

# Appendix A: COSMO Schools survey

A school staff survey was originally planned as part of COSMO. The intention had been to recruit a sample of staff members with good knowledge of the Year 11 group in the 2020–2021 academic year drawn from the same schools where young people (and their parents) were sampled to participate in the main part of the study. Fieldwork was planned for the Autumn 2021 school term (October–December 2021).

However, despite extensive attempts to recruit staff to the survey using both telephone and web-based approaches, the fieldwork for this survey was adversely affected by school staff shortages and increased workload in schools during the pandemic, which led to a decision to drop this element of the study.

This chapter covers a brief description of the fieldwork methods used, together with the challenges encountered.

## 1.1 Original fieldwork plan (telephone survey)

The original plan was to conduct a 30-minute telephone survey of school staff drawn from the same schools that were used to draw the parent and pupil sample. Therefore, the issued sample included the 460 schools that formed the original issue NPD school sample<sup>1</sup> (see Chapter 2) together with the 33 schools recruited as part of the independent school sample (see Chapter 7).

The questionnaire was focussed on the challenges faced by schools during the pandemic covering the period March 2020 to July 2021, with a focus on the cohort of students who were in Year 11 during the 2020–21 academic cycle.

The questionnaire<sup>2</sup> covered the following broad topics:

- Classification of staff member (job title, responsibilities)
- In-person attendance levels during school lockdowns (for example for vulnerable pupils and children of key workers who were still eligible to attend) and the challenges associated with managing this
- Ability to deliver the planned curriculum to Year 11 during lockdown periods and remote learning resources used
- Extent of problems experienced by students trying to access remote learning, for example due to digital exclusion

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<sup>1</sup> Schools selected as part of the reserve sample were not in scope

<sup>2</sup> Available on request from the research team at UCL, please email [cosmostudy@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:cosmostudy@ucl.ac.uk)

- School and bubble closures after schools re-opened (during the periods September to December 2020 and March to July 2021)
- Level of student absence due to COVID-19 during these periods
- COVID-19 safety protocols at the school (one-way systems, school zones or bubbles, staggered start times, and so on)
- Measures put in place to allow students affected by the pandemic to catch up, for example, use of tutors and additional catch-up lessons
- Barriers and challenges to enabling students to catch up on lost learning due to the pandemic
- Staff absences and shortages incurred due to COVID-19 during the 20–21 academic year
- How GCSE assessments (in place of normal GCSEs) were managed in Summer 2021 and how these were assessed

Fieldwork was launched in early October 2021. Letters and emails sent to the 493 schools in the issued sample. Depending on the contact information available<sup>3</sup>, correspondence was sent to headteacher and also the Head of Year 11.

The CATI survey included a screener section where the interviewer sought the most appropriate person to speak to about the school survey. Interviewers were instructed to speak to *'a staff member who has good knowledge of students who were in Year 11 during the last 2020–21 academic year. For example, Head of Year 11, Deputy Head of Year 11, or another senior staff member with good knowledge of that year group'*.

As part of the screener stage, there was an option to trigger an email to be sent to a staff member who had not previously received this; this covered the same information as the advance letter/emails.

Following a briefing with the telephone interviewers, CATI fieldwork started on 5<sup>th</sup> October 2021.

The Horizons survey website included a bespoke section for staff to access information about the schools survey including FAQs, signposting to further contacts, and the survey privacy notice.

## 1.2 Impact of COVID-19 on telephone survey fieldwork

The telephone survey ran from 5 October to 31 October 2021.

Unfortunately, interviewers found it very difficult to achieve interviews during this period for the following reasons:

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<sup>3</sup> In advance, we conducted a manual web search to add relevant staff names where we could find these.

- The staff members targeted for recruitment were usually teaching or engaged in other activities and interviewers were not usually able to speak to them directly. This meant that most contact about the survey was delivered via non-direct channels such as voicemail and email which were rarely responded to.
- A lack of direct telephone numbers meant that contact generally needed to be channelled via the school reception which was often unstaffed, especially out of normal school hours and during break/lunch periods.
- It was often the case that gatekeepers/receptionists did not know staff schedules and therefore were unable to suggest a suitable time for interviewers to make contact with relevant staff members.
- The length of interview was a barrier – at 30 minutes this would usually take up the majority of a school break/lunch period. Although attempts were made to make appointments for after school, this proved challenging.
- Where an appropriate staff member was identified, this would often be a senior staff member such as Head of Year 11 who interviewers found difficult to make contact with due to their busy schedules.
- More generally, schools were continuing to deal with the challenges associated with the pandemic, including managing staff and student absences and remote learning, and administering lateral flow testing and other health and safety procedures.

As a result of these challenges, a decision was made to halt telephone fieldwork on 31 October 2021 and to trial a CAWI approach instead – see below.

## 1.3 Web-based fieldwork

Given the challenges set out above, an online (CAWI) survey was set up in the hope that this would provide more flexibility for staff to complete the survey. In addition, the survey length was cut from 30 minutes to 15–20 minutes to reduce burden.

The CAWI survey was launched on 26 November 2021. Letters and emails inviting staff to participate in a web survey were posted and emailed to Head teachers, who were asked in the letter/email to forward the invitation to another relevant suitable staff member where necessary. Staff members were provided with a unique login and password to be entered on the schools' survey website. The website also included access to information such as FAQs, Privacy Notice etc.

Correspondence to schools also stated that the research team would make a charity donation to the charity Mind on behalf of all participating schools to thank them for their participation.

However, despite significant efforts to make contact with schools online, response rate continued to be very poor. Poor response was thought to be related to difficulty in

ensuring that letters and emails reached a relevant staff member who was eligible to complete the survey. In addition, web fieldwork also coincided with the peak phase of the Omicron virus and Plan B restrictions, during a period where schools were continuing to deal with extra workload caused by staff shortages, remote learning provision and catch-up activities.

Overall, despite significant efforts to recruit school staff to this survey, the number of completed interviews across the CATI and CAWI survey was very low (33 in total), and as already noted a decision was made to close the survey at the end of 2021. It is noteworthy that a disproportionate number of schools who did participate (n=14) were from the independent sector, which may indicate that the challenges listed in sections 12.2 and 12.3 were mainly associated with state sector schools.