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# Chapter 2

## Questionnaires

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The English Housing Survey (EHS) collects data in two separate phases. In the first phase an interviewer visits a sampled address and conducts a face-to-face interview, using a questionnaire that is administered using computer assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). Following the interview a second phase of data collection occurs when, for a sub-sample of cases, a qualified surveyor visits the address to make an assessment of the fabric and condition of the home. The surveyor completes a detailed physical survey form using a digital pen.

### Overview

- 2.1 Each year the relevance of the data collected by the interview questionnaire and surveyor form is reviewed. Questions are revised if they are found to deliver poor quality data, or removed altogether if the information they elicit is no longer relevant to users' needs. In addition, established blocks of questions are periodically rotated in and out of the questionnaire. This makes room for the inclusion of new questions to capture data on emerging trends and new government policy.
- 2.2 The annual questionnaire review is led by the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) in consultation with the Department for Energy and Climate Change (DECC) and key survey users across both departments.
- 2.3 While the content of the physical survey has remained largely unchanged from the former English House Condition Survey (EHCS), the interview questionnaire has undergone more significant changes since its inception in 2008-09. More details on the content and annual review of the questionnaire and survey form are provided below.

### Interview questionnaire

- 2.4 A core set of questions is retained in the interview questionnaire each year. These questions cover:
  - household composition, ethnicity, nationality, economic status, education and health

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- household accommodation and length of residence
  - housing history and aspirations
  - rent and mortgage payments
  - satisfaction with landlord/attitudes to neighbourhood
  - income
- 2.5 These topics cover the key attributes of a household and the dwelling it resides in. The permanent inclusion of questions on these topics (with minimal change to the phrasing of the questions) ensures a consistent picture is provided over time.
- 2.6 The questionnaire also contains a number of rotating question sets which come in and out of the survey on an annual or biennial basis (or in some cases, less frequently). Topics covered in these modules include:
- second homes
  - fire and fire safety
  - satisfaction with the neighbourhood
  - work undertaken to improve energy efficiency of the home
  - adaptations made to the home to improve accessibility
  - tenancy deposits
- 2.7 The content of the interview survey is reviewed annually. In 2011-12, a fairly radical overhaul of the questionnaire was undertaken. This was driven by a significant reduction in funding and the consequent requirement to reduce the length of the questionnaire from 50 to 30 minutes. By comparison, changes to the interview questionnaire between 2011-12 and 2012-13 were relatively minor.
- 2.8 The main changes that were made to the 2012-13 questionnaire were:
- questions on second homes were rotated onto the questionnaire
  - questions on disability and adaptations to the home and tenancy deposits were rotated out of the questionnaire
  - wording changes were introduced to account for the fact that the questionnaire was no longer part of the Integrated Household Survey
  - more guidance to interviewers on a number of questions was built into the interviewer (CAPI) programme (accessed via an on-screen help facility). This included guidance on tenure and landlord, type of accommodation, mortgages and employment
  - questions on marital status and long-standing illness or disability were updated to reflect changes to Office for National Statistics (ONS) harmonised questions; questions on agency working were also included for the same reason
  - the question on highest education level was simplified

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- a number of other minor wording changes were made to improve comprehension of questions

2.9 The 2012-13 questionnaire covered the following topics:

- demographics: including age, sex, marital status, household reference person and household relationships
- accommodation
- tenure
- individual characteristics including nationality, country of birth, ethnicity, time at address, health and disability, education
- age of accommodation
- housing history
- subletting
- waiting lists (for social housing)
- rooms available to the household and shared facilities
- type of dwelling and household
- satisfaction with accommodation and neighbourhood
- access to vehicles
- council tax and utilities
- energy efficiency
- ownership type (i.e. leasehold or freehold)
- satisfaction with repairs and maintenance
- ownership details
- mortgages including type, payments and arrears
- tenancy type
- social renting details
- rent and housing benefit including payments and arrears
- number of tenancy agreements
- energy performance certificate
- fire safety
- second homes
- buying aspirations
- working status and job details
- economic status
- Income and earnings
- benefits
- income support and mortgage interest
- savings and investments

2.10 The full EHS 2012-13 questionnaire is published on the DCLG website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-housing-survey-questionnaires>.

2.11 In 2012-13, the median interview length including recruitment to the physical survey was 37 minutes. This length is calculated on full interviews only; partial

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interviews are excluded. A partial interview is when a substantial part of the interview is carried out (up to QBuyAsp.PlanTen) but the interview is stopped before the end is reached. There were two partial interviews in 2012-13

## Physical survey

- 2.12 The physical survey form is designed to collect facts and observations about the dwelling and its surroundings, and observations and judgements about the condition of the property and what would need to be done to remedy defects.
- 2.13 The content of the physical survey has remained largely unaltered from the former EHCS. Surveyors continue to record details of the nature and type of each dwelling; the presence and condition of facilities and services; the condition of the internal and external building fabric; the presence and condition of shared facilities and services in blocks of flats or on estates and an assessment of the environment in which the dwelling is located. Assessments are made of health and safety risks associated with the dwelling and these were extended in 2008-09.
- 2.14 The content of the physical survey is reviewed annually and new questions are added where appropriate to reflect, for example, changing technology, e.g. the presence of solar panels or wind turbines.
- 2.15 In 2011, as part of the major EHS review (see paragraph 2.7), BRE and DCLG undertook an extensive review to identify and recommend areas and options for reducing the scope and complexity of the physical survey. Following this review:
- redundant questions were removed (details below)
  - the separate HMO (house in multiple occupation) form was dropped with some questions added to section 7 of the main form
  - the number of directly measured housing health and safety rating system (HHSRS) hazards was reduced from ten to six; the others became extreme risks

As a result of these changes, the length of the physical survey was reduced by three pages and the number of questions/decisions was reduced by 253.

Specific questions that were removed included:

- for vacant homes whether the dwelling is boarded up (page 2)
- whether the dwelling is a permanent residence, a second home or a holiday home (page 2)
- whether walls have dry lining (page 3)
- separable units - whether the dwelling contains some form of separate accommodation with its own amenities (page 3)

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- the presence of specific kitchen amenities such as a washing machine and disrepair to secondary amenities actions (page 4)
  - household questionnaire section of the physical survey; toilets (operation of flush, leaks to bowl), whether problems with flooded drains, whether any professional/non-professional treatment has been undertaken where problems exist with rats and mice (page 8)
  - private entry stair – whether a flat has an internal or external staircase providing access to it but to no other flat (page 9)
  - contribution of specific criteria e.g. poor design, to problems of general condition to common areas, presence of refuse chutes, defects, rats and mice in common areas (page 10)
  - contribution of specific criteria e.g. poor design, to problems of general condition to shared facilities (page 12)
  - section on boundary walls (page 17)
  - whether blockage to underground drainage, situation of block (nature of the road on which the dwelling is located e.g. main road, side road) and ownership of the parking provision e.g. household, local authority (page 18)

The 2012-13 physical survey covered the following topics:

- amenities
- services, heating and energy
- construction
- measurement
- exterior and plot
- ageing elements
- Internal / external defects
- structural faults
- housing health and safety rating system
- pests
- drains
- common parts
- shared facilities
- flat construction and faults
- local area and environment

2.16 The full EHS 2012-13 physical survey form is published on the DCLG website: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/english-housing-survey-physical-surveys>