas in more detail:*
    a. *Comprehensive dataset – specifically, what does comprehensive mean?*
    b. *Enables longitudinal analysis – specific examples*
    c. *Rich socio-demographic variables – what benefits do these provide?*
    d. *Breadth and depth/richness of coverage – specific examples*
    e. *Trusted dataset/high quality – what specifically makes USoc trusted?*
    f. *Difference in importance between academic v non-academic users*
4) What specifically does Understanding Society offer above and beyond other datasets? *PROMPT – garner more specific details about other datasets and comparison between them.*
5) What does Understanding Society contribute to your work?
    a. *How does USoc contribute to your work?*
6) What impact does using Understanding Society have on … *(with specific examples)*
    a. **Academic knowledge** (*PROMPT – promoting shifts in understanding, advancing scientific method, development of theories, promoting intra and inter-disciplinary working*)
    b. **Economic and societal outcomes** (*PROMPT – development of public policy, improved organisational knowledge, economic benefits – growth/productivity, societal benefits – increased awareness, improved health/wellbeing*)
    c. **Increased capacity** (*PROMPT – increased/improved academic and professional skills base – e.g. Quantitative capacity or innovative methods, spin-outs – direct and indirect use of US to developing researchers*)
7) What impact does Understanding Society have on collaborative or interdisciplinary work? *(PROBE - Can you provide any examples of where this has been achieved? How did USoc help to foster this work?)*
	To explore the importance of USoc for a range of users and the impact that it has

CONSEQUENCES OF LIFE WITHOUT UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY	30 minutes

8) What would be the consequences for you if Understanding Society did not exist? *(Probe for limitations around longitudinal analysis, challenges accessing specific variables needed, limitations around proposing complex research questions – causal pathways)*
    a. What other datasets would you be able to use?
    b. What functionality would alternative datasets offer you?
    c. Would alternative datasets allow you to do the required analysis?
	To explore the consequences of what not having USoc would be for research and impact

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	Purpose/Time

d. Would your scientific conclusions be weakened without Understanding Society, and if so, how? (*PROMPT – smaller sample sizes, fewer variables, inability to measure change over time*)
 	
9) What would the impact of not having access to Understanding Society be on …
    a. Advancing knowledge and scientific methods (PROMPT – e.g. developing new theories, promoting intra- and inter-disciplinary working)
    b. Achieving economic and societal impacts (PROMPT – e.g. informing public policy, increasing awareness, achieving economic benefits)
    c. Increasing Skills base (PROMPT – e.g. Increasing academic and non-academic skills, quantitative capacity, teaching)	

CONCLUSIONS	5 minutes
10) Are there any further comments that you would like to add to this focus group?	

Linking Understanding Society to other datasets

This is the topic guide to be used for the focus group exploring experiences of linking Understanding Society to other datasets.

Topic Guide

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	Time
INTRODUCTION – ALL PARTICIPANTS	10 minutes
1) Introduction – outline the purpose of the session 2) To begin, it would be helpful if you could briefly introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about your work with Understanding Society. [*Limit to 1-minute per participant*]	To help contextualise experiences
USE OF LINKED DATASETS	30 minutes

3) What datasets linked to Understanding Society do you use? (*PROMPT – linked datasets include to NPD in England and Education record in Scotland; DVLA data; and geographical data via LSOA, constituency, Local education authorities and primary care trusts*)
    a. Can you provide some examples of projects that you have linked?
4) Why do you choose to use these linked datasets?
    a. What benefit does this have for your projects? (*PROMPT - increased data use, improvement in quality and quantity of data, more trusted/robust data, more collaborative working, increased capacity – development of technical skills*)
    b. What would be the consequences of not being able to use the linked datasets?
5) What is the process of using the linked datasets?
    a. Have you experienced any problems with using the linked datasets?
    b. What could help to overcome any issues with the linked datasets? *Support/training?*
6) Are there any other datasets that having Understanding Society linked to that would be valuable? *Why would this be valuable? What would the impact of this be on your work?*
7) Rather than using the linked datasets, do you conduct any linking to aggregate level information, such as IMD or local unemployment rates? *Why do you do this? What does this mean for the quality of your research? What does it enable you to do?*
	To explore how datasets are linked and in which ways
	
	Benefits of linking

IMPACT OF LINKING DATASETS	30 minutes
8) What is the impact of using linked datasets, on: (*can you provide examples*) a. **Academic knowledge** (*PROMPT – shift in understanding, advancing scientific method, development of theories, promoting intra and inter-disciplinary working*)	To explore impact of linking on

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	Time
b. **Economic and societal impacts** (*PROMPT – development of public policy, improved organisational knowledge, economic benefits – growth/productivity, societal benefits – increased awareness, improved health/wellbeing*) c. **Increased capacity** (*PROMPT – increased/improved academic and professional skills base – e.g. Quantitative capacity or innovative methods, spin-outs – direct and indirect use of US to developing researchers*) 9) Are there any further impacts that linking datasets allows you to produce? (*PROMPT - Any specific examples of impactful outputs using linked data?*)	different areas
CONCLUSIONS	5 minutes
10) Are there any further comments that you would like to add to this focus group?	

Advancing Methodological Innovation

This topic guide will be used to explore how Understanding Society is used to develop quantitative skills capacity, promote methodological innovation and new ways of thinking about social issues.

Topic Guide

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	Time
INTRODUCTION – ALL PARTICIPANTS	10 minutes
1) Introduction – outline the purpose of the session 2) To begin, it would be helpful if you could briefly introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about your work with Understanding Society. [*Limit to 1-minute per participant*]	To help contextualise experiences
DEFINING METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATION AND HOW USOC SUPPORTS THIS	15 minutes

3) What do you understand by methodological innovation? What does this mean to you and how you conduct research? *(PROMPT – new types of research questions, new concepts, generating different/new methods, promoting news ways to analyse data, used of existing theoretical approaches/methods in reformed/mixed/applied ways)*
 4) How does interdisciplinary research link to methodological innovation? *(PROMPT – adapting methods from other disciplines to social sciences, transferring methods)*
 5) How does using Understanding Society promote methodological innovation? *(PROMPT – Explore extent to which engaging with USoc promotes generation of new research questions, new methods, new ways of analysing data, advancing theoretical concepts)*
    a. What specific methods has Understanding Society enabled to be used? *Provide examples*
    b. What barriers are presented by using Understanding Society to explore new research questions/new methods? *PROMPT – Fear of making mistakes, complexity, time to learn analysis*
    c. How does Understanding Society allow you to approach research areas differently?
 6) To what extent are innovative methodologies from using USoc accidental or deliberate?
 7) Are there any examples where Understanding Society has tested or challenged existing paradigms, and has led to a shift in understanding about a particular issue?
	To explore what innovation with USoc means

IMPACT OF UNDERSTANDING SOCIETY ON INNOVATIVE METHODOLOGIES	30 minutes
8) What impact have innovative methodologies arising from using Understanding Society had on:	To explore the impact of

a. **Academic knowledge** (*PROMPT – shift in understanding, advancing scientific method, development of theories, promoting intra and inter-disciplinary working*) b. **Economic and societal impacts** (*PROMPT – development of public policy, improved organisational knowledge, economic benefits – growth/productivity, societal benefits – increased awareness, improved health/wellbeing*) c. **Increased capacity** (*PROMPT – increased/improved academic and professional skills base – e.g. Quantitative capacity or innovative methods, spin-outs – direct and indirect use of US to developing researchers*) 9) How does Understanding Society aid methodological capacity? 10) To what extent does using Understanding Society help you to gain confidence to try new things and explore new ideas?	USoc and innovation
CONCLUSIONS	5 minutes
11) Are there any further comments that you would like to add to this focus group?	

The Innovation Panel

This is the topic guide to be used for the focus group exploring experiences of using the Innovation Panel, together with the processes involved and the benefits and impact of this for researchers and organisations.

Topic Guide

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	Time
INTRODUCTION – ALL PARTICIPANTS	10 minutes
1) Introduction – outline the purpose of the session 2) To begin, it would be helpful if you could briefly introduce yourselves and tell us a little bit about your work with Understanding Society. [*Limit to 1-minute per participant*]	To help contextualise experiences and tailor subsequent questions
USE OF THE INNOVATION PANEL	30 minutes
3) How did you find out about the Innovation Panel? 4) Why did you choose to apply for a study to be included in the Innovation Panel? [*PROMPT – Was it to test out new social science questions – if so on what topic? Test new method/procedure; note that IP Wave 12 focused on biomarker and medical measures) – If appropriate probe further with Q9*] 5) What does having a study in the Innovation Panel offer that is not possible elsewhere? [*PROMPT – range of variables, richness/depth of data, methods used, robustness, high quality data, enables different analytical models; timeliness of research*] 6) What was the process of applying like? *Could someone talk me through the process of applying?* 7) What support was available when you worked to have your study in the Innovation Panel? 8) Is it possible to link to other datasets from the Innovation Panel? *How can this help your work? Examples of doing this?*	To explore what Innovation Panel offers users and the practicalities of using it
IMPACTS OF THE INNOVATION PANEL	30 minutes

9) What did using the Innovation Panel for your study enable you to achieve?
    a. Has there been an impact on enabling quantitative capacity? How? What impacts has this had for your work?
    b. Has it helped interdisciplinary/collaborative work? How? What impacts has this had for your work?
10) What impact has the use of the Innovation Panel had on:
    a. **Academic knowledge** (*PROMPT – shift in understanding, advancing scientific method, development of theories, promoting intra and inter-disciplinary working*)
    b. **Economic and societal impacts** (*PROMPT – development of public policy, improved organisational knowledge, economic benefits –*
	To explore perceptions of impact from use of Innov Panel

Questions (*Prompts are identified in italics, and these will be used as necessary to guide the discussion*)	Time
growth/productivity, societal benefits – increased awareness, improved health/wellbeing) c. **Methodological capacity** (*PROMPT – increased/improved academic and professional skills base – e.g. Quantitative capacity or innovative methods, spin-outs – direct and indirect use of US to developing researchers*) 11) Are there any limitations of using the Innovation Panel? (*PROBE - Cross-sectional moment-in-time data collection?*) a. How could these limitations be overcome?	
CONCLUSIONS	5 minutes
12) Are there any further comments that you would like to add to this focus group?	