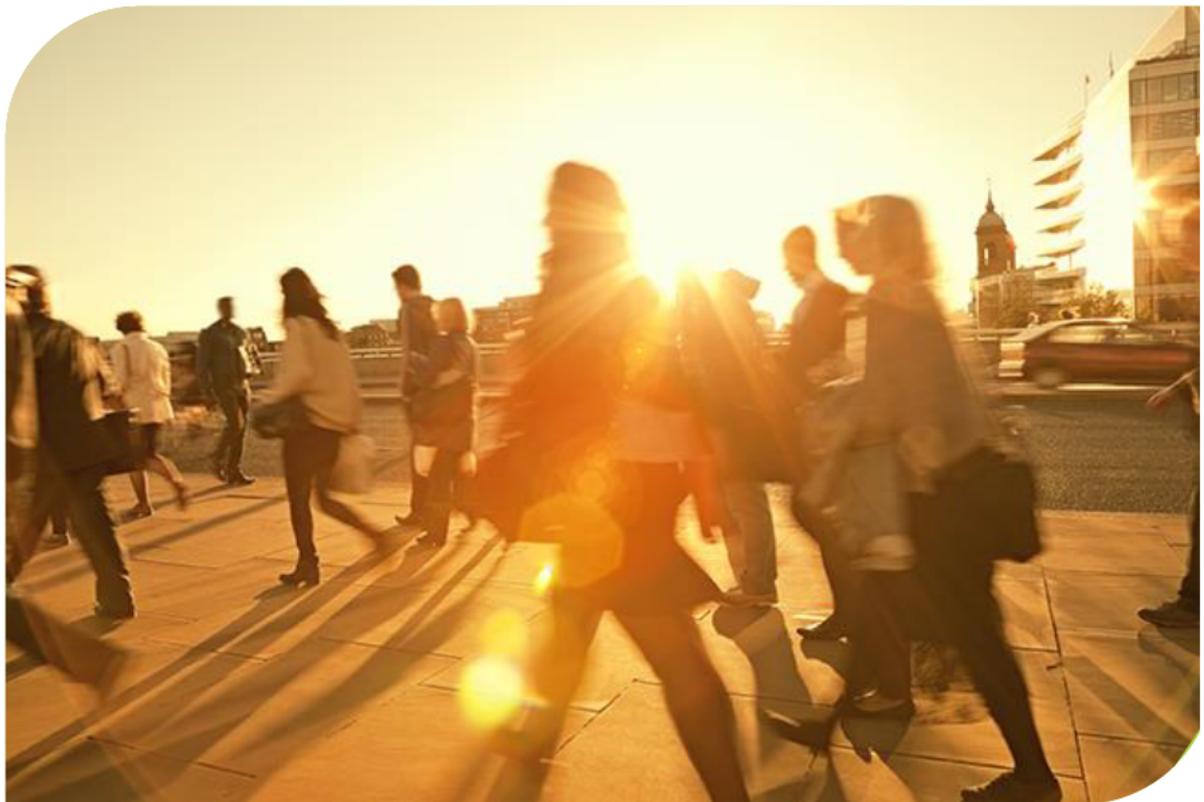


Scottish Employer Skills Survey 2020

Scottish Government

July 2020



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Management Summary

Introduction

The Employer Skills Survey provides the definitive picture on skills challenges faced by employers in Scotland. The survey serves as a primary source of skills-based LMI in Scotland. During a time of unprecedented change in the labour market during 2020 as a result of Covid-19, this will be more important than ever. The successful contractor will take a lead on sampling, questionnaire design, data reduction, data cleaning, weighting, production of data tables and the data file, and reporting. The research will build on previous waves of the study (last run in 2017 by IFF) and may incorporate new questions focused on Covid-19, it will be conducted to meet the ONS National Statistics Code of Conduct.

Credentials

IFF Research Ltd is one of the largest independent market research agencies in the country, and we have an unparalleled track record of research among employers on skills issues and on areas of public policy more generally.

- > We designed and conducted the Employer Skills Survey in 2011, 2013, 2015, and 2017 (all including Scotland), have led the 2019 ESS survey for DfE, and also led the Investment in Training Survey in these years. We also led the 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, and 2018 UK Employer Perspectives Survey (EPS), and the 2019 EPS in Scotland.
- > We are a full service agency with extensive trained home-telephone interviewer network (and on-site telephone centre).
- > We are accredited by MRS, IQCS and ISO 27001.

Methodology

The core methodology will be the close to the survey 2017 the survey will be conducted by telephone and will involve interviews with employers with a headcount of at least 2 people, across all sectors of the Scottish economy. The questionnaire will be reduced to 20 minutes and may include the option of new Covid-19 questions, it will be piloted before fieldwork. The survey will be structured to deliver findings which are representative within Scotland.

Deliverables



The core output will be a concise publishable report of findings from the survey of no longer than 50 pages in length. We will also produce comprehensive data tabulations, and microdata (delivered in SAS format) detailing all findings and accompanied by a data dictionary, and a Technical Report (which will include a summary of QA processes).

Fees



IFF's core fees will be [REDACTED]+VAT for a sample size of 2,200 interviews. This fee has been discounted reflecting our desire to work with you. The budget available for the work does present a challenge and precludes a larger sample size, we outline this in our proposals, and would be happy to discuss.

1 Understanding the requirement

We believe that IFF has unrivalled credentials for undertaking this project, having conducted the previous four iterations of the UK ESS which included Scotland (2011, 13, 15, and 17), as well the preceding Scottish Employer Skills Surveys, and the Scottish Employer Perspectives Survey 2019. On top of this we undertake very wide-ranging research into employment, skills and workforce development for clients such as the Scottish Government and Skills Development Scotland (SDS), Welsh Government, the Department for Education (DfE) and the DWP, alongside a host of other agencies and non-departmental public bodies. Recent work we have undertaken includes: employer and learner views of apprenticeships (SDS, BIS/DfE), employer planned responses to the apprenticeship levy (AELP, CITB and DfE), employer perceptions and experiences of Graduate Apprenticeships (SDS), employer views of T-levels (DfE), customer views of the National Careers Service (NCS), apprenticeship pay (DfE), regular work among schools and post-16 institutions on issues including work experience, careers advice and employer engagement (DfE), destinations of graduates (HESA), the extent and nature of skills mismatches (BEIS), and the impact of migration in construction (CITB).

The team that we have put forward for the project has a wealth of experience in the field. [REDACTED] and [REDACTED], who will direct the study, have been working in Learning and Skills research for a combined total of over 35 years. [REDACTED] [REDACTED] and also co-directed ESS 2017 (including Scotland), Scottish EPS 2019 and ESS 19 (excluding Scotland) with [REDACTED] who has been lead Director for ESS in 2011, 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2019. Our proposed project manager [REDACTED], and deputy-project manager [REDACTED] have been managing the 2019 ESS survey for the DfE.

Both the ESS and EPS have provided a rich body of evidence used widely for policy development. They provide definitive information on the extent and nature of skills needs and challenges faced by employers, their (training) response and their engagement with the skills system. Skills have long been recognised as a keen means to enhance productivity, enable greater social mobility and ensure prosperity. This is firmly acknowledged in the Future Skills Action Plan for Scotland published last year, which identifies skills as key driver of inclusive growth and productivity.¹

The ESS series is a key source of evidence used by a variety of policy teams within Scotland. Measures around skills shortages, skills gaps, recruitment of non-UK workers, upskilling and underutilisation form a key part of the Future Skills Action Plan. The National Performance Framework (NPF), which tracks progress towards National outcomes and shows progress across 81 measures², also includes the incidence of skills shortages, and skills underutilisation. The NPF notes these measure help to inform policy, planning and service delivery and delivery on Scotland's strategy priorities of improving productivity and Inclusive Growth.³ ESS also provides key data to support the activities of agencies including Skills Development Scotland (SDS), and the Scottish Funding Council, as well as performance and monitoring data as part of the Scottish STEM strategy.⁴

¹ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/future-skills-action-plan-scotland-evidence-analysis-annex/pages/1/>

² <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/>

³ <https://nationalperformance.gov.scot/index.php/measuring-progress/national-indicator-performance>

⁴ <https://www.gov.scot/publications/science-technology-engineering-mathematics-education-training-strategy-scotland/>

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

⁵http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/documents/briefingnote/wcms_738753.pdf

⁶<https://www.gov.scot/publications/future-skills-action-plan-scotland-evidence-analysis-annex/pages/4/>

⁷<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-skills-survey-2017-scotland-toolkit>

⁸<https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/46791/covid-19-labour-market-insights-16062020-v2.pdf>

⁹<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/coronavirus-job-retention-scheme-statistics-june-2020>

¹⁰<https://www.centreforcities.org/blog/what-does-the-covid-19-crisis-mean-for-the-economies-of-british-cities-and-large-towns/>

<https://www.centreforcities.org/blog/where-is-the-job-retention-scheme-keeping-jobs-on-life-support/>

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Alongside this, the project also offers an important opportunity to gauge employers labour market and skills needs as we emerge from the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. As we outline in our method, the scope for new questions are many and varied. Therefore it will be important as part of meeting this aim to understand which specific areas/new questions are of most interest to Scottish Government, work with you to refine these questions and identify options for their inclusion that give you the new evidence required, but similarly do not disrupt the flow of the existing questionnaire or time series.

In order to fully measure changes, and gain the fullest insight into employer views on skills shortages, skills gaps and training, it will be important that the questionnaire and methodology maintains consistency over time as far as is reasonable. The current proposal is for a 2020 study that maintains consistency with the 2017 ESS survey conducted in the UK, and it will therefore be important to balance the need for development vs. consistency. Delivering a survey that both maintains the previous timeseries, allows new questions to be asked, and also aligns with ESS developments in England, Northern Ireland and Wales will be critical to the success of the survey. If a methodology is delivered that is not robust, then there will be significant risks to data quality and the timeseries.

Whilst there are likely to be challenges to the delivery of the proposed project during the current time, these are not insurmountable. Key challenges for the project include:

- [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]

¹¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/employer-skills-survey-2017-scotland-toolkit>

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

The IFF team are passionate about both the ESS and EPS series, our Managing Director [REDACTED], and shareholders [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] have spent much of the last 20 years working on this series, and our Director [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] Our unwavering enthusiasm for these projects from the leadership of the company mean that you can be assured that we will work collaboratively with you through every step of development and go above and beyond to ensure this project meets your objectives.

We have been integral in developing the evolving shape of the ESS surveys, whether this be in the questionnaire design seeking to balance continuity over time with meeting emerging question needs, sampling strategies to balance representativeness with sufficient coverage of all parts of the employer population, fieldwork protocols to maximise response rates and ensuring high quality data collection, weighting strategies to minimise bias, and the delivery of reports which provide clear yet detailed analysis for different audiences.

Nobody knows the history and development of these surveys as well as our team, and the combined knowledge and shared history we have with the ESS/EPS series will ensure that we are able to provide the continuity of approach needed to maintain consistency with earlier versions of the study, as well as to identify and implement improvements and innovations to the survey. Significantly, we

have led the redevelopment of the 2019 ESS survey in the rest of the UK, and have been commissioned to lead the next study in 2021. We know what has been tried before and what is truly new; we know what has worked and what hasn't and what 'side effects' there have been. There is nothing like the first-hand experience that the IFF team can bring and we would welcome the opportunity to continue our work in this area.

2 Research design and methodology

Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to work with you on a Scottish version of the Employer Skills Survey, and develop the questionnaire and survey to ensure this key source of skills and labour market intelligence meets current needs. We bring to this project the ability to:

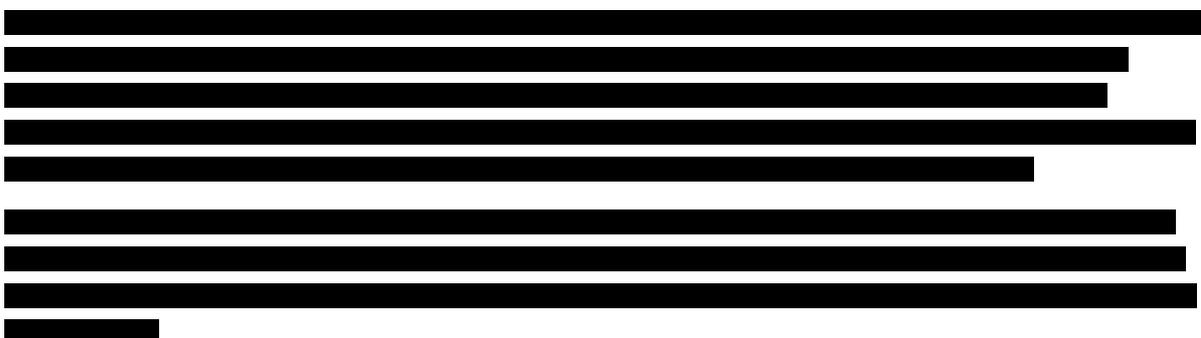
- **Hit the ground running** – we have unrivalled knowledge of the history behind the design of the UK Employer Skills Survey series, having conducted the UK ESS from 2011-2017 and the 2019 study (minus Scotland), and the Scottish Employer Skills Survey in 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2006 for Futureskills Scotland. We require no familiarisation period as we have been at the forefront of their development;
- Understanding of the **analytical opportunity** offered adding questions around COVID-19 to the existing survey, and can work with Scottish Government to maximise the insight that can be gained from this; and
- Offer unrivalled experience that can be used to **identify the challenges and potential pitfalls** around further development of the ESS series.

Population and sample design

Defining the survey population and selecting the sample source

We anticipate that the employer population which the survey will cover will remain as **establishments across all sectors of the economy with an employment headcount of at least two people**, matching the survey population in the last two waves. Establishments are eligible if they have two or more people on the payroll at the site, regardless of whether or not these individuals are proprietors or not, and excluding the self-employed, outside contractors and agency staff.

When selecting the **sample source** for any survey, a key requirement is the extent to which the sample is representative of the population being surveyed. A sample source with a lack of coverage relative to the population, or skewed coverage, will undermine the findings of the research.



When we have conducted ESS (and EPS) for the whole UK, the purchased lists have been supplemented with 'top-up' sample ordered direct from the ONS Inter-Departmental Business Register (IDBR). The IDBR top-up has been limited to a selection of SIC codes where either (1) analysis has shown that the commercial suppliers under-represent the business population, or (2) the absolute numbers of businesses in certain sectors or SIC codes are relatively low, thus requiring as much sample as possible to maximise the interviews that can be achieved. These two challenges

have arisen as a particular feature of the whole UK survey due to the large scale. If IDBR sample is drawn then sample requires telephone numbers to be looked up as it does not as standard have telephone numbers, the sample also tends to arrive later in fieldwork due to the longer lead in times completing an MRP application.

For the Scottish EPS 2019 as the sample size was lower than previous iterations of EPS and ESS (2,600 vs c.6,000 interviews), we reviewed the Market Location sample and it gave sufficient coverage of establishments without using the IDBR. We see no reason why this would have changed for the ESS 2019 and therefore propose not using IDBR (this also saves budget for telephone look ups as IDBR does not have good telephone number coverage).

In previous ESS and EPS, using a quota approach (though with a known quantity of sample drawn), sample has been ordered on an 8:1 ratio to the final number of interviews required in each cell of the sampling matrix (though in some quota cells, particularly establishments with 100 plus staff, this ratio is not possible due to oversampling of large employers and insufficient numbers in the available population).

It is worth noting that in ESS 2019 in one English region a random probability sampling (RPS) approach was adopted whereby once sample was selected it was all called to an agreed minimum number of times, rather than sample being withdrawn once quota targets had been reached. With the RPS approach, a lower (than the 8:1) sample ratio was used (with the sample worked harder). As a note, as we understand it, no decision has been made on whether ESS 2021 will use RPS or not.

Sample preparation, validation and distribution

Once received, the sample needs careful validation and checking. We believe that the processes and protocols that IFF has designed and adopted in previous waves of EPS and ESS remain suitable. Moreover, our knowledge and experience of applying these will allow us to apply the validation protocols quickly: which will be essential if the survey is to meet the demanding set-up timetable. Key checks include:

- [REDACTED]

Another consideration within this validation process is dealing with duplicate telephone numbers. Where these are found they will be examined on a manual, case by case basis. If they are exactly the same record (same number, same company name, same address) duplicates will be removed. As a

note the validation checks listed above will be done following this deduplication process. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Sample size

Within the budget outlined in the ITT, we are able to deliver 2,200 interviews (of average duration 20 minutes).

Stratifying the sample, setting quota targets and weighting the data

Throughout the course of the EPS/ESS series we have undertaken various reviews of sampling and weighting approaches and worked with our independent statistician to identify ways in which sampling / weighting efficiencies could be achieved. Having been lead contractor on all previous iterations we understand in detail the previous sampling and weighting strategies used for ESS (and EPS) and the historical decisions taken around their development. We have over the years balanced the need for consistency as well as evolution of the survey.

There is a tension in the design of all employer survey sampling approaches between the drive for “*natural representation*” and the need to allow analysis of differences between different sub-groups of employers. The tension derives from the uneven distribution of most employer populations, particularly the fact that micro employers form the vast bulk of the population but are relatively less important in employment terms, and also because of the wide variation in the size of each sector. The ESS sampling and weighting approach has to balance the need to provide both establishment and employment-based measures.

The ESS and EPS series has consistently adopted a tried and trusted sample design based on a modified probability proportionate to size (PPS) approach which intentionally over-samples (a) employers in smaller sectors (in an attempt to support discrete analyses within these sectors) and (b) larger employers, thereby maximising the proportion of the workforce covered by the survey. To oversimplify, this has involved allocating half the target interviews evenly to each sector, and half in proportion to the sector’s share of the total units. This ensures that more interviews are conducted in large sectors than small sectors, but that the target in small sectors is more than would occur if the sample was split strictly in proportion to the size of the sector. Within sector, the target is distributed to size band in proportion to employment across the sector. We suggest repeating this broad approach. (with interlocking size by sector quotas, and with ROA region being allowed to fall out naturally without specific targets).

IDBR population statistics will be used as the basis to stratify the business population. The IDBR is administered by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), which holds records of all businesses registered for VAT and all businesses operating a pay as you earn (PAYE) income tax scheme. The IDBR is widely regarded as being the most accurate and comprehensive ‘official’ source of business population data available, and was used for sampling and weighting in all previous editions of the Employer Skills Surveys. We will discuss and agree with the Scottish Government project manager the sampling approach and the specific quota targets that we plan to use prior to fieldwork commencing.

Weighting the data

ONS's IDBR population statistics will be used as the basis for weighting the survey data. IDBR is widely regarded as the most accurate and comprehensive "official" source of population data. Weighting will take account of geography (ROA areas), size and sector.

We anticipate that both a '**unit-based**' weight and an '**employment-based**' weights will be required for the survey. The unit-based weight is designed for analyses by the number or proportion of establishments; the employment-based weight is designed for use when analysing by number or proportion of employees (including volume measures of vacancies, skills gaps and numbers trained).

The aim of the weighting process is to ensure the findings are representative (e.g. that a sector, region or size band accounts for the correct proportion of the final weighted data set as found in the population). This can be a challenging process, particularly given the 6/7 sizebands, 13 ROAs and potentially 13 sectors. Weighting is not simply a mechanical process: in many ways it is an art as much as a science. [REDACTED]

Typically the weighting used for the ESS survey in Scotland has derived grossing weights on a 13 broad SIC sector and seven sizeband grid. The employment sizebands used are usually: 2-4, 5-9, 10-24, 25-49, 50-99, 100-249, 250+. Where any smaller sample sizes are achieved by cell, upper sizebands will be collapsed into a 100+ sizeband for weighting purposes.

Questionnaire development

Our knowledge of the ESS questionnaire history

We are confident that we have unrivalled knowledge and understanding of the questionnaire's history and origins (including why questions are asked the way they have been and why questions have changed over time) and this will enable us to undertake the required design and then testing within tight timescales. [REDACTED]

Our proposed team has been at the heart of the development of this series from both the contractor and commissioning side for the last ten years. This has included most recently IFF re-designing the ESS survey in 2019 to combine with questions from the EPS survey for DfE, Welsh Government and Northern Ireland Executive. Our experience also includes for example re-designing and harmonising the survey across the UK in 2010/11, [REDACTED] and implemented at IFF by [REDACTED] following a review of UK LMI [REDACTED] 2010)¹²; conducting expert reviews to consider the long-term options for EPS/ESS [REDACTED]

¹²https://dera.ioe.ac.uk/1294/1/Assessing%20the%20UK%20Evidence%20Base%20on%20Employment%20and%20Skills_1.pdf

[REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]



It is worth [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

There are a number of key metrics which ESS has always collected: the number and occupational pattern of skills-shortage vacancies and skill gaps, the proportion of employers funding or arranging training, the nature of the training they provide and the number of employees that benefit. We anticipate that if time series is required for key performance indicators, the survey should continue to collect these measures *in the same manner*. There are also a number of classification questions (firmographics) which are essential for quota management purposes and/or for data analysis purposes. In addition, there are a number of opening and closing questions / notices which are more or less mandated. Together, these questions account for more than three-quarters of the length of an average interview.

We also [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] Aside from the merging of EPS content (which is out of scope for this project), in terms of key developments of “core ESS” content these have included (but not limited to) for example:

- [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

We anticipate it will be helpful to review the list of 2019 amendments with Scottish Government at inception to understand whether these should similarly be in scope for questionnaire development for SESS 2020, and we could provide the full list in advance for your consideration.

Developing new questions

As discussed in the ITT, there is interest in adding questions that examine the skills related impacts of COVID-19 (as well as potential Scotland-specific questions). Clearly it is to be expected that the COVID-19 pandemic will affect all aspects of the topics covered by the ESS questionnaire, from company size through to their demand for skills, current recruitment activity and the amount of training they are providing. For this reason there are clearly multiple question areas that could be covered under the heading ‘skills related COVID-19 questions’, though a key challenge is fitting these in within a suitable questionnaire length.

The ITT indicates that ‘Tenderers should note that the Scottish Government and the RAG will develop a draft set of new Scotland specific and / or skills related COVID-19 questions for discussion with the appointed contractor at the inception meeting.’ For this reason we do not suggest here potential questions, though we imagine there will be particular interest in whether they are particular skills that have become more important as a result of (or perhaps just since) COVID-19. We do believe, however, that we are well placed to provide feedback on these draft questions based on our experience of designing, testing and asking skills-related questions on ESS and many other surveys, as well as more general, extensive of undertaking business-to-business studies.

Piloting

Once we have agreed a draft of the questionnaire with you, the questionnaire will be piloted. This involves administering the questionnaire exactly as it will be for mainstage fieldwork. As well as allowing us to conduct a further check on the comprehension of the questions and the flow of the interview, the pilot also gives us the opportunity to monitor response patterns and the overall interview length.

The pilot study will involve 25 interviews over 2-3 days. The interviewers will receive a briefing to advise them of the background and objectives of the study, on whose behalf it is being conducted, how details have been sourced, etc. The research team will listen in to interviews to assess any areas where respondents have difficulty understanding a question or with the available answer codes (e.g. where they asked for clarification, or where there are high levels of ‘don’t know’ answers), the flow and order

of the questionnaire, whether there are areas where the questionnaire felt repetitive, and any areas where the interviewers had difficulties administering the questionnaire. We will also run an SPSS file of the pilot data to look for unusual responses (e.g. small employers with very large number of hard to fill vacancies), and we can go back to these specific recordings to see if there were any apparent misunderstandings.

We will also conduct an interviewer debrief to draw on their expertise, gaining feedback on where they believe there were issues or difficulties, and where improvements might be possible.

We will produce a short (c 4-5 page) report discussing the conduct of the pilot and highlighting recommendations for any improvements (and the reasons why these changes are being proposed) – these will focus particularly on new question areas. Clearly an important part will be reporting the average interview length.

Scripting and testing of the pilot and main stage questionnaire

We will script the telephone questionnaire in IBM's Dimensions Data Collection software, one of the most common software systems used by UK research providers.

The IFF scripting will be undertaken by one of our senior Data Services team who has worked on previous ESS (we have a team of five programmers, three have been involved in previous ESS/EPS scripting and the three have worked at IFF for a mean average of 16 years). We will use the 2017 script (which IFF programmed as the basis for the 2019 ESS script), thereby reducing the potential for errors in the script and reducing fees).

Once programmed for CATI it is vital that the questionnaire is then thoroughly tested. We have tried and tested systems and protocols for this. [REDACTED]

Changes will be sent back to the programming team, and then the questionnaire re-checked. Researchers are thoroughly trained on what to look for in this script checking phase. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] A lot of time is spent going through the questionnaire script answering in different ways to test the full range of routing within the questionnaire.

In addition dummy data will be run through the script into an SPSS file. This is very useful for checking the routing and if the right number of people are answering each question (it is particularly useful where the routing depends on a combination of their previous responses).

We trust that we have demonstrated through delivery of the previous iterations of the survey that we have all the requisite skills to script a complex survey such as ESS.

Fieldwork processes

Interviewer recruitment

IFF benefits from [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This means we envisage no need for any interviewer recruitment for this study, and this brings great advantages of our being able to draw on a team of experienced interviewers, indeed primarily those who have worked on previous ESS and EPS studies. The homeworking approach also greatly reduces any COVID-19 risks in the sense of no impacts of the office/call centre becoming closed if any outbreak was to occur.

Interviewer training and briefing

Our telephone interviewers benefit from a highly developed process that covers initial recruitment and training, through to ongoing and continuous supervision, monitoring and coaching by a team of 30 Team Leaders with a combined 100 years' experience). All of IFF's interviewing work has been accredited to the Interviewing Quality Control Scheme (IQCS), the industry's benchmark for quality since 1978. However, our desire to provide excellence means that our interviewer recruitment, training and quality standards are higher:

- Our initial training begins with a multi-stage recruitment process that encompasses both in-house Assessment Sessions through to live working trials; and
- New and experienced interviewers may from time-to-time require further or refresher training (generic or project specific) and we run a number of bespoke programmes to enhance existing interviewer skills with regards to survey introductions, refusal handling, outcome coding, probing and verbatim recording.

For SESS 2020 fieldwork briefings involve:

- All interviewers will receive a c. two-hour face-to-face briefing via Zoom to advise them of the background and objectives of the study, on whose behalf it is being conducted, how details have been sourced and all other pertinent points drafted from discussions with Scottish Government, as well as our internal team meetings. Written notes will be provided to interviews highlighting key points;
- IFF briefings will be conducted by the research team and will include a detailed run-through of all survey questions. Screenshots of the CATI script will also be used to guide interviewers through the more complex questions, such as allocating employees to occupational categories. Members of the Scottish Government research team are always welcome to attend and indeed contribute to this briefing; and
- Interviewers will then spend a minimum of an hour running through the test version of the CATI programme and will be able to raise questions or seek clarification on any matter, prior to making their first live call.

Monitoring and quality assurance (for IFF interviewing)

We conduct rigorous quality control procedures overseen by our full-time Telephone Centre Manager, [REDACTED], who designs, monitors and reports the quality control systems and procedures for each survey. He is supported by a team of Team Leaders who listen in and assess the work of the interviewers.

We have refined IQCS minimum standards in a number of ways to ensure quality control is not merely a paper exercise but leads to real improvements in interviewing. This includes:

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

In terms of our general approach to fieldwork management and to monitoring progress, the Field Project Control team will send the research team a daily report which provides summary field information and details of any issues that have arisen during the shift.

Response rates

A multitude of factors have led to average response rates declining across the market research industry. We have developed systems and practices to ensure that our surveys continue to buck this wider trend. We believe there are a number of key steps to help maximise the response rate to the survey. These are:

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

We would expect the response rate to match that in ESS 2017 if the interview length is 20 minutes in length. There has been a clear pattern of response rates lowering as survey length increases - in 2011 the average interview took 25 minutes and a response rate of 39% was achieved. In 2013 the length was reduced to 22 minutes which returned an improved response rate of 44%. In 2015 the interview increased to 23 minutes and the response rate lowered to 42%. Most recently we reached a 41% response rate for ESS 2019, and 44% for the Scottish EPS 2019.

Clearly COVID-19 presents a number of challenges for fieldwork among employers particularly regarding response rates. These arise basically as a result of a) respondents being at home and hence it being harder to get hold of people (office landlines not being answered etc.) b) businesses have shut down on a temporary basis and c) research being considered a lower priority than in normal times as they face other, more existential challenges.

In fact in practice we have not found that business response rates have been adversely affected. While challenge a) above has been encountered, this has just meant a little more work than usual getting hold of the individuals. We have found willingness to take part in government studies higher than normal with employers keen to talk about the challenges they are facing, and in this light it will be important to stress how the information being collected will be important for the future planning of training and skills to help business growth.

Of course, we do expect to encounter more employers than normal to no longer be operating. This information will be recorded. This will not affect response rates as such (as we normally report these on the base of valid contacts e.g. excluding dead telephone lines and businesses that are no longer operating. It does mean a lower conversion rate however (more sample required for each interview).

Reporting and other deliverables

We see the key outputs / deliverables as being:

- Data tables, in excel. We note the requirements for a contents page with hyperlinks, and a page of explanatory notes to aid interpretation (e.g. explaining the significance testing used);
- Anonymised data in SPSS (saved and delivered to Scottish Government in SAS), both a full set for Scottish Government, and a reduced set for the UK Data Archive;
- A report of the findings (which will be submitted as an official statistics release);
- A technical report which details all key aspects of the survey design from sampling and questionnaire design, through to fieldwork process and response rates, to data reduction and weighting, and quality assurance; and
- A presentation of the survey results.

All data outputs (tables and SPSS/SAS) will be produced in house by our experienced data services team to specifications agreed with Scottish Government. We discuss in Chapter 5 our quality assurance processes for checking the accuracy of these outputs.

The report is perhaps the key survey output, at least the highest profile. We discuss our approach to report design, writing and quality assurance in Chapter 3 in the section 'Reporting and quality assurance of written outputs.' To summarise, key aspects include: discussion with Scottish Government regarding the length and content of the report; a detailed draft report structure then being provided as to the key sections, tables and charts; only once this is produced will the team start writing. We provide extensive details in Chapter 3 of our experience of writing insightful, clear and accurate reports for our public sector clients, and in Chapter 5 of our processes to ensure the accuracy of the data presented in reports, and the quality of our reports. We welcome the idea discussed in the ITT of a concise report, and have costed on the basis of a 50-page report.

We welcome the opportunity to present the findings to RAG and wider stakeholders . We will discuss and agree the presentation structure and content with the Scottish Government project manager, and then provide a detailed draft structure. The presentation structure and content will depend on such issues as the desired duration for the presentation, the level of detail required (e.g. regional analysis), the interest in longitudinal comparisons, and in comparisons against the rest of the UK. Once this is agreed we will draft the presentation slides, and deliver these at an agreed point prior to delivery to allow Scottish Government to comment and feedback on these. We will supply a version with speaker notes so that they can be used for your own dissemination to other audiences.

We have assumed in our costing that the presentation will take place remotely (by Zoom, or similar alternative). It will be delivered by the senior team, including Directors.

The deliverables described above relate to final outputs, but there will be a series of other outputs during the course of the research including: an inception report; a paper on the sampling approach with details of the proposed quotas; a detailed timetable and risk register, updated and re-issued during the course of the study; a short pilot report; and regular progress reports.

Ethics

It is critical that any research we undertake meets the necessary ethical standards our clients and our own internal processes demand. All our research is conducted in accordance with the five principles of research ethics, as set out by the Government Social Research unit (GSR) and the Social Research Association's Ethical Guidelines. We have outlined in Chapter 4 on "Project management, risk assessment and ethics" below our approach to these principles and specific considerations relating to SESS 2020.

For brevity we have not repeated these considerations in full in this section, however it is worth highlighting considerations around personal and social harm. For this research we would ordinarily not anticipate that the topics being covered are sensitive in nature, and therefore ordinarily would expect the risks around personal harm are likely to be minimal given the research is focused on employers and their skills challenges. *However* we will need to be mindful that during current times if an employer has found operating has been a struggle, this may evoke emotions, stress and sensitivities when they are asked questions about their establishment, particularly if questions around COVID-19 are added. It is therefore still important for employers to understand that answering any particular questions is voluntary and they can stop or reschedule the interview at any time. Our interviewers are trained to respond appropriately to respondents becoming upset, and this will be included as a key briefing point ahead of fieldwork commencing.

We will monitor through both the pilot, and during mainstage fieldwork, in close collaboration with our field team whether any parts of the questionnaire are causing undue distress to respondents. This will be flagged with Scottish Government and appropriate action taken, if required, to modify the questionnaire. Additionally we will ensure this is an area of focus during QC to ensure interviewers are responding to respondents appropriately if and when any issues arise, and any feedback/best practice is shared and disseminated across the field team.

We would additionally suggest Scottish Government work with us to ensure we have an information / support sheet to be given to the employer with contact details for any relevant business support organisations, this would be helpful to discuss at inception if there are any sources of advice we can include.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

IFF's experience extends well beyond the research team. Importantly there would be continuity within the data services team who will be responsible for the vital roles of drawing and managing the

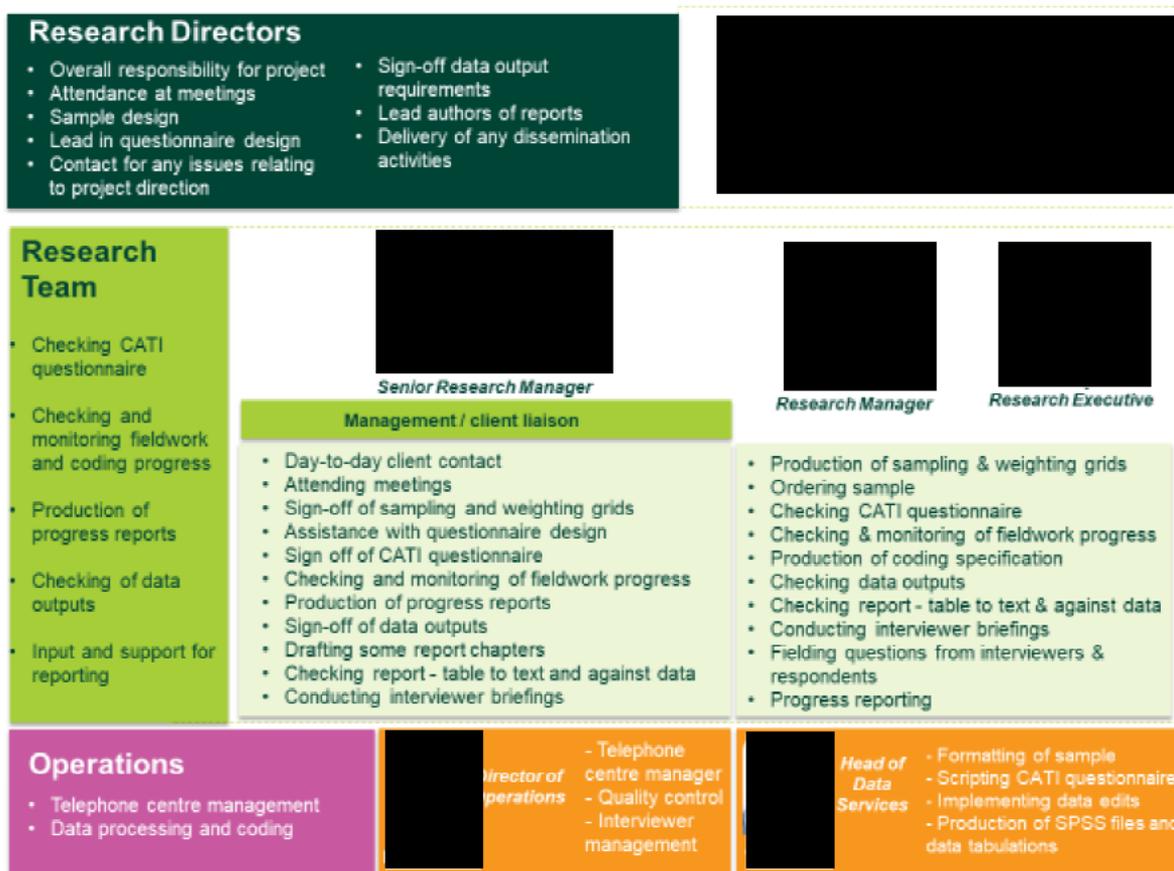
sampling, CATI script writing, data merging and producing the SPSS and tables outputs: headed up by [REDACTED], three members of the team have worked on all previous ESS studies. [REDACTED], **Director**, who has worked at IFF for [REDACTED] years, will oversee the work through field: he too has worked on all previous UKESS and EPS surveys.

The following table and diagram highlights key responsibilities of members of the core project team:

Person	Key Responsibilities
[REDACTED], <i>Directors</i>	Overall responsibility for project (Genna is overall contract manager); Sampling and technical design; Questionnaire design; Report authors; Contact for any issues relating to project direction; Genna will be the designated quality assurer for written outputs.
[REDACTED], <i>Senior Research Manager (Project Manager)</i> [REDACTED], <i>Research Manager (Designated Deputy)</i>	Day-to-day client contact (including progress reporting); Design sampling frames / weighting grids; Sign off of CATI questionnaire programming; Interviewer briefing Specifying and checking data outputs; Sign off codeframes; Specifying quality control issues to QC co-ordinator; Report writing.
[REDACTED], <i>Senior Research Executive,</i> [REDACTED], <i>Research Executive</i>	Checking CATI questionnaire; Checking and monitoring of fieldwork and coding progress; Progress reporting; Production of coding specification, coding briefing and coding QC; Production of interviewer briefing materials; First checking of data outputs; Fielding questions from interviewers and respondents; Charting for reports, and figure check of reports.
[REDACTED], <i>Director of Interviewing Services</i>	Overseeing the conduct of the fieldwork (including our having a suitable number and quality of interviewers and field controllers).
[REDACTED], <i>Data Services Manager</i>	Direction of a team of six people responsible for formatting of sample for CATI; Scripting survey questionnaire for CATI; Implementation of data edits; Data merging; Production of SPSS files and data tabulations.

The planned days for the research team (for the 'core' element of the survey, i.e. excluding additional questionnaire length) are as follows:

[REDACTED]						
Days	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]	[REDACTED]



Team resilience under COVID-19

We have proposed a core team of six experienced researchers including two directors to undertake the study. This size of team provides more than sufficient cover to the extent that the short-term illness / absence of any one or two of these staff could be managed within this core team of six.

If there is longer term absence / illness of any of these staff (through COVID-19 or any other reason) more could easily be added from our research team of 60 staff, among whom there is ample capacity to take on additional work. This includes a number of staff that have worked on previous ESS and EPS studies (including a number of directors), and many that specialise in large quantitative employer surveys. As noted elsewhere in our proposals we also have a large interviewing team to draw on, the majority of these usually work from home in locations across the UK and it is unlikely that significant numbers will be absent through illness at any one time. We note in our risk registers in the project management and business continuity sections of our proposals mitigations we have in place for resourcing.

Reporting and quality assurance of written outputs

IFF has dozens of research reports published for our public sector clients each year, including in the last 18 months for Scottish Government, Welsh Government, DfE, DWP, HMRC, CMA, CITB and many others. We would be happy to supply a list of these (and links to many can be found on IFF's website).

These vary widely in style depending on the nature of the specific research project and the client requirements. Previous reports for ESS have clearly been very long and detailed, including annexes of tables of findings, and have been written very much from the perspective of producing a report that

is something of a reference document rather than something to be read from cover to cover. Other reports we produce are much shorter and punchier, and designed with more of a narrative thread. For example, one we delivered to CITB in June 2020 examining the plans of construction employers regarding apprenticeship recruitment and retention (a quantitative research study involving 185 interviews), was 15 pages long, including the Executive Summary.

We welcome the opportunity to deliver a concise report. The ITT indicates a desire for it to be shorter than the recent one we wrote for Scottish EPS 2019, which was 115 pages excluding supplementary tables. We would need to work backwards to agree the desired length and then to work out how this can be achieved. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Clearly these are quite challenging decisions, and these will need to be made in discussion with Scottish Government. Once the length has been agreed we will then produce a detailed report structure including details of the content and the tables within each chapter.

We suggest working towards aiming for a report of 50 pages, and have costed on this basis.

We propose that instead of supplementary tables being provided in the word report as an annex, we provide a simplified excel set of tables (for all questions or ideally key questions) that could be published on the Scottish Government website. By simplified we mean that they would just show for example size, sector and region as cross-breaks.

Quality assurance of the reports and presentations

Chapter 2 outlines the methodology and key phases of the reporting process. It is of critical importance that all reporting outputs are fully quality assured. [REDACTED] will have overall responsibility for this element of our delivery (and give the draft and final report final sign off). [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

An important element in the delivery of timely, accurate, quality assured reports is that they are delivered internally with sufficient time for the director to undertake our quality assurance processes. This involves the Directors having early discussions with the team (during the data reduction phase) assigning report writing tasks to specific members of the team (i.e. who will lead each chapter, who will support that person, who will be producing the tables and charts within the report, who will be undertaking figure checks etc.). We will also discuss the resource (days) we expect those tasks to take, and indicate when we expect them to be started and delivered. In weekly team catch ups we will discuss progress against these to ensure they are all on track for the internal delivery of the first draft (and subsequent revisions when they are returned to the chapter authors). We believe these processes have worked well, and we pride ourselves on our ability to deliver complex yet accurate reports within the timescales agreed with the client.

IFF recognises the importance of its role as a producer of official statistics. As per the requirements of producers of statistics in the Code of Practice for Statistics:¹³

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

The same approaches and processes apply for the content and delivery of presentations. They will be given by the senior team (including Directors), all of whom have previous experience of presenting data in the ESS series.

¹³ <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Code-of-Practice-for-Statistics.pdf>, pp.10-11.

4 Project management, risk assessment and ethics

Approach to project management

At IFF we pride ourselves on our ability to work in close and open collaboration with clients, and to conduct research to the highest industry standards. The vast majority (90% plus) of our work is for public sector clients, most of it is published, and both aspects necessitate undertaking high quality research which can withstand scrutiny. Based on over 50 years' experience delivering projects for the public sector, [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Key to the success of any project, is having it managed by a suitably sized and suitably experienced team, and with that team having sufficient time and resources available for the project.

We are confident we meet these criteria. We have proposed a core team of six experienced researchers. More could be added if required from our research team of 60 staff, but we think this will be unlikely. The experience of the team members is given in the previous chapter, as well as their roles in the study. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] have over 40 years' research experience.

[REDACTED] will be IFF's Project Manager. He will be the main point of contact for Scottish Government, both for answering Scottish Government questions, and for IFF supplying information and updates. However, all members of the research team will be familiar with the state of play of the study, and able to answer any questions you may have. We have also designated a deputy project manager for the project, Sam Whittaker, who work closely with the project manager and provide cover as required. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

As well as having a suitably skilled and experienced team, it is also critical that they have sufficient time allocated to the project. This is managed at the outset where we have an internal inception meeting where we discuss all aspects of the study, and importantly the expected time allocation needed / expected of each member of the team for each phase. This time then gets ring-fenced in our researcher resource planner.

IFF prides itself on our ability to deliver high quality research to time and budget. Fieldwork and analysis processes are managed in-house giving us control and flexibility to ensure deadlines are met. We ensure on-time delivery by:

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]

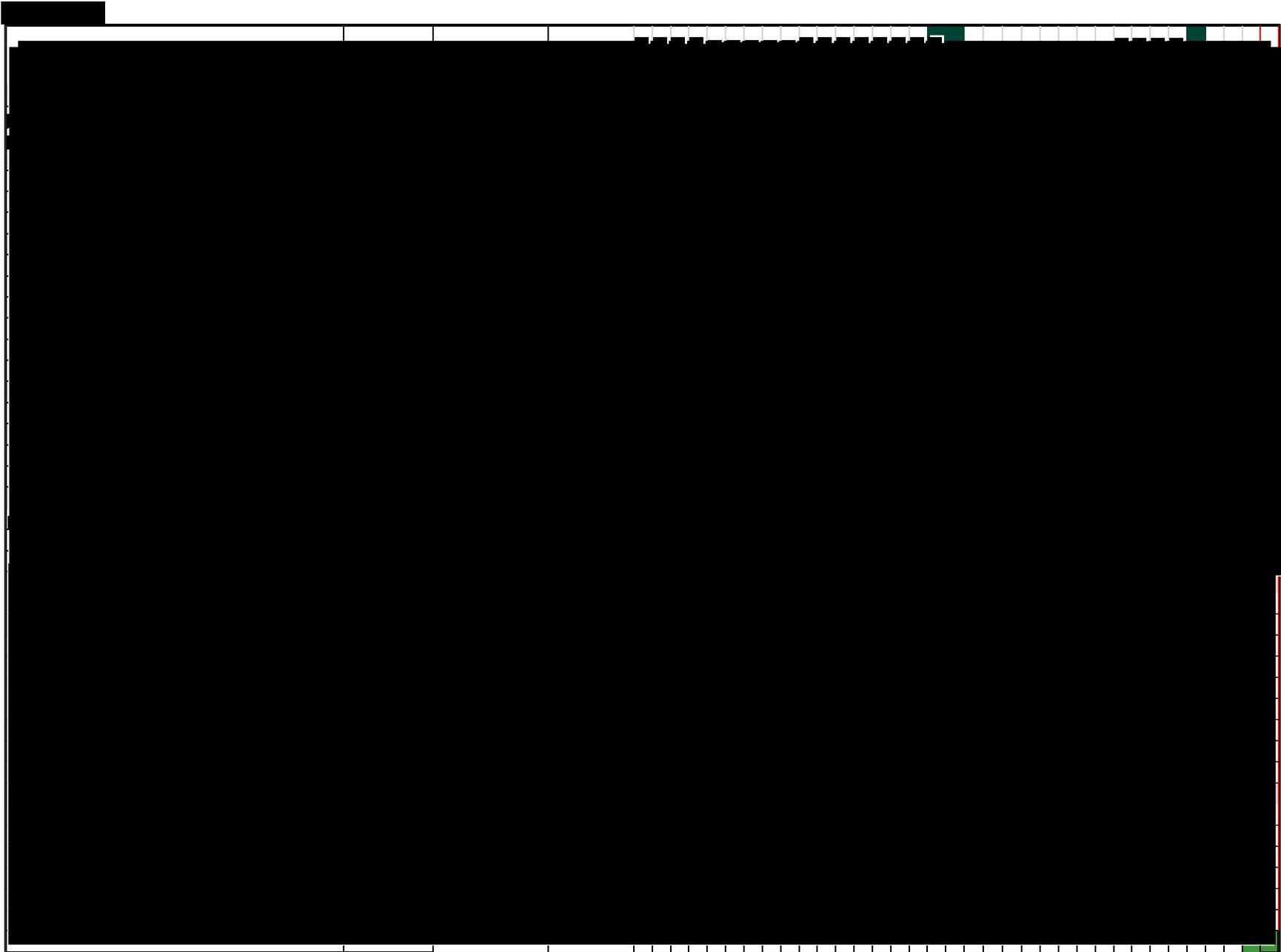
- [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Equally important is the communication with Scottish Government and the RAG. We will need an **initial inception meeting** to discuss and agree all the key aspects of the survey methodology, including the questionnaire and sampling strategy, and timetable. Following the inception meeting we will produce a short inception report, detailing what we believe has been agreed. This will also include:

- A full project (Gantt) timetable, including the key dates where we need Scottish Government input/agreement/sign off. Once agreed, this will be kept as a live document throughout the study, and re-issued if a change in the timetable is agreed; and
- An updated risk register (risks, their likelihood and potential impacts, and actions to mitigate these. Again, this will be updated and re-issued during the study should new risks emerge.

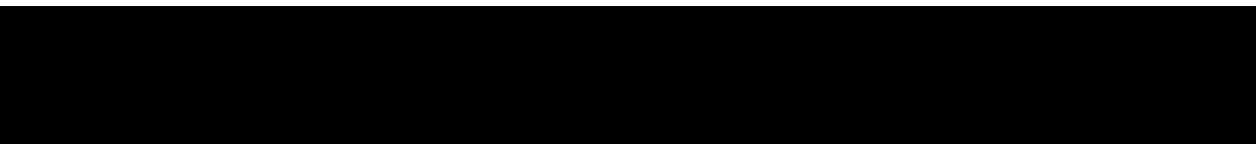
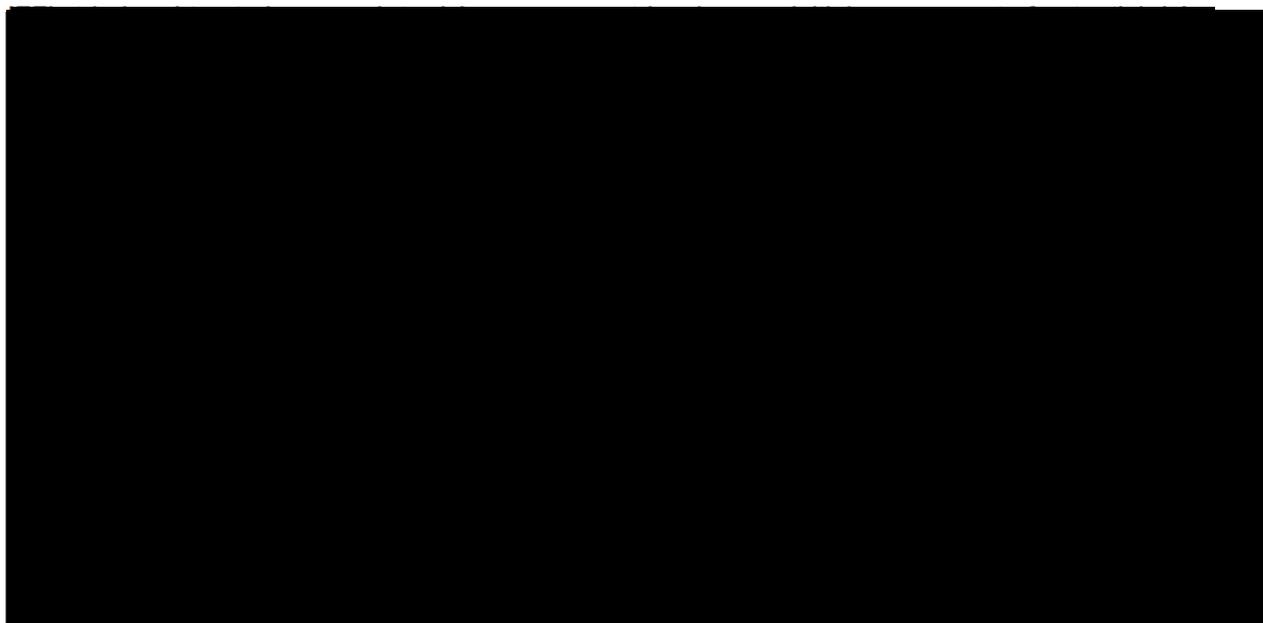
After the initial inception meeting, we propose **diarised fortnightly catch-ups** with your project manager. In the past this would have usually been a telephone catch-up, however we have found a key advantage of the lockdown period has been increasing use of video-conferencing facilities, increasing our face-to-face contact with clients, and we would be keen to use this approach with Scottish Government if feasible. Clearly the focus of these will change over the course of the project, from at the outset, sampling and questionnaire design and programming, through to fieldwork progress, the format of data outputs, and reporting. Our aim is to work transparently with clients, sharing all project materials. We will work closely with you to develop research outputs, agreeing not only structure/content but also the 'look and feel' of the outputs to suit your audiences. During fieldwork we will provide weekly progress updates to an agreed format.



The timetable presented above outlines how we would anticipate the phasing of the project to look, which will be refined upon inception in discussion with Scottish Government and the RAG. The timetable is designed to allow 8-9 weeks of fieldwork, whilst we could complete the interviews in a more compressed period, in order to help maintain response rates we have suggested that we have a minimum of 8 weeks in the field. To allow this length of fieldwork and fit in a pilot and any subsequent amends before mainstage fieldwork means the timetable for questionnaire development and programming is tight. Traditionally the ESS questionnaire is at the more complex end of surveys we programme, and though we build on previous scripts, it will be imperative to allow sufficient time to check the script is working as intended. We are confident that we are excellently positioned to hit the ground running in both of these regards (development and programming), however timely conclusion of questionnaire development will also be reliant on quick feedback and decision making on questionnaire drafts from the Scottish Government and the RAG. It will also be important that we have an extended discussion at the inception meeting on the questionnaire priorities so that development can begin immediately after.

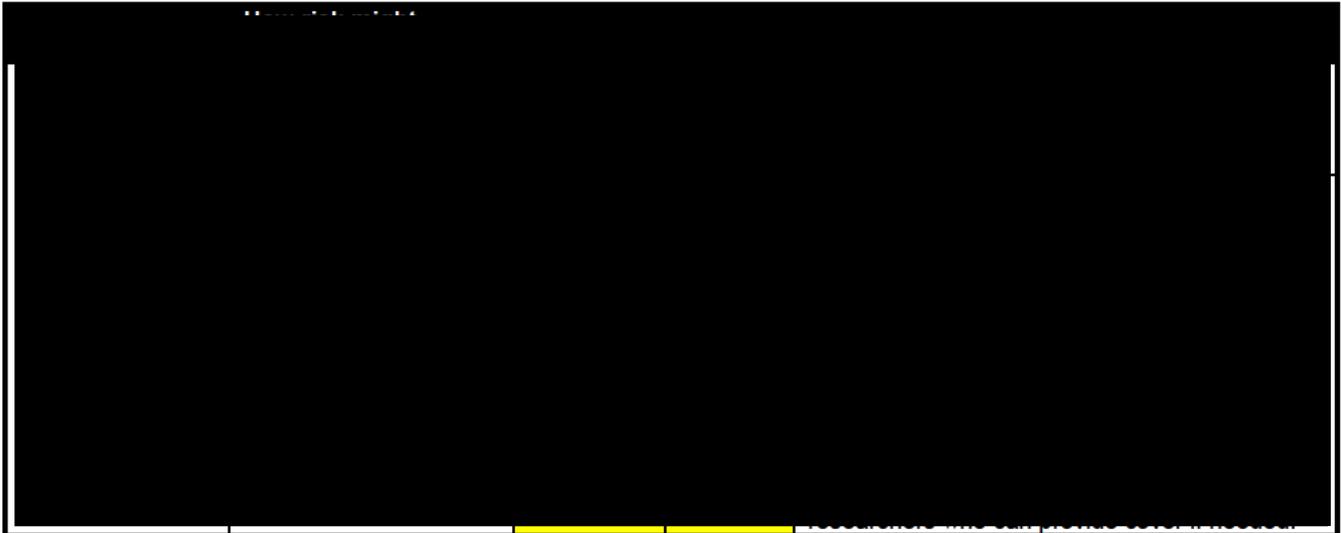
Turning to data cleaning, weighting, and the production of the SPSS, and data tables, the work involved in producing these on the ESS survey should not be underestimated. We believe the time we have allowed is sufficient, however this does condense the window of time available for report drafting. Internally we would aim to do as much advanced planning as possible so that some work can begin before we hit the 4-week drafting window – this would include agreeing the report structure (final report and technical report) during fieldwork. We would also look to draft sections of the technical report, where possible during fieldwork/alongside the data prep, and once the structure has been agreed for the final report, we would set up the format of relevant report charts and tables during so populating these and drafting will be swift when we have the final data.

Risk management



Clearly, the country is experiencing a time of unprecedented change as we continue to react to the impacts of the coronavirus. As well as the usual project risks we might expect on a quantitative project, the summary below includes the risks relating to coronavirus as we currently see them and our intended mitigations. The situation is evolving and we would revisit and update this summary at inception and throughout the project. It should be noted that any risks relating to “Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery” (BCDR) are not covered in the summary below but rather covered in the Chapter 8 on BCDR.

F	How risk might
F c c	[Redacted content]



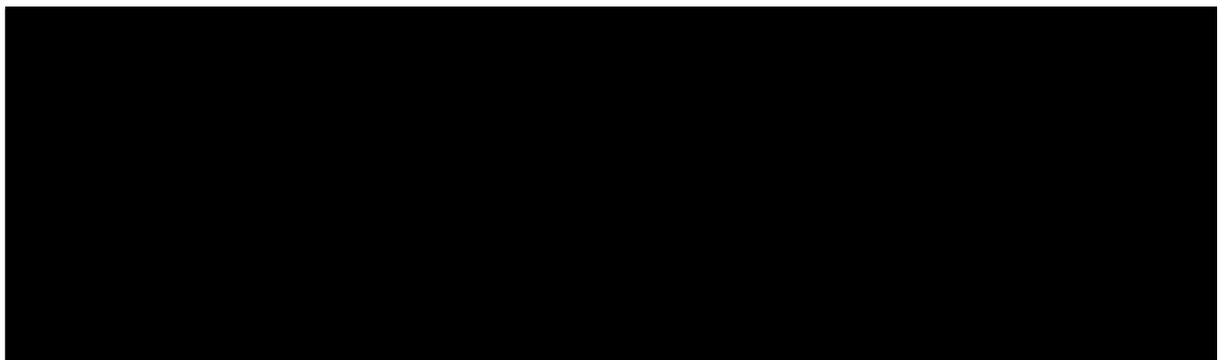
Data security

IFF takes the issue of data security extremely seriously and takes all reasonable steps to ensure the safety and confidentiality of respondents' records and of management/ administrative data provided by our clients and of survey data collected. IFF holds ISO/IEC 27001:2013 certification (the international standard for information security). The controls selected for the IFF ISO 27001 certified Information Security Management System also align with UK Cyber Essentials.

The data security certification is reviewed every 3 years by external auditors (BSI). These external auditors also conduct an assessment on all aspects of our data security approach (assessing these against the ISO standards) every 6 months, while external information security specialists also conduct an informal review every 6 months – meaning that our whole approach – both theory and implementation – is subject to a feedback and improvement loop on a six-monthly cycle. This approach is supported by regular management review meetings.

Only authorised users can access IFF Research systems, Access to IFF systems is restricted to users with an approved Active Directory account. All users are required to have a 10-character complex password which must be changed every 30 days. A clear screen policy is in effect with automated locking and blanking of screens after 5 minutes.

We also have an access rights policy that restricts access of sensitive data on an authorised as needs basis. Privileged access is by IT administrative staff only. Restricted areas of the system are subject to an access control policy whereby data controllers manage access on an as needed basis. A register is kept of who has been granted access rights to sensitive data.



Data transfers

We are happy to comply with your own Data Protection Policies and ownership of data requirements. The process that we most commonly adopt for data transfers is as follows:

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

Transferring data to sub-contractors

We do not anticipate needing to transfer data to any sub-contractor as part of the contract. If this situation were to arise, this would be in full consultation with Scottish Government. We have confidentiality agreements/data handling agreements with our sub-contractors which confirms that they shall employ appropriate operational and technological processes and procedures to keep Personal Data safe from unauthorised use or access, loss, destruction, theft or disclosure. They also confirm that their organisational, operational and technological processes and procedures comply with the requirements of ISO/IEC 27001:2013 and GDPR.

As outlined above, [REDACTED]

Any data you pass onto us will not be transferred to any 3rd party without your prior consent and will not be used by any other purposes other than research on your behalf.

Portable media

IFF has full end point security, meaning that any device with storage capabilities, such as a camera, PDA, phone, or mp3 is automatically denied access to IFF's system, as is the use of the cd/dvd writers on PCS.

Data can only be transferred using IFF password protected encrypted laptops along with IFF owned password protected encrypted USB data storage devices (Iron keys) both of these adhere to the minimum compliance with AES-256.

Data destruction

Data protection principles mean we need to ensure that personal data is not kept for longer than is necessary. For this reason, we will agree with the client at the start of each specific project, at what point the personal data can be destroyed (the default is typically 12 months from the project end, but we can set parameters with the client regarding their specific research study). When doing this, we ensure data is deleted from our systems; and provide confirmation in writing to the client that this has been done. Naturally any datasets generated by the research will be retained indefinitely in case further analysis is required in future – is the IFF retention process is focussed around the destruction of sample data (contact details etc.), qualitative recordings and the removal of personal identifiers from any datasets.

Related to this, the procedure for de-commissioning company data storage facilities is as follows: all company media including all hard drives, removable media are wiped and then professionally physically destroyed to WEEE standards. Certificates of destruction are retained on site for at least 2 years.

GDPR – technical and procedural measure summary

IFF Research fully supports the aims of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). The work that we do inevitably involves us handling individuals' personal data, including contact details; and sometimes involves us asking for data from individuals that is classed as sensitive.

Collecting and processing this personal (and sometimes sensitive) data is an inherent part of our core business, and we are committed to reducing the risk of such data being misused, exposing stakeholders in our research to potential detriment.

The research studies that we conduct typically involve both IFF Research and our clients acting in the capacity of both data processors and data controllers. As such, risks are shared between IFF Research and our clients and risk management is a collaborative exercise in which we need to work closely with our clients. Typically, this means that we will need our clients to:

- Establish that they have consent, or legitimate public interest, as a basis for sharing customer contact details with us for research purposes;
- Agree with us, at the start of each project, a date by which we will destroy any data files of customer contact details that we used as the starting point for conducting fieldwork;
- Agree with us, at the start of each project, a date by which we will fully anonymise any research datasets so that individuals cannot be identified;
- Be transparent about the purposes for which any permissions to re-contact research participants will be used; and agree an expiry date for these permissions;

- Cooperate with risk assessments around sensitive personal data; and planning steps to minimise any risks identified.

The legal basis for IFF Research processing personal data varies according to the project and the data being collated, but is typically based on:

- It being used for research purposes in the public interest; and/or
- Explicit consent of the data subject.

Explicit consent of the data subject is established and documented at the start of each survey interview or qualitative discussion. This will be explicitly and separately obtained in relation to sensitive categories of personal data, in addition to our obtaining consent to participate in general.

Our approach to establishing consent, and our processes for handling, collecting and processing personal (and sometimes sensitive) data is tailored to each project, in agreement with our client. Typically, this will include:

- Asking for clear consent from research participants at the start of interviews and discussions, and before asking for any sensitive data. This will involve us saying how we will use their data, and for how long;
- Explaining research participants' rights to see the personally identifiable data we hold on them, to change this data, or to have it deleted;
- Agreeing with clients, at the start of each project, a date by which we will fully anonymise any research datasets so that individuals cannot be identified;
- Agreeing with clients the purposes for which any permissions to re-contact research participants will be used; and agree an expiry date for these permissions – so that we can be transparent about this with research participants;
- Storing personal and sensitive data on an encrypted server, with access restricted to key members of the IFF research team, on a 'need to access' basis – with the need for access confirmed by the Director, Associate Director or Research Manager on the study.

All of our storage, handling and processing of personal and sensitive data is conducted within the UK; and in line with ISO27001 (the international data security standard, with which IFF Research is accredited). We assess our relevant suppliers to ensure they are GDPR-compliant. We use Standard EU Contractual Clauses if an adequate privacy arrangement is not in place for any suppliers outside of the EU.

The effective utilisation of privacy related procedures and controls is audited by the Compliance Manager at least twice a year as part of our ISO 27001 internal audit schedule.

GDPR – handling requests by participants to see, change or delete data

We explain to research participants, at the point of interviewing them, their rights to see the personally identifiable data we hold on them, to change this data, or to have it deleted. At this point we also signpost them to an FAQ's page on our website (www.iffresearch.com/gdpr) giving research participants information about the legal basis for taking part, what we do with their data, and the rights that they have. This page allows them to fill in a form to start the process off: asking for a copy of their responses to our research questions, asking to change some of their responses, and/or asking us to delete all of their responses.

Staff training

As part of ISO 27001 certification all employees are provided regular Information Security Awareness Training, as well as initial induction sessions we hold regular refresher training. Training records are kept of all induction and refresher training sessions.

New joiners are given an Information Security Induction including being given a copy of our Acceptable Use of Information Processing Facilities document. They are required to confirm in writing that they have read and understood the document. They also receive Information Security Induction Training upon joining and training records are kept confirming attendance.

The HR department confirms new starters to the third-party IT provider who will create a user account and grant access rights according to the information they are authorised to access. Access rights are reviewed regularly and there are additional procedures for granting access to sensitive data on the secure drive on our network.

On leaving the company, we require that any company equipment is returned and that user accounts are disabled or deleted as appropriate. All our contracts have confidentiality clauses which continue to apply after someone has left. Leavers are reminded in writing of their continued confidentiality obligations as part of the leaver process.

Should you require any further information about our approach to data security, we can provide this on request.

Ethical sensitivities and equalities

It is all-important that any research we undertake, meets the necessary ethical standards our clients and our own internal processes demand. All our research is conducted in accordance with the five principles of research ethics, as set out by the Government Social Research unit (GSR) and the Social Research Association's Ethical Guidelines. GSR Professional Guidance¹ sets out that Government social research should be conducted in a manner that:

- Ensures valid, informed consent is obtained before individuals participate in research;
- Takes reasonable steps to identify and remove barriers to participation;
- Avoids personal and social harm; and
- Protects the confidentiality of information about research participants and their identities.

These principles closely align with the five Scottish ethical principles outlined in the ITT, and we outline below how our research complies with each of these.

Principle 1: Sound application and conduct of social research methods and appropriate dissemination and utilisation of the findings

1

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/515296/ethics_guidance_tcm6-5782.pdf

IFF Research is a full-service research agency that has become one of the largest independent research companies in the UK. Established in 1965, IFF Research is a trusted partner of numerous public and private sector organisations. Our extensive experience means that we begin your research with a ready understanding of the key research challenges our clients tend to face. This helps us to design high-quality research programmes using a wide range of methodologies that are appropriate and sound in application to the research in hand. We work collaboratively with our clients and ensure specifications for the project – whether it be the sampling strategy, questionnaire, data specifications, or report outline are shared and agreed before proceeding, allowing time for discussion and iterative development as required.

On the ESS series in particular we have been integral in developing the evolving shape of the ESS surveys over the last 20 years. The series has had to stand up to continued public scrutiny over the years, and the approaches used have been reviewed by independent statisticians, DfE researchers, and the UK Commission prior to that. The series has developed over time to ensure the research methods used are appropriate for the objectives being met (which have necessarily evolved over time to meet the changing policy landscape). We have been at the heart of these methodological developments whether this be in the questionnaire design seeking to balance continuity over time with meeting emerging question needs, sampling strategies to balance representativeness with sufficient coverage of all parts of the employer population, fieldwork protocols to maximise response rates and ensuring high quality data collection, weighting strategies to minimise bias, and the delivery of reports which provide clear yet detailed analysis for different audiences.

The dissemination and utilisation of the findings ultimately rests with our clients, however we play a key role in providing outputs that treat the research appropriately. This includes providing anonymised non-disclosive and well labelled data sets; clean, accurate and navigable data tables with information on bases, significance testing, and notes on how to use; reporting outputs that make appropriate use and analysis of the data collected; and advice on appropriate interpretation and analysis through for example data dictionaries and technical reports. As we have outlined elsewhere in our proposals, we work collaboratively with our clients sharing specifications for outputs ahead of their development and these are only used once signed off.

Finally, whilst dissemination of research is usually led by our clients, we are very happy to support with dissemination of research findings. We have for example in the past [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Critically, any support with dissemination is only undertaken with your permission, and we do not make reference to research results ahead of the client making these publicly available themselves.

Principle 2: Participation based on valid informed consent

For every piece of research we carry out, we must get participants' 'informed consent'. For consent to be informed, participants must understand who is doing the research, its purpose, what data we are collecting, what will happen during the research, whether and how the session is being recorded or observed, and how we will use the results. They must also understand their participation is voluntary,

and that they can stop or withdraw at any time. They must also know how we will handle their personal data, including how long their data will be kept, who it will be processed by, and which organisation is responsible for their data (the 'data controller') so the participant knows who to contact if they want to stop taking part in the research or make a complaint.

This information is given both at the point of recruiting participants and is reinforced immediately prior to participation – both verbally, and if required via an “reassurance letter”, designed in collaboration with you. The wording is kept as clear and simple as possible, and time is set aside to clarify understanding.

In the event that researchers are unsure about an individual’s capacity to give informed consent then they are trained to ask the individual to repeat back what they have understood about the research. If they still have any concerns then they are advised not to continue with recruitment/the interview.

Principle 3: Enabling participation

Ensuring accessibility of participation: IFF are experienced at conducting research among many different audiences; we do everything we can to ensure that participation is accessible to all those that the research is relevant for, and that the interview experience is a positive one for the participant. For this study where we are speaking to employers, many of the strategies we have outlined to help maximise response rates are also aligned with the principle that the research is accessible to as many respondents as possible. In addition many of the employers we speak to will have faced varied challenges whilst operating through COVID-19. We will ensure our research is as accessible as possible in the following ways:

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

Principle 4: Avoidance of personal harm

Our research approach is always designed to ensure as far as possible that taking part does not cause any personal or social harm to participants. For example, we are careful to avoid physical or psychological harm, discomfort, stress or embarrassment, but we would also consider the risk to a subject’s personal social standing, privacy, personal values and beliefs, their links to family and the wider community, and their position within occupational settings, as well as the adverse effects of revealing information that relates to illegal, sexual, or deviant behaviour.

We would avoid such harm largely by ensuring that the topics covered by the research are only as sensitive as absolutely necessary in order to meet the objectives of the research. If the research does require questions to be asked that are of a personal or potentially sensitive nature (for instance, questions about sexuality or elements of personal wellbeing such as loneliness or feelings of worth), we would ensure participants know this in advance, and it would be stressed at recruitment and throughout the research that taking part, and answering any specific question, is completely voluntary.

For this research we would ordinarily not anticipate topics being covered are sensitive in nature, and therefore ordinarily would expect the risks around personal harm are likely to be minimal given the research is focused on employers and their skills challenges. *However*, we will need to be mindful that during current times if an employer has found operating has been a struggle, this may evoke emotions, stress and sensitivities when they are asked questions about their establishment, particularly if questions around COVID-19 are added. It is therefore still important for employers to understand that answering any particular questions is voluntary and they can stop or reschedule the interview at any time. Our interviewers are trained to respond appropriately to respondents becoming upset, and this will be included as a key briefing point ahead of fieldwork commencing.

We will monitor through both the pilot, and during mainstage fieldwork, in close collaboration with our field team whether any parts of the questionnaire are causing undue distress to respondents. This will be flagged with Scottish Government and appropriate action taken, if required, to modify the questionnaire. Additionally we will ensure this is an area of focus for QC to ensure interviewers are responding to respondents appropriately if and when any issues arise, and any feedback/best practice is shared and disseminated across the field team.

We would additionally suggest Scottish Government work with us to ensure we have an information / support sheet to be given to the employer with contact details for any relevant business support organisations, this would be helpful to discuss at inception if there are any sources of advice we can include.

Principle 5: Non-disclosure of identity or personal information

IFF's compliance with security certificate ISO27001, and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct, ensures that we safeguard all participants' personal data.

It is standard practise within IFF to maintain confidentiality in research; no one outside of each project team would be able to identify the responses of individual participants, because all identifying personal information is stored on secure files that only the project team has access to (even project team access is revoked on a regular basis and must be re-requested). We use and store the minimum required amount of required personal data, and the data is only held for as long as necessary for each relevant project, then it is deleted. Findings are always reported on an anonymous basis such that no participants could be identified (unless participants give their explicit consent to be named). We would take particular care to ensure anonymity is preserved where, for instance: sample sizes are very small; data might contain sufficient contextual information to permit identification; where data could be matched with publicly available information (such as employer websites) or where data could be matched with other sources (such as Companies House data). Our usual practice is to only include data in published data tables and reports where we have a base size of 25 responses or more.

5 Quality assurance of methodology and data

IFF Research understands the importance of producing high quality and trusted statistical data which provides value to the public, the three pillars that make up the Code of Practice for Statistics.² IFF has over 50 years' experience of running large-scale employer studies for public sector clients and has worked as lead contractor on the ESS series since its inception in 2011, and on the predecessor surveys in Scotland prior to that. IFF has also run three waves of the Annual Survey of Goods and Services for ONS where the results are released as Official Statistics and data subjected to rigorous validation checks. Impartiality, independence and making a difference are at the heart of IFF's values and what we strive for as an organisation.³ These values are underpinned by rigorous quality assurance processes that are undertaken at each stage of the research process, each covered below. Mark Winterbotham, Director on the project, will have overall responsibility for this element of delivery.

Questionnaire design and script checking

Providing high quality survey data relies first on effective questionnaire design. More information about the proposed content of the questionnaire can be found in Chapter 2. As far as possible, the questionnaire content will be kept consistent with previous waves of ESS, however clearly new questions will need to be tested to ensure their efficacy and that they are understood by respondents. Iterative questionnaire design, with input from the Research Directors at IFF and Scottish Government, will be crucial to developing suitable questions that provide valuable and insightful data. 25 pilot interviews will be conducted to check the new questions work in terms of comprehension and questionnaire flow.

We will script the telephone questionnaire on IBM's Dimensions Data Collection software, one of the most common software systems used by UK research providers. Scripting will be undertaken by one of our senior Data Services team who has worked on previous ESS studies (we have a team of five programmers, three have been involved in previous ESS scripting and the three have worked at IFF for a mean average of 16 years).

Once programmed for CATI it is vital that the questionnaire is then thoroughly tested. We have tried and tested systems and protocols for this. [REDACTED]

² <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/code-of-practice/the-code/>

³ More information on IFF's core values can be found on its website [here](#).

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

We will also [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] This is very useful for checking the routing and if the right number of people are answering each question (it is particularly useful where the routing depends on a combination of their previous responses).

While we would always aim to ensure that routing issues leading to missing data are identified and corrected prior to mainstage fieldwork, there is a low risk that such issues can occur on a complex survey like ESS. [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

[REDACTED] f we were to find missing data via these checks, we would alert Scottish Government to this as soon as possible and offer to call back relevant respondents to collect the missing data.

Strong communication between the Research and Field team assists in minimising the risk of questionnaire defects and routing issues going unnoticed. Interviewers are encouraged to report suspected questionnaire issues to their Team Leaders and this is fed back to the Research team.

Another important aspect of the questionnaire design and programming which enhance data quality is [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Monitoring and quality assurance of interviewing

Another crucial component of producing high quality data is the initial data collection, and IFF prides itself on the quality of its interviewing team, fieldwork and quality control procedures.

IFF is an accredited member of the Interviewer Quality Control Scheme (IQCS), the industry mark of fieldwork excellence. This involves meeting IQCS quality standards, recording these for all projects, and an annual audit / inspection. This membership can be evidenced by visiting the IQCS website member listing section at www.iqcs.org. However, our call-handler recruitment, training and quality standards are higher than required by IQCS, reflecting the more demanding nature of much of our work. We ensure the quality of our call-handlers through the following procedures:

- All interviewers will receive c. two-hour briefing to advise them of the background and objectives of the study, on whose behalf it is being conducted, how details have been sourced and other pertinent points drafted from discussions with Scottish Government;
- IFF briefings will be conducted by the research team and will include details of the aims and objectives, the client, the sample source and how the data will be used. There will then be a thorough run-through of all survey questions. Screenshots of the CATI script will also be used to guide interviewers through the more complex questions, such as allocating employees to occupational categories. Members of the Scottish Government research team are always welcome to sit in and indeed contribute to this briefing; and

- Interviewers will then spend a minimum of an hour running through the test version of the CATI programme and will be able to raise questions or seek clarification on any matter, prior to making their first live call;

In accordance with the MRS Code of Conduct, we ensure that the appropriate permissions are sought when contacting respondents. Reassurances will also be made to respondents regarding the anonymisation of their responses and that their data will be handled securely at all times.

We conduct rigorous quality control procedures overseen by our full-time Telephone Centre Manager, [REDACTED], who designs, monitors and reports the quality control systems and procedures for each survey. He is supported by a team of Team Leaders who listen in and assess the work of the interviewers.

We have refined IQCS minimum standards in a number of ways to ensure quality control is not merely a paper exercise but leads to real improvements in interviewing. This includes:

- [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
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- [REDACTED]
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[REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

Progress reporting

IFF will provide weekly updates to Scottish Government during the fieldwork period. As well as providing details on interviews achieved and how these break down by survey subgroups including size, sector and region and tracking fieldwork progress, the progress reports will also show the topline results on key survey measures such as the proportion of employers with vacancies, skill-shortage vacancies, skills gaps and the proportion that train. This will give an early indication of potential 'surprising' findings that can be discussed and investigated.

Coding

Data will be coded by our in-house coding team to a specification signed off by the Project Manager. To ensure comparability of results, codeframes will largely replicate those used in previous waves. However, it is possible that the types of responses given by employers may change in light of

changing circumstances; for instance, employers could mention COVID-19 as a reason for not training staff. The coding and research team will therefore conduct an initial coding review in the early stages of fieldwork and from this establish a suitable codeframe. The codeframe will be shared with Scottish Government.

In terms of quality assurance processes, the coding manager checks a minimum of 5% of the work of each coder. The research team initially provides a detailed written specification to the coding team with information on how each question should be coded (e.g. whether single or multi-coded, details on questions which should share codeframes, etc.). The research team will conduct an interim QC check of the coding team's work, checking verbatim responses against the allocated codes and feeding back to the coding teams any issues with miscoding. Another QC check is conducted by the research team post-fieldwork (in total they check 5% of all coded work undertaken).

From a coding perspective, relatively straightforward is the "hard coding" to SIC and SOC which is central to the quality and usability of the data that the survey returns. We have a very detailed understanding of SIC and SOC coding. We will review the completeness of SIC and SOC coding i.e. the proportion of responses where a full 4 digit SIC has not been coded, in the anticipation that there should not be significant differences either compared to earlier studies. Similarly we monitor differences in the proportion of responses remaining in 'other' after coding.

It is worth noting that ESS traditionally requires respondents to self-report the occupational breakdown of existing employees. To assist with this, and to ensure accuracy of coding, we recommend setting up an online prompt card (which can be accessed by respondents mid-interview) to help respondents correctly categorise their staff. The prompt card will provide examples of sector-specific occupations that fall into each of the broad occupational survey categories.

Data cleaning, validation, processing and analysis

The data cleaning phase is critical to ensure accurate, reliable data, and it is important that the approach (and the specific edits adopted) replicates as closely as possible that used for previous ESS waves. We believe that we are uniquely placed in this regard.

Data cleaning begins at the questionnaire design stage, when high value checks and data logic checks are built into the CATI script to check with the respondent. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. In addition, some data checks are dependent on responses which are coded after the interview (e.g. the validity of SOC and SIC codes).

We will therefore write and programme an edit specification which we will run through the "raw" survey data post-interviewing. [REDACTED]

Specifications for the analysis outputs (SPSS files and tables) are developed by the research team (with final sign off from a Director) and agreed with the Scottish Government before implementation.⁴ The specifications will draw heavily on those used in previous ESS waves to ensure comparability.

⁴ Note, IFF uses SPSS software for data processing and checking purposes, but we are able to convert SPSS files to SAS files before sharing with Scottish Government.

the checking process. All outputs will be checked against each other (toplines against SPSS files against tables) with each output signed off in that order.

Weighting

We propose retaining ONS's IDBR population statistics as the source to weight the survey data. IDBR is widely regarded as the most accurate and comprehensive "official" source of population data. We will submit an application for population counts to the Microdata Release Panel and once supplied, the project manager checks the counts provided are correct (2+ employment including any working proprietors).

[REDACTED]

We anticipate that unit and modular weights will be required. Unit-based weights are designed for analyses by the number or proportion of establishments; the employment-based weight is designed for use when analysing by number or proportion of employees (including volume measures of vacancies, skills gaps and numbers trained). Weights will be calculated and grossed up to the total population of establishments (unit weight) and employees (employment weight) using an interlocking size by sector grid. Overlaying these grids, we also propose RIM (random iterative method) weights by ROA region in Scotland to ensure that the local geography matches the true population without further correction for size and sector at this level.

Weighting is not simply a mechanical process: in many ways it is an art as much as a science. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Data outputs

We will use Merlin data tabulation package to produce the Excel tables and SPSS files, as in previous years a Macro designed in-house would then be used to clean and format data tables.

The full SPSS file will be converted to an SAS file before delivery as per the requirements of the brief. This will be fully labelled and include 2 and 4-digit SIC, as well as the unit, and employment weights relevant to each file. The full SAS file will be accompanied by a **data dictionary** which details the

variables contained within the file, and any syntax used to define complex variables. A smaller cleaned non-disclosive dataset for use in the UK Data Archive will also be provided.

Data tables will include c.150 worksheets with 15-20 cross breaks. We have the set up in place to ensure the data outputs produced are consistent with previous years for variables that remain unchanged on the survey.

Tables and SPSS will be supplied prior to the reporting process to enable Scottish Government to form its own view on key findings.

At any time during (indeed after) fieldwork we can provide interim topline findings but these will be uncoded and unweighted.

Reporting and quality assurance documentation

Chapter 2 outlined the methodology and key phases of the reporting process and in Chapter 3 we discussed quality assurance of outputs in the section 'Quality assurance of the reports and presentations'. For brevity we do not repeat these here.

Further supporting the outputs will be a full **Technical Report** detailing key methodological details, this will serve as a key quality assurance document giving full details of all stages of the project. We will take the ESS 2017 Technical Report as the template, and will agree any new or additional details needed. We anticipate a technical report including details on sample design, questionnaire development and piloting, response rates, fieldwork processes, population data, data cleaning processes, weighting approaches and conventions and a statement of sampling errors and statistical confidence. The Technical Report will also provide a detailed log of IFF's QA processes followed through the preparation of the data (as summarised above), although this could be provided as a separate document if necessary. The Technical Report will be prepared so it is ready for publication at the same time as the main report. All reports will be produced using the Scottish Government's report template and adhere to style guidelines.

As outlined earlier, the table and data file specifications will have been shared and agreed with Scottish Government ahead of these outputs being produced, however final versions will be supplied at the end of the project as part of the quality assurance documentation – these include for example detail on the specification of each table, cross breaks, the specification of derived variables etc. Finally, a data dictionary will accompany the data file providing the metadata data for the file, including which weights to use for analysis.

Data security and delivery of outputs

We have discussed data security in detail in Chapter 4 (in the 'Data security' section), and for brevity we do not repeat it here. Needless to say, IFF treats the issue of data security very seriously and we take all reasonable steps to ensure the safety and confidentiality of client sample, client management information, and of survey data collected. In summary, we hold ISO/IEC 27001 accreditation (the international standard for information security), we are registered with the Data Protection Commission as a Data Controllers under the Data Protection Act 1998, we are a Corporate Member of the Market Research Society, and all employees abide by the Market Research Society's Code of Conduct for all the work we undertake.

6 Sustainability

Sustainability is inherent in IFF’s operational practice. Here we outline our approach to sustainability, in respect of its social, environmental and commercial aspects.

Social

We believe our business can make a positive contribution to society by managing our activities with care and working with responsible organisations that promote social and ethical practice. We are committed to ensuring that our work is conducted in a rigorously professional manner and in compliance with all relevant laws and regulations. All groups and individuals with whom we have a relationship through this project will be treated in a fair, open and respectful manner. This includes:

- Working with the Scottish Government
- Delivery of research services
- Wider social value

Working with Scottish Government

IFF is committed to working in an open and transparent manner with our clients. In the highly unlikely event of any potential personal or corporate conflicts of interest, we will always declare this and seek guidance from the client on how to proceed.

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

[Redacted text block]

Delivery of research services

As a Corporate Partner of the Market Research Society (MRS) IFF complies with the MRS Code of Conduct for professional standards. We fully comply with the Government Social Research Professional Guidance for Ethical Assurances in Social Research. As such, Scottish Government can be confident that IFF will deliver any research services on their behalf in an **ethically responsible manner**.

To ensure potential participants receive enough information to **achieve informed consent**, the information is built into the templates of IFF's telephone interview scripts to ensure every participant is made aware of the client that is commissioning the research; the general subject of the data collection, who will have access to findings, and the time that data collection is likely to take. Participants will be assured that research is being conducted in accordance with the MRS code of conduct, that taking part is entirely voluntary, and that at any time they can decline to take part. We also provide means for participants to 'check-up' that IFF is a bona-fide agency and the research is legitimate (for example providing contact numbers at Scottish Government and the Market Research Society, and directing them to relevant Scottish Government or IFF web pages). IFF will ask what we can do to ensure the participant can take part fully and comfortably in the interview

If a participant should disclose during research that they/someone else is at risk of harm, this would be escalated to the project directors, and if appropriate the client would be alerted and the appropriate authorities notified. (This consideration almost never applies for employer research of the sort proposed.)

We are also careful to **preserve the anonymity of participants** by removing identifying information from any type of data before passing it on. We will not provide any data can be 'cut' using variables into separate groups of fewer than ten people, as this may mean that individuals are identifiable. IFF adheres to the procedures and systems relating to our ISO Security Accreditation 27001 in relation to secure data storage and transfer.

Wider social value

IFF seeks to achieve wider social value through our work with a particular focus on opportunities for young people. IFF Research activities in this space include:

- IFF annually offers two paid Research Assistant internships for a sandwich students;
- IFF operates a graduate training programme and over the last 5 years has recruited between 4 and 6 graduates each year;
- IFF offers apprenticeships, and over the last 5 years have had apprentices in our IT and Finance departments;
- For the last two years IFF has worked with a charity, Future Frontiers, whereby our staff work with and coach local school children to help them considering their careers and future options; and
- IFF offers a charitable matching scheme, matching any money raised for charity by staff up to £100 per employee per year. We also operate a payroll giving scheme, enabling easy, and tax efficient, charitable donations.

Environmental

IFF has an internal environmental working group that is undertaking a comprehensive review of the company's environmental impacts, while also supporting individual project teams minimise their particular impacts. We would be happy to work with Scottish Government to ensure minimal environmental impact and carbon footprint is produced as a direct result of providing services.

Measures IFF already undertakes to reduce our **environmental impact** relate to:

- Efficient use of energy;

- Environmentally responsible waste management; and
- Minimising carbon footprint from staff travel (business and commuting).

Energy Usage

- Lighting in our office is controlled by movement-sensors, and hence turn off then in parts of the building when nobody is around;
- Air conditioning equipment is also time controlled to coincide with office hours; and
- Staff are required to switch off all computers at the end of the day (as set out in the Staff Handbook and discussed at induction).

Waste Management

We try to minimise the amount of waste we create by operating a clear desk policy to encourage information security and discourage paper usage. We use electronic means to communicate with clients and internally and we store documents in electronic archives.

We offer computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) or computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) in the first instance, rather than paper-based approaches. For qualitative fieldwork, interviewers are encouraged to keep copies of discussion guides and any notes on portable electronic devices, rather than printed copies, as far as possible.

We buy our paper through a supplier with the FSC® (Forest Stewardship Council) certification as well as the EU EcoLabel which ensures our paper products come from well-managed sources.⁵ We use a thinner paper (75gm) to reduce the impact of the paper we use on the environment. Our printers are set by default to double sided printing, reducing paper use overall.

To manage the waste we do produce, we have an office recycling scheme which covers paper, glass, plastic bottles and cans. Waste Electronic and Electronic Equipment (W.E.E.E. wastes) are disposed of by the local authority. Other waste is stored, safely and securely in Euro1 bins and is collected twice a week by the local authority.

Staff are encouraged to make efficient use of company resources and dispose of waste responsibly and this is communicated in a range of ways, including at induction through IFF's Staff Handbook.

Staff Travel

We have a range of schemes in place to minimise carbon dioxide emissions incurred through staff commuting to work:

- Interest free season ticket loans for train and tube travel are available to staff;
- Staff are encouraged to cycle to work through the provision of secure facilities for storing bicycles. Schemes with Evans Cycles and Cyclescheme enable staff to save money on the purchase of a new bicycle;

⁵ To be given FSC certification a forest must be managed in an environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial and economically viable manner. The EU Ecolabel identifies products as having a reduced environmental impact throughout their life cycle, from the extraction of raw material through to production, use and disposal.

- We have no company cars; and
- All staff (including telephone interviewers) are set up to be able to work from home.

We use technology to reduce the need to travel for business through the following measures:

- Conducting inception meetings with end clients via teleconference or video-conference (according to client preference);
- Briefing field interviewers via teleconference, with fieldwork materials (questionnaires, topic guides etc.) having been shared electronically in advance, rather than asking them to travel to IFF's offices – where we are confident that doing so will not be to the detriment of the project;
- Using telephone depth interviews, accompanied by electronic stimulus materials shared online, to conduct qualitative interviews that traditionally would have been conducted face-to-face because of the need for visual stimulus materials (where using this approach does not compromise the project objectives);
- Using online forums to support longitudinal engagement with respondents in qualitative studies, thus reducing the need to travel to follow-up interviews (where using this approach does not compromise the project objectives); and
- Where acceptable to the client, delivering debriefs via teleconference or video-conference (supported by presentation materials which would be circulated electronically in advance).

In addition, we work to the following policy for minimising the impact of necessary business travel:

- Staff are encouraged to make use of public transport, where possible, for business travel. Staff only use flights for business travel where use of trains is unfeasible;
- When conducting fieldwork, interviewers cluster their visits within a geographical location to ensure the most efficient use of time and resources;
- Where travel to face-to-face meetings is unavoidable, we would look for opportunities to 'piggyback' on one face-to-face meeting by seeking to conduct any other forthcoming business (with framework organisations in the same location) on the same day.

Commercial

We also aim to be sustainable in our sourcing of products and services. Most of our research work is conducted entirely in-house. Within this project the only outsourcing anticipated is purchase of sample.

We aim to eliminate discrimination on any grounds and promote equality of opportunity in the supply chain. As and when services are required, we will request quotes from at least three suppliers and select based on best value for money. All suppliers are treated fairly and even-handedly at all stages of the procurement process. We provide constructive feedback, on request, on the outcome of bids.

Where we work with suppliers, we aim to ensure that these are responsible organisations that promote social and ethical working. Suppliers are regarded as our partners and we will work with them to help us to achieve our aspirations in terms of the workplace standards and behaviours that

are consistent with any client requirements. These may be reflected in tenders / contracts where appropriate. All suppliers must observe international human rights norms within their work.

In return, we are clear about what we expect from suppliers and work with them to address any issues encountered in the delivery of services. Each subcontractor will have a nominated relationship owner responsible for that subcontract agreement and its delivery. Channels of communications will be clearly defined and established. Invoicing is tied to agreed milestones and we pay fairly and on time.

7 Fair Work

At IFF we recognise the value of our team and understand that they make up who we are as a company. We foster a people-centric culture, which operates around our core values:

“Being Human First”, “Impartiality and Independence” and “Making a Difference”

We acknowledge that we are humans first and foremost, and all work and think differently and we believe in the importance of fair work, striving to maintain a “best place to work” for all. This is delivered through:

i) Respect

Our core values are brought to life by our 14 “Rules of the Game” which were devised by the team to outline how we interact and work together. These are:

Take pride in every piece of work
When you can, say ‘yes’
And when you’ve said ‘yes’ deliver (well, and on time)
Respect that everyone has lives outside of work; share the load and look out for each other
Keep your head out of the sand; be brave enough to anticipate and share problems
Make it safe for everyone to have a voice
Be proactive, don’t wait to be told
Consult and collaborate; remember we’re all working towards the same thing
Think critically and challenge the easy option
Smile and be friendly; welcome new faces
Thank, praise and give feedback
Be genuine in your communication - honest in content, authentically ‘you’ in style
Stay calm, kind and constructive when it’s hardest to do so
Be who you are, wear what you want, but be brilliant

In respecting that everyone has lives outside of work, we have implemented a range of measures to encourage flexible working and support a positive work life balance, which is drawn together through our flexible working policy. Some of the areas we offer flexibility are:

- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]
- [Redacted]

With such a flexible workforce working at different times and different locations, it's important that our team feel well informed and know the support available to them. Our policies and procedures are shared with new joiners and we are currently developing an intranet where these will be easily accessible at all times. We also work alongside a health and safety provider to carry out regular risk assessment reviews ensuring a safe place to work and have an employee assistance programme (EAP) available to all offering confidential support for a range of issues.

ii) Security

Job security couldn't be more critical at a time of international uncertainty. We are proud that with the support of the government, the agile nature of our team and the resilience our home-based set up offered, we have been able to offer continued job security to our team.

[REDACTED]

We work with pay banding for roles and this is clearly visible to the team to ensure consistency across the business.

iii) Opportunity and diversity

We have signed and committed to the Market Research Society's CEO Pledge: A Manifesto for Opportunity. In doing so, we have committed publicly to ensuring that our team represents the diversity of the UK; we're committed to publishing diversity pay information alongside our gender pay gap reporting and have committed to reviewing our recruitment practices across all areas of the business, redressing any practices or approaches that may be deflecting from these objectives. We are absolutely committed to a culture which will not tolerate any form of discrimination. In our recent graduate recruitment campaign, we removed certain requirements on grade and cover letters and saw a 46% increase in BAME applicants progressing to interview.

In our last wave of recruitment for Telephone Interviewers, we developed a 4-stage campaign where we removed the requirement for a CV or certain grades and a team of current Telephone Interviewers and Team Leaders reviewed online application forms and video interviews before the candidates progressed to an online assessment centre and fully paid live trial. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Last year, our gender pay gap reporting shows that our pay gap across the whole company is -1% compared to a national average of 17.2%. We have a 49%/51% female/male split in our upper quartile and are committed to maintaining gender parity across the business.

We have also worked on internal opportunities and building a stronger connection between our flexible interviewing services team and our research team and have now seen a number of people move from Telephone Interviewers to Research Executives. In addition to this, we carry out annual reviews where clear objectives are set and individuals are shown which skills they need to develop in order to progress to the next level. Our director team then spends time discussing each individual to identify those that are ready for promotion. As a result, we have seen 52 promotions in the last two years.

It is important to us to facilitate opportunities outside of the traditional academic route often seen within research and therefore, we're very proud of the work we do with the charity Future Frontiers. Volunteers from all levels across the business take part in mentoring disadvantaged school pupils in the local area and supporting them through career discussions. In turn, they are able to see and hear how we work at IFF, highlighting opportunities within research. We have also run apprenticeship schemes within our IT and finance teams, offering the learning and tools needed to kickstart their career.

iv) Fulfilment

Input from our team is important to drive us forward which is seen in our team-led committees and working groups. We have a wellbeing committee who drive the wellbeing agenda across the organisation, committing to the below statement:

“At IFF we put positive workplace wellbeing at the heart of our culture, evident in our core values and ways of working. We are committed to fostering an environment in which our employees feel supported in leading a healthy and happy lifestyle, both inside and outside of work. Our Wellbeing Committee – formed to help us cement this goal – is dedicated to:

- *Running initiatives and regular events that promote positive physical and mental wellbeing;*
- *Sharing content through the monthly newsletter for external sources of support;*
- *Equipping line managers with the tools to offer basic pastoral care, reasonable adjustments and recommended referrals where appropriate; and*
- *Offering first line support and early identification of concerns through our Mental Health First Aiders.”*

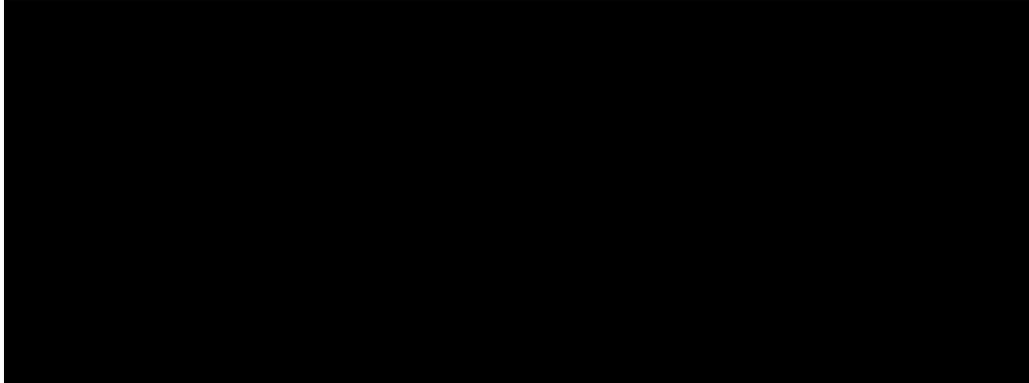
We also have an environmental working group who are carrying out a sustainability audit to help us reduce waste and emissions and a social committee who offer a range of activities for all, including; games nights, quizzes and sporting activities. In addition to this, we develop new ideas and ways of working through working groups such as; a team that is developing how we carry out qualitative research, another looking at the use of statistics and one developing our intranet “The Hub” as a central information point.

We invest in Market Research Society membership and training for our team and deliver a wide range of internal training which is logged on our bespoke learning and development portal. Our internal training is delivered by many different members of the team allowing shared experiences and collaborative working.

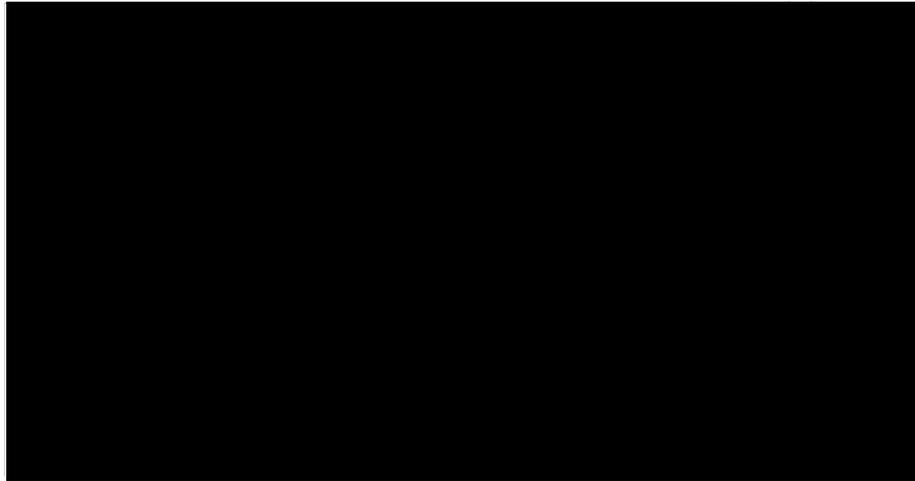
v) Effective Voice

In line with our Rule of the Game; “Make it safe for everyone to have a voice”, we truly value the input from every single member of the team. We run quarterly engagement surveys to see how the team are feeling and have a range of free text sections for suggestions and further feedback. We currently split the survey to our salaried team and flexible workforce as they often have different needs but

what consistently comes up from both teams is that they feel supported in the job that they do and that they're proud to work for IFF.



We have also made numerous changes over the past year as a result of the feedback from the team and we're pleased to see the significant increases across the board:



The next phase is to launch listening sessions where different people will come together each quarter to discuss the survey responses and deep dive into why the team may feel a certain way and what changes they would like to see.

8 Business Continuity and Disaster Recovery

[Redacted text block]

- [Redacted list item 1]
- [Redacted list item 2]
- [Redacted list item 3]
- [Redacted list item 4]
- [Redacted list item 5]
- [Redacted list item 6]

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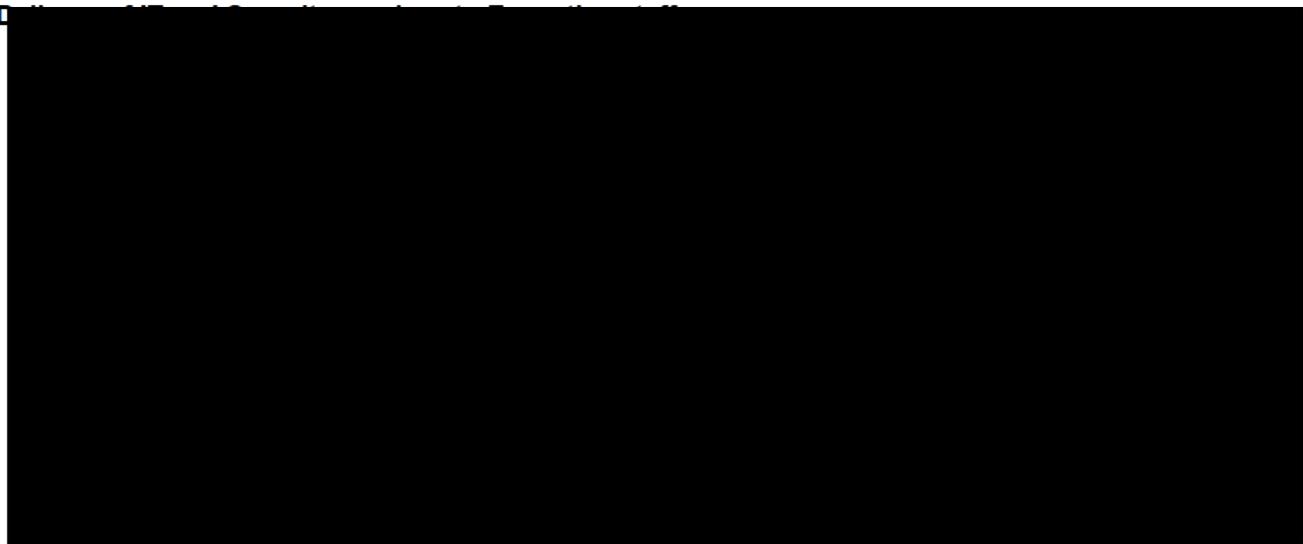
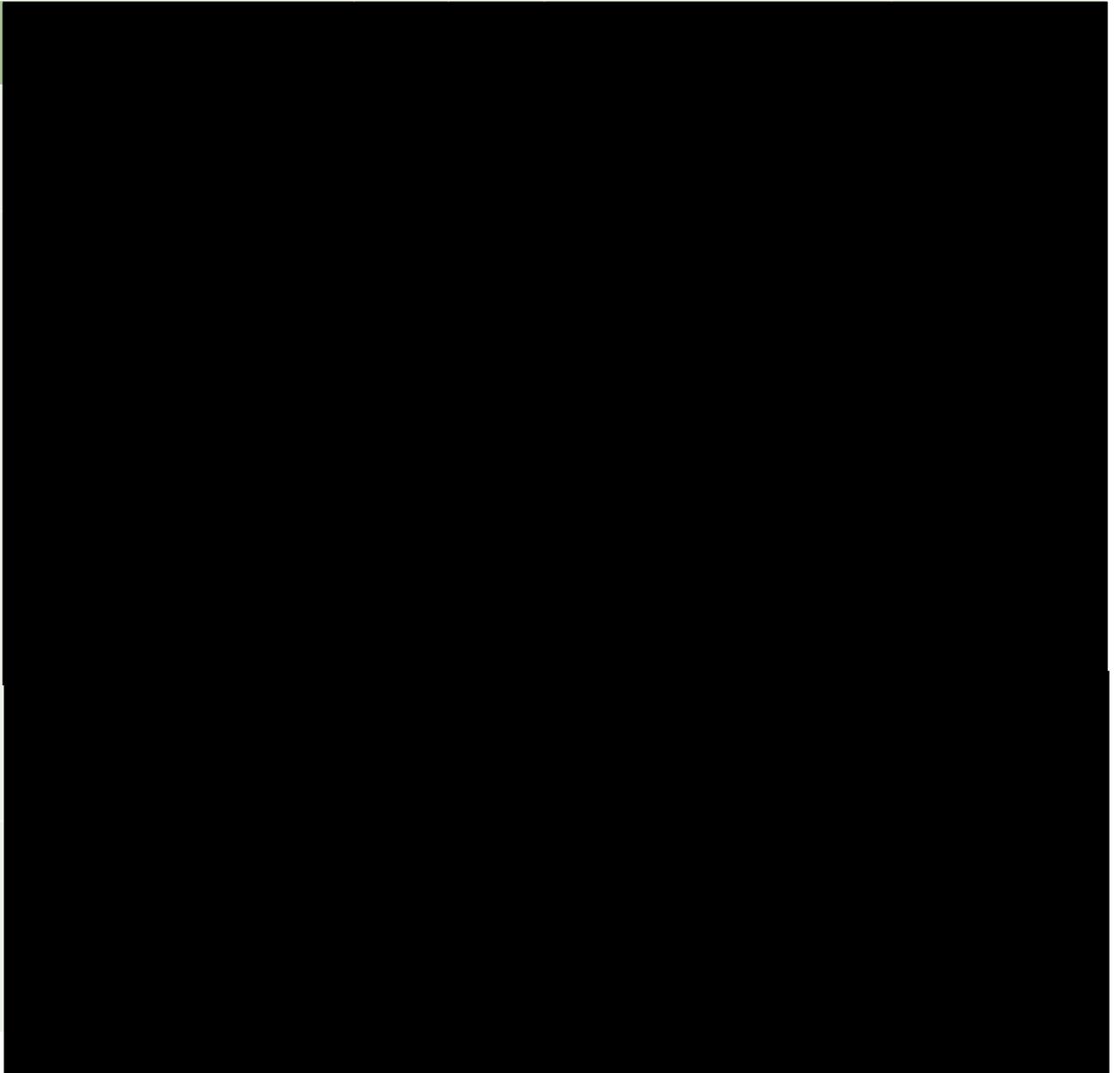
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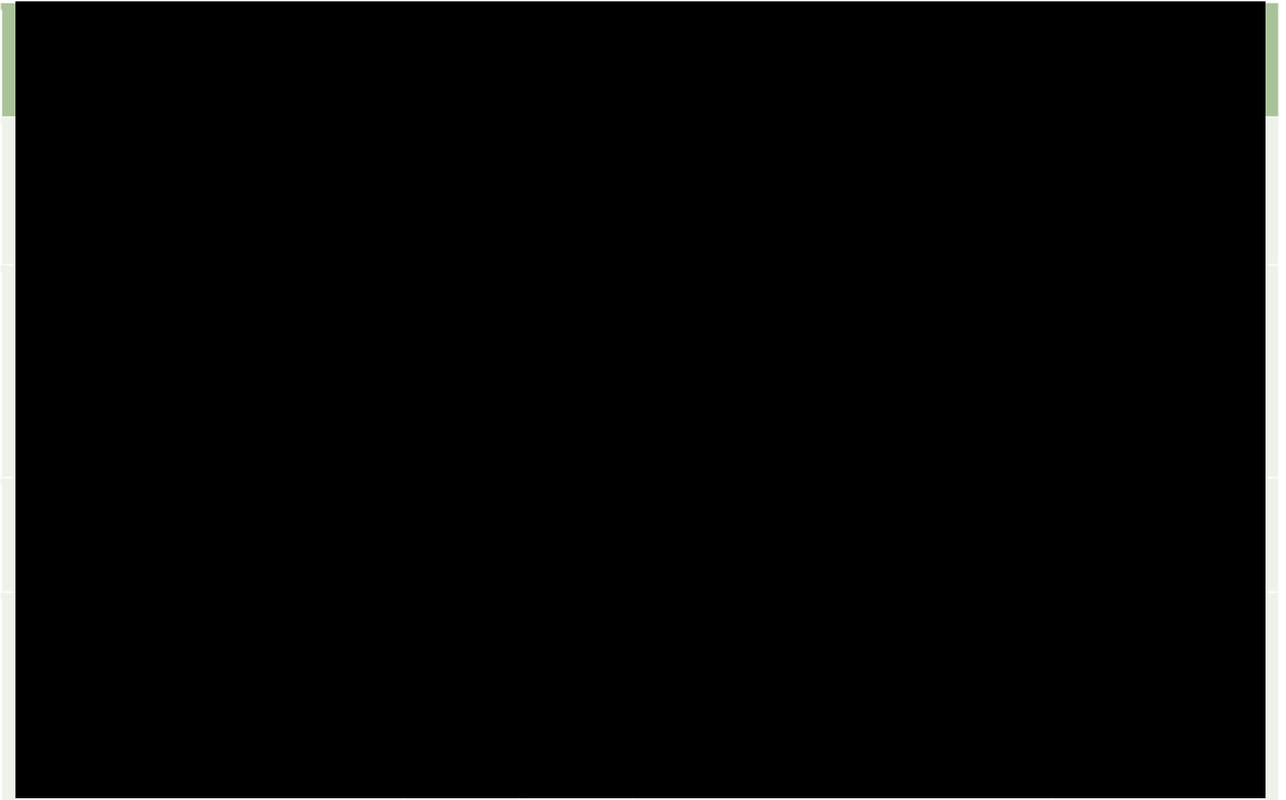
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9 Annex – Section 3

Section 3 Non-Scoring and Information only Questions:

		Non-Scoring
Q1	<p>SCOTTISH BUSINESS PLEDGE (NON-SCORED)</p> <p>The Scottish Business Pledge is a Government initiative which aims for a fairer Scotland through more equality, opportunity and innovation in business. Information on this can be found at the following link: https://scottishbusinesspledge.scot/</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I have signed this.</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No, but I commit to signing it in the future.</p>
Q2	<p>LIVING WAGE (NON-SCORED)</p> <p>The Scottish Living Wage Accreditation Initiative and the Living Wage Foundation recognise and celebrate the responsible leadership shown by Living Wage Employers and support employers to incorporate the Scottish Living Wage into organisational structures long term. More information can be found at the links below: http://scottishlivingwage.org/ http://www.livingwage.org.uk</p>	<p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I am accredited</p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No, but I commit to obtaining accreditation in the future</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No, but I commit to paying staff directly involved with the delivery of this contract the Real Living Wage</p>

