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# **Early Life Cohort Feasibility Study: Qualitative Research Findings**

**Research amongst Own Household  
Fathers and Low-income Families**

Lead Authors: Faith Jones and Polly Hollings

Ipsos MORI





# Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>1 Executive summary</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>2 Introduction</b> .....	<b>14</b>
2.1 Background and objectives .....	14
2.2 Research team and outputs .....	15
2.3 Method and sample .....	15
2.4 How to read this report .....	24
2.5 The research process for this 2021 qualitative research .....	25
2.6 Reflections on the research process .....	26
<b>3 Own Household Fathers</b> .....	<b>29</b>
3.1 Motivations and barriers to study participation .....	29
3.2 Study topics and activities .....	36
3.3 Saliva sample collection .....	41
3.4 Involvement from a new partner .....	44
3.5 Study mode .....	44
3.6 Recruitment approaches .....	50
3.7 Study communications .....	54
3.8 Conclusions .....	58
<b>4 Low-income Families</b> .....	<b>65</b>
4.1 Motivations and barriers to study participation .....	65
4.2 Study topics .....	71
4.3 Study mode .....	77
4.4 Interviewer characteristics .....	79
4.5 Saliva sample .....	81
4.6 Novel modes .....	83
4.7 Study engagement .....	87
4.8 Conclusions .....	89
<b>5 Appendices</b> .....	<b>95</b>
5.1 Own Household Fathers materials .....	95
5.2 Low Income Families materials .....	115

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# 01

## **Executive Summary**

# 1 Executive summary

## 1.1 Background

The Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) at the UCL Institute of Education (IoE) has been commissioned by Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to carry out a feasibility study for a new national longitudinal cohort study, called the Early Life Cohort Feasibility Study (ELC-FS).

A particular focus for the ELC-FS is in engaging parents who are often under-represented in cohort studies. CLS commissioned Ipsos MORI to carry out qualitative research amongst the following two groups to understand barriers and enablers to potential ELC-FS participation.

- **Own household fathers (OHFs).** OHFs are defined as fathers who do not live with their child full-time.
- **Low-income families (LIFs).** Low-income families are defined as those whose combined household income fell below £18k per annum, and who reported claiming means tested benefit(s) and/ or financial precarity. Within this group, CLS were keen to understand the views of people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

These groups were chosen as they have been identified as key groups for inclusion in the ELC-FS sample. The Fatherhood Institute is part of the ELC-FS team and, jointly with ScotCen Social Research, has previously carried out scoping research amongst OHFs to explore potential engagement of this group in cohort studies. They supported the development of the research approach and materials for this audience.

The research set out to understand participants' perceptions of the benefits and drawbacks of ELC-FS participation, views regarding potential recruitment and engagement approaches, preferences for data collection modes and views on the types of information that participants would be happy to share with the ELC-FS.

## 1.2 Method

A qualitative approach was employed, enabling the study to capture the reactions of a diverse range of participants to the idea of taking part in the ELC-FS. Two separate topic guides were developed to help explore the key motivations and barriers for taking part in the ELC-FS across the two groups. Where relevant, the guides used stimulus materials to ensure that the information participants were given about the ELC-FS was consistent throughout each interview.

Individual depth interviews were carried out with participants, providing an individual conversation with an interviewer in which they could speak openly about their views. Depth interviews lasted up to 1 hour and participants were given the choice of taking part via telephone or video interview; an even mix of these modes were chosen. Interviews were carried out between 11<sup>th</sup> August and 26<sup>th</sup> September 2021 by an Ipsos MORI fieldwork team comprising six experienced qualitative researchers.

Participants were identified via a free-find recruitment approach with locally based recruiters networking to find participants. This included some recruitment via 'intermediaries' (e.g., child's mother, friends, their own parent) who sought their permission to share contact details with recruiters. Recruitment materials

for OHFs and LIFs were tailored to ensure that each group understood why we were collecting the data and the specific value of participation. Each participant was given a £40 thank you for taking part.

It is useful to bear in mind any impact the research process may have had on participant views towards taking part in the ELC-FS. For example, participant views towards incentivisation for the ELC-FS may have been influenced by receiving £40 for taking part in this qualitative research.

### 1.3 Sample

30 depth interviews were carried out with each group of OHFs and LIFs (60 interviews in total).

As the ELC-FS will endeavour to engage parents and their child at age 6-9 months, all of the qualitative research participants recruited were birth/ legal parents of a child aged under two years old. This enabled the research to capture views of those with a young child.

For each group additional key quotas were identified to ensure that a diverse group of participants from different backgrounds participated in the research. Key quotas are summarised below.

Own household fathers	Low-income families
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Spread of type and frequency of contact with child including regular overnight stays and no-current-contact.</li><li>• Mix of those in a romantic and not in a romantic relationship with the mother of their child.</li><li>• Spread of ethnicity.</li><li>• Mix of socio-economic group.</li><li>• Interviews across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Inclusion of participants from each of the following ethnic minority backgrounds: Black Caribbean, Black African, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi.</li><li>• Mix of mothers and fathers.</li><li>• Interviews across England, Scotland, and Wales<sup>1</sup>.</li></ul>

### 1.4 Key findings

The following sections of this executive summary discuss key findings from this qualitative research. Some findings were shared across OHF and LIF participants, while others were specific to each group. General findings are outlined below, and specific findings are presented in blue (OHF) or yellow (LIF) boxes.

#### Motivations to ELC-FS participation

The following motivations to participate in the ELC-FS emerged:

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<sup>1</sup> Please note, due to the very low ethnic minority population in Northern Ireland (where ethnic minorities make up under 2% of the population<sup>1</sup>) recruitment for the LIF sample was not attempted in Northern Ireland. Whilst quotas were set for carrying out interviews across the LIF sample for those living outside of England, these quotas were met in Scotland and Wales where recruiters were better able to identify potential participants from a range of different backgrounds.



**Recognising the role of families in different circumstances:** both groups noted the importance of the ELC-FS recognising and representing families across a range of different circumstances. This was a key motivator for participation in the study.

Own household fathers were particularly motivated by the idea that the ELC-FS would recognise the important role of fathers in children's lives, and specifically acknowledging the role of fathers who don't live with their children full-time.

Low-income families, and particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds, were motivated by the notion of capturing the experience of a diverse range of families in a variety of different circumstances.

**Social value of the study:** participants across both groups felt that the study, and the findings produced by the study, had social value. Both recognised that the study could impact policy and improve the lives of children and parents, and specifically the lives of those in similar circumstances to themselves.

**Feedback, reflection and learning:** Both groups saw an opportunity for the study to encourage reflection and learning. This was particularly motivating for participants who wanted to receive insights from the study findings, either general or specific, to families like their own. Some participants were keen to receive more specific, individual-level feedback.

In addition to feedback, participants were also motivated by the idea that the study would provide signposting to useful resources relating to children's development and parenting.

Own household fathers were particularly motivated by the opportunity to reflect on their child's development that they felt study participation would provide. They were interested to reflect on the ways in which their role as a father impacted upon their child's development.

**Financial recognition of participation:** Although financial incentives typically weren't the key motivation for participation, both groups acknowledged the importance of receiving financial recognition for their participation.

**Spending time with their child:** The potential opportunity to spend time with their child was a key motivator for OHFs, especially those in regular contact.

Own household fathers were particularly motivated by the possibility of spending more time with their child, often assuming that this opportunity would arise by taking part in the study at the same time as their child.

## Barriers to ELC-FS participation

The following barriers to participating in the ELC-FS emerged:

**Time:** Participants across both groups felt that time would be a key barrier to participation. Both groups suggested that it may be difficult to schedule a time to take part in the research as participants were working long hours and/or had inconsistent shift patterns.

Low-income families felt it would be particularly challenging to find a time where both parents were available to take part in the interview due to work or childcare arrangements.



**Data confidentiality:** Both groups had concerns about why data was being collected, and how it would be used. For some, this was a significant barrier to taking part in the ELC-FS.

**Sensitivity of individual circumstances:** For participants across both groups there were concerns about difficulties regarding talking about, or answering questions relating to, personal or sensitive experiences. Both groups recognised that a barrier to participation may be the fear of being judged for their circumstances or approach to parenting.

Own household fathers noted specific concerns about how their participation may negatively impact their relationship with the mother of their child, and by extension with their child. Those who reported that they had a difficult relationship with the mother of their child speculated that their participation in the ELC-FS may cause further tensions.

**Role of the child:** Both groups felt that the role of the child, and uncertainty regarding what the child's involvement in the ELC-FS might involve could be a barrier to participation. Some participants had specific concerns about the potential for their child to be negatively impacted by participation in the ELC-FS (either in the short or longer term).

### Study topics

Participants were asked how they would feel about answering questions on a range of different study topics that would likely be included in the ELC-FS. Both groups expressed a range of concerns regarding study topics:

#### Judgement:

Own household fathers expressed some specific concerns around fear of being judged for not living with their child full-time, or for the breakdown of the relationship with their child's mother. Some felt that specific or in-depth questions around these topics may be challenging and deterring.

Low-income families, and particularly those from ethnic minority backgrounds, felt that they might be reluctant to discuss or answer questions about cultural norms and religious practices. This reluctance stemmed from a fear of being judged for not following traditional norms in their community.

**Uncertainty about child's development:** Some participants expressed confusion around how different topics that may be included in an ELC-FS interview related to children's development. Both groups felt that they may be more reluctant to answer questions where they didn't understand or immediately recognise the link to children's development.

Own household fathers noted that they may have reservations about being asked specific questions about their child's development. Whilst some OHFs welcomed the opportunity to talk about their child's development, others felt that they might struggle to answer specific questions. OHFs warned that this might make some fathers feel guilty. This was particularly noted by fathers who had less frequent contact with their children.

**Sensitivity of individual circumstances:** Participants across both groups expressed concerns about answering questions on sensitive or personal topics, such as financial hardship and mental health.

Some own household fathers felt that they, or other fathers, may struggle to answer questions about their relationship with their child's mother, and felt that detailed questions about parental relationships should be avoided as they could trigger negative emotions.

Low-income families also mentioned potential sensitivities around answering questions about birth and mental health as some mothers may have had traumatic birthing experiences or have experienced post-natal depression.

**Privacy:** Both groups had concerns about privacy, however there were some specific concerns within the two groups.

Own household fathers were particularly concerned about whether their responses would be shared with the mother of their child. They felt this may deter some fathers from answering certain questions or encourage dishonest responses.

Low-income families expressed concerns about answering questions on certain topics in front of their partner within their household. Topics like mental health and financial hardship, specifically debt, were considered particularly sensitive for parents to talk about in front of their partner.

### Interviewer characteristics

Low-income families were asked how they would feel about being given the option to select interviewer characteristics. Overall, participants felt that being given this option was important because it signalled to them that the study valued diversity and inclusivity. Choice of interviewer gender was considered the most important factor, particularly for mothers who lived alone and families from certain religious and ethnic minority backgrounds.

Some participants from ethnic minority backgrounds said they may consider selecting an interviewer from a different ethnic/religious background to themselves. This was because they were concerned that the interviewer might judge them for following, or not following, certain cultural norms or practices within their household.

### Novel types of data collection

In terms of novel modes of data collection, both groups were asked their thoughts on providing a saliva sample. Low-income families were also asked about app-based data collection (OHFs would not be eligible for data collection in this way in the ELC-FS).

#### Saliva sample

The idea of the ELC-FS collecting a saliva sample evoked strong reactions from participants across both groups. Participants expressed specific concerns around invasiveness of sample collection, privacy and security of the data, the use of the data, and who had access to the data.

Although some participants understood the relevance of collecting this type of data, others were unclear about how genetic information related to children's development. Those who were uncertain also tended to be more sceptical.

Some own household fathers spontaneously queried whether the sample could be accessed by third parties, specifically the police or private companies. Scepticism relating to the agenda behind the saliva sample was particularly noted by Black African and Black Caribbean fathers.

In contrast, some participants were really interested in the saliva sample and were keen to receive individual level information about themselves and their child. However, others worried about the possibility of finding out information about themselves, their partner, or their child that they did not want to know.

### App-based data collection

We asked LIFs how they would feel about being asked to upload videos of themselves with their baby to a mobile app, and about completing a diary and answering one-off questions on a mobile app.

Low-income families were generally positive about the option for app-based data collection. Many felt that it could be an engaging and enjoyable activity; however, some participants did have concerns around the time commitment, type of activities they might be required to do and the privacy of their data.

Some low-income families were uncomfortable with the idea of sharing images or videos of themselves with their child on the app. There were specific concerns around who might capture and view the images. For example, LIFs noted that it would not be appropriate for a male researcher to view pictures or videos of a mother wearing a niqab.

### **Study mode**

Questions about different study modes were exclusively asked to own household fathers because CLS are exploring the option to offer phone or online modes to encourage OHF participation.

Own household fathers expressed that convenience and comfort were key factors when thinking about study mode preferences. OHFs felt more favourably toward more flexible modes such as telephone or online because they felt they were more convenient, particularly for those with busy schedules. However, some felt that taking part via an online survey would be less engaging and suggested that it may lead to poor quality responses

While they recognised that face-to-face or video modes would allow for them to build rapport with interviewers, some felt that this might hinder their ability to answer more personal questions for fear of judgement.

Overall, OHF participants felt that telephone offered a good compromise between convenience, sensitivity, privacy, and engagement.

### **Study engagement**

#### LIF engagement approaches

LIFs were presented with two potential engagements approaches: engagement via a health visitor and community engagement<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> The community engagement approach which was explored during the interviews was engagement via a local church or community centre.

Low-income families felt that health workers were well placed to engage families in research as they had existing relationships with families, understood their personal circumstances and would be well placed to navigate sensitive family circumstances, and had a clear link to child development.

LIFs were also positive about this engagement option because they felt that religious and community leaders would be seen as trusted gatekeepers. However, there were some specific concerns about the motivation of religious or community leaders helping with the study recruitment.

### OHF recruitment approaches and communications

Three recruitment approaches were explored with OHFs: via birth registration records; mother sharing father’s contact details with the study; mother passing on study information to father.

Own household fathers noted that the acceptability of these approaches would depend on several factors. These included their relationship with the mother of their child, and the extent to which they wanted control over their participation. For example, some perceived the use of birth records or the mother sharing their details with the study as negating their agency to make the initial choice to participate and wanted an opportunity to consent to their details being shared.

In terms of communication, OHFs recognised specific challenges with engaging them in the study. They emphasised the importance of promoting the benefits of taking part, providing reassurances which addressed specific concerns and ensuring that language around fatherhood was neutral.

## 1.5 Conclusions

In conclusion, we identified three key factors to support ELC-FS participation across both groups. Each of these themes is important, and any engagement with OHFs and LIFs should consider all three at each stage of the research process.



# 02

## Introduction

## 2 Introduction

### 2.1 Background and objectives

A team led by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) at the UCL Institute of Education (IoE) has been commissioned by Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) to carry out a feasibility study for a new national longitudinal cohort study, called the Early Life Cohort Feasibility Study (ELC-FS). The study will pave the way for a new national birth cohort for the UK.

The ELC-FS is planning to recruit participants who have babies that are approximately 6-9 months<sup>3</sup> old at the time of data collection and will ask them to take part in an interviewer visit in their home. The visit is planned to comprise of interviews with both birth parents in the same household or in separate households as needed (see target groups section below), as well as some observations and assessments of the baby, and the collection of biological samples from babies and birth parents.

The ELC-FS in particular aims to engage parents who are often under-represented in cohort studies. CLS commissioned Ipsos MORI to carry out qualitative research with these groups to explore views towards cohort study engagement, drivers likely to encourage participation, preferences for data collection mode and views on the types of data and information planned for collection in the ELC-FS.

CLS were particularly interested to understand:

- what information participants would like to be provided with as part of the study recruitment process, what they perceive to be the benefits and costs of research for society, their child and themselves.
- what would motivate them to take part and what would deter them from doing so.
- the form(s) that the cohort study communications and information should take (such as use of text messages, emails, letters and so on).
- their preferences for data collection modes (whether that be face-to-face, by telephone, online, or some other means); and
- the types of data and information they would be happy and/or keen to provide to a study like the ELC-FS.

The research findings will be used by the ELC-FS study team to inform the development of future study questionnaires and protocols going forward.

This qualitative research project took place between July 2021 and November 2021, with interviews taking place between 11<sup>th</sup> August and 29<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

### Target groups

CLS identified two groups for inclusion in this research:

1. Own Household Fathers<sup>4</sup> (referred to as Own Household Fathers, or OHFs, throughout this report).

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<sup>3</sup> Please note: participants were told that the study would be recruiting at 9 months old, however it has since been decided that recruitment will take place at 6 months.

<sup>4</sup> Own Household Father is a term created by the Fatherhood Institute and used in the ELC-FS to describe a father that does not live full-time with their child.

2. Low Income Families (referred to as LIFs throughout this report). Within this group, CLS were keen to understand the views of people from different ethnic minority backgrounds, specifically Black Caribbean, Black African, Bangladeshi, and Pakistani groups.

These groups were chosen as they have been identified as key groups for inclusion in the ELC-FS sample.

The inclusion of OHFs as a key group for ELC-FS is particularly important because, despite around 15-20% of infants having a birth father living separately, OHFs have not been included in any large-scale UK child cohort study. There are also important demographic differences in the proportion of infants who live separate to their birth father, with infants from socio-economically disadvantaged families more likely to have a birth father living separately<sup>5</sup>.

ESRC has previously commissioned scoping work to inform the strategy for recruiting, collecting data from and retaining OHFs in a future birth cohort study<sup>6</sup>. This research, carried out by the Fatherhood Institute and ScotCen Social Research, found that no qualitative research had been done with OHFs to understand factors influencing their participation in cohort studies, either in the UK or abroad. This gap in understanding was a key motivating factor for CLS to commission qualitative work to inform the survey methods and questionnaire topics for OHFs in the ELC-FS<sup>7</sup>.

Likewise, LIFs were a target group because they are often under-represented in cohort studies and have also been considered a challenging group to recruit to take part in research. Although both OHFs and LIFs were recruited in their own right, it was also important that both groups included a diverse range of participants. As the ELC-FS plans to over-represent families living in low-income areas, and those from Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Black African, and Black Caribbean backgrounds, we ensured that the sample included participants from these groups.

## 2.2 Research team and outputs

Ipsos MORI worked closely with CLS to agree the methodological approach, sampling approach and design of the materials (including participant facing materials and the topic guides) for both OHF and LIF groups. The Fatherhood Institute is part of the ELC-FS team and provided invaluable support and guidance during the design and development phase of the OHF research.

Although this report is the main research output for this project, Ipsos MORI also delivered a presentation of the research findings to key stakeholders in the ELC-FS project team.

## 2.3 Method and sample

### Method

The method chosen for this research was individual depth interviews, each lasting 1 hour. This was chosen instead of group discussions because, in interviews, participants would be able to give their own individual views toward the ELC-FS and explain in depth how they would personally feel about participating. This method reflected any potential sensitivities amongst the target groups, generating an

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/journal-of-social-policy/article/who-are-nonresident-fathers-a-british-sociodemographic-profile/38576583AB83D9095271867F8F9721FF>

<sup>6</sup> Goldman, R., Bradshaw, P., Burgess, A. and Vosnaki, K. (2019) *Recruitment and retention of birth fathers in split-off households. Methodological considerations for cohort and longitudinal studies. Working Paper*. Economic and Social Research Council. <https://esrc.ukri.org/files/funding/funding-opportunities/recruitment-and-retention-of-birth-fathers-in-split-off-households-methodological-considerations-for-cohort-and-longitudinal-studies/>

<sup>7</sup> It is worth noting that qualitative research about birth cohort participation of resident fathers who are already participants (Millennium Cohort Study - Wallace et al, 2013); and with 'lone mothers' about the potential participation of OHFs (Life Study – Keeble et al, 2015) already exists. As such, OHFs presented a key gap in knowledge.



environment where participants would feel comfortable describing any personal circumstances that may influence attitudes or practicalities regarding ELC-FS participation. Participants were given the option to participate via video call (MS Teams) or telephone depending on their own personal preference.

The interviews took place between 11<sup>th</sup> August and 29<sup>th</sup> September 2021 and were carried out using a structured discussion guide (see appendix).

58 of the total 60 interviews were audio recorded with consent from the participants and detailed notes were taken by researchers following the interviews. For two participants who did not consent to audio recording, interviewers took detailed notes during the interviews.

The moderator team comprised six experienced qualitative researchers. Moderators were selected based on their experience of conducting qualitative research with similar demographics (i.e., low income and ethnic minority participants) and their experience of research on similar topics (i.e., exploring attitudes to cohort study participation).

## Recruitment

The recruitment of 'hard to reach'<sup>8</sup> audiences for this qualitative research presented a key challenge. As such, participants in this qualitative research study were identified via a free-find recruitment approach. This approach combines a range of different recruitment strategies such as using networks or snowballing. We worked alongside an experienced recruitment organisation, Criteria Fieldwork Ltd, who were able to use their network of recruiters to ensure we were able to sensitively approach, and recruit seldom heard audiences. Some participants were recruited via intermediaries. Intermediaries are people that recruiters come across whilst networking for participants. Intermediaries sought permission to share participant contact details with the recruiter who then provided further information about the study. In the context of this research, intermediaries included the child's other parent, other relatives (the child's aunt, uncle, or grandparents), friends and colleagues.

The design of the recruitment and engagement materials (see appendix) was supported by Ipsos MORI's Social Research Ethics Group. This project also received ethics approval from UCL Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee<sup>9</sup>.

The recruitment protocols included:

- **Carefully designed recruitment materials:** we designed a recruitment screening questionnaire which clearly covered the sample criteria while avoiding lengthy or sensitive questions which would risk deterring potential participants from taking part in the research.
- **Comprehensive recruiter briefings:** we carried out a recruitment briefing for each group to ensure that recruiters understood the sample we were seeking to include in the research and provided guidance regarding the use of recruitment materials and engagement approach. The Fatherhood Institute kindly provided a valuable briefing to Ipsos MORI moderators and the recruitment lead at Criteria Fieldwork Ltd to support our approach in engaging OHFs.
- **Clarity around the purpose and value of the research:** we developed participant facing recruitment materials which clearly explained why we were collecting the data and why taking part would be worthwhile. We developed tailored recruitment materials for OHF and LIFs to

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<sup>8</sup> In the context of this research, a 'hard to reach' audience refers to a group within society that is typically under-represented in the research process or has limited capacity for involvement in research. Please note, there are many reasons that certain audiences may be harder to engage in research, but it is important not to assume that they are 'hard to reach' because they don't want to be reached.

<sup>9</sup> UCL Institute of Education ethics application no. REC 1544

ensure that each group understood the specific value of participation and provided a convincing rationale for participation. These were developed in collaboration with CLS and the Fatherhood Institute (for OHF materials), to ensure the framing was appropriate for the target audience.

- **Ensuring informed consent:** we provided Participant Information Sheets (see appendix) which explained the voluntary nature of involvement, the process for withdrawing consent if they changed their mind, and data confidentiality.
- **Ensuring accessibility of our research:** we worked with our recruiters to ensure people could participate in our research comfortably and ethically, reflecting individual needs. For example, we made it clear that we could provide translated research materials and arrange for translators to carry out interviews if the participant did not want to carry out the interview in English.
- **Offering incentives:** as a gesture of appreciation for participating in the research we offered a £40 financial incentive provided via BACS or e-voucher.

## Sample

Given the qualitative nature of this study, we employed a purposive non-probability approach to capture diversity within the target population. The key quotas for each group were:

- **OHF:** birth/ legal<sup>10</sup> fathers of a child(ren) under two years old who are not resident full-time in the same household as their child.
- **LIF:** birth/ legal parents of a child(ren) under two years old whose combined household income fell below £18k per annum, and who reported claiming means tested benefit(s) and/or financial precarity.

To ensure that we captured a diverse range of circumstances we also applied some additional quotas. Details regarding the quotas set and achieved for each target group are provided below.

### Own Household Fathers

The specific inclusion criteria for OHFs are detailed below.

- Birth/legal father of a child(ren) under two years
- Contact with child: OHFs currently residing in a separate household to their child and their child's mother for some or all of the time, including:
  - OHFs living part-time or having regular overnight stays with his birth/legal child/ren under 2 years e.g., at the mother's place or his place.
  - OHFs who do not have regular overnight stays, but spend regular face-to-face time with their child (either in person or by video-call); and
  - OHFs with infrequent or no current contact with their child.
- Relationship with the mother of their child, including:

<sup>10</sup> In the context of this research 'birth/ 'legal parent' refers to the biological parent of a child, or the parent that has parental responsibility of a child, either by adoption or if they are on the birth certificate. Under this definition, parents who conceived in a same-sex parental couple; through egg or sperm donation; surrogate pregnancy or misattributed paternity etc. would all be included under this definition.

- OHFs who are in a romantic ‘non-cohabiting’ relationship with mother (which may involve regular overnight stays at the mother’s place); and
- OHFs who are not in a romantic relationship with mother (e.g., have separated from the mother or were never in a romantic relationship with her).

As the ELC-FS is aiming to over-represent families living in low-income areas and families from ethnic minority backgrounds it was important that we recruited OHFs who belonged to these groups. As such, we aimed to recruit a minimum of 3 OHFs from Bangladeshi, Pakistani, Black African and Black Caribbean ethnic groups. Due to the very low prevalence<sup>11</sup> of OHFs from Bangladeshi and Pakistani backgrounds we agreed to combine the quota for Bangladeshi and Pakistani OHFs. We also set a minimum quota for social grade as a proxy for low-income (C2DE<sup>12</sup>).

As the ELC-FS is planning to recruit families across the UK it was important that we spoke to OHFs in different countries. As such, we set a minimum quota for fathers in each of the UK countries. Within countries, participants were recruited from a mixture of regions, including both urban, suburban and rural areas.

### Figure 2.1: Target and achieved sample: Own Household Fathers

The table below provides an overview of the OHFs we spoke to as part of this research. The fathers we spoke to ranged from 20 years old to 44 years old. All had a child aged under two years old, and the age of this child ranged from eight weeks to 24 months. Some were first time fathers, while others had multiple children including older children and, in one case, two children aged under two years old. It is important to note that OHF circumstances could be complex and fluid. For example, one participant whilst recruited as ‘in regular contact’ with his child noted that this had more recently been less frequent due to personal circumstances. Another participant whilst recruited as ‘not in a romantic relationship’ with the mother of his child noted that it could be described as ‘semi-romantic’. Potential limitations of the quota descriptors are discussed in more detail in the ‘reflections on the research process’ section below.

Quotas	Target (minimum quota)	Qualitative interviews completed
<b>Own Household Fathers &amp; contact with child</b>		
Regular contact: Between 2 and 8 nights with child in a typical fortnight	Recruit a mix	16
Regular contact in person (no overnight stay) in a typical fortnight		8
Regular contact (phone/ video) in a typical fortnight		1
Infrequently or never have contact		5
<b>Age</b>		
20-24	No quota	5
25-34		16
35-44		9
<b>Relationship with child’s mother</b>		
Romantic relationship	8	10

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.modernfatherhood.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Briefing-paper-Non-resident-fathers.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> Social grades are a system of demographic classification used in the United Kingdom. The grades are often grouped into ABC1 and C2DE; these are taken to equate to middle class and working class, respectively. Their definition is now maintained by the Market Research Society.

Not in a romantic relationship	8	20
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
White <sup>13</sup>	No quota	11
Bangladeshi and/or Pakistani	Min 3	2
Black African	Min 3	6
Black Caribbean	Min 3	7
Other <sup>14</sup>	No quota	4
<b>Social grade</b>		
C2DE	10	18
<b>Country</b>		
England	No quota	23
Northern Ireland	Min 2 from each country	2
Scotland		3
Wales		2
<b>Area Type</b>		
Urban	No quota	16
Suburban		11
Rural		3
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>

Please note: During fieldwork it became clear that we would not manage to meet the minimum quota for Bangladeshi and/or Pakistani OHFs. Of the two OHFs recruited to this quota, both were Pakistani. On this basis, it was agreed that we would recruit a higher number of Black Caribbean and Black African OHFs as data indicated that these groups had a higher percentage of dependent children in lone parent families<sup>15</sup>.

### Low-income families

The specific inclusion criteria for LIFs are detailed below.

- Birth/legal mother or father of a child(ren) under two years.
- Low income, which was defined as families whose combined household income fell below 60% the median before housing costs (BHC)<sup>16</sup>. As such, the threshold for 'low income' was set at £18k a year<sup>17</sup>.

To account for additional contextual factors (i.e., differences in region, household composition and housing costs) we decided to use two additional factors to determine 'low income' families:

- Claiming a means-tested benefit
- Self-reported financial precarity, which was measured using a set of attitudinal questions to understand financial situations (e.g., how frequently participants struggle to make ends meet,

<sup>13</sup>The 'White' category included this includes those who identify as White English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British

<sup>14</sup>The 'other' category included a range of different ethnic groups and mixed/multiple ethnic groups. These included Arab, Indian and mixed/multiple ethnic backgrounds)

<sup>15</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/families/adhocs/12947proportionofchildreninloneparentfamiliesbyethnicgroupenglandandwales2019>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-low-income-is-measured/text-only-how-low-income-is-measured>

<sup>17</sup> According to the 2021 estimates from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) median household income in the UK is £29,900, or £547pw (BHC). On this basis, the threshold for 'low income' was set at £18k a year (60% of £29,900)

borrow money from friends and family to pay for food or other essentials and use food banks). Questions used can be found the recruitment screening questionnaire (see appendix).

As the ELC-FS is aiming to over-represent families from ethnic minority backgrounds it was important that we recruited a diverse group of mothers and fathers. As such, we recruited a minimum of five parents (three mothers and two fathers) from each of the following ethnic minority groups: Bangladeshi; Pakistani; Black African; and Black Caribbean.

As the ELC-FS is planning to recruit families across the UK it was important that we spoke to LIFs in different countries. However, due to the high quotas on ethnicity and the low percentage of ethnic minority participants outside of England we did not set minimum quotas for participants recruited in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Instead, the recruiter was instructed to try and include 5 LIFs outside of England. Due to the very low ethnic minority population in Northern Ireland (where ethnic minorities make up under 2% of the population<sup>1</sup>) recruitment for the LIF sample was not attempted in Northern Ireland.

### Figure 2.2: Target and achieved sample: Low-income Families

The table below provides an overview of the LIFs we spoke to as part of this research. It is useful to note that whilst the quotas enabled us to capture a range of LIFs in the research, they are structured descriptions and therefore did not always fully capture the diversity and complexity of LIF participant circumstances. The parents we spoke to range from 20 years old to 44 years old. All had a child aged under two years old, and the age of this child ranged from 8 weeks to 24 months. Some were first time parents, while others had multiple children including older children and, in one case, multiple children aged under two years old.

Quotas	Target (minimum quota)	Qualitative interviews completed
<b>Birth parent</b>		
Mother	18	18
Father	12	12
<b>Age</b>		
20-24	No quota	1
25-34		15
35-44		13
45-54		1
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
	<b>3 x Mother &amp; 2 x Father were recruited for each ethnic group</b>	
White <sup>18</sup>	No quota	8 <sup>19</sup>
Bangladeshi	5	5
Pakistani	5	5
Black African	5	5
Black Caribbean	5	5

<sup>18</sup> The 'White' category included this includes those who identify as White English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British

<sup>19</sup> 5 x mothers and 3 x fathers

Other <sup>20</sup>	No quota	2 <sup>21</sup>
<b>Contact with child</b>		
Living with child full-time	Monitor - Recruit a mix	28
Not living with child full-time		2
<b>Relationship with child's other birth/legal parent</b>		
Romantic relationship	Monitor - Recruit a mix	18
Not in a romantic relationship		12
<b>Country</b>		
England	Monitor for inclusion of families living outside of England (aim for 5 in total)	22
Northern Ireland		0
Scotland		4
Wales		4
<b>Area type</b>		
Urban	No quota	25
Rural		5
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>30</b>

## Topic guides

Topic guides were developed with the intention of guiding the discussion with interviewees and ensuring that the topics were covered with participants. Moderators were responsive to the lead of the participant. This approach helped to ensure that each interview reflected the participant's views and experiences as accurately as possible. As such, it is possible that not all of the questions were asked in each interview, and there may have been slight differences in the exact wording used or the order in which the questions were asked.

Both OHF and LIF topic guides included stimuli which enabled the moderator to provide participants with specific information about the ELC-FS research. Using stimuli helped to ensure that the information participants received was consistent throughout the interviews.

## OHF topics

Below is an overview of the areas covered in each section of the OHF topic guide. The guide was designed to gradually provide the participant with more detail about the ELC-FS and what study participation would involve. This structure was chosen to help avoid participants becoming overwhelmed with information.

The order of the guide was carefully considered to reduce bias. For example, we felt it was important for participants to understand the topic areas before thinking about interview mode because preference for mode may differ depending on the type of questions being asked. Likewise, we felt it was important for participants to understand what taking part might involve before thinking about recruitment approaches or study communication. The complete OHF topic guide can be found in the appendices.

Topic guide section	Areas covered
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<sup>20</sup> The 'other' category included a range of different ethnic groups and mixed/ multiple ethnic groups. These included Indian and Ecuadorian.

<sup>21</sup> 1 x mother and 1 x father

<b>1. About the study</b>	<p>Overview of CLS</p> <p>Stimulus 1A: overview of what the ELC-FS is, and what would be expected of participants taking part</p> <p>Stimulus 1B: overview of ELC-FS impact</p> <p>Initial reaction to the study</p> <p>Reflections on motivations and barriers to taking part</p>
<b>2. Topics/activities covered</b>	<p>Spontaneous expectations of topics</p> <p>Stimulus 4: overview of topic areas covered, explanation about optional nature of questions and confidentiality of the study</p> <p>Views on potential topics</p> <p>Overview of potential saliva sample collection and views on saliva sample</p> <p>Reflections on motivations and barriers relating to topics</p>
<b>3. Ways to take part</b>	<p>Spontaneous expectations of mode</p> <p>Stimulus 5: overview of different modes</p> <p>Thoughts on different modes and exploration of preference</p> <p>Reflections on motivations and barriers relating to modes</p>
<b>4. Participation of new co-habiting partner (optional)</b>	<p>Reflections on whether OHFs co-habiting partner would be interested in taking part in ELC-FS</p>
<b>5. Recruitment and inviting OHFs to take part</b>	<p>Spontaneous expectations of recruitment for study</p> <p>Overview of different methods</p> <p>Stimulus 6: Case study of OHF not on child's birth registration records</p> <p>Reflections on options for recruitment via the mother</p> <p>Stimulus 7: Case study of OHF on child's birth registration records</p> <p>Reflections on options for recruitment via birth registration</p> <p>Reflections on motivations and barriers relating to recruitment approaches</p>
<b>6. Motivations, barriers, and communications</b>	<p>Reflections on the study and study participation, including:</p> <p>Perceived benefits and concerns for themselves and their child</p> <p>Incentive amount</p> <p>Feelings about recruitment and participation of child</p> <p>Type of information provided about the study</p> <p>Study communication (including language used)</p>
<b>7. Overall motivations and barriers and wrap-up</b>	<p>Reflections on the overarching barriers and motivators for study participation</p> <p>Suggestions for engaging OHFs in research</p>

### LIF topics

Below is an overview of the areas covered in each section of the LIF topic guide. The guide was designed to gradually provide the participant with more detail about the ELC-FS and what study participation would involve. Like the OHF guide, the structure was chosen to help avoid participants becoming overwhelmed with information and to reduce bias.

Within this guide there were certain questions, or stimuli, which were exclusively asked to LIF participants from ethnic minority groups. The complete LIF topic guide can be found in the appendices.



Topic guide section	Areas covered
<b>1. About the study</b>	<p>Overview of CLS</p> <p>Stimulus 1A: overview of what the ELC-FS is, and what would be expected of participants taking part</p> <p>Stimulus 1B: overview of ELC-FS impact</p> <p>Initial reaction to the study</p> <p>Reflections on motivations and barriers to taking part</p>
<b>2. Topics/activities covered</b>	<p>Spontaneous expectations of topics</p> <p>Stimulus 4: overview of topic areas covered and explanation about optional nature of questions and confidentiality of the study</p> <p>Stimulus 5: overview of topics specific for ethnic minority participants</p> <p>Views on potential topics and views on potential saliva sample collection</p> <p>Reflections on motivations and barriers relating to topics</p>
<b>3. Ways to take part</b>	<p>Spontaneous expectations of mode</p> <p>Explanation of face-to-face (F2F) mode and home visit</p> <p>Thoughts on F2F mode and home visit</p> <p>Thoughts on specific considerations (e.g., use of translators, views of partner or other relatives living in household)</p> <p>Exploration of motivations and barriers relating to mode</p>
<b>4. Novel ways to take part</b>	<p>Stimulus 6: Explanation of possible activities carried out during, or after, a face-to-face interview (capturing videos of child and uploading to a mobile app, filling out an app-based diary or answering app-based questions)</p> <p>Reflections on motivations and barriers relating to novel modes</p>
<b>5. Engagement</b>	<p>Spontaneous expectations of study engagement</p> <p>Overview of different methods</p> <p>Stimulus 7: Case study of community engagement approach</p> <p>Reflections on community engagement</p> <p>Stimulus 8: Case study of service-user engagement approach</p> <p>Reflections on service-user engagement</p> <p>Suggestions for engagement</p> <p>Reflections on motivations and barriers relating to different engagement approaches</p>
<b>6. Motivations, barriers, and wrap-up</b>	<p>Reflections on the study and study participation, including:</p> <p>Perceived benefits and concerns for themselves and their child</p> <p>Incentive amount</p> <p>Type of information provided about the study</p> <p>Feelings about recruitment and participation of child</p> <p>Feelings about parental involvement in study participation</p> <p>Reflections on the overarching barriers and motivators for study participation</p> <p>Suggestions for engaging other families</p>

## Analysis

Thematic analysis incorporating the use of data summaries was conducted in order to produce timely evidence<sup>22</sup>). A thematic framework for the analysis of the data was developed through collaborative discussion among research team members. The analysis framework was used to generate focused evidence summaries to support data analysis. Analysis was supported by iterative team discussions during and following completion of fieldwork.

### 2.4 How to read this report

When considering these findings, it is important to bear in mind what a qualitative approach provides. Qualitative research is illustrative, detailed, and exploratory. It explores the range of attitudes and opinions of participants in detail, and it provides an insight into the key reasons underlying participants' views.

Qualitative research cannot – and does not set out to be – representative of the wider population. We sampled participants purposively in order to highlight a diverse range of views and circumstances. When analysing the data, we were not seeking to understand prevalence but rather the values and experiences which underpin people's attitudes and opinions. As such, the sampling criteria was designed to ensure that the sample reflected the diverse range of circumstances that CLS are aiming to include in the ELC-FS study population. Quota sampling was used to ensure the sample captured a diversity of experiences. It should be noted that the quotas were not intended to facilitate detailed sub-group analysis or report specific sub-group differences – this is because, given the scale of the study, the sub-group numbers do not allow for robust analysis. Furthermore, the findings cannot be considered quantifiable as they are not drawn from a statistically representative sample. As such, the findings should not be treated as generalisable to the wider population.

It is useful to reflect that whilst these research findings specifically focus on attitudes towards participating in the ELC-FS, findings from our participants may be useful when looking to engage similar groups in other research studies. We hope that wider research studies may find these findings valuable.

When analysing the data, we were not seeking to understand prevalence but rather the values and experiences which underpin people's attitudes and opinions. It is useful to reflect that whilst these research findings specifically focus on attitudes towards participating in the ELC-FS, findings from our participants may be useful when looking to engage similar groups in other research studies. We hope that wider research studies may find these findings valuable.

### Reporting conventions

Throughout, we have referred to “participants” and provided evidence through verbatim quotes where these illustrate findings. To protect participant anonymity, quotations have been attributed to key characteristics<sup>23</sup>. For OHFs we have included the type of contact fathers had with their children, whether they are in/not in a romantic relationship with the mother of their child. For LIFs we have included whether they are a mother or father. We have also included ethnicity<sup>24</sup>, age group and interview number in the quote attribution for both groups. Given the small numbers recruited outside of England we have not added country to the quote attributions.

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<sup>22</sup> Ritchie, J. and Lewis, J., 2013. *Qualitative research practice*. London: Sage Publications.

<sup>23</sup> Please note, the interview transcripts and anonymised datasets containing verbatim quotes will not be shared with CLS or archived. Data will be securely stored for three months after the project has ended (January 2022)

<sup>24</sup> Please note, those coded as mixed/multiple ethnic groups provided further detail regarding their heritage during recruitment, but this detail is not included in quote attributions to ensure participant anonymity.

Although participants were primarily reflecting on their own views and experiences, they also provided an insight into how they felt those in a similar position to themselves may feel. It is important to note that, where relevant, we have reported participant perceptions of how others in similar circumstances might feel.

Throughout the report we have referred to the Early Life Cohort Feasibility Study as the 'ELC-FS' or 'the study'.

## 2.5 Reflections on the qualitative research process

In addition to guidance on how to read this report it is useful to note some additional considerations for interpreting the research, specifically reflecting on the different ways that the research process may have influenced views on taking part in future research such as the ELC-FS. These are discussed in detail below:

**Amenability to participating in research:** although it is difficult to determine the impact of this factor, it is important to recognise that those who agreed to participate in this qualitative research may be intrinsically more amenable to participating in research in general. It is therefore plausible to assume that those who took part in this research may be more open to participate in future research such as the ELC-FS.

**Approach to recruitment:** it is important to consider the ways in which the recruitment approach for this research may have informed participants' perceptions of, and reactions to, the different engagement approaches outlined in the interview. Participants were recruited via a recruiter which was an approach chosen to ensure that potential participants could build a sense of trust with the research. This may be reflected in participant suggestions for hearing about ELC-FS via a source of trust (although it should be noted that trust will always play a role in research participation).

In addition, some participants were recruited via 'intermediaries'<sup>25</sup> (e.g., child's mother, friends, their own parent) who sought their permission to share contact details with a recruiter who then provided further information about the study. This recruitment approach may have influenced some OHF participant expectations and views on the recruitment section of the interview, specifically regarding their preference to give permission for the mother of their child to share contact details with the ELC-FS. It should be noted that participants' concern around data confidentiality and anonymity of taking part in a study that focuses on sensitive circumstances may have informed these preferences too.

**Incentivisation:** We used stimuli in both the OHF and LIF interviews to provide a clear overview of the likely features of the ELC-FS. This included an explanation of the likely length of an ELC-FS interview, and the incentive amount. It is possible that the higher incentive payment offered for taking part in this qualitative research (a £40 incentive for participation in a 1-hour long interview) may have influenced participants expectations for study incentives or informed how they felt about taking part in a study like ELC-FS, which plans to offer a smaller £10 incentive payment for participation. It is difficult to know the extent to which this informed how they felt about the ELC-FS incentive, but the higher incentive for this research may well have had a priming effect, particularly for LIF participants who were asked how they would feel about doing a 1.5-hour long home visit.

**Tailored recruitment materials:** recruitment for this research used tailored recruitment materials, identifying the benefit of diverse families taking part in this qualitative research as well for the ELC-FS. For example, the OHF recruitment materials highlighted the importance of fathers taking part in cohort

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<sup>25</sup> Intermediaries are people that recruiters come across whilst networking for participants.

studies, with a specific mention of fathers who do not live in the same home as their children. In addition, the screening questionnaire asked fathers about their individual circumstances (including relationship with child's mother and the type/ frequency of contact with their child)<sup>26</sup>. This may have resulted in: higher levels of engagement from those who are specifically motivated by ensuring representation of fathers/OHFs in research; expectations that questions for fathers/OHFs would focus on their circumstances; and linked to this, expectations that ELC-FS findings would specifically consider outcomes for fathers/OHFs.

Likewise, the LIF recruitment materials highlighted the importance of including a diverse range of families in different circumstances. In addition, the screening questionnaire asked parents questions about their personal circumstances (including questions about household income and financial hardship)<sup>27</sup>. This may have resulted in: higher levels of engagement from those who are specifically motivated by ensuring representation of diverse families; expectations that questions may focus on their circumstances (specifically financial hardship); and linked to these, expectations that ELC-FS findings would specifically consider outcomes for families like theirs.

Despite using clear and non-specific language to describe the ELC-FS and the impact of study findings in the OHF and LIF stimuli (i.e., talking broadly about improving services for mothers and fathers), participant assumptions regarding the purpose of the ELC-FS and the types of questions they may expect to answer may have been primed during recruitment and screening. However, it is difficult to know the extent to which participants had developed preconceived ideas about the study.

**Mode and interview style:** Despite outlining the likely face-to-face mode of interview in the topic guide stimuli, it is possible that the mode used for the 2021 qualitative research (e.g., a choice between telephone/ video call mode) informed participants expectations and opinions about the suggested modes offered by the ELC-FS. For example, some assumed that they would participate in the study virtually (i.e., over the telephone or via MS teams), and others assumed they would be offered a choice of mode.

In addition, the qualitative approach may have influenced expectations for what an ELC-FS interview would be like. Despite providing participants with information about the likely ELC-FS interview mode and question format ("a survey") during the interview, some participants (particularly from the OHF sample) assumed that the interview would be conversational (as with a qualitative interview). Although the potential ELC-FS modes were outlined during the interviews it is difficult to know how well participants understood the differences between modes or between a survey and this qualitative research.

## 2.6 Reflections on the research process for this qualitative study

### Barriers to recruitment:

**Incidence rate:** The incidence rate (the number of people who qualify vs those that don't) indicates how hard (or easy) it is to recruit a specific audience: the more specific the audience, the lower the incidence rate. In this research, the specificity of the inclusion criteria for both groups meant that the incidence rate was low. While we were aware of this from the outset, this was the single biggest barrier to recruitment.

**Individual circumstances:** In addition to the low incidence rate, the quotas for specific circumstances added an additional layer of complexity for recruitment. For example, OHFs who have little or no contact with their child were very difficult to both locate and recruit. It is possible that these OHFs found research relating to parenthood harder to engage with on the basis that they didn't have regular contact with their

<sup>26</sup> See OHF recruitment materials in appendix

<sup>27</sup> See LIF recruitment materials in appendix

child. In addition, these OHFs were less likely to have contact with the mother of their child, meaning that they were also less likely to be recruited via a referral from the mother.

**Time poor participants and unpredictable schedules:** Both OHF and LIF participants had limited time to participate in research. One of the main challenges for both recruiters and us, as researchers, was providing adequate flexibility for participants who needed to reschedule interviews at the last minute. In particular, amongst LIFs, challenges regarding last minute changes to childcare arrangements (especially for single parents/ families with multiple children) and receiving last minute shift allocations for work meant that flexible interview scheduling was required.

#### Facilitators to recruitment:

**Using trusted contacts and networks:** Recruiters utilised networks to recruit participants from both groups. For example, some OHFs were recruited via referrals from the mother of their child, friends and their own parents. These 'intermediaries' sought permission from the potential participant to share their contact details with the recruiter who then provided detail and explanation regarding the study. In other cases, no intermediary was used, and recruiters directly engaged potential participants.

**Reassurance around anonymity:** Recruiters emphasised that being able to reassure participants about anonymity and confidentiality was extremely important when asking potential participants about their interest in taking part in the research. This was particularly useful when participants had concerns about any sensitive topics. For example, when parents raised concerns about finance related questions asked in the recruitment screening questionnaires for LIFs recruiters were able to personally reassure parents that their participation would not impact their benefits or child maintenance payments.

**Flexibility:** As mentioned above, participants across both groups were time poor and many had unpredictable schedules. It was important that recruiters and researchers were able to accommodate last-minute interviews and provided flexibility around rescheduling. In addition, offering a flexible mode (i.e., the choice between MS Teams and telephone) was important as some participants were felt less able/comfortable committing to a video call.

**Time:** A long lead time for recruitment of participants was essential. This time was required for recruiters to network to find relevant participants. Time was also needed for recruiters to explain the research carefully and fully to potential participants and provide clear reassurances about the anonymity of taking part.

#### Additional reflections

**Capturing the complexity and nuance of individual circumstances:** In order to recruit participants who met specific quotas it was important that we kept the screener questionnaire as simple as possible to avoid overburdening participants during the recruitment phase and risking drop-out. However, it is important to note that whilst the quotas enabled us to recruit OHFs in a range of specific circumstances, the structured descriptions didn't always capture the diversity and complexity of OHFs circumstances.

At the start of each OHF interview participants were given an opportunity to confirm whether the descriptors provided at the recruitment stage best described their involvement with their child and relationship with the mother of their child. While some felt the descriptor was accurate, others took this opportunity to provide some additional context to explain their individual circumstances. Although the descriptors weren't necessarily inaccurate, the detail OHFs provided at this stage indicated that the nature of their involvement and relationships were more complex than the information captured using the structured descriptors.

For example, in the context of the time spent with their child, OHFs were often keen to provide detail about their involvement (often citing the type of activities they do with their child or explaining why they are not able to spend more time with their child). On reflection, it was clear that some OHFs found that measuring their involvement with their child using frequency of contact served to negate or undermine their subjective reality of fatherhood because it did not represent the active role they played, or felt they played, in their child's life.

It is important to consider the challenges of capturing the nuance and complexity of individual circumstances in the context of the wider ELC-FS. Reflecting on this, moderators felt that a careful balance would need to be struck between ensuring that participants feel 'heard' and collecting the necessary and relevant data for the study. Striking this balance would require sensitivity on the part of the interviewer, particularly when navigating how much detail participants may want to give. It is important that participants feel that their circumstances have been accurately represented without overburdening interviewers or researchers.

Thinking about the ELC-FS, in addition to emphasising that participants are expected to choose the category which most closely reflects their personal circumstances, it may be beneficial to allow participants to provide additional details at their/the interviewers' discretion. This could be done by providing another (open text) response, for example.

**Capturing the complexity and nuance of individual identities:** We used the ONS guide<sup>28</sup> for the collection and classification of ethnic groups; however, it is important to acknowledge the fundamental complexity of capturing individual ethnic identities. The definition of what constitutes an ethnic group or ethnicity is unclear and can differ considerably depending on the individuals subjective understanding. While ethnicity is frequently taken to represent a self-claimed or subjective identity linked to a perception of shared ancestry, it can also include a person's nationality, cultural origins, and religion.

Using an ethnicity quota for this research helped to ensure that our sample was 'diverse'. However, upon reflection, different dimensions of ethnicity (specifically religion and cultural practice) might have informed participants attitudes and beliefs about different aspects of the ELC-FS. This research did not collect information about participant religious beliefs or religious adherence and therefore we are unable to report on how this may influence participant views. However, it may be useful to consider these participant characteristics in future research.

# 03

## Own Household

# Fathers

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/methodology/classificationsandstandards/measuringequality/ethnicgroupnationalidentityandreligion>

## 3 Own Household Fathers

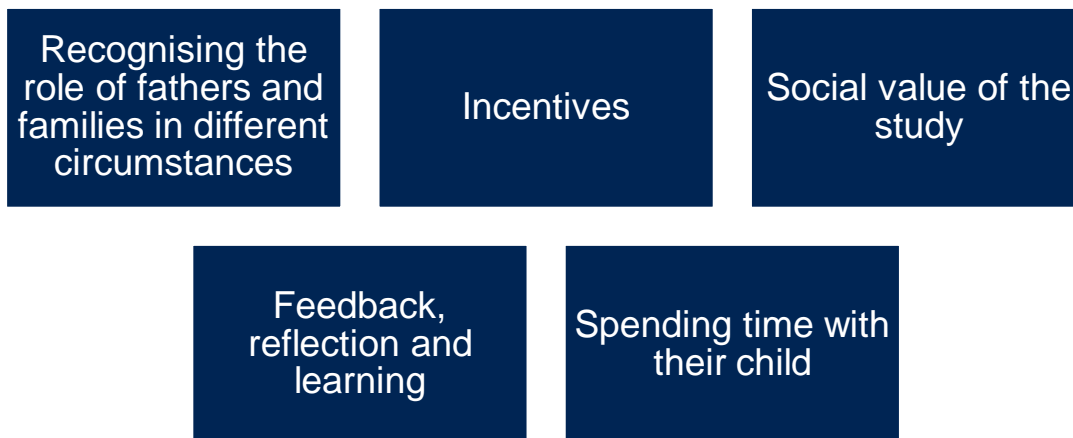
### 3.1 Motivations and barriers to study participation

This section of the report explores motivations and barriers to study participation. Interviews amongst Own Household Fathers (OHFs) highlighted the diversity of circumstances within the audience. Participants did not live with their child full-time for a range of reasons which were often multiple and complex. Where specific circumstances influenced views towards taking part in the ELC-FS, these are reported on.

#### Motivations

Across the research, five factors likely to motivate OHFs to participate in the ELC-FS emerged. Not all motivating factors were voiced by each participant.

**Figure 3.1: Five motivating factors (not shown in any particular order)**



Each of the above factors is discussed in turn below.

#### Recognising the role of fathers and families in different circumstances

Across the research fathers expressed positive reaction to the idea that the ELC-FS was looking to include fathers, particularly those that do not live with their child full-time. They expected that mothers would typically be the focus for research about children and child development and were therefore pleased to see the inclusion of fathers.

*“Fathers are literally just the sperm donors when it comes to research projects...good to see that this survey is looking at both accounts, both father and mothers.” (OHF Interview 23, regular face to face contact, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

For some, the inclusion of fathers signalled a recognition of societal changes to the ‘traditional family unit’ and they were encouraged to see the study thinking about families with different circumstances. Linked to this was the notion that by involving participants similar to themselves, the implications of the study would be more relevant to others in similar circumstances.

Participants noted that they would personally find it motivating to know that the ELC-FS was looking to gather the views of fathers who may be in similar circumstances to their own. Some reflected that they



had not previously had the opportunity to talk about their circumstances and experiences and felt that this could act as a motivator to participate.

*“These days the financial incentive is one way [to encourage fathers to take part in the study]. The other thing is that I can answer some questions that no one has ever asked me before.” (OHF Interview 28, infrequent or no contact with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Pakistani, 35-44 years old)*

However, not all felt that fathers would feel comfortable sharing information about their personal circumstances. This was personally cited by some participants whilst others reflected that this might be a barrier to ELC-FS participation for other fathers. These participants suggested that there may be reluctance to share information on sensitive personal topics such as the relationship with the mother of their child (especially where this was difficult) and/or why they did not live with their child. Further discussion of this is provided in the ‘barriers’ section below.

### Social value of the study

#### **Background information and context**

- During the qualitative research interview participants were told that findings from these types of studies (cohort studies) have helped governments understand how to improve children’s education and health services for fathers and mothers.

Participants were motivated by the idea that taking part in the study could lead to positive policy changes and outcomes that could improve the lives of children and families in similar circumstances. They were interested to know how the study would have impact mentioning:

- **Positive impacts in the short-term as well as the longer-term:** participants talked about positive outcomes from the study that could lead to policy changes that would positively impact the lives of families now and in the future.
- **Positive impacts for families in general and families with similar circumstances to those as the participant:** whilst participants recognised that findings from the study could impact families in general, they were often particularly interested to think about how findings might lead to positive changes for families where fathers did not live full-time with their child.

*“At the end of the day it’s trying to get something good out of it, aren’t they. So I’d be absolutely fine with taking part. Because it’s about getting a better understanding for children at the end of the day isn’t it. Not everyone understands what’s going on when fathers are not so involved and stuff like that. And if it benefits a child at the end of it – and we get a better understanding for kids – well then it’s a win win.” (OHF Interview 14, overnight stays with child, in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 25-34 years old)*

Overall, participants raised a number of areas where they anticipated findings from the study could inform positive changes. This included impacts on educational outcomes, inequalities in education based on ethnicity or income, access to services for underprivileged families, help in identifying groups in society that might need assistance and better understanding the relationship between fathers and children. Fathers who saw their child infrequently/did not currently have contact with their child were

particularly likely to mention the potential for the study to generate learnings that could help keep families together.

### Feedback, reflection and learning for participating fathers

Participants considered the way in which the experience of taking part in the study and findings from the study could be beneficial to themselves and their child. They raised queries about whether findings from the study would be shared with fathers who took part in the study. They cited a range of ways in which feedback and participation in the study could support them to reflect and learn about their child's development as well as their role as a father:

- **An opportunity for reflection:** participation in the study was seen as an opportunity to reflect on their child's development and think about their own role as a parent.
- **Learning from their child's responses:** thinking about future occasions when their child might actively take part in the study by answering questions, participants noted that they would be interested to hear what they said, hoping that they could learn from their child's responses.
- **Learning from the study findings:** participants hoped that they would receive feedback from the study focusing on findings relating to families with similar circumstances to their own. They felt that this type of feedback could provide insight into what families - particularly fathers - could do to support positive child development and outcomes for their children.

*"I'm young, I have got a lot of kids compared to other 28-year olds, even if I don't always follow advice [...] if I can see there is a study been done that shows this way is clearly better than this way, I'll always be open minded about how I do things" (OHF Interview 2, regular face to face contact, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

When thinking about receiving this type of feedback, it was noted that it would be particularly valuable to receive feedback from other fathers, as participants felt that they would be able to relate to this and would find it useful to understand the experiences of other fathers. This led a couple of participants to query whether there would be any group sessions with fathers as part of the study. They felt that these would be a good opportunity to share parenting experiences.

- **Receiving individual level feedback:** a couple of participants expressed interested in receiving individual level feedback and were keen to understand about the development of their child in relation to other children. They felt that this would help them think about how to further support their child's development.

*"So I would say the biggest motivation... it would be a way to evaluate what's happening with my child. An opportunity to reflect on things" (OHF Interview 27, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black African, 25-34 years old)*

- **Providing advice:** a few participants wondered whether the study would be able to provide advice to fathers such as information about child development. Fathers with infrequent/no contact with their child queried whether the study could provide advice for how to spend more time with your child.

***"I would want to know more information about child development, so would we get access to information about child development if there was something we were concerned about with our own child?" (OHF Interview 21, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)***

It was clear that for a couple of participants there were some expectations regarding the role of the interviewer for providing advice or an expert role in mediating a conversation between parents suggesting that clarity around the scope of the interview and role of the interviewer will need to be carefully managed.

### **Spending time with their child**

The study as an opportunity to take part in an activity with their child was most frequently mentioned as a motivator to participation by fathers who were not in a romantic relationship with the mother of the child and did not typically stay overnight with their child and had regular contact with their child.

***"I think taking part would make me feel like I am actively involved in her upbringing, and I'd take pride in doing something like that, you know, you're contributing to their development and that can be a big source of guilt for fathers" (OHF Interview 4, regular face to face contact, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 35-44 years old)***

These participants noted that they were keen to spend more time with their child and assumed that the child would be present when they took part. They felt that taking part in the study could help 'strengthen' the relationship with their child.

***"I think it might make me think more about what I'm doing as a dad, and how I can be the best dad to my kids, it feels like if I took part in this kind of study, we'd both be part of something important, like it's something we did together" (OHF Interview 1, regular face to face contact, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 25-34 years old)***

Building on this, a couple of fathers who had infrequent/no contact with their child suggested that an alternative incentive for participation could be a soft toy or a voucher for a day out with their child. Whilst seen as a further way in which fathers could spend time with their child, it was unclear from their circumstances whether this was something that they would personally be able to benefit from.

### **Incentives**

#### **Background information and context**

- Participants were informed that the potential incentive for the ELC-FS would be £10 for a 30-minute interview.
- It is useful to note that participants taking part in this 2021 qualitative research received a £40 incentive for a 60-minute interview. This may have influenced their views on incentivisation for study participation.

Views towards incentives were mixed. Those who felt that an incentive would encourage their participation were keen to note that people would expect something in return for time taken to participate in an interview.

*“It’s a nice little bonus I suppose. It’s quite important to provide it really – people won’t do it for nothing. Money talks doesn’t it. People will do it if they know they are getting paid and getting something back for it. Then they won’t mind doing it.” (OHF Interview 14, overnight stays with child, in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 25-34 years old)*

There were a range of views regarding the value of the incentive. Whilst £10 was often considered sufficient as a gesture and recognition that people would be giving time to take part, others felt that this would not be appealing. Often comparing £10 to the £40 offered for participant in this 2021 qualitative research, participants suggested that a greater financial value would be more motivating and more likely to immediately attract the attention of someone invited to participate.

Those who placed less importance on a financial incentive as a motivator for participation agreed that it would be ‘nice to have’ but tended to feel that the social value and aims of the study would hold greater personal impetus.

**Barriers**

Across the research, four factors likely to act as a barrier to OHF participation in the ELC-FS emerged. Participants reflected on things that they may personally find a barrier to participation as well as factors they felt may impact other fathers with similar circumstances. Not all barriers were voiced by each participant.

**Figure 3.2: Four barriers to participation (not shown in any particular order)**



Each of the above barriers is discussed in turn below.

**Time**

**Background information and context**

Participants were informed that taking part in the study would involve a 30-minute interview.

Availability to take part in the study was often cited as a potential barrier to participation. This was particularly the case for those who worked long hours or in shift patterns. Three key factors emerged as important to help overcome time as a barrier:

1. **Clarity regarding the length of the interview:** participants agreed that a short interview length (30-minutes) would help encourage fathers to take part in the study. They felt that this would be important as it would help fathers find time to participate and some further noted that a longer interview could feel daunting.
2. **Flexibility for when to take part:** those who cited finding a time to take part as a barrier to participation suggested that there could be flexibility in when they took part including evenings and

weekends. One participant wondered whether there would be any way in which the study could work with employers to allow fathers to take time off from work to participate.

***"Work is the main thing. So for fathers – it will be finding the time and space – so offer flexibility – like doing it at weekends." (OHF Interview 27, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black African, 25-34 years old)***

- 3. Convenience of participation:** participants talked about the convenience of different modes and were keen to note that fathers would be unlikely to participate if it involved travel to a central location. Further feedback regarding mode is discussed in section 3.3.

### Data confidentiality

#### **Background information and context**

Participants were informed that all answers given by study participants would be kept confidential and securely by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies.

Concerns regarding data confidentiality and security could quickly emerge as a barrier if clear information and reassurances regarding these were not provided for both fathers and their child. Participants noted that anyone invited to take part in the ELC-FS would be keen to understand why the data was being collected, who would use it and how it would be kept secure.

Data use and security were raised as key concerns when discussing the potential inclusion of collecting saliva samples in the study. Lack of detail regarding this could act as a strong deterrent to participating in this specific activity. This is further discussed in section 3.2.

### Sensitivity of individual circumstances

Participant feelings towards study participation were influenced by personal and individual circumstances. Two themes emerged and are discussed below.

#### **How fathers felt about discussing or sharing information about their circumstances**

Participants felt that talking about personal circumstances could be a deterrent to the study as fathers may prefer not to share any personal information.

***"People don't want anyone to know their business. In Black communities, like when I was growing up my mum always used to say when you go to school don't tell anyone our business...so maybe that's why people wouldn't want to do it – because they wouldn't want people to know their business." (OHF Interview 29, infrequent or no contact with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black African, 35-44 years old)***

This was particularly the case for topics that participants felt were potentially sensitive such as income/receipt of benefits, the relationship they had with the mother of their child and/or reasons why they did not live with their child. Some felt that the sensitivity of personal circumstances such as experiencing a relationship breakdown could be a barrier to participation. It was suggested that questions exploring these types of topics could be made optional. More broadly participants spoke about a general barrier amongst men from a range of backgrounds to talk openly about their situation or feel confident in communicating their feelings. Whilst participants recognised that this type of information would be beneficial to the ELC-FS, they anticipated that men may be resistant to answering these types of questions.

Participants felt that there could also be some reluctance to take part in the study for fear of being judged for not living with their child full-time or feeling that their parenting abilities were being tested.

***“A lot of people may feel like potentially they’re being judged a little bit for not living with their partner. They might not want to go into the details if they are not living with their child or their partner...– they might feel like it’s going to be quite an intrusive experience, where they might worry they’ll be asked why and what the problem is. Like why don’t you live together?” (OHF Interview 15, overnight stays with child, in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Mixed/Multiple ethnic background, 25-34 years old)***

Concerns about being judged echoed personal experiences amongst fathers who felt they had been judged by institutions (e.g., schools and hospitals) for not living with their child. A few participants talked about their own experiences, or those of friends where feelings of being judged and difficulties in maintaining contact with their child had led to a distrust in institutions. They felt that this would likely impact their interest in taking part in research such as the ELC-FS.

### **How study participation may be influenced by the relationship they have with the child’s mother**

Concerns regarding ways in which study participation may impact the father’s relationship with the child’s mother were cited by participants who were not in a romantic relationship with the mother.

Participants anticipated that fathers who did not have a good relationship with the child’s mother would be unlikely to take part in the ELC-FS. For example, one participant who had infrequent/no contact with his child raised concerns that taking part in the study could exacerbate an already difficult relationship with the child’s mother. This led to concerns that participation could further put pressure on his relationship which could lead to further restrictions on his access to his child.

Unease about the impact the study could have on the relationship between the father and mother were further heightened for participants who wondered whether both parents would need to be present at the same time for an interview. Where there was a poor relationship, there were concerns that this could result in a difficult experience and that it would be preferable not to participate in the study.

There was also apprehension that a poor relationship between the father and mother could influence responses to interview questions with concerns that the mother might speak negatively of the father in front of an interviewer and the child.

***“Might be a spiteful kinda vibe...[instead of]...constructive research.” (OHF Interview 23, regular face to face contact, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)***

A couple of participants reflected that when interviewed at an older age, children may give different responses when with mothers compared to when they were with fathers and wondered how the study would manage this.

### **Role of the child**

It was not always clear to participants what involvement would be required of their child if they were to take part in the study. Fathers wondered if interviewers would be asking their children questions or making other demands on them and expressed concerns regarding any pressure or stress that their child may experience as a result of taking part in the study.



*“Mentally not sure what that would do to them in the long run, being surveyed all the time. They’re human beings they are not test subjects.” (OHF Interview 17, infrequent or no contact with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

Some were worried that taking part in a face-to-face interaction with a stranger (the interviewer) could make their child feel uncomfortable, particularly in light of limited social interactions during the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants also expressed concern regarding negative outcomes related to children being observed, or the potential of children knowing the study results in future and being negatively impacted at that point in time. For example, one participant noted that they did not want their child to feel different because their parents did not live together and felt that it would be important for the study to make clear that children from a range of circumstances were included in the study.

### 3.2 Study topics and activities

#### Background information and context

Participants were asked what topics they would expect and want to be asked about in the ELC-FS, and were then informed that the study may ask questions on the following topics (these were described using the descriptions below):

- Your circumstances (e.g., if you are working, your income)
- Your physical health
- Your mental wellbeing
- Relationship and involvement with your child
- Your child’s health and development
- Relationship with the mother of your child.

This section details participants’ spontaneous mention of interview topics and their reaction to the ELC-FS proposed interview topics. It should be noted that participants often struggled to spontaneously identify the types of topics that the ELC-FS would cover, however where topics were spontaneously mentioned, this is reported below. Participants expressed mixed views towards answering questions on these noting that some felt sensitive and personal. However, there was often openness to answering these if participants could see a clear link between the study collecting this information and the study making a positive difference to children’s lives.

Participants also queried the likely depth of the questions. While many suggested they would have concerns about being pushed too far on certain subjects, that was not a unanimous sentiment.

Participant feedback suggests that it will be important for the study to provide clear and transparent information about what types of topic areas will be covered, why and how they feed into learnings on child development, and reassurances about data anonymity, privacy (in particular, in relation to their child’s other parent) and the option to opt out. Potential sensitivities of topics further suggest that it will be important for the study to respect participants’ mental health and ensure awareness around safeguarding.

Views towards inclusion of each potential topic area are discussed below.



## Your circumstances

Where circumstances emerged spontaneously as a topic for exploration in the study, participants mentioned gathering information about:

- **Demographic information:** participants anticipated that demographic questions such as ethnicity and educational attainment would be included to enable the study to ensure a range of parents were included.
- **Fathers' daily lives:** this was suggested by those who felt that the study would benefit from understanding how factors such as employment status and financial income impacted their lives and interaction they had with their child. For example, one participant was keen that the study understand if finances were a barrier to fathers seeing their child more frequently.
- **Fathers' upbringing:** participants felt that the study would find it useful to understand fathers' upbringing and how this may have influenced their own perspective on parenting. For example, some noted that their father had not lived with them full-time when they had been a child and wondered how this influenced their own views of parenting.

*"As a young man, how do you know what to do if you're not led by example you know, my dad wasn't around much and my mum did everything when I was growing up, I didn't want to have kids so young and then life just happened like that. I didn't want my kids to grow up without a dad like me so I am trying to be the best dad I can be, but sometimes you do become your parents [...] I think that would be an interesting thing to talk about, I think about it a lot and it's made me approach stuff with my kids and my baby mum different." (OHF Interview 1, regular face to face contact, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 25-34 years old)*

Overall, participants were comfortable with the idea of answering questions about their circumstances envisaging that this would help ensure the study included a range of families, and that these questions would enable the study to explore the different circumstances of children. However, there were some concerns that not all fathers would feel comfortable answering questions, particularly where these related to sensitive personal circumstances. For example, participants suggested that answering questions regarding income or claiming benefits may be off-putting for those who may feel embarrassed. There was also reluctance amongst some to answer very detailed questions about their circumstances feeling that this would be too 'intrusive'. Participants called for clarity regarding why this information was useful to the study.

## Your physical health

Participants did not spontaneously suggest that the study include questions regarding physical health. However, they felt open to answering questions on this topic and anticipated that in most cases fathers would be comfortable with the inclusion of this topic in the ELC-FS.

However, there was some concern that the inclusion of questions regarding physical health could be sensitive in situations where an individual had a health condition.

***“Yes but for me I have a few conditions that I would not want to disclose. Same as for [asking questions about] income – it would be an intrusion into that part of my private life – that probably I don’t want anyone to know.” (OHF Interview 27, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black African, 25-34 years old)***

Participants also anticipated that there could be sensitivities around questions asking about behaviours such as smoking and alcohol or substance use. Anticipating that the study would be looking to make links between these behaviours and the development of children participants felt that these questions might not always be answered truthfully.

***“Yeah I feel like that’s fine – whether or not they’ll be truthful or not is another situation. Because I mean people that drink rarely say ‘yeah they like a drink’. Maybe to their friends or family, but something like this they may not tell the truth. But it is a good question to ask, because this could be one of the issues for them not seeing their child.” (OHF Interview 29, infrequent or no contact with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black African, 35-44 years old)***

### **Your mental wellbeing**

Whilst only mentioned spontaneously by a few, overall participants responded positively to the idea of the study including questions around mental wellbeing. Participants identified a number of benefits for including this topic in the ELC-FS including:

- The current salience of the issue in light of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and the impact these have had on mental wellbeing.
- Demonstrating that the study is interested in the wellbeing of fathers. This was particularly noted by fathers who felt that a greater focus is often placed on the mental wellbeing of mothers.
- Giving fathers the opportunity to talk about their mental wellbeing. A couple of participants reflected that it could be helpful for fathers to be given an opportunity to speak openly about their mental health. For example, one participant felt that taking part in the study could give fathers a chance to express their feelings and assumed that support would be available if needed.

***“When it comes to mental health or mental state, you are better off answering honestly, you’d be surprised who might be able to help you or even like, how you might feel better for even admitting it to yourself”. (OHF Interview 2, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)***

Whilst positive towards its inclusion in the ELC-FS participants were keen to note that there were likely to be strong barriers to engaging fathers in questions on this topic. It was noted that mental wellbeing can be a taboo topic for men especially within ethnic minority communities and participants felt that study participants were likely to be reticent to speak about this. It was suggested that clear information about why the study sought this information, reassurances about confidentiality and making any questions optional could support openness on this topic. Participants were keen to note that mental wellbeing may be a sensitive topic particularly for those currently experiencing poor mental health and that any questions on this topic should therefore be treated carefully.

### Relationship with your child

Participants spontaneously anticipated that the ELC-FS would ask fathers about the time they spent with their child. This included how often they saw their child, what activities they carried out with their child and how they felt about the time they spent with the child.

***“I think the research needs to understand how interactive the fathers are, what they’re doing with their kids on a daily, weekly, monthly basis. How they see their kid’s interaction with them develop over time, because sometimes it will develop, sometimes it won’t depending on the circumstances. How things are between the mother and father. I think those are the most important things in terms of questions, that comes to mind.” (OHF Interview 5, overnight stays with child, in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Mixed/Multiple ethnic background, 35-44 years old)***

Thinking specifically about the range of different circumstances that fathers may be in, some wondered whether the study would ask fathers about access to their child and how this had been arranged with the child’s mother. There were varied expectations for how detailed questions about fathers’ access to the child would be and mixed views on how open fathers might be to answer these types of questions. Whilst some were keen to note that they spent time with their children and therefore would feel comfortable answering questions on this topic, it was agreed across participants that this topic would be sensitive for some.

Participants noted that there could be a range of reasons why a father may not spend lots of time with their child and therefore this topic area should be treated sensitively. This was particularly noted by those who felt they could not spend as much time with their child as they liked with specific mentions from those who had infrequent/no contact with their child and those who felt that their difficult relationship with the child’s mother impacted on the time spent with their child.

In addition to concerns regarding the sensitivity of the topic, participants felt that fathers could feel judged about the amount of time they spent with their child and that this could deter them from answering detailed questions on this topic.

### Your child’s development

Information provided to participants regarding the ELC-FS explained that the study would be exploring child development. Spontaneously, participants expected that questions on this topic might explore key milestones for the child such as those around walking and talking. Those who also had older, school-aged children also mentioned the educational development of their child as something they anticipated the study would be interested in.

Those that responded most positively to this topic area were those who would welcome the opportunity to share information about their child’s development with the study. These were typically fathers who stayed overnight with their child in a typical fortnight or had regular face-to-face contact with their child.

*"I'm one of those dads that celebrates everything, like every little achievement it doesn't matter how small. I've tried to get as much information as I can about bringing up kids and what to expect, and I think I'd probably just enjoy getting a chance to speak on that, like speak on my child's development, maybe share some high points or even concerns I might have [...] I've got a lot to say but nobody ever asks me this kind of stuff, so I'd really enjoy that" (OHF Interview 1, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 25-34 years old)*

For some, questions on their child's development were considered sensitive as they might personally be concerned about whether they were making the right decisions for their child or were worried that not living with their child full-time may affect their development.

*"For me as a parent, a father, the questions I think they'll ask are what are my plans for my children, if I am making the right decisions for my child? They'll want to know what sort of relationship I have with my child, and how my decisions are affecting that child." (OHF Interview 24, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black African, 25-34 years old)*

Other barriers to answering questions on this topic included:

- **Disclosing child's health problems<sup>29</sup>:** participants felt that fathers would likely feel less comfortable answering questions relating to their child's development if the child had a health condition. This was considered to be something that could be sensitive and upsetting for parents.

*"I would want to protect my child – so talking about my own child would be more challenging and sensitive. If my child had some underlying health or development issues – I would have a problem answering questions about this. If I felt everything was ok – then I would be more open to talking about it. But if issues arise it could become personal." (OHF Interview 26, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Pakistani, 35-44 years old)*

- **Disclosing development concerns:** similarly, participants felt that parents may find it difficult to disclose concerns they may have about the development of their child.
- **Feel unable to answer questions:** Not all fathers felt that they would be able to answer questions about their child's development. This included fathers who had infrequent/no contact with their child. Whilst some were open to being asked questions about this, others noted that they would feel guilty for not know the answers and concerned that they may be judged for this.

### Relationship with the mother of your child

There was an expectation amongst participants that the study would ask some questions regarding the relationship they had with the mother of their child. Participants spontaneously wondered if the ELC-FS would include questions that asked about their living situation, how long they had not been living together for, how living arrangements for the child had been handled, and how fathers felt about the

<sup>29</sup> It should be noted that sampling for this qualitative research did not include any quotas for fathers with a child with a health condition.

situation. Whilst expected to be part of the ELC-FS, participants expressed mixed views on answering questions on this topic.

Participants who were currently in a romantic relationship with the mother of their child or had an amicable relationship with them were open to the idea of answering questions on this topic.

***"I am on good terms with her mother, so would not mind talking about that [relationship with mother of child], but in the past we haven't been so good and I am not sure I would have wanted to answer questions about it then" (OHF Interview 11, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 20-24 years old)***

However, these participants felt that detailed questions regarding peoples' relationship situations should be treated sensitively as they could encourage people to unhelpfully recall previous problems.

Where relationships were currently difficult there was a preference to answer broad questions on this topic and to have the option not to answer these questions.

***"That again could be a sensitive topic – because for my own self we are not on speaking terms – so that's quite a sensitive topic – it was not an amicable break up – probably wouldn't want to answer questions about this in depth, broadly maybe I would be ok." (OHF Interview 26, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Pakistani, 35-44 years old)***

Anonymity of responses emerged as particularly important for those who were concerned that their responses would be shared with the mother. For example, one participant explained a complex relationship with the mother of their child and whilst open to the idea of answering questions on this topic would want reassurances that his answers would be treated anonymously and not shared with his child's mother.

### 3.3 Saliva sample collection

#### **Background information and context**

Participants were asked how they would feel about providing a saliva sample to help researchers understand more about the parent and the child's genetic background.

Participants were given the following information about the purpose of collecting this data from parents and children:

*Previous studies have asked parents to provide a saliva sample which can help researchers understand more about the father's and child's genetic background and how this influences health, development, behaviour and things like that. As with all parts of the study, this activity would be optional.*

This section of the report explores participants' expectations, thoughts and concerns about the study collecting a saliva sample from themselves and their child. Where specific circumstances influenced views towards the saliva sample, these are reported on.

Detailed views from participants regarding saliva sample collection are discussed below.

### Benefits to providing a saliva sample

The key benefit cited by participants was that a saliva sample could be an **important contribution for the study**. Participants noted that they felt reassured by the fact that the study was genuine and that the sample was being collected for legitimate reasons (i.e., understanding the impact of genetics on children's health and development). Participants acknowledged that these findings could benefit children and help to improve society in the future.

*"I was satisfied that there is actual proper benefits from it then I would be comfortable with it. But I would want to know that before agreeing to it." (OHF Interview 13, overnight stays with child, in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 25-34 years old)*

*"If it's going to help, I would be interested and happy to help. I can see the value to the work." (OHF Interview 4, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 35-44 years old)*

### Concerns about providing a saliva sample

Those who felt sceptical or concerned about providing a saliva sample as part of the study noted the following concerns:

- **Feels too invasive:** participants felt that collecting a saliva sample from either themselves or their child felt extremely invasive in the context of this study. Although some suggested that they may feel comfortable providing this in a medical study, they expressed concerns about how invasive it would feel to be asked in a study like the ELC-FS.

*"For me it is more of a discouragement – because it gone from a survey questionnaire to a science experiment." (OHF Interview 25, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black African, 35-44 years old)*

*"I'd be very hesitant. I think it boils down to the fact that it is a personal intrusion as well." (OHF Interview 27, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black African, 25-34 years old)*

Participants also felt that the type of information that could be generated from a saliva sample could be highly sensitive. Some had automatically assumed that the study would provide them with a personal 'genetic profile' after they gave a saliva sample. On this basis, participants expressed concerns about the sensitivity of the information they could learn about themselves or their child (i.e., underlying health conditions). There were also concerns amongst some OHFs that saliva samples could be used to determine whether their DNA matched that of their child.

*"Are they doing it to see if the child is mine?" (OHF Interview 19, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

Although participants were generally comfortable to answer sensitive or personal questions during a survey, the saliva sample felt too invasive for many.



- **Privacy, security, and data protection:** participants who were sceptical about providing a saliva sample expressed apprehension about the sensitivity of the data, and the security of such data. Participants raised concerns regarding who would be given access to the data (i.e., other organisations, or with mother of their child), anonymity of the data (i.e., would they/or their child be identifiable from the saliva sample) and the potential for their personal data to be exploited or misused.
- **Data use and intent:** in addition to concerns around the privacy and security of data, participants also expressed worries around the intent for collecting this sort of information. To some extent, this was due to participants having limited information about the saliva sample and how it would be used. Participants who were worried about intent felt they would be cautious, particularly around providing their child's saliva. Other participants understood the importance of collecting genetic information for the study but remained sceptical about a hidden agenda behind the saliva sample.

Concerns around the agenda of saliva sample collection were particularly prevalent amongst Black African and Black Caribbean participants. Scepticism from this community was informed by a far deeper and more complex mistrust of specific authorities, including the scientific community and the police. For example, references were made to the way in which genetics had been used to legitimise racial discrimination.

*"When it comes to DNA and that, it sounds like a police officer thing, I don't know what you're gonna do with this DNA and it sounds like an invasion of privacy, like obviously it's for the research but I don't know what system this is gonna be logged in [...] you'd have to come up with a magical explanation to convince people to do it." (OHF Interview 2, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

Some participants, specifically those from ethnic minority backgrounds, reflected that they had become more cautious about the use of genetic data since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants mentioned that COVID-19 related misinformation and conspiracy theories had contributed to a general feeling of distrust toward the scientific community and medical research.

*"I am more sceptical about a science experiment and taking swabs and stuff– especially in this day and age with COVID – might make people more sceptical – and make people think, hmm what are they then going to do with my DNA sort of thing." (OHF Interview 25, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black African, 35-44 years old)*

*"It wouldn't discourage somebody like me, but some people who have been in prison or in trouble with the law – it may then sway against it – in case it gets used against them some time down the line." (OHF Interview 29, infrequent or no contact with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black African, 35-44 years old)*



***"Why would someone want to know your genetic stuff. It could bring up a lot of stuff you didn't even know about, e.g., not actually kid's dad [...] It's too much. I'm wary of it but not totally against it." (OHF Interview 18, overnight stays with child, in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 25-34 years old)***

### 3.4 Involvement from a new partner

Across the research only one participant had a new partner and a child with this partner. He was in regular contact with his other child. Whilst he anticipated that his new partner in theory would be open to answering a few questions as part of the study taking part in the research, he noted that she did not have much involvement with the child that would be the focus of the study and therefore wondered what the value would be. He further explained that he tried to keep this new relationship separate from the relationship with his other child and felt that questions about the new relationship may be uncomfortable to answer.

***"I just like to keep things separate, you know, I don't mind if the kids are together or whatever, but I try to keep the relationship separate and private" (OHF Interview 2, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)***

### 3.5 Study mode

#### **Background information and context**

Participants were asked for their views on taking part in an interview via a range of modes including: face-to-face; telephone; video call; and online survey.

It should be noted that participants were given the option to take part in this 2021 qualitative research via telephone or video call and this may have influenced participant views towards taking part in research via these modes.

Across the research a few participants had previously taken part in research and therefore expressed some familiarity with the modes explored.

Overall mode preferences amongst fathers varied but were typically driven by which mode they felt would be personally most convenient and comfortable. For some, comfort in speaking to someone face-to-face played an important role in participants feeling that they were able to be open about their circumstances. However, others felt that scheduling a face-to-face appointment would be too challenging and they would be more likely to engage in the study if there was flexibility over when, where and how they could take part.

Views towards each mode are discussed below.

#### **Face-to-face**

Across the interviews there were mixed views towards taking part in a face-to-face interview and some noted that they would seek reassurances that: interviewers had been vetted and were able to provide ID;

interviews would not be video recorded; and that only one interviewer would visit their home to conduct the face-to-face interview.

Those who felt positively towards face-to-face study engagement cited the following benefits of this approach:

- **Engagement with the interviewer:** being able to see and talk directly to the interviewer was considered important for those who felt that they would feel more at ease and comfortable taking part in the research if they could build rapport with the interviewer. This was considered particularly important when thinking about discussing more personal or sensitive topics.

*"Personally, I would prefer face-to-face – personal, you know who the person you're speaking to is, you know they are listening" (OHF Interview 18, overnight stays with child, in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 25-34 years old)*

Participants noted that they would feel encouraged to give detailed answers in a face-to-face setting with the opportunity to explain their answers and feel they had been able to 'get their view across'. Desire to explain answers suggests that participants may have been anticipating a discursive interview experience (more similar to a qualitative interview compared to a survey interview) during which they could talk openly with the interviewer<sup>30</sup>.

- **Convenience:** there were mixed views on where a face-to-face interview would take place. Where fathers felt that they would be comfortable taking part at their own home, or the primary residence of their child, they felt that a face-to-face interview would be a convenient way to participate.
- **Familiarity:** a few participants noted that they would be comfortable with a face-to-face setting for an interview as they were familiar with face-to-face meetings as part of their work or had previously taken part in market research in a face-to-face setting.
- **Observing father-child interactions:** a couple of participants noted that a face-to-face interview offered the opportunity for the researcher to observe interactions between the father and child. This was mentioned by fathers who stay with their child in a typical fortnight or have regular face-to-face contact with their child. Whilst they could see a benefit for the study, they felt that looking after the child at the same time as taking part in an interview could be distracting

*"I think also things like your child's development, you could show them, because you are in the comfort of your own home. The child has all their toys there and if there are questions about the child's development you can show them that they can do this or that, sort of thing." (OHF Interview 16, overnight stays with child, in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 20-24 years old)*

A range of barriers to taking part in a face-to-face interview emerged across the interviews:

- **Availability and scheduling:** a face-to-face interview felt inflexible (requiring a set time and place for participation) for those with busy schedules.

Childcare commitments influenced views regarding ability to take part in a face-to-face interview. Some were concerned that taking part in a face-to-face interview could eat into time they usually

<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that the 2021 qualitative research interviews explained that the ELC-FS would involve taking part in a survey but did not provide detail on how exactly how questions would be asked, or responses recorded.

spent with their child. Some participants had more than one child with the mother of their child aged under 2 years old and referenced childcare commitments for these other children. Work commitments were also mentioned. For example, one participant noted that they worked very long hours and often felt drained at the end of a working day; they would only be available to participate at the weekend.

Concerns regarding scheduling a face-to-face interview were also influenced by the interview location, and who would need to be present. If taking part in a neutral location (i.e., not the father's home or the primary residence of the child) then travel time would need to be factored in. Participants felt that travelling a long distance would be a strong barrier to taking part in a face-to-face interview and an alternative mode would be more convenient. Further discussion of findings related to the location for a face-to-face interview is provided in the following report section.

Overall flexibility and choice over times to take part was considered important by participants, enabling them to choose what best suited their circumstances and take part on their own terms.

- **Concerned about having people in the home:** those concerned about having an interviewer in their home felt that this would be invasive especially as there were alternative ways in which people could take part in the study.

*“What the hell you need to come to my house for? Just call me or email me a survey!” (OHF Interview 17, infrequent or no contact with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

Some further noted concerns related to COVID-19 and felt that this could be another reason for reluctance to participate face-to-face.

- **Sensitivity of individual circumstances:** participants anticipated that some fathers may feel nervous, judged or pressured to answer questions in a face-to-face setting. They also noted that a face-to-face setting could lead to an open discussion which could surface emotions leaving fathers feeling more sensitive or vulnerable.

*“[A] face-to-face interview might feel a bit more like they're put on the spot. Make them feel a bit nervous, probably feel like OK is this an interview or is this something else, like someone judging me.” (OHF Interview 21, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

Participants were asked how they would feel about answering questions on more sensitive or personal topics either face-to-face or via self-completion during a face-to-face interview (using an interviewer tablet). Participants tended to feel open to answering personal or sensitive topics with an interviewer as long as it was clear why the study was seeking this information. Those who suggested that self-completion would be more suitable tended to focus on questions about their relationship with the mother of the child and felt that fathers may be more honest if given the option to answer these via self-complete.

### Location for face-to-face interviews

Participants were asked their views on where they would prefer to take part in a face-to-face interview.

Some spontaneously anticipated that they would need to travel to a **venue** to take part. The idea of taking part in a venue was met with mixed responses. Those most positive to this idea suggested that a

neutral venue would work best for their own circumstances offering a neutral ground where they might feel more secure in speaking openly. Whilst some suggested an office setting where others would not be able to hear their responses, others felt that a public and informal setting would be 'comfortable', 'relaxed' and 'friendly'.

There were some queries around whether the child would need to be present in the interview with fathers noting that if the child did need to be present the venue would need to have child-friendly facilities.

It should be noted that location of the interview influenced views towards any incentive offered for taking part in the study; participants felt that an incentive higher than £10 would be required if people were asked to travel to a venue to participate. It was also noted that time taken to travel to a venue could be a deterrent to participate in the research for some.

Participants were asked their views on taking part at their **child's primary residence**. Those who were in a romantic or amicable relationship with the child's mother were most likely to feel positive towards this. These participants noted that they regularly stayed at the address or went there to collect their child and therefore it would also be convenient. Some noted that if the interview would involve the child, the child would feel most comfortable in their primary residence, and it could also be convenient if the mother was taking part in the study at the same time.

Those who preferred not to take part at their child's primary residence cited a difficult relationship between themselves and the child's mother. These participants felt that if looking to take part in a face-to-face interview, an alternative location (e.g., their own home or somewhere else) would be required.

*"I think for fathers, it's just going to depend on what sort of relationship they have with their kids' mother, if they're in a rough place then they need to give fathers the option to meet somewhere else, it could put some people off having to do the interview with the mother because it could be awkward." (OHF Interview 7, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 20-24 years old)*

When asked for their views on taking part in a face-to-face interview **in their own home** participants suggested that the key benefits to this would be convenience and comfort.

*"I would probably choose [to take part at] home. Because I wouldn't have to go out of my way to go anywhere. I'd feel comfortable, I'm in my own space. It's not costing me anything, just my time. If I had to go somewhere, I'd have to make travel arrangements, maybe take time off of work, or leave work early. So coming to my house would be a bit easier." (OHF Interview 29, infrequent or no contact with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black African, 35-44 years old)*

Those who preferred not to take part in their home cited discomfort with have a stranger in their home. Those who lived in shared accommodation or with family noted that their home environment would not lend itself to a face-to-face setting. For example, one participant noted that the property needed repairs so may not be suitable. Another noted that the only private space they had in the property was his bedroom and he would not feel comfortable taking part there or speaking openly in front of flatmates in shared spaces in the property.

## Video call

Those positive towards the idea of carrying out an interview via a video call noted the following benefits:

- **Convenience:** participants felt that when compared to face-to-face, a video call would offer greater convenience. For example, participants noted that they could take part wherever was most convenient at the time and video calls could offer greater flexibility and be more easily rescheduled compared to face-to-face appointments.
- **Visual engagement without the need for meeting face-to-face:** participants felt that a video call offered the benefits of seeing and building rapport with an interviewer without the need to meet face-to-face.

*“I personally prefer the video call survey – it gives you a more personal touch – you can see the person doing the questions. There is a bit more of an introduction when you can see the person face-to-face and it feels a bit more comfortable.” (OHF Interview 26, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Pakistani, 35-44 years old)*

- **Familiarity:** some mentioned that they had become familiar with using video calls since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Barriers to taking part in an interview via video call included:

- **Technology use and access:** participants noted that not all fathers may have online access and therefore it would be important to provide options for ways to take part. A couple of participants further expressed lack of confidence in using technology suggesting that alternative modes may be better suited for some.
- **Lack of convenience:** those who felt that a video call mode lacked convenience were typically comparing this to taking part in a telephone interview. They felt that they would need to plan more to take part in a video call as they would need to arrange to be in a specific location (i.e., sat down and ready to take part), set up a laptop or tablet and ensure that their surroundings looked presentable.

*“For some reason again I feel like video calls are somehow more inconvenient in some ways than a telephone call – because you have to make sure your environment looks fine, and make sure you look presentable. And hard to do a video call on your phone so you would have to get a laptop or ipad set up.” (OHF Interview 15, overnight stays with child, in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Mixed/Multiple ethnic background, 25-34 years old)*

- **Potential distractions:** drawing on experience of using video calls in a work environment, a couple of participants noted that people could become easily distracted with their surroundings on a video call, and this could distract them from engaging fully in the interview.

## Telephone

Those positive towards the idea of carrying out an interview via telephone noted the following benefits:

- **Convenience:** the convenience of taking part via telephone was a key consideration for participants especially those who noted that they had competing priorities such as childcare and work.

*"[The] only reason I'd be more open to a phone call is because of time, like I said with me not living with them my schedule is quite hectic, for me to make the time for a face-to-face, it would be hard to find the time between picking them up, seeing them, going to work, going to sleep, spending time with the baby, the phone call is just a lot more easy to fit in" (OHF Interview 2, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

- **Comfort:** participants felt that they would feel comfortable taking part in a telephone interview as they could take part from their home. This was particularly noted by those who anticipated that they would feel pressured in a face-to-face setting.

*"Over the telephone, you have a bit of time to think, you're probably in the comfort of own home and just in your own space – so I think that is easier, so that's an advantage. No pressure as well, there are no eyes just staring at you waiting for your answer. You can take your time with it." (OHF Interview 21, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

Comfort of a telephone interview was also noted by those who felt concerned about inviting a stranger into their home particularly in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- **Familiarity:** participants noted that they were often on their phone and this was a familiar way of communicating.

Barriers to taking part in a telephone interview included:

- **Lack of visual engagement:** not being able to see the interviewer emerged as the strongest barrier to participating in a telephone interview. Participants felt that not be able to see the interviewer could limit the rapport built with the interviewer and participants could feel less personal engagement with the study in general. Participants suggested that reduced rapport through lack of visual engagement could lead to less detailed or open responses from study participants.
- **Potential distractions:** it was acknowledged that there could be distractions if taking part in an interview on the telephone such as participants carrying out other tasks at the same time or receiving messages on the phone during the interview.
- **Reliance on technology:** there were a few minor concerns regarding the reliability of battery life and sound quality when using mobile telephones.

## Online

Convenience and comfort emerged as key benefits of taking part in an online survey:

- **Convenience:** participants noted that they would be able to complete an online survey in their own time. Whilst some felt that this would give them the flexibility to complete the survey over a couple of days depending on when would best suit them, others assumed that an online survey would be quicker to complete when compared to speaking to an interviewer.
- **Comfort:** an online survey was considered to be a comfortable way to participate in the study by those who felt it would give them time to reflect on their answers especially where they may be



covering sensitive topics. Online was also considered a more comfortable format for fathers who might feel less confident talking to someone.

Barriers to taking part in an online survey included:

- **Potential for minimal/less considered responses:** this concern was voiced by those who felt that if provided with an online survey they may answer questions quickly without much detail and there was the potential for people to 'click buttons' without paying full attention. Participants felt that surveys could be 'boring' which would impact the quality of responses received.

*"When it comes to online surveys, I feel like people just click anything, you wouldn't get a genuine or more accurate response" (OHF Interview 2, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

- **Lack of detail and context:** participants queried how much detail could be gathered in an online survey. They felt that people would be unlikely to write long essay-style responses to questions and that multiple-choice questions would be more appealing. They noted that this would mean that there may be limited scope in an online survey to understand the context behind participant responses and would not provide opportunity for participants to explain their answers.
- **Technology concerns:** participants recognised that not all people may have the technology skills needed to complete an online survey and noted that there could be technical issues with online surveys e.g., links not working. With this in mind, they noted the importance of providing choice over participation mode.

### 3.6 Recruitment approaches

#### Background information and context

Participants were asked for their views on the following ways in which OHFs could be recruited to the ELC-FS:

- Via birth registration records (where there is joint birth registration). It should be noted that this research did not inform participants about any potential opt-out process that may be administered prior to details being passed to researchers.
- Asking mothers to share contact details for the father with the study.
- Asking mothers to pass on information about the study to fathers.

Case study examples of how these different recruitment approaches could work were developed and used in some interviews to support participants understanding of how these approaches could work. These are provided in the report appendix. This section of the report details reactions to these different recruitment approaches.

It is useful to note that for this 2021 qualitative research some participants were recruited via 'intermediaries' (e.g., child's mother, friends, their own parent) who sought their permission to share contact details with a recruiter who then provided further information about the study. This process may have influenced OHF participant views regarding preferences to give permission for the mother of their child to share contact details with the ELC-FS.



## Recruiting via birth registration records

Use of birth registration records was met with mixed response. Not all fathers knew whether their child had a single or joint registration, and many did not realise that birth registration records would include parent addresses<sup>31</sup>. Some noted that the birth registration details may not be accurate as since registration they had moved to a different address.

Those who were open to the idea of birth registration records being used to invite fathers to take part in the ELC-FS felt that a key challenge would relate to whether fathers would open or engage with a letter that arrived 'out of the blue'. Some reflected that they often assumed that post was 'junk mail' and did not always open letters. It was suggested that any letter should:

- Clarify how the study had sourced the father's contact details.
- Clearly explain the study and its aims.
- Make clear the legitimacy of the study to avoid concerns about scams (e.g., inclusion of website/telephone number that participants could contact to confirm legitimacy).

Those who expressed negative views towards this approach to study recruitment felt uncomfortable with birth registration records being used in this way. These participants were often those who noted that their child had joint birth registration<sup>32</sup> and described having a difficult relationship with the mother of their child including some who had infrequent/no contact with their child. Two areas of concerns emerged:

1. **Use of official records:** participants felt uncomfortable about their records being used for the purposes of study recruitment. They expressed surprise that personal records could be used in this way noting that it felt intrusive.

*"I'm surprised that this way is possible. Didn't think anyone had access to that [birth registration information]. I'm very surprised that a third party has access to that information." (OHF Interview 29, infrequent or no contact with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black African, 35-44 years old)*

A couple of participants felt unease about the study pre-selecting them for potential participation based on their personal records noting that this felt at odds with the idea of fathers being able to opt-in to participation.

*"Getting information from birth registration is sneaky and messed up, going behind their back to check information and getting records, illegal." (OHF Interview 17, infrequent or no contact with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

2. **Potential impact on the relationship with their child's mother:** a couple of participants felt that being invited via birth registration records without first informing the mother that this was happening could cause further problems to already difficult relationships. They preferred that the mother be informed that they would be invited first to avoid any issues.

<sup>31</sup> It should be noted that birth records will only include a father's address if there is a joint birth registration and if the parents were not living together at the time of the birth registration.

<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that not all participants across the research revealed or knew whether their child had joint or single birth registration.

## Recruiting via the child's mother

Overall views regarding recruiting fathers to the study via the mother were influenced by the **relationship** with the child's mother. Those with a difficult and less amicable relationship with the mother felt that reaching fathers via the mother of their child would not be suitable or would need to be handled very carefully.

*"That could be a tricky one – if you are not on speaking terms with the mother or if you have had a bad break up, then the last thing you'll start talking about is about research, or about passing on information about the research... I never see my ex now, we have barely any contact, very little. The last thing I would want to do is have a conversation with her. I think it would be very, very difficult therefore for them [CLS] to get through to me through my ex." (OHF Interview 26, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Pakistani, 35-44 years old)*

Where there was a good relationship between the father and mother participants felt that engagement via the mother would be feasible.

Across interviews there were mixed views regarding preferences for the mother sharing information about the study with the father, or sharing the fathers' contact details with the study - this is discussed in more detail below.

### Asking mothers to share the contact details of fathers

Consent from the fathers for mothers to share their contact details with the study was considered important. Participants suggested that mothers would check consent and confirm with the father which contact details he would be happy to be shared with the study. It was noted that checking for consent could give fathers a greater sense of control over their potential participation. Some reflected that gaining consent was probably something that mothers themselves would want to do as they may feel uncomfortable sharing contact details without consent from the father.

Participants noted that they would require information about the study so that they could decide whether they were happy for their contact details to be passed on. They wanted to know who their information would be shared with and why.

*"As long as I know where the information is going to – I have no issue" (OHF Interview 3, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 35-44 years old)*

As discussed above a key barrier to this method of engaging fathers was cited by those with a difficult or less amicable relationship with the child's mother. These participants felt that mothers sharing contact details could cause problems between the mother and father, and that asking for permissions to share contact details with the study could be difficult especially if they were not on speaking terms.

### Asking mothers to pass on information about the study to fathers

Fathers (both those in a romantic relationship and those not in a romantic relationship with the mother of their child) were typically open to the idea of mothers sharing information with them about the study, providing that they were on good terms. Some anticipated that they would naturally talk about the study if a letter about it arrived at the mothers' home, and it was about their child or would pass on a letter that was address to them both and was about the child. Those particularly positive towards the idea of the mother passing on information about the study with fathers noted the following benefits:

- **Avoids the need to share fathers' contact details with the study:** those reticent about sharing their contact details and concerned that their details could be shared without their consent preferred the idea of mothers passing information directly to them.
- **Study information comes from a trusted source:** a couple of participants, with a good relationship with the mother of their child, noted that trust in the information could be increased if it came via the mother.

*“Most feasible as its coming from someone of trust – from the mother.” (OHF Interview 23, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

However, there were concerns amongst some that mothers would not inform fathers about the study unless any study communications made it clear that this was something they should do. As discussed above, the key barrier to this method of engaging fathers was cited by those with a difficult or less amicable relationship with the child's mother. These participants felt that asking mothers to pass on information could be difficult especially if they were not on speaking terms.

### Consent for the child's participation

Participants were asked how much involvement they would expect to have in any decision-making process for their child taking part in the ELC-FS. Overall participants wanted involvement in this decision but were not always sure how this would work in practice.

Across the research fathers with a range of different types of contact with their child felt that any decision about their child taking part in the ELC-FS would be made jointly by both mother and father. These participants felt that the study should ask both parents, giving both parents a chance to check they were happy with their child being involved. Others suggested that mothers would take a lead on deciding whether to participate and that the mother would then ask for the father's input. These participants often expected that the mother would make the decision as the primary carer for the child; however, they noted that they would like involvement in the decision.

Some anticipated that the mother of their child would be unlikely to agree to take part in this type of study. Where this was the case there was some uncertainty amongst participants about whether they would still be able to take part. Most assumed that she would not agree to the child taking part and therefore they would not take part.

Where there was a very difficult relationship with the child's mother (this type of relationship was reported amongst some who were not in a romantic relationship with the mother of the child) participants anticipated that it would be too difficult to discuss participation in the study and therefore - even though the father may be interested in the study - they would be unlikely to take part.

***"My kid's mother doesn't get involved in anything like this, we don't talk so trying to get involved in anything like this would be a nightmare, we don't even speak because we have agreed that it is better for the kids if we do our own thing and let each other live our lives, so it would be hard for me to do this study" (OHF Interview 1, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a relationship with mother, White, 25-34 years old)***

### **The mother's participation**

Participants were asked whether knowing that the mother of the child was taking part in the study would influence their own participation.

Knowing that the mother was taking part in the ELC-FS could act as an encouragement to participation based on a desire for the study to include the view of the father as well as the mother, feeling that this would provide a more balanced viewpoint. This was particularly cited by those who felt that the role of fathers could be overlooked in studies.

***"I think it is better to make sure the father is involved, when you invite fathers to take part let them know that 'you are an important factor as well' - because sometimes fathers get pushed aside and they don't really get looked at like the mum does, which is fine because the mum does everything. But fathers can feel more sensitive about things to do with their kids – so as long as fathers are made to feel involved and they feel like someone does actually cares about what they have to say, that will be good" (OHF Interview 21, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)***

Those that did express concerns about the mother taking part tended to focus on whether fathers and mothers would be required to be interviewed together. The idea of this was a clear deterrent to those who reported having a difficult relationship with the mother; they anticipated that this would be awkward and, in many cases, unfeasible. It was also noted that bringing the mother and father together could generate a difficult environment for the child to experience. If this were to be the case, it was suggested that only one parent take part.

## **3.7 Study communications**

This section of the report details participants expectations regarding study communications including: suggested content for any study communications that they felt would help engage fathers in the research; preferences for how the study contacted them; and views towards the language that the ELC-FS could use to describe fathers who do not live full-time with their child.

### **Information content for study communications**

Suggestions for information provided in study communications regarding the ELC-FS were similar across participants. They reflect the motivations and barriers identified in section 3.1.

#### **Promoting the motivations for taking part in the study**

- The importance of including fathers and families in different circumstances in the study.
- Details of any incentive provided for participation.

- Information about the benefits of taking part in the study for society. For example, how study findings will help other families, children and fathers in similar circumstances. Participants felt that it would be very important that any information was clear about the aims and benefit of the study.

***“Focus on the benefits of the research – information on how this will benefit the general public, this will motivate the fathers to get it done” (OHF Interview 23, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)***

- Information about the personal benefits of taking part in the study for the participant and their child. As discussed earlier in section 3.1, participants suggested that sharing study findings at both general and individual levels could support fathers in reflecting and learning about their child’s development and their role as a father. Being clear about how involvement could positively impact their child was a key motivating factor that participants suggested be included in any study communications.

***“I would describe it as an optional study that you would be able to get involved in for your children’s development and progress – and to help other who might be struggling on that front as well” (OHF Interview 27, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black African, 25-34 years old)***

- Participants noted that it could be useful to share examples from previous studies of the types of benefits for both society and individuals. For example, detailing how past families have found taking part useful, or stories and feedback from those who have taken part in similar studies.

#### **Providing reassurances about potential barriers to study participation**

- Clear information regarding the time commitment and reassurances that scheduling will be flexible and convenient.
- Reassurances regarding data confidentiality including how data is stored and used. Participants felt that it would be particularly important to provide this information for the collection of saliva samples. It was suggested that information about data confidentiality could be strengthened by clear information about the legitimacy of the research and the organisation carrying out the research
- Information about any potential negative impacts of taking part for the father and the child.
- Clear information about whether the mother will need to take part in an interview at the same time.
- Setting clear expectations for the topics the study will cover and that answering these would be optional. Across the research, participants sometimes assumed that they would be asked very detailed questions about their personal circumstances where they may feel judged for their answers (e.g., why they did not live with the mother of their child). Setting expectations regarding the detail sought could provide reassurances on this point.

*"My initial gut instinct is that there would be a lot of questions about why they don't live in a more traditional way – and how they can get to that more traditional position. Even though it's just a study – they might be a bit uneasy that there will be lots of questions about the reasoning of why they don't live together or spend more time with their child." (OHF Interview 15, overnight stays with child, in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Mixed/Multiple ethnic background, 25-34 years old)*

## Channels for engagement

Participants were asked to think about how they would prefer to be contacted if invited to take part in the ELC-FS. Preferences tended to focus on channels that participants felt comfortable using in daily life, and channels where they felt comfortable assessing the legitimacy of the information.

**Letters** were often preferred by those who felt they were more formal and would attract their attention.

*"But a letter, that would feel a bit more formal and important" (OHF Interview 1, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 25-34 years old)*

A couple of participants noted that they would query how the study had got their personal address noting that this felt like private information. However, the key downside of receiving a letter was the likelihood that participants simply would not open it, or assume it was junk mail.

*"I get so much junk mail I normally just put it all in the bin, if it's that important they will email or call me" (OHF Interview 11, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 20-24 years old)*

**Email** contact was often suggested by those who noted that this was a familiar channel for receiving information. Email was often something that participants had frequent access to so would be likely to notice it.

*"I do most things online so if it was sent by email that would work for me – because I check my emails a lot, but not everyone does. So maybe by post – but I do throw things away I don't recognise sometimes." (OHF Interview 24, overnight stays with child, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, Black African, 25-34 years old)*

However, emails were often associated with scams, especially when coming from unfamiliar sources. There were strong concerns amongst participants that fathers would ignore or delete an email assuming that it was junk, spam or a scam. With this in mind, it was suggested that the source of the email be clear so that recipients could confirm its legitimacy.

**Telephone** was not a popular channel for finding out about the ELC-FS amongst participants. It was noted that phone calls could be easily missed, and unknown telephone numbers ignored. Whilst some participants were open to talking about the study via telephone, they noted that they wouldn't expect to receive a telephone call out of the blue. They felt more comfortable with receiving a telephone call if they had specifically passed on their telephone number to the study (via the mother), or if they had already received some written information about the study to read and think about. With this in mind a few suggested that a text message might be a good way to contact fathers whilst providing information about the study that they could read in their own time.



Overall, participants expressed some concerns that if they received information about the study 'out of the blue' they may not engage with it. They suggested ways in which the study could be more widely promoted so that people would be aware of it before receiving any relevant information. Suggestions included:

- **Promoting the study via word of mouth.** Perhaps reflecting the way in which some participants may have heard about the opportunity to take part in this 2021 qualitative research, participants felt that hearing about the research from someone they knew. They felt that this personal recommendation would give them trust in the study. For example, one participant suggested that a GP or health visitor may be able to pass on information about the study.
- **Advertising.** TV campaigns, billboards and social media were also suggested as places where adverts regarding the study could be placed to promote the study and make people aware of it before they were contacted to be invited to participate.

### Language use in communications

Participants were asked for their views on terminology that the study should use to engage and describe Own Household Fathers. Fathers were prompted to consider the following terms that are used to describe fathers that do not live with their child full-time: non-resident father; separated father; absent father; and own household father.

Participants reflected that there would be differences in the type of involvement that fathers may have with their child. Some identified themselves as 'actively involved' but recognised that this might not be the case for all fathers. The complex and individual nature of circumstances led some participants to query whether 'labels' were useful and could potentially disengage some fathers. For example, those who were in a romantic relationship with the mother of the child and not living with her and the child full-time noted that it would be important that any terminology did not suggest that they were not in a romantic relationship. Across the research, fathers also noted that they would like to spend more time with their child but that circumstances made this difficult and were keen that any terminology should reflect the sensitivity of this situation.

Participants often struggled to think of how they would describe their own situation. They were keen to note that there would be varied circumstances amongst those who did not live with their child full-time and anticipated that it would be very difficult to find a term that adequately represented all of these.

*"To be honest, I'm just a dad at the end of the day, like it doesn't matter where I live or where I'm from or how often I see my kids, I'm their dad and I don't see myself as anything else" (OHF Interview 1, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 25-34 years old)*

Participants felt that their situation should be spoken about with respect and were keen to avoid negative descriptions or connotations.

*"I would describe myself as very hard working, outgoing and positive person, I try my best to give the best to my child" (OHF Interview 7, spends regular time with child face-to-face, not in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 20-24 years old)*

The term 'absent father' attracted the most negative feedback across participants as it suggested the father was not involved with their child out of choice. Two participants did feel that the term 'absent' described their situation; both had infrequent/no contact with their child. However, overall participants



strongly felt that this term should be avoided in any study information. They felt that it was negative in tone, could feel demoralising and lacked positivity which would be required to engage fathers in the ELC-FS.

Views regarding other terms including ‘single father’, ‘non-resident father’ and ‘separated father’ were met with mixed views. Some participants felt that these could work for their situation, but it was clear that they were looking for the term that most closely related to their individual circumstances rather than identifying a term they felt strongly positive towards.

Participants had not previously heard the term ‘**own household father**’. There were mixed views towards this term. Those who felt positively towards the term particularly liked its neutral feel and praised the fact that it did not make a judgement on the father’s involvement with their child. This was particularly noted when compared to the term ‘absent father’. Some noted that it was useful to have a term that was specific and explained the situation of fathers that did not live full-time with their child; these participants felt that ‘own household father’ did describe their own situation.

Those less positive towards the term felt that it was not easy to understand and sounded wordy and complicated. Some wondered if saying ‘dads that don’t live full-time with their child’ would be simpler (it should be noted that this was a phrase used throughout the research interview and therefore something that participants may have become more familiar with during the research process).

*“Fathers who live independently from their child – that therefore does not imply they are absent – just that they live independently for an unknown reason.” (OHF Interview 6, overnight stays with child, in a romantic relationship with mother of child, White, 25-34 years old)*

A few participants confused the term with indicating some form of home ownership and one participant reflected that they lived in a shared household and therefore this did not feel like it described his circumstances.

### 3.8 Conclusions

Across the research, three themes have emerged that are important to take into account when looking to engage OHFs in the ELC-FS.



Each of these themes is important, and any engagement with OHFs should consider all three.

Below we provide further detail on each of these factors including some key considerations. It is important to note that these qualitative considerations and findings will need to be considered alongside wider work being carried out by CLS regarding the ELC-FS and wider evidence.

## Clarity

### Key clarity considerations

- Lack of clarity regarding research purpose and processes could quickly deter participants from engaging with and taking part in the study.
- Lack of clarity regarding who needs to be present during the interview, and inadequate reassurances around the confidentiality of survey responses between parents is likely to be a strong deterrent particularly for those who do not have an amicable relationship with the mother of their child.

A clear understanding of different aspects of the ELC-FS will support engagement amongst OHFs. Whilst many areas for clarity identified below are likely to be important for any parent invited to take part in the study, reflecting how and why these hold particular salience for OHFs will be key to successful engagement. The research suggests that it will be essential that any study information provides clear information about the following aspects of the ELC-FS:

- **Involvement from OHFs is sought:** providing participants with clear understanding that the study is looking to gather input from fathers that do not live full-time with their child, and families with different circumstances will support OHFs in understanding why it is important for them to participate in the study. Noting that the study is aiming to include these audiences could also act as a signal to participants that this study recognises that families are all different, and that views of the father are important. Detailing why it is important for fathers and those in different circumstances to participate will further cement for OHFs why it is important for them to consider taking part.
- **An incentive will be offered to those who participate:** clarity around the incentive amount and the fact that it will be offered to those participating in the research will be important for some. Although there is a risk that £10 may be deemed too low an amount, the research suggests that for some, a financial recognition of participation could act as a motivation to participate.
- **The study has social value:** clarity regarding the social value of taking part in the study is likely to act as motivation for some and should therefore be included in study communications. The research suggests that any information that can be shared regarding the positive impact that the study will have on families, children and fathers with similar circumstances are likely to be particularly engaging. Relevant findings from other similar cohort studies could provide positive examples of how these types of studies have had impact in the past. These tangible examples are likely to help bring the social value of taking part in the ELC-FS to life for potential participants. However, it will be important that any previous findings are presented in a positive way, and do not infer judgement on families, fathers and children living in different circumstances. Clarity regarding the social value of the study is further likely to support engagement in survey topics or study activities that are considered 'sensitive'. For example, OHFs may be more open to sharing details about their circumstances or health if they are able to make a clear link between providing these responses and the value for the study (especially the value for families, children and fathers with similar circumstances). Examples from how previous families/fathers have found taking part useful, or stories and feedback from those who have taken part in similar studies could help promote the benefits of taking part.
- **Data will be confidential and kept security:** whilst often a 'hygiene' factor for research participation in general, clear reassurances and information about data confidentiality and security hold particular salience amongst OHFs for: security of information regarding their personal circumstances; and

avoidance of sharing survey responses with the mother of the child. Confidence in data security is likely to be reinforced by ensuring that study communications provide information about the research organisation, and legitimacy of this organisation. OHFs also seek reassurances regarding data confidentiality and security for information about their child.

It will also be important that the study sets **clear expectations** for the following:

- **Who needs to be present at the interview:** OHFs will need clear information regarding who needs to take part in the interview. Expectations and preferences for this are likely to vary. It will be important to be clear on any involvement required from the child and/or the mother. The ELC-FS should consider that diversity of circumstances means that some OHFs may expect or hope to take part with their child and at the same time as the mother, whilst for others this will not be sought or feasible.
- **Topic coverage:** information regarding the topics for coverage will help manage expectations for what taking part in the study will involve. For OHFs it will be particularly important to clarify the optional nature of topics especially those around the relationship with the child's mother. The ELC-FS should further consider that some OHFs may not feel able to answer questions related to their child's development, and options not to answer these should be carefully framed to avoid any potential for perceived judgement in offering this. Identifying certain topics for coverage may act as further motivation to participate. For example, amongst OHFs whose father did not live with them as children, there was interest in this topic area being part of the study, linked to the notion that the study could look at the impact this may have on families/attitudes towards parenting.
- **Child participation:** reflecting some confusion amongst participants regarding the role of the child, it will be important that any study communications set clear expectations regarding what any involvement from them will require.
- **Feedback from the study:** reflecting that some participants are likely to expect and be motivated by the idea of receiving feedback (at both general and individual levels), any feedback that ELC-FS participants will receive should be carefully and clearly communicated.
  - If only general-level feedback from across the study is to be shared with ELC-FS participants, it will be useful to consider what type of information participants will be most interested to receive. The research suggests that anything that can be tailored to families/fathers/children with similar circumstances will be of particular interest to participants. OHFs were most likely to mention interest in general-level study findings that would help them reflect and learn about their child's development and their role as a father.
  - If the study does not plan to share individual level feedback, this should be clearly communicated and explanations for why this is the case could help mitigate any disappointment in this respect.
  - Clarity will be needed on whether any results of saliva samples will be shared.
- **Advice and the role of the interviewer:** it will be important for the ELC-FS to consider what signposting and safeguarding processes may be required given the topics to be covered in the study. The study should also consider setting boundaries for what advice the study will be able to provide. This will help manage participant expectations for what taking part might involve. For example, amongst OHFs it will be important to clarify whether there will be signposting for fathers, and for any

signposting to include support for those who are unable to spend as much time with their child as they would like. The research suggests that there may also be an expectation amongst some that the research will provide an opportunity for mediated discussion with the child of the mother, and therefore expectations need to be set.

**Flexibility**

**Key flexibility consideration**

- Lack of flexibility for mode could result in quick disengagement, in particular from those who feel strongly against taking part in a face-to-face interview.

Time is often cited as a barrier to ELC-FS participation, especially for OHFs who have competing childcare responsibilities and may be working shift work or long hours. Clear information about the time commitment required to take part in the study will be important. Equally, reassurances that the scheduling of participation will be flexible will be essential. Offering participation on different days of the week, including weekends and different times of the day will be useful. Flexibility on this point will be important as some OHFs may be concerned about giving up time they would usually spend with their child.

Flexibility of mode will also be important. Where face-to-face is a preference, this is likely to be based on the desire to build rapport with the interviewer and anticipated feelings of increased comfort in being able to physically see the interviewer. In-home may offer a comfortable setting but will not be suitable for all and the ELC-FS will need to consider that there will be varied reaction (based on the amicability of relationship between father and mother) towards the idea of taking part in the home of the child’s mother. Some OHFs are unlikely to participate in a face-to-face interview based on barriers related to living circumstances (e.g., shared accommodation), other time commitments, COVID-19 concerns, privacy concerns and for some, an unease at the idea of speaking about sensitive topics in a face-to-face setting. Offering an alternative to face-to-face will likely increase engagement.

It is useful for the ELC-FS to note that offering choice in mode is a key way in which to ensure that OHFs feel they have choice in their participation. Overall, feelings of choice and control over participation (e.g. how and when to take part) is likely to increase engagement in the study.

**Sensitivity**

**Key sensitivity considerations**

- Those who are concerned that taking part in the ELC-FS could negatively affect the relationship they have with the mother of their child are likely to be a difficult group to engage in the study and very unlikely to participate. This is particularly where OHFs are apprehensive that disruption to this relationship could impact on access to their child.
- Giving inadequate consideration to the sensitivities of individual circumstances and the impact this may have on their participation is likely to result in disengagement in the ELC-FS.

It is clear that there will be some sensitivities for the ELC-FS to navigate in engaging OHFs in the study.

**Relationship with the mother of their child:** it will be important for the ELC-FS to consider the diversity of relationships between OHFs and mothers. The ELC-FS should consider how this relationship will impact the following:

- **OHF participation:** there is concern amongst those with a very poor relationship that discussion of, or participation in the study could further negatively impact the relationship and therefore access to the child. The ELC-FS should ensure that OHFs do not feel pressured into taking part and have autonomy and information to decide whether taking part could negatively impact the relationship they have with their child and the mother of their child.
- **Sharing OHF contact details:** there is a preference for OHFs to be given the option to give consent to the mother sharing their contact details with the ELC-FS. This suggests that OHFs would like control over their participation, as well as use of their personal data. Practicalities for how mothers would ask fathers where there is a difficult relationship will need to be considered especially in situations where doing this could negatively impact the existing relationship between mother and father. Whilst this research has focused on the views of fathers related to recruitment, it will be useful to also consider the views of the mother, and how they may feel about involving OHFs and their role in this.
- **Consent for the child to participate:** echoing desire for choice and control in their own participation in the ELC-FS, this research suggests that OHFs are also keen to be involved in the decision about their child's participation in the study. However, it is not clear how this would work on a practical level for those who are not on good terms with the mother of the child.

**Recruiting via birth registration records<sup>33</sup>kl:** whilst only mentioned by a couple of participants in the research, it should be noted that some fathers responded negatively to the use of birth registrations for study recruitment. Having clear rationale for any use of this approach will be important.

**Rationale for topics and activities included:** it is clear that some topics and activities may be considered sensitive by some OHFs. For example, information about their circumstances, their relationship with the child's mother, health of the child and themselves and saliva sample collection. It will be important that it is made clear to participants why this information is sought, how much detail on these topics will be asked, the confidentiality and anonymity of responses and how information on these topics will benefit the study and feed into the social value of the study. It will also be important to make it clear that there is a choice in answering questions or taking part in activities.

**Building trust:** OHFs are more likely to feel open to taking part in the study if they feel they can trust it. Ensuring that communications make it easy for potential participants to check the legitimacy of the research will be important. The research also suggests that wider advertising of the study - from trusted sources - could help build trust.

**Ensuring a non-judgemental approach:** it will be essential that ELC-FS think about the potential for OHFs to feel judged; they are likely to quickly disengage if they fear judgement. At a broad level, there are concerns that fathers may be judged for not living with their child full-time and it will be important that the study talks clearly about its desire to include OHFs. Framing of questions will also be important. Questions regarding child development, income and finances, and health behaviours such as drinking and smoking can all generate fear of judgement. Questions exploring these topics will need to use neutral language and include 'prefer not to answer' options. Questions related to type of contact the father has with the child will also need to be handled carefully as detailed questions could be an emotive topic for some. Care should also be taken to consider the language used to talk about OHFs. Neutral terminology should be used and terms such as 'absent father' avoided as it holds negative connotations

<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that the research did not explore any opt-out process that could be administered prior to details being passed on to the ELC-FS researchers. Proposed use of administrative data, including for sampling via birth registration, in the ELC-FS is being explored in detail separately via in-depth public dialogue research.

likely to disengage OHFs. It is clear that no one term will suit the circumstances of all OHFs; the work taken to generate recruitment materials for this 2021 qualitative research may provide a good starting point for development of phrasing for this group.

**04**

**Low-income  
Families**



## 4 Low-income Families

### 4.1 Motivations and barriers to study participation

This section of the report explores motivations and barriers to study participation. It should be noted that participants were living in a range of different circumstances, all of which had an impact on whether, why, and how they would want to take part in the ELC-FS. Where specific circumstances or participant characteristics influenced views towards taking part in the ELC-FS, these are reported on.

#### Motivations

Across the research, four factors likely to motivate low-income families to participate in the ELC-FS emerged. Not all motivating factors were voiced by each participant.

**Figure 4.1: Four motivating factors (not shown in any particular order)**



Each of the above factors is discussed in turn below.

#### Recognising the role of families in different circumstances

Across the research many participants emphasised the importance of capturing a wide range of views and experiences in the ELC-FS. They felt that it would be important for the study to reflect the reality of different family situations and how these may impact children.

*“[You] need studies from people all over for a true look at how life is” (LIF Interview 12, Mother, Black Caribbean, 35-44 years old)*

*“Sounds interesting, especially how it would capture different families.” (LIF Interview 5, Mother, Black African, 25-34 years old)*

As often-time marginalised groups in society, there was a sense amongst participants that their views were not usually heard, and so they would welcome the opportunity to share their experiences. Linked to this was the notion that by involving participants similar to them, the implications of the study would be more relevant to others in similar circumstances.

*“Happy because they need everyone’s point of view, not just ‘normal’ circumstances.” (LIF Interview 20, Mother, White, 25-34 years old)*

Participants were motivated by the idea that the study would present an opportunity to allow people to feel heard, and as though they would be a part of something important.

*“For me it’s about being heard.” (LIF Interview 14, Mother, White, 25-34 years old)*

***“Good to give my input...it would be nice to be part of something.” (LIF Interview 16, Mother, White, 25-34 years old)***

### **Social value of the study**

#### **Background information and context**

- During the qualitative research interview participants were told that findings from these types of studies (cohort studies) have helped governments understand how to improve children’s education and health services for fathers and mothers.

While not all participants were familiar with studies like the ELC-FS, it was not a completely alien concept to most, and many referenced seeing similar projects documented on television programmes. With this reference in mind, participants were able to grasp how the data might be used to influence changes in society and allow for learning and comparisons across generations.

***“The research and stuff that has then made the books and the advice and stuff that I have invaluable, that’s what I imagine this is going to bring about, so if I can help someone like me in 5 years time or whatever, I’d be more than happy to do that.” (LIF Interview 9, Mother, White, 35-44 years old)***

Participants were motivated by the idea that participating in this type of research could make a positive difference to families and children. While both mothers and fathers recognised the benefits to children, mothers tended to mention more specific ways in which the study might benefit child development, such as the impact of breastfeeding on development.

***“[A] very good idea...trying to improve things.” (LIF Interview 24, Mother, Pakistani, 25-34 years old)***

Those with an educational background or job that was related to the research goals of the ELC-FS (i.e., understanding child development) immediately recognised the value of taking part in the study and the wider social value of study findings. For example, those working in a related environment such as a school or hospital, or those who had studied psychology in the past. As such, the ELC-FS was already aligned with their personal interests, which was a key motivating factor for participation.

***“When I was at uni I studied psychology and stuff like that, so I’d be really interested in taking part like something like that, especially because it’s every couple of years, and I’d be really interested to find out what the findings were.” (LIF Interview 1, Mother, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)***

For a small number of participants however, there was some sense of scepticism, with a feeling that they would want to be reassured of the potential difference it could make. They did not want to take part only to find that the research findings were not later used to make any tangible changes and the study became a ‘tick-box’ exercise.

***“Good idea but what will happen afterwards, will it work? Don’t want it just to be a tick-box exercise.” (LIF Interview 17, Father, Bangladeshi, 35-44 years old)***

### Feedback, reflection and learning for participating parents

Across the interviews, study findings being shared was highlighted as a particularly motivating factor for participation. They discussed the following ways in which they and their child could benefit from study findings:

- **An opportunity for reflection:** participants felt that taking part in the ELC-FS would offer an opportunity for parents to engage in more reflection on how they are parenting and bonding with their child. This was appealing for participants who emphasised how busy life was with small children. Echoing this, there were also positive views towards the potential for this to be captured through video footage, for those who were happy to partake in the filming element of the research, discussed further in section 4.6.

*“It would be good to think more about how you're bonding with your child” (LIF Interview 20, Mother, White, 25-34 years old)*

- **Learning from the study findings:** as parents, participants had a particular interest in learning more about factors that impact a child's development, as well as how to improve things for future generations. Seeing these findings at the end of the study held strong appeal.

*“It would be interesting to know things like, do stay at home mums have more advanced babies because they're spending more time with them? If you've got more money are your babies healthier, do they develop quicker, that kind of thing would be really interesting.” (LIF Interview 9, Mother, White, 35-44 years old)*

Participants with more than one child reflected that each child is different and felt that it would be fascinating to understand those differences with more context.

*“I think it would be interesting to find out about development, my first daughter was very difficult, so I think I'd like to go through the research and see what came out of it.” (LIF Interview 10, Mother, Black African, 25-34 years old)*

Particularly motivating was the idea of answering questions related to circumstances that participants already acknowledged could be having an impact on their child's development. For example, not being able to afford to send their child to nursery, understanding the impact of multiple languages being spoken at home, or the impact of COVID-19 on their child.

- **Receiving individual level feedback:** Some participants were particularly interested in finding out about their own children's development at an individual level, with an expectation that they would receive individual feedback as a result of participation. Parents hoped that this individual feedback would help them understand what they could do to support their child's development.

*“To be honest it would be good for somebody to see my children...they have struggled with some things...pandemic had bad effect on children...I think it would be good to understand how to help them.” (LIF Interview 14, Mother, White, 25-34 years old)*

Highlighting the strength of appeal of this amongst some, one participant noted that they would feel less motivated to participate in the study if they were unable to obtain specific feedback on their child at an individual level.

- **Providing advice:** some expected that they would be provided with direct feedback, input and support if they were to take part in the study. These participants hoped that the study team would explain how their child's development compared to other children, what parents could do to support them better, and to provide information on things like finances, local services and how to improve their children's life chances.

*"I want to know how it would benefit my child. Will they do something to help my child?" (LIF Interview 3, Mother, Pakistani, 35-44 years old)*

## Incentives

### Background information and context

- Participants were informed that the potential incentive for the ELC-FS would be £10 for each parent for taking part in an interview structured as follows:
  - Interview with one parent about themselves, their family and their child, which would last about 60 minutes.
  - Interview with the other parent, mainly about themselves, which will last about 30 minutes.
  - Activities for 10 minutes on a mobile app which would include taking a video recording of the parents playing with their children. This could be done on the parent's mobile, or the interviewer's mobile.
- It is useful to note that participants taking part in this 2021 qualitative research received a £40 incentive for a 60-minute interview. This may have influenced their views on incentivisation for study participation.

There was mixed feedback on the incentive amount of £10 per parent. For some participants it held appeal, with a sense that every little helps and that even a small amount would make a difference for their family.

*"Someone like me, for a tenner I can get 100 nappies, 6 packs of wipes, and a couple of bodysuits out of Lidl for that...a tenner is a lot when you're on a limited income." (LIF Interview 9, Mother, White, 35-44 years old)*

Others however, even those on very low incomes, felt that for the time commitment and level of detailed and personal feedback the study was asking for, £10 was too low an amount. Some suggested that £10 would feel pointless, and that they would rather take part in the study for the social value, without a financial incentive.

*"I'd do it for knowledge...wouldn't do it for a tenner, don't think many people would." (LIF Interview 12, Mother, Black Caribbean, 35-44 years old)*

Participants suggested that a greater financial value would be more motivating and should reflect the time and engagement needed from participants (an incentive for each interaction, including app-based activities) and the personal nature of questions asked.

## Barriers

Across the research, four factors likely to act as a barrier to low-income families participating in the ELC-FS emerged. Not all barriers were voiced by each participant.

**Figure 4.2: Four barriers to participation (not shown in any order)**



Each of the above barriers is discussed in turn below.

### Time

#### **Background information and context**

Participants were informed that taking part in the study would involve an interview structured as follows:

- Interview with one parent about themselves, their family and their child, which would last about 60 minutes.
- Interview with the other parent, mainly about themselves, which will last about 30 minutes.
- Activities for 10 minutes on a mobile app which would include taking a video recording of the parents playing with their children. This could be done on the parent's mobile, or the interviewer's mobile.

Time required to take part in the study was often cited as a potential barrier to participation. Participants questioned the exact time commitment that would be expected if participating in the study noting that it was lengthy. They noted that with young children it could be difficult to make time for any kind of activity, particularly if it needed their full attention. This was particularly emphasised by those with more than one child in the household. These participants anticipated that there would be challenges related to balancing the multiple demands that exist e.g., quiet space for homework for older children and keeping younger children happy while simultaneously being interviewed.

There were also some questions about the time-of-day interviews would be expected to take place, particularly for parents who worked long hours, and thinking about how an interview would be arranged to fit around the child's schedule e.g., nap times.

***“I'd do it if it would be something that would fit in to us.” (LIF Interview 14, Mother, White, 25-34 years old)***

Flexibility on when interviews took place to fit around parent schedules appeared to be key. Linked to this was the importance of providing very clear information upfront about what the study would involve,

any preparation needed from parents, and the potential for flexibility to accommodate participant schedules.

### Data confidentiality

#### **Background information and context**

Participants were informed that all answers given by study participants would be kept confidential and securely by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies.

Concerns regarding data confidentiality and security could quickly emerge as a barrier if clear information and reassurances regarding these were not provided. Some felt that it would be important to have transparent processes in place and strong reassurances in order for them to consider taking part.

*"The only thing that's coming into my head right now is, what are the aims of this study? Who's it going to? Who's going to be using it? Is it going to be a free-for-all after a little while? Is it going to be just government departments? Is it going to be health organisations? I guess it depends on what comes out really." (LIF Interview 25, Father, Indian, 25-34 years old)*

Participants that expressed scepticism regarding the study noted that they would do their own research before agreeing to take part in such a study. They would want to be able to look up the organisation in detail to reassure themselves about their legitimacy, and if their concerns were alleviated then they might consider taking part.

*"If I looked it up then I'd give you my opinion, if it felt okay." (LIF Interview 29, Father, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

For some of the more sceptical participants there was a sense of reassurance in the fact that they could opt out of answering certain questions or undertaking some of the activities involved in the research.

### Sensitivity of individual circumstances

Participant feelings towards study participation were influenced by personal and individual circumstances. This was a particular issue for single parents, especially if the relationship with their ex-partner was not amicable. In these circumstances, participants noted that they would seek reassurance that the other parent would not be contacted about participation in the study unless they were fully informed of how that would happen, or they had expressly given their permission to make that contact.

*"Including their dad would be hard...do you have to speak to the mum and dad?" (LIF Interview 11, Mother, Pakistani, 35-44 years old)*

There were clear examples of topics being particularly sensitive to some participants due to the specific nature of their circumstances. For example, if a mother had experienced a traumatic birth, or post-natal depression, they may not be ready to discuss such matters in an interview.

*"[The] birth was traumatic, so quite sensitive. [I] would skip the question." (LIF Interview 27, Mother, White Ecuadorian, 35-44 years old)*

Overall, inclusion of sensitive topics was not felt to be a reason not to take part in the study, so long as interviewers made it very clear that answering questions would be optional, as well as recognising when a subject might be sensitive and not pushing on details.

### **Role of the child**

It was not always clear to participants what the expectation of their child would be, and whether there could be potential for any negative side-effects if their child were to take part in the study. Some parents wondered if interviewers would be asking their children questions, or making other demands on them, and how exactly that might work.

***“Maybe if they wanted my child to do specific things I didn't want her to do, that might put me off.” (LIF Interview 1, Mother, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)***

There was also a worry that young children wouldn't be able to consent to participation and a sense of responsibility and concern from parents should there be any negative impacts.

***“I'd be interested but a bit worried about it becoming invasive and my daughter can't give consent.” (LIF Interview 6, Mother, Bangladeshi, 25-34 years old)***

Similar concerns related to whether there could be negative outcomes from children being observed, or the potential of children knowing the results in future and being negatively impacted at that point in time. Participants called for clear explanations around the study and a sense from the research team that these concerns were considered, with an overview of any potential impacts or risk to the child provided.

## **4.2 Study topics**

### **Background information and context**

Participants were asked what topics they would expect and want to be asked about in the ELC-FS, and were then informed that the study may ask questions on the following topics (these were described using the descriptions below):

- Baby's health and development.
- Relationship between parents and relationship with baby (e.g., questions about infant-parent bonding).
- Service use (e.g health [GP/ NHS], childcare, local authority [Sure Start]).
- Your physical and mental wellbeing (e.g., pregnancy and birth, mental health or substance use).
- Your circumstances (e.g., income and benefits claimed, occupation, home ownership and housing conditions).
- Financial hardship (e.g., debt).

Participants from an ethnic minority background were also asked for their views regarding the following topics (these were described using the descriptions below):



- Languages spoken at home.
- Community and sense of belonging.
- Religion and cultural practice.
- Ethnicity of yourself and child.

This section details participant reaction to the ELC-FS proposed interview topics.

When asked about what topic areas or questions they would expect to be involved in the ELC-FS, a range of responses were provided. Some were unsure, with little understanding about how children's development would be measured or assessed, or what information the study might want to collect to understand development better.

Others, specifically mothers, gave long lists of topic areas they anticipated being asked about, often pre-empting topics that the ELC-FS intends to cover. These included questions around development such as reaching milestones like teething, eating solids and crawling; what the child does; what they eat; how they interact with others; whether they're in childcare, and who they live with, among others. A few participants had not expected there to be questions about themselves. Given the study focus on child development they anticipated that all questions would centre on the child.

Participants noted that certain topics were very sensitive and personal. However, there was often openness to answering these if participants could see a clear link between the study collecting this information and the study making a positive difference to children's lives.

***"It's not about me, it's about helping future generations, so happy to answer, and that motivates me to answer questions that may be more personal." (LIF Interview 19, Mother, White and Black African, 35-44 years old)***

Participants also queried the likely depth of the questions. While many suggested they would have concerns about being pushed too far on certain subjects, that was not a unanimous sentiment.

Participant feedback suggests that it will be important for the study to provide clear and transparent information about what types of topic areas will be covered, why and how they feed into learnings on child development, and reassurances about data anonymity, privacy and the option to opt out. Potential sensitivities of topics further suggest that it will be important for the study to respect participants' mental health and ensure awareness around safeguarding.

Views towards inclusion of each potential topic area are discussed below.

### **Baby's health and development**

Across the research, there was an understanding of the importance of sharing information on the child's health and development and this was an area of particular interest amongst participants. There was also interest in how exactly the child's health and development would be assessed and what would be involved in this. Whilst engaging for many, some participants spoke of the potential sensitivity of this topic area noting that parents may find it difficult to disclose concerns they may have about the development of their child.

Participants considered who within their household may be able to share views on the child's development. It was recognised that the domestic dynamic of each household would be different, and that to get an accurate picture of a baby's health and development, all primary carers should be invited to provide input, where possible. In households where extended family members were closely involved in caring for children, there was suggestion that they should be involved in this topic area too. This point was more frequently made by Pakistani and Bangladeshi participants, but not exclusively.

***"Essential that other family should be spoken to as well; grandparents, aunties." (LIF Interview 17, Father, Bangladeshi, 35-44 years old)***

### **Relationship between parents and the baby**

Participants identified this topic area as one that could be potentially sensitive although there was a general sentiment that parents would be willing to speak openly about their experiences, and a belief that this would be an important area for the study to cover.

Thinking specifically about the relationship between parents, participants noted that there could be issues discussing the relationship between parents if they were separated and the relationship was no longer amicable.

***"Me and kid's Dad are no longer together...we don't get on so could be hard." (LIF Interview 15, Mother, White, 25-34 years old)***

There was also a concern among some participants that their study responses may be shared with their partner (current or ex) and that this would not be appropriate. In these instances, participants called for reassurance that their answers would not be shared beyond the research team and certainly not with a partner.

The topic of relationship with the child was considered by some participants to be especially personal, particularly if they had experienced issues around bonding with their baby. These participants wondered how others might feel about speaking openly on this topic.

***"My mental health has been an issue with the babies...it's a touchy subject." (LIF Interview 14, Mother, White, 25-34 years old)***

However, even under these circumstances there was a sense that parents would still provide answers to such questions. The willingness to have these difficult conversations was acceptable in order to help the study achieve its aim of making positive changes for future generations.

***"I had Postnatal depression with [my] second child, really bad...I might be quiet on these questions and a bit close to home, but I would answer." (LIF Interview 15, Mother, White, 25-34 years old)***

Participants noted that the option not to answer these questions would be important and that interviewers should be mindful of the potential for participants to feel under pressure to answer.

### **Physical and mental wellbeing**

Overall participants responded positively to the idea of the study including questions around mental wellbeing, although they were keen to reflect that this could be a sensitive topic for some. Those who had experienced mental health issues felt that it would be an important area for the study to include but given their own personal experiences were not sure how they would feel about answering questions on

the subject. It was agreed that care should be taken to ask about this in a sensitive way. For example, participants felt that it would be important to consider how much people should be probed as there would be apprehension about providing too much personal detail.

The importance of the topic was echoed more broadly by participants who felt that mental wellbeing was an important issue for parents and for society as a whole, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. This relevance encouraged many to note that they would be motivated to be open if answering these questions.

***“I'd want to give as much information for the benefit of the research as possible. So, I wouldn't personally feel obliged to say anything, I think I'd be very open.” (LIF Interview 9, Mother, White, 35-44 years old)***

***“It'd be perfectly fine asking these questions...lots of people are suffering.” (LIF Interview 24, Mother, Pakistani, 25-34 years old)***

Participants raised queries about whether support would be made readily available, with a recognition from participants that asking someone to open up on their mental health could have an immediate and lasting effect on the person. There was a feeling that there would need to be some consideration around safety measures that could be put in place to offer subsequent support once the research has taken place.

Physical wellbeing appeared to be a less controversial issue for participants who did not raise concerns in this area. Participants who had experienced ill health in their family expressed a strong desire to give feedback on their experience, and answer questions about the NHS and healthcare.

***“It's so important that they know how important these services are, and how much they help families. We need to make sure they stay free because they are literally saving lives, I don't know how families would cope without them.” (LIF Interview 13, Father, White, 20-24 years old)***

### Service use

Some participants were unsure why the study would ask questions about service use, while others said such questions made sense to them, anticipating that the study would be looking at service use at a local level. Overall, participants were comfortable with the idea of answering questions on this topic but felt that an explanation about why they are being included would be helpful.

Participants identified the types of services that they thought would be useful for the study to ask about. This included information about childcare, the cost of childcare, accessibility of childcare and the flexibility of employers and support for working parents. Others emphasised the importance of the study understanding how supported families in different circumstances feel, and whether they were aware of services, and able to access them.

***“How supported do parents feel, whether they have help from others including someone like a local councilor to represent their views?” (LIF Interview 11, Mother, Pakistani, 35-44 years old)***

As with some other topic areas, discussion of the types of issues that could be covered led some participants to think about any signposting that could be provided to those who might not know about services or may need support. It was suggested that it would be beneficial to ask participants *how* they could be helped and subsequently direct them to services.

***"[You] should offer support... will there be help available?" (LIF Interview 23, Father, Bangladeshi, 35-44 years old)***

### **Financial circumstances and hardship**

Discussing financial circumstances, and particularly financial hardship, was highlighted as one of the most sensitive subjects for potential inclusion in the ELC-FS.

Debt was cited as a particularly sensitive topic across participants from different ethnic and social backgrounds who felt that these questions could feel intrusive.

***"I don't like people knowing my business [specific to debt question]. (LIF Interview 23, Father, White, 35-44 years old)***

While a few participants said they simply wouldn't answer questions about debt others noted that they would be open to answering these questions but felt that questions and discussion should be kept broad and 'top-line'.

***'Income is sensitive, I wouldn't want to share details, more yes-or-no answers. Debt is very sensitive.' (LIF Interview 27, Mother, White Ecuadorian, 35-44 years old)***

Financial hardship was flagged as a particularly 'touchy' subject although participants were not closed to the idea of answering questions on this topic. Those most open to this topic were those who felt there would be a clear benefit for the study to capture this information. This was particularly noted by those who felt that it would be important for the study to understand the impact on children of living in financial hardship. For participants experiencing life on a low income, there was often a strong interest in the subject, and recognition of the importance of learning more about the impact on child development.

***"I'd like to share my thoughts on the financial side of bringing up a family, and just how hard it is to afford to live and bring up a baby, I'd like to elaborate on that because it might help other families. It's not easy for a lot of families. So many families have to work two or three jobs just to make ends meet, I just think we need to be honest about how hard it really is." (LIF Interview 13, Father, White, 20-24 years old)***

Some fathers noted that discussing financial circumstances would be a particularly sensitive subject for them or others to answer if they were struggling financially. They felt that fathers might be reluctant to speak openly due to social stereotypes and traditional expectations for men to be family providers.

***"I'd talk about it, but would be slightly more reserved, especially as a male." (LIF Interview 17, Father, Bangladeshi, 35-44 years old)***

### **Languages spoken at home**

Across participants where more than one language was spoken at home with their child, there was a strong desire to understand what the impact might be for children. This acted as an incentive for taking part in the study for these participants and emerged as particularly relevant in the Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities (but not exclusively).

***"Questions about languages spoken at home...YES!" (LIF Interview 22, Mother, Pakistani, 35-44 years old)***

Participants felt that collecting data about different languages being spoken at home was important and there was no reluctance to divulge this information. It was suggested that providing study material in multiple languages would help make the study more accessible for those with limited English. Echoing this, participants felt that there could be times when an interpreter would be helpful for interviews. This is further discussed in section 4.4.

### Community and sense of belonging

Across the interviews, participants did not feel strongly about the inclusion of questions related to community and sense of belonging in the study and were mostly open to the inclusion of this topic. A few participants felt that it would be useful to understand why questions on this topic were asked, what relevance they had and how they would help the study overall.

### Religion and cultural practice

Overall participants were comfortable answering questions on this topic area. However, there were some examples where this was not the case. For example, one Muslim participant described herself as not very religiously strict and said this would make her nervous about answering questions on religion if the interviewer was a Muslim, as she would feel judged.

Cultural context was identified as an important area for the study to consider, in that there may be different cultural norms involved in parenting. For example, one Bangladeshi participant was keen to note that some parents in his community may not speak English to their children until they begin school, and often approached the diets of their infants differently to what may be considered the norm for British parents.

***“Some parents in Asian communities don't feed solids until about a year old.” (LIF Interview 17, Father, Bangladeshi, 35-44 years old)***

There was a feeling that in cases where cultural norms in child development were different to typically British norms, some participants may feel defensive in answering questions. It was clear that interviewers would need to have a neutral, non-judgmental position when asking such questions to ensure that participants of the ELC-FS felt comfortable to answer.

### Ethnicity

Participants noted that they would expect questions regarding ethnicity to be included in the ELC-FS and reflected that they were familiar with answering these regularly on forms. Overall participants felt that this information would be important for the study so that differences for ethnic minority groups could be identified in the study findings. However, for some it was noted that it would be important to explain why the study was seeking this information to avoid any potential for the questions to be conceived as alienating or disrespectful. For example, one participant queried why - in day-to-day life - they were frequently asked about their ethnicity.

***“[I was] born here, I'm Bangladeshi, but why do they keep asking? What's the benefit?” (LIF Interview 17, Father, Bangladeshi, 35-44 years old)***

Overall, there was no strong preference as to whether ethnicity was shared by ticking a box from a predetermined list or being able to identify themselves by writing down their background.

***“I really don't have any preference, either you give me a list or you ask me directly, either one is fine, I really don't mind how people ask.” (LIF Interview 10, Mother, Black African, 25-34 years old)***

However, there were some nuances amongst participant views. A predetermined list was familiar for most and offered a quick and easy way to share the information. For one participant selecting from a list meant that they were not being expected to explain themselves to the research team, or anyone else.

***“I know what I am and what I represent...I don't need to explain myself.” (LIF Interview 18, Father, Black African, 25-34 years old)***

Those who preferred to self-determine had strong feelings around this question and emphasised the importance of being able to self-define.

***“I don't fit in a box...I'm Black British, but when people meet me, I look Indian... my mum is Indian... I don't fit in anything.” (LIF Interview 7, Mother, Black Caribbean, 35-44 years old)***

Similarly, a small number of participants discussed the ‘Other’ box that is frequently present on pre-defined lists asking about ethnicity. For example, one participant reflected that their baby had mixed heritage and she would not want to group them as ‘mixed other’ on the ethnicity form. This participant emphasised that the UK is very diverse, and people should feel that they have a voice and are not simply considered as ‘other’.

Most participants did not think that sharing their ethnicity would alter how they would feel about answering any other questions. However, one participant wondered whether knowing her ethnicity could impact the interviewer’s approach and how they perceive her.

### **Additional topic suggestions**

The COVID-19 pandemic was identified as a potential area for inclusion in the ELC-FS. Participants noted that this had impacted everybody and was particularly salient with regards to other topic areas such as mental health. Participants suggested that it would be interesting to see how the fall-out of COVID-19 impacts lives and particularly how babies and children have been impacted.

Beyond the pandemic some participants highlighted wanting to understand more about people’s environments. There was a suggestion from some that questions on the local environment and facilities available to families would be of particular interest. This linked to an underlying hope that findings on these areas could have the ability to influence and improve local facilities.

## **4.3 Study mode**

### **Background information and context**

Participants were informed that the ELC-FS would collect information ‘face-to-face’, which would involve a trained researcher conducting the interview arranging a time to carry out the interview at their home with their partner (if applicable) and baby.

Participants were told that the interview would last no more than 1.5 hours and would involve a mixture of survey questions and activities.

It is also worth noting that participants were given information about the availability of self-report methods for more sensitive topic areas (e.g., self-completion survey and option to type answer into interviewer tablet).

Across the research, participant reactions to the idea that the ELC-FS would take place face-to-face with a trained interviewer in their home were mixed. Although most expected that the study might take place



'in person', families expressed differing levels of comfort with the idea of an interviewer coming to their home to carry out an interview.

Participant feedback suggests that it will be important for the study to provide clear and transparent information about what an in-home interview would involve, why the study was seeking to collect in-home information such as observing parents with their child and the benefits of the study collecting information in a face-to-face format. Flexibility of when interviews can be scheduled will also be important.

### Benefits to taking part in the home

Those positive towards the idea of carrying out the study in their home noted the following benefits:

- **Comfort:** participants felt that being able to take part in their own home afforded them a level of comfort which they may not get if they were asked to carry out the interview elsewhere. Participants felt they were generally more relaxed in their own home, which they saw as being a benefit both for themselves, their child and for the research more generally. For example, participants noted that they would be more comfortable answering private or sensitive questions in their own home and felt that they be more comfortable asking interviewers for clarification if they didn't understand something.

*“Interviewers coming into your home makes sense, makes you more relaxed” (LIF Interview 6, Mother, Bangladeshi, 25-34 years old)*

- **Engagement with the interviewer:** the opportunity to build rapport with interviewers was felt to be another benefit of having the interview take place at the participant's home. Participants thought that having an interviewer visit them would make the study feel more personal. Many felt that, provided the interviewer was friendly, an in-home interview would help build trust and facilitate a more personal connection to the study.
- **Convenience:** participants felt that having an interviewer visit them was convenient for them, particularly given the fact that their baby would be 9 months old at the time of the first visit. Convenience in participation was considered important. For example, participants felt it would be easier for them to look after their baby (and any other children) in the home while the interview was taking place. Additional practical benefits included not needing to travel or arrange childcare.

*“When my daughter was 9 months it would be much more convenient for it to be in my home anyway, so it would probably be nicer to have it in my home [...] just like the health visitor coming over or something.” (LIF Interview 1, Mother, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

- **Authenticity:** In addition to individual benefits, participants felt that taking part in the study in their home would also benefit the broader study findings. They recognised the importance of observing the family in their home, as they felt that the interviewer would be able to better understand the family context. Participants also felt it was important for the interviewer to observe their child, and the parent-child interaction, in an a 'real' life setting

### Disadvantages to taking part in the home

Those who were less keen on the idea of carrying out the study in their home noted the following disadvantages:

- **Availability and scheduling:** some participants felt that it would be a challenge to schedule an interviewer visit to their home. Although they did not object to the idea of an in-home interview in



principle, they felt it may be too difficult to organise around their already busy schedule(s). Participants cited a range of factors including work, childcare, hospital appointments and the schedules of other household members as barriers to organising a suitable time for the interviewer to visit. Those who felt that an in-home interview would be impractical typically made comparisons to other modes, such as telephone or online interviews, which they felt would be more flexible and feasible.

- **Fear of being judged:** although comfortable with the idea of a face-to-face interview, some had concerns about being judged or observed. Those who were concerned made comparisons to social workers and expressed discomfort with the idea that the interviewer might be making assessments about their personal circumstances based on their home environment. Participants felt this would make them feel anxious and may deter them from agreeing to take part.

*“I wouldn’t want to do it at my house...people being nosy...social workers...no” (LIF Interview 24, Mother, Pakistani, 25-34 years old)*

*“People might have anxiety about how their flat looks or house looks [...] I’ve got 3 children in a 2-bedroom flat and the council hasn’t fixed this, and hasn’t fixed that, then that goes better for the research because then you’ve actually got evidence how people are living. But, as I said, some people do not feel comfortable showing you how they live, because they’re not comfortable themselves.” (LIF Interview 26, Mother, White and Black African, 25-34 years old)*

- **Sensitivity of individual circumstances:** there were some topic areas which participants felt they would prefer to answer more discretely than in a face-to-face setting. Participants expressed some concerns around answering certain topics in front of the interviewer, other family members living in their household and, in some cases, their own partner. For example, some participants said they would be uncomfortable answering questions about their mental health or household finances in front of others. Participants were generally satisfied with the option to provide answers more discretely (e.g., opting for self-completion), but they emphasised the importance of interviewers handling the interviews with sensitivity to avoid any awkwardness.
- **Safety:** while some participants welcomed a return to normality, others were concerned about the safety of an in-home interview in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. For some, the idea of conducting an interview face-to-face was anxiety provoking. Those who had concerns about the safety of face-to-face interviews were generally uncomfortable with the idea of an interviewer coming to their home and suggested that the interview could be carried out in the garden. Others expressed a preference for more remote modes of interviewing such as telephone or video interviews.

*“Would they come to my house?...I’d rather [an] online interview over face-to-face. Especially with COVID.” (LIF Interview 16, Mother, White, 25-34 years old)*

#### 4.4 Interviewer characteristics

##### Background information and context

Participants were asked how they would feel about being able to request an interviewer of a specific ethnicity, gender or religion.

Across the research, participants expressed a positive reaction to the idea that study participants could be given an opportunity to specify interviewer demographics. Participants felt it was important that the study provided families with an opportunity to specify, even if they themselves did not have strong preferences. Many felt that simply providing the opinion signalled that the study was taking inclusion and diversity seriously.

Overall, participants felt that interviewer conduct was critical. Participants, specifically those belonging to ethnic minority groups, emphasised the importance of friendly, non-judgemental and culturally sensitive interviewers. Overall, participants felt that the conduct of the interviewer meant far more to them than the interviewer demographics. Participants felt it was important for all interviewers to operate in a culturally sensitive way, regardless of their background.

Of the options suggested, gender was the demographic characteristic which participants felt they would be most likely to specify given the option. Participants who did wish to request an interviewer expressed their preference for a female interviewer. Participants gave three key reasons for selecting a female interviewer:

- **Safety:** both male and female participants suggested that some women may feel safer choosing a female interviewer, particularly if they lived alone.

*"I would probably be more comfortable with a female but if Dad was at home then a male would be okay. Nice to have the option like at the GP they ask if you're happy for a trainee doctor to sit in on appointment." (LIF Interview 26, Mother, White and Black African, 25-34 years old)*

*"You feel more comfortable, rather than letting a man in. If my wife was a single parent, would she feel comfortable having another man? Technically, he's just got a badge. You're just trusting it really. It doesn't mean anything. Maybe you'd just feel more comfortable if it was a woman, especially if you're a single parent." (LIF Interview 25, Father, Indian, 25-34 years old)*

- Some mothers suggested that female interviewers may be more empathetic, particularly if they were parents themselves. Participants felt that female interviewers would be better equipped to understand the specific experiences and challenges of being a parent, and specifically those of being a mother.
- **Religious or cultural sensitivity:** participants across a range of different demographics acknowledged that some families may feel more comfortable inviting a female interviewer for religious or cultural reasons.

Although participants acknowledged the importance of **religious or cultural sensitivity**, they expressed mixed sentiments about the option to select an interviewer from the same ethnic or religious background to themselves. While some felt that speaking to an interviewer from the same ethnic background would make them feel at ease, others were concerned about the potential judgement they might experience if they themselves did not adhere to some of the cultural or religious norms of their community.

Participants belonging to ethnic minority groups emphasised the importance of interviewers being culturally aware and sensitive but felt that this sensitivity was not synonymous a shared ethnic or religious background. Some expressed concerns about being judged more harshly by members of their

own community and felt that given the option they may request an interviewer from a different background.

*“People can ask for people from the same ethnic background but it’s not the same [if the interviewer is more privileged for example] can feel looked down upon, most important factor to consider for interviewers: needs to be somebody that understands it a bit more rather than just a job, someone that has more knowledge and understanding. Just because they’ve got a degree they get asked first [but might not be the best person for the job]” (LIF Interview 12, Mother, Black Caribbean, 35-44 years old)*

### Translation

Some participants felt that requesting interviewers from specific ethnic groups was only important insofar as navigating language barriers. Although all of the participants involved in this research chose to do the interview in English, those who spoke other languages expressed concerns about the potential bias of translators. These participants felt that where translation was required, getting the ‘right’ translator or interpreter was more important than the ‘right’ interviewer.

Participants also felt it was extremely important that the study used in-person translators rather than automated or computer assisted translations. This was important to participants because they felt that families requesting to do the interview in their mother tongue may use colloquial terms which would risk being misunderstood without in-person clarification.

Additionally, participants were concerned about how language barriers would be navigated during recruitment, specifically in the initial communication about the study. They queried how those requiring translation would know this was an available option. As such, participants felt it important the study find a way of making this option clear to all participants from the outset.

## 4.5 Saliva sample

### **Background information and context**

Participants were asked how they would feel about providing a saliva sample to help researchers understand more about the parent and the child’s genetic background.

It is also worth noting that participants were given information about the purpose of collecting this data from parents and children.

Participants were also told that this part of the study would be optional.

This section of the report explores participant expectations, thoughts and concerns about the study collecting a saliva sample from themselves and their child. Where specific circumstances or cultural differences influenced views towards the saliva sample, these are reported on.

Overall while some participants expressed strong reservations about providing a saliva sample some felt that given adequate reassurances they would be open to the idea. Participant feedback suggests that it will be important for the study to provide absolute clarity around the purpose for, use of and storage of their saliva sample. Although it is unlikely that those who were strongly opposed to the idea of providing a saliva sample would be persuaded, those who were sceptical or uncertain expressed that they may be

more comfortable with the idea if they were provided with explicit reassurances about why the study wanted to collect this data, how it would be used, who would access it and how it would be stored.

Detailed views from participants regarding saliva sample collection are discussed below.

### Benefits to providing a saliva sample

Those who felt positively about providing a saliva sample as part of the study noted the following benefits:

- **Personal interest:** participants who felt positive about providing a saliva sample expressed a personal interest or curiosity in the research. They were particularly interested in what sort of information might come from the saliva sample, and specifically what it might tell them about their child's or their own genetic background.

Many participants assumed that they might receive individual level information about their own or their child's genetic background often comparing the test to a DNA ancestry test. Participants felt this would be interesting, and for some may even serve as a motivator to participate in the study. Participations who were dual-heritage (or whose children were dual-heritage) felt that this would be particularly interesting as they were curious about their genetic background, or how their different heritage would impact their own child's genetic makeup.

*"I would just want to know how it would have that correlation with the child's development or behaviours and stuff like that." (LIF Interview 1, Mother, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

- **Important contribution for the study:** participants recognised the medium- and long-term medical benefit of providing this sort of information as part of the ELC-FS. This was particularly true of participants (or the children of participants) who had health conditions themselves, or those who were concerned about specific health conditions that were prevalent amongst people within their specific community (e.g., sickle cell within the Black community).

In addition to making an important contribution to medical knowledge, participants also felt that there was an important social benefit to better understanding the impact of genetics on children's health and development. Participants acknowledged that these findings could benefit future generations and help to improve society in the future.

*"I think it actually helps because, in a Black community, you have more children with sickle cell than you might find in other cultures." (LIF Interview 26, Mother, Mixed/Multiple ethnic background, 25-34 years old)*

### Concerns about providing a saliva sample

Those who felt concerned about providing a saliva sample as part of the study noted the following concerns:

- **Privacy, security and data protection:** participants who were sceptical about providing a saliva sample raised concerns about the privacy of such sensitive data. They primarily expressed concern about the security of such sensitive and personal data. These concerns ranged from who would be given access to the data, anonymity of the data (i.e., would they/or their child be identifiable from the saliva sample), the risk of a data breach and the potential for the data to be misused. These concerns were both immediate (i.e., around access) and longer term (i.e., around storage).

- **Data use and intent:** in addition to concerns around the privacy and security of data, participants also expressed worries around the intent for collecting this sort of information. To some extent, this was due to participants having limited information about the saliva sample and how it would be used. Participants who were worried about intent felt they would be cautious, particularly around providing their child's saliva. Other participants understood the importance of collecting genetic information for the study but remained sceptical about a hidden agenda behind the saliva sample. A small number of participants reflected that they had become more cautious about the uses of genetic data since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, and felt they were more sceptical about scientific and medical research as a result.

*'I'd be cautious about saliva sample...not sure, what's it for and why do they need it? Be concerned about saliva sample would be shared, asking for a saliva sample could put people off'* (LIF Interview 17, Father, Bangladeshi, 35-44 years old)

*"I'd just like to know it's definitely being used for what they say it's being used for, and obviously, I don't know, that reassurance it's not going to go missing or be in the wrong hands or whatever. That's it, really"* (LIF Interview 1, Mother, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)

- **Feels too invasive:** some participants felt that collecting a saliva sample from either themselves or their child felt too invasive in the context of this study. Although some suggested that they may feel comfortable providing this in a medical study, they expressed concerns about how invasive it would feel to be asked in a study like the ELC-FS. Aside from being uncomfortable with the idea of being asked, participants were also uncomfortable with the idea of providing the sample and how it might be collected.

Despite being a motivator for some participants, others felt that the type of information that could be generated from a saliva sample could be highly sensitive. Participants expressed concerns about finding out information about themselves, their partner or their child that they did not want to know (i.e., information about their heritage, underlying health conditions or relating to the DNA match between themselves and their child). Although participants were prepared to discuss sensitive or personal issues, the saliva sample felt like an overstep of boundaries.

*'If they take my DNA sample, and they take my child's DNA, and then you find out it's not a perfect match, and that the missus has been playing away, and then it causes a whole lot of problems.'* (LIF Interview 25, Father, Indian, 25-34 years old)

## 4.6 Novel modes

### Background information and context

Participants were informed about some novel modes of data collection which the study team were considering using as part of the ELC-FS. This included an app which participants could use for a variety of different study-specific tasks including:

Capturing videos of participants and their baby doing different structured activities (e.g., playing). These would be filmed via Smartphone and uploaded to a mobile app (either by the participant or the interviewer)

Completing a diary about how participants spend their time

Answering one-off questions sent via app notifications

This section of the report explores participant feelings about novel ways in which people could take part in the ELC-FS. Where specific circumstances or cultural differences influence views towards novel modes, these are reported on.

Generally, participants were tech savvy and the idea of using an app to participate in elements of the research was well received. A small number of participants raised that the technology involved in an app as potentially challenging, but even then, it was felt that either a partner could help if required, or the interviewer could assist in the process. Participants emphasised the importance of having a clear, easy to use app. For example, some suggested providing examples (such as an example of a diary entry) to aid their understanding of how to complete different tasks.

Overall participants were happy to use the app, so long as it wasn't too time-consuming or difficult to use and there was clarity regarding data privacy and security. There was a strong feeling that there should be extra incentives available for agreeing to the follow-up activities due to the extra time commitment.

Detailed views regarding app-based activities are discussed below.

### Uploading videos of participants with their baby to a mobile app

Across the research, participant reactions to filming and uploading videos of themselves with their baby to a mobile app were mixed. Some responded positively to the idea, some felt neutral or indifferent, and others expressed that they would feel uncomfortable taking part in this sort of activity.

Those who felt positively about capturing and uploading video content noted the following benefits:

- **Enjoyment:** positivity towards this type of activity was often noted by those who felt that capturing and uploading video of them doing different activities with their child would be an enjoyable aspect of the study. Those who felt this way mentioned that they already took pictures and videos of their baby, so the idea of uploading this content to an app for the benefit of the study felt comfortable and familiar to them.

*"I take photos and videos of [baby] all the time so it wouldn't make any difference... I would just be uploading them somewhere different." (LIF Interview 9, Mother, White, 35-44 years old)*

For those who were open to the idea, there was a question over whether there would be the option to watch videos back. This would act as an incentive for some parents.

*"I would be really keen to do that, actually, it would even be nice for me to have that sort of thing to look back at, because it's just me most of the time it would be kind of nice to have some videos of us playing together." (LIF Interview 1, Mother, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

- **Feels engaging:** Some participants expressed that this would be one of the more engaging elements of the study because it required interaction with their baby. Participants who felt positively about this idea saw it as an opportunity to actively engage with the study. They were intrigued about what sort of activities they might be asked to do and interested to know how the footage could be



used to understand children's development. Whilst participants were interested in this type of engagement, they did express some apprehension over having a child 'play on demand' and that capturing video to a specific schedule could prove challenging. With that in mind some participants felt they would prefer to capture and upload any footage themselves as opposed to a researcher doing so, which they felt could complicate capturing footage, and also make the video less authentic. Clear instructions would also be needed for any self-filming.

***"More comfortable recording video ourselves rather than researchers.... Is much better if [it is] natural" (LIF Interview 14, Mother, White, 25-34 years old)***

Those who were uncertain or opposed to the idea of capturing and uploading video content noted the following concerns:

- **Privacy, security and data protection:** participants expressed different concerns around privacy. Some felt uncomfortable with the idea of sharing what they saw as a personal and intimate moment with their child. These concerns were rooted in a more fundamental discomfort with the idea of recording themselves with their child.

Others were comfortable capturing these moments in principle, but instead had concerns about the anonymity of themselves and their child. Participants who expressed these worries tended to have a more general scepticism about the use or misuse of personal data and were cautious about sharing personal content in other contexts (e.g., social media). The fact that their child would be involved in this type of activity heightened their concern about the potential risks involved and served as a barrier for participation.

***"An app, I've got no issues with. It's more what's going to happen to the videos, what's going to happen to the pictures. We're quite careful on social media, in terms of sharing pictures. That would be my concern. Is it going to end up on [an] advert without our consent?" (LIF Interview 25, Father, Indian, 25-34 years old)***

Clarity regarding the purpose for, use of and storage of video and photo content was paramount. Those who were uncertain or even opposed to the idea expressed that given adequate reassurances they may be willing to participate in this element of the study. Participants felt that the acceptability of the app-based activities was contingent on the provision of unequivocal and accessible guidance and reassurances around the use of personal data and privacy.

- **Cultural barriers:** some participants referenced specific cultural or religious concerns about filming in the home. While these concerns did not necessarily apply to participants themselves, they felt that they may be relevant to other families from their community. For example, some participants expressed concerns around the gender of the researcher who would be viewing and analysing the video content. Cultural sensitivity was highlighted with feedback from one Pakistani participant suggesting that Muslim women who wear a Niqab wouldn't be comfortable with being on camera and may require assurances that only a woman would watch the footage. The option for having their faces blurred was also discussed.

***"I don't want my picture shared to anyone of me and my children." (LIF Interview 24, Mother, Pakistani, 25-34 years old)***



### Completing a diary and answering one-off questions on a mobile app

Across the research, participant reactions to the idea of completing a diary or answering one-off questions on the mobile app were generally positive. Whilst those participants who had general privacy-related concerns were more comfortable with these types of activities (in comparison to sharing video-based content), they expressed that they would still require reassurances around data privacy and security.

Those who felt positively towards the idea of completing a diary and answering one-off questions on the app noted the following benefits:

- **Feels engaging:** participants felt that one-off questions on the app might be interesting, or even beneficial. There was a feeling that the diary element could be interesting for parents and could help them to record what they're doing with the child and spot patterns themselves. Another possible benefit proposed was that it could help parents plan activities with their baby by tracking what worked well at different times. Some participants also expressed that it might be 'nice' to be asked how they felt as a parent as it signalled that the study cared about their wellbeing as well as their child.

*"I think it would be good to ask parents about say, how they're feeling, how their day has been, some people are very lonely, especially single parents, and being asked how your day has been might really be nice for some people" (LIF Interview 13, Father, White, 20-24 years old)*

*"It's interesting, because I've always been interested in how breastfeeding has an effect on child development, or how much time you play, how much interaction you have with them during the day, or how you speak to them, and stuff like that. So, I would personally find it really interesting, the kind of questions they'd ask, I'd try and give as much information as I could, just because I'd really want to know the findings" (LIF Interview 1, Mother, Black Caribbean, 25-34 years old)*

- **Flexibility:** participants felt providing information via a mobile app would offer greater flexibility for data collection as they would be able to complete activities in their own time. In principle, most participants were comfortable with the idea of using an app for additional data collection.

**Time was the primary barrier** cited by participants when thinking about participating in app-based activities. Many queried how long activities might take, and how frequently they might be expected to do them. While some participants expressed that they would be happy to take part in these app-based activities, their willingness to use the app was contingent upon how burdensome it would be.

*"If it is something which might take me 20-30 minutes to complete then I'd need to be given time to do it, you know, I wouldn't always be able to do things straight away so they would need to make sure they weren't rushing me, we should be given a couple of days to complete and make sure that they aren't putting me under pressure." (LIF Interview 10, Mother, Black African, 25-34 years old)*

Participants emphasised the importance of providing clear information about the expectations and time commitment for any additional tasks on the mobile app, information about frequency of activities, upfront guidance around the time each activity should take to complete example diary entries, and clearly defined timeframes for task completion.

### Further suggestions for app-based study engagement

Participants felt that the app had great scope for engagement beyond the suggestions discussed in the interview. For example, participants wondered whether they might be able to receive notifications or 'memories' to look back on (e.g., a reminder of a video they had taken a year ago that day). In addition, participants queried whether the app would be able to signpost them to useful resources, either locally or nationally, which were relevant to the topics and issues being explored in the study.

A small number of participants felt that they may be more inclined to stay engaged with the study if the app offered wider benefits. For example, some participants wondered whether there would be an opportunity to receive study-related or child development related insights (e.g., pop-ups containing information gleaned from similar studies), or even suggestions for additional activities they could do with their child.

The question on the feasibility of communicating with other participants via this element of the app was raised, and whether there could be scope for community engagement; being able to compare their activities to what others are doing was appealing to some who felt it could be both interesting and educational.

## 4.7 Study engagement

### Background information and context

- Participants were introduced to two different approaches to engagement during the interview:
- Engagement via the local church or community centre.
- Engagement via a health visitor or community nurse.
- Case study examples of how these different engagement approaches could work were developed and used in some interviews to support participants understanding of how these approaches could work. These are provided in the report appendix.

This section of the report explores participants expectations, thoughts and concerns about the different ways the study might look to engage families in research about their children. Where specific circumstances or cultural differences may influence views towards engagement, these are reported on.

Across the research, participants agreed that engaging with families was an important consideration for the study. Participants had similar expectations about how they might expect to hear about a study like the ELC-FS. For example, participants spontaneously mentioned the GP, health visitors, citizens advice bureau, community or civic centre, parent and baby clubs, local newspaper or radio, supermarket noticeboards and social media as potential methods of engagement.

Although the different approaches discussed were not always applicable or relevant to participants own circumstances or experiences, they were broadly supportive of them both. Overall, there were several key factors participants considered when thinking about engaging families in research:

- **Trust:** when thinking about the most effective approach to engaging families in research participants were emphatic about the importance of trust. On this basis, participants were generally positive about engagement using trusted organisations or individuals like health workers, community leaders or religious leaders. Many felt that using trusted gatekeepers was an effective way of navigating the

initial mistrust or scepticism that some families might feel toward the study. Receiving information about the study from a source which they know and trust to operate in their best interests was extremely important for participants.

*"In Scotland you get a family nurse, and she often gives us leaflets, so she may be able to give parents a leaflet about the study [...] family nurses are with you for the first 2 years of your baby's life, you really do trust them and have a good relationship, it would be a really nice way to hear about the study I think." (LIF Interview 13, Father, White, 20-24 years old)*

- **Sensitivity:** alongside trust, many participants suggested that using individuals like health workers, community leaders or religious leaders to communicate with families would likely ensure greater sensitivity. Participants felt that this was particularly true of healthcare professionals, who they assumed may be more familiar with families' personal situations and therefore better placed to navigate any potential sensitivities.
- **Clarity of intent:** while most participants expressed a positive reaction to engaging with families through health workers, community leaders and religious leaders, others felt that they would require additional reassurances around their motivation to help recruit families for the study. Some participants expressed concerns that families may feel pressured into agreeing to participate, or sceptical about the motivation of the person providing information about the study. For example, participants suggested that some families may feel as though they were being encouraged to join the study so that they could be more closely observed (e.g., by doctors or social services), or because the individual was receiving an incentive to recruit families. As such, clarity and transparency around motivation and information provided was considered key to ensuring that this approach was effective.

*"As long as I know there's no incentive for them, and they're just saying, genuinely, 'There's a study going on. It will benefit society or future generations,' I probably would trust them as well, as long as I know there's no incentive." (LIF Interview 25, Father, Indian, 25-34 years old)*

### Social media engagement:

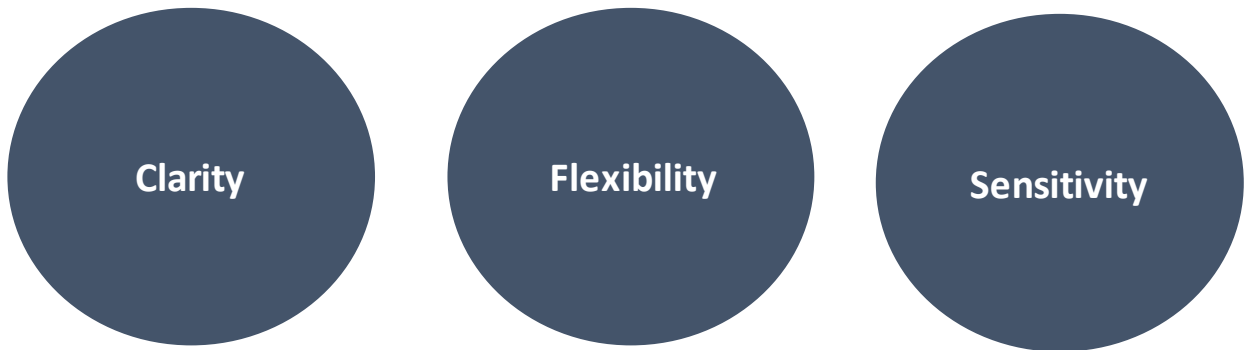
In addition to the approaches discussed, participants felt that social media could facilitate effective engagement with families. Participants referenced two key ways in which the study could utilise social media:

1. **Social media pages, groups and communities:** participants mentioned being part of social media groups or following specific pages which related to different aspects of family life (e.g., parenting support or advice, children's health or local family activities). Participants tended to use these groups for information, guidance and support. Not only did participants expect that they might hear about the study via a social media group, but many also felt that this would be an effective method of raising parent's awareness about the study.
2. **Social media influencers<sup>34</sup>:** participants suggested that the study may be able to utilise the large platforms of specific parent/family-specific 'influencers'. Participants, specifically younger mothers, engaged with these social media influencers regularly and considered them to be a trusted source of information and guidance. In addition, some influencers cater to specific audiences which could be beneficial for the study if seeking to promote the study to a diverse range of families.

<sup>34</sup> A social media influencer is someone who has established credibility in a specific industry, has access to a huge audience and can persuade others to act based on their recommendations.

## 4.8 Conclusions

Across the research three themes have emerged that are important to take into account when looking to engage LIFs in the ELC-FS.



Each of these themes is important, and any engagement with LIFs should consider all three.

Below we provide further detail on each of these factors including some key considerations. It is important to note that these qualitative considerations and findings will need to be considered alongside wider work being carried out by CLS regarding the ELC-FS and wider evidence.

### Clarity

#### **Key clarity considerations**

- Lack of clarity regarding research purpose and processes could quickly deter participants from engaging with and taking part in the study.
- Inadequate reassurances regarding the optional nature of topics and activities and what a face-to-face interview will involve could generate concern about participation.

A clear understanding of different aspects of the ELC-FS will support engagement amongst LIFs. Whilst many areas for clarity identified below are likely to be important for any parent invited to take part in the study, reflecting how and why these hold particular salience for LIFs is important. The research suggests that it will be essential that any study information provides clear information about the following aspects of the ELC-FS:

- **Involvement from diverse families is sought:** providing participants with clear understanding that the study is looking to gather input from diverse families with different circumstances will support LIFs in understanding why it is important for them to participate in the study. Detailing why it is important for the study to capture the experiences of families in different circumstances will further cement why it is important for LIFs to consider taking part.
- **An incentive will be offered to those who participate:** clarity around the incentive amount and the fact that it will be offered to those participating in the research will be important for some. Although there is a risk that £10 may be deemed too low an amount, the research suggests that for some, a financial recognition of participation could act as a motivation to participate.
- **The study has social value:** clarity regarding the social value of taking part in the study is likely to act as motivation for some and should therefore be included in study communications. The research suggests that any information that can be shared regarding the positive impact that the study will have on children and families - especially those in similar circumstances or from similar ethnic

minority backgrounds, is likely to be particularly engaging. It will be important to make the social value feel tangible to LIFs. This could be achieved by providing real-life examples of the impact of child development research, and specifically cohort studies. Examples of policy changes (e.g., those related to improving health outcomes for children) that have been informed by evidence from cohort studies could help illustrate the impact of, and benefit of taking part in the ELC-FS. When providing examples, these should be presented in a positive way, and avoid inferring judgement on families and children living in different circumstances. Providing additional detail and clarity around the social value of the study is likely to support LIF engagement in survey topics or study activities that may be considered 'personal' or 'sensitive'. For example, LIFs may be more open to sharing details about their financial situation or personal health if they are able to clearly understand why/how providing this information will enhance the value of the study findings. It may also be powerful to include personal testimonies or more generic feedback from families who have taken part in similar studies. This could help illustrate the benefits of taking part in the ELC-FS, particularly if the feedback highlighted the individual-level benefits experienced by participating families. The research suggests that trust is particularly important for engaging LIFs in research, therefore using authentic testimonies from real families may help reassure and convince them of the value.

- **Data will be confidential and kept security:** whilst often a 'hygiene' factor for research participation in general, clear reassurances and information about data confidentiality and security for parents and their child was important for LIFs. Reassurances will be needed particularly in relation to the collection of saliva samples and the storage of photographs or video footage collected via a study app. In addition to confidentiality and security, it will be important to provide information about who has access to this data, specifically clear reassurances around third-party access.

It will also be important that the study sets **clear expectations** for the following:

- **Topic coverage:** information regarding the topics for coverage will help manage expectations for what taking part in the study will involve. For LIFs it will be particularly important to clarify the optional nature of topics, especially if taking part in a face-to-face interview (e.g., finances and health/wellbeing). Given that many participants were interested in the impact of COVID-19 on families and children, this may be a topic that serves as a 'hook' for potential participants.
- **An in-home interview:** confirmation of what an in-home interview is likely to involve will be an important way to reassure LIFs about taking part in this format. This could include: an overview of the structure of the interview and length; what activities will involve; and whether there will be any household observations. Potential participants are likely to be further engaged in taking part in a face-to-face interview if provided with information about why this format is beneficial to the study, how they will be able to confirm the legitimacy of the interviewer and reassurances around different options for navigating more sensitive or personal topics.
- **The app-based activities:** setting expectations for how the app will work and whether it will offer any additional features will be important. For example, clarifying whether it will include signposting to relevant organisations and whether video/photo content can be accessed in the future by parents. Reassurances regarding the accessibility and user-friendly nature of the app will also be important, particularly for those who are less confident with technology. Providing an example of activities such as a diary entry could support participants in understanding what involvement is required.
- **Child participation:** reflecting some confusion amongst participants regarding the role of the child, it will be important that any study communications set clear expectations regarding what any involvement from them will require.

- **Feedback from the study:** reflecting that some participants are likely to expect and be motivated by the idea of receiving feedback (at both general and individual levels), any feedback that ELC-FS participants will receive should be carefully and clearly communicated.
  - If only general-level feedback from across the study is to be shared, it will be useful to consider what type of information participants will be most interested to receive. The research suggests that anything that can be tailored to families/fathers/children with similar circumstances will be of particular interest to participants.
  - There may be some interest in local-level findings. This is likely to be driven by a desire for the study to understand about access to local services such as childcare with the hope that the study will inform improvements to these services.
  - If the study does not plan to share individual level feedback, this should be clearly communicated and giving explanations for why this is the case (e.g., the value of looking at a generation of children as a whole) could help mitigate any disappointment in this respect.
  - Clarity will be needed on whether any results from saliva samples will be shared.
- **Advice and the role of the interviewer:** it will be important for the ELC-FS to consider what signposting and safeguarding processes may be required given the topics to be covered in the study. The study should also consider setting boundaries for what advice the study will be able to provide. This will help manage participant expectations for what taking part might involve. The research suggests that there may also be an expectation amongst some that interviewers will be specialists in child development and therefore be able to comment on the child's development and make suggestions or recommendations to parents and therefore expectations need to be set.

## Flexibility

### **Key flexibility consideration**

- Lack of flexibility for when to take part is likely to be a key barrier to LIFs, particularly if both parents (if the baby has two parents) are required to be present.

Time is often cited as a barrier to ELC-FS participation, especially for LIFs who have competing childcare responsibilities and may be working shift work or long hours. This is likely to be particularly challenging where the ELC-FS is looking to schedule a time suitable for both parents. Clear information about the time commitment required to take part in the study will be important. Reassurances that the scheduling of participation will be flexible will be essential and will help signal to potential participants that the study is thinking about how best to engage diverse families. The research suggests that clarifying the possibility of rescheduling interviews could help with engaging participants.

Flexibility of mode will also be important for some. Whilst many identified benefits to participating in a face-to-face interview, there were some concerns related to COVID-19 and the ability to schedule a face-to-face appointment. It is clear that some LIFs will be better motivated and engaged in the study if there is an alternative way to take part that does not rely on a face-to-face appointment.

It is useful for the ELC-FS to note that offering choice in mode is a key way in which to ensure that LIFs feel they have choice in their participation. Feelings of choice and control over participation is likely to increase engagement in the study. Choice of how and when to take part will be important.



## Sensitivity

### Key sensitivity considerations

- Lack of rationale for topics and activities included in the ELC-FS - particularly those considered sensitive - could act as a barrier to engaging with the study. Inadequate reassurances regarding the optional nature of these could also deter LIFs from taking part.
- Approaches that do not adequately consider participant backgrounds or circumstances could result in disengagement in the ELC-FS.

It is clear that there will be some sensitivities for the ELC-FS to navigate in engaging LIFs in the study.

**Rationale for topics and activities included:** some topics and activities may be considered sensitive. For example, information about finances or mental health will be considered sensitive by some. Comfort in answering questions on these topics is likely to increase where: participants are clear why this information is sought; there is clarity on how much detail on these topics will be asked; there are reassurances regarding the confidentiality and anonymity of responses; and there is a clear link between how collecting information on these topics will benefit and feed into the social value of the study. It will also be important to make it clear that there is a choice in answering questions or taking part in activities and self-completion methods for sensitive questions. Some parents may also seek reassurances that they can answer questions separately to their partner and that these responses will be kept confidential.

**Building trust:** LIFs are more likely to feel open to taking part in the study if they feel they can trust it. Ensuring that communications make it easy for potential participants to check the legitimacy of the research will be important. The research also suggests that wider advertising of the study - from trusted sources - could help build trust.

**Ensuring a non-judgemental approach:** it will be essential that ELC-FS think about the potential for LIFs to feel judged; they are likely to quickly disengage if they fear judgement. Concerns can be addressed by considering and ensuring that interviewers are culturally aware and sensitive. Neutral framing and phrasing for questions will also be important particularly if asking about parenting practices that are likely to differ across communities (e.g., child's diet). Reassurance that interviewers are not judging home environments should also be considered. There is some suggestion that offering an interviewer from a different background could mitigate concerns of being judged by someone from participants' own community.

**Cultural sensitivity:** The ELC-FS should consider how cultural sensitivity can be ensured, thinking specifically about the following:

- **Interviewer characteristics:** providing opportunity to specify interviewer demographics is likely to build engagement with the study as it will demonstrate that the study is thinking about how to include diverse families. Whilst offering interviewers of a shared ethnic or religious background did not emerge as a key factor likely to influence participation in the ELC-FS, it will be important that interviewers are friendly as well as culturally aware and sensitive. It was noted that a female interviewer would likely be preferred by some communities suggesting that this will be important for the ELC-FS to offer.



- **Approach to video-based data capture:** it will be important for the ELC-FS to consider comfort levels in sharing videos amongst different communities, especially where cultural norms may impact how videos are captured and shared.
- **Translated materials:** the study should consider how to ensure study communications are provided in different languages.

# 05

## Appendices

# 5 Appendices

## 5.1 Own Household Fathers materials

### Recruitment screening questionnaire

Good morning / afternoon / evening.

My name is ..... and I am calling you from Criteria fieldwork on behalf of Ipsos MORI, the research organisation.

Ipsos MORI is an independent research organisation, carrying out this research on behalf of the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) at the University of London. CLS carries out research studies exploring the experiences and development of children as they grow up in the UK. CLS's research informs services helping children and families, including fathers. This will help the planning of a new study by CLS called the Early Life Cohort Feasibility Study.

Because the studies that CLS carry out focus on the experiences and development of children, it is important that they also include information on the situation and views of both parents - whatever their circumstances or involvement with their child.

There is a lot of interest in the lives and roles of fathers, whether or not they live in the same home as their children. For this research we would like to speak to fathers who live separately from their dependent child/ren, either all of the time or part of the time, no matter how often they have contact with their child.

To help us understand how best to include these fathers in research about children we would like to ask for your views on:

- What would encourage or enable fathers to take part in future research about children
- What would discourage or prevent fathers from taking part
- How to invite fathers to take part
- Topics that might be covered in future research
- Different ways in which fathers could take part.

To make sure we understand how to include fathers in future studies we need to make sure that we speak to fathers in different circumstances, living in different geographical areas across the UK.

The interview will be conducted within the MRS (Market Research Society) Code of Conduct and General Data Protection Regulation 2018. This means that Ipsos MORI will keep your personal data and responses in strict confidence. We will only share recorded material(s) from the interview with the Ipsos MORI research team. Your responses will be used for research purposes and **no personal information will be shared with any third parties**. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and any answers are given with your consent. You can also choose not to answer any questions, that you would prefer not to answer.

The interview will last around **1 hour**, and we can schedule the interview to take place at a time that is convenient for you. We can conduct the interview over Microsoft Teams or by telephone. As a thank you for your time, you will receive **£40** for taking part in this research. This will be paid by BACS transfer or as a Love2Shop e-voucher depending on your preference. Would you be interested in taking part in this research?

We need to ask you a few questions before we confirm the interview, as we need to ensure that we are speaking to a broad range of individuals.

During this interview I will need to ask specific questions about your ethnicity. This information will only be collected with your explicit consent and is being collected to ensure that the research includes people from different backgrounds.

<b>Q1.</b>	<b>Are you happy to continue on this basis?</b> SINGLE CODE ONLY		
	Yes	1	CONTINUE
	No	2	THANK AND CLOSE

### Screening questions

#### ASK ALL

<b>Q2A.</b>	<b>How long ago did you last attend a market research group discussion/depth interview?</b> SINGLE CODE ONLY		
	In the last 6 months	1	ASK Q2B MONITOR TO ENSURE NOT ALL HAVE TAKEN PART IN RESEARCH RECENTLY
	6 Months-3 years ago	2	ASK Q2B
	More than 3 years ago	3	ASK Q2B
	Never	4	CONTINUE TO Q3

#### ASK ALL

<b>Q2b.</b>	<b>What was each of those market research studies about?</b>	
	WRITE IN:	<b>IF ON A SIMILAR SUBJECT AS THIS SURVEY, <u>CLOSE</u> INTERVIEW</b>

#### ASK ALL

<b>Q3.</b>	<b>How would you describe your gender?</b> SINGLE CODE		
	Male	1	GO TO Q4
	Female	2	THANK AND CLOSE
	Other	3	
	Prefer not to say	4	

## ASK ALL

<b>Q4.</b>	<b>Do you have at least one child under 2 years old? This includes both birth and adopted children. Please don't include stepchildren, your partner's children who are not your birth children, or long-term-fostered children.</b>		
	YES, I have at least one birth/ adopted child under 2	1	CONTINUE TO Q5
	NO, I don't have a birth/adopted/ child under 2	2	THANK AND CLOSE

## ASK ALL

<b>Q5A.</b>	<b>As part of our research, we would like to speak to fathers who have different types of living arrangements and interactions with their children, including fathers with no current contact. In a typical two-week (fortnightly) period do you live or stay overnight with your child, either in your household, in their mother's household, or elsewhere?</b> [If more than one birth/adopted child under 2, ask about the involvement with the youngest of these children who he does not live with full-time, or at all] READ OUT. SINGLE CODE		
	YES	1	CONTINUE TO Q5B
	NO	2	CONTINUE TO Q5C

## ASK IF CODED 1 AT Q5A

<b>Q5B.</b>	<b>Which of the following best describes a typical two-week (fortnightly) period?</b> [If more than one birth/adopted child under 2, ask about the involvement with the youngest of these children] READ OUT. SINGLE CODE		
	I live with my child full-time	1	THANK AND CLOSE
	I live or stay with my child for the majority of nights (in my household, in their mother's household, or elsewhere)	2	THANK AND CLOSE
	I stay with my child for around half of a typical fortnight (in my household, in their mother's household, or elsewhere). That would be six to eight nights.	3	ALL CODED 3 AND 4 AT Q5B - PLEASE MONITOR TO INCLUDE A MIX GO TO Q6
	I stay with my child for one to five nights in a typical fortnight (in my household, in their mother's household, or elsewhere). For example, one or two nights a week or every other weekend.	4	
	Other	5	RECRUITER WRITE IN AND MAKE DECISION ABOUT WHICH CODE IS APPLICABLE IF UNSURE PLEASE CONTACT OFFICE

## ASK IF CODED 2 AT Q5A

<b>Q5C.</b>	<b>Which of the following best describes a typical two-week (fortnightly) period?</b> [If more than one birth/adopted child under 2, ask about the involvement with the youngest of these children] READ OUT. SINGLE CODE		
	I infrequently or never have contact with my child	1	ALL CODED 1-3 AT Q5C - PLEASE MONITOR TO INCLUDE A MIX GO TO Q6
	I spend regular time with my child face-to-face (in person).	2	
	I have regular time with my child by video-call (e.g., Zoom or WhatsApp) or am in regular contact with their other parent	3	
	Other	4	RECRUITER WRITE IN AND MAKE DECISION ABOUT WHICH CODE IS APPLICABLE IF UNSURE PLEASE CONTACT OFFICE

ASK ALL

<b>Q6.</b>	<p>[IF code 1 at Q5c please ask] <b>Just to check, which of the following best describes your current relationship with your child’s mother? – that is the mother of your birth/adopted child under 2 years with whom you don’t live with full-time.</b></p> <p>[IF coded 3 or 4 at Q5B or 2 or 3 at Q5C please ask] <b>We know that there are a range of different family circumstances, and we would like to include a range of these in our research. Please can I ask, which of the following best describes your current relationship with your child’s mother? – that is the mother of your birth/adopted child under 2 years with whom you don’t live full-time.</b></p> <p>[If more than one birth/adopted child under 2 with different mothers, ask about the mother of the youngest of these children] READ OUT. SINGLE CODE.</p>		
	We’re in a romantic relationship	1	AIM FOR: AT LEAST 8 X IN A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHILD’S MOTHER AT LEAST 8 X NOT IN A ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHILD’S MOTHER GO TO Q7
	We’re not in a romantic relationship	2	
	For example, you may have separated from the mother of your child, or were never in a romantic relationship with her		

ASK ALL

<b>Q7</b>	<b>How old were you on your last birthday?</b> WRITE IN EXACT AGE		
	<b>Exact Age</b>		PLEASE RECORD FOR INFORMATION ONLY GO TO Q8

ASK ALL

<b>Q8.</b>	<b>How would you describe your ethnicity?</b> SINGLE CODE. DO NOT READ OUT.		
	<b>White</b>		PLEASE AIM TO INCLUDE 3 X PARTICIPANTS WITH PAKISTANI OR
	English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	1	
	<b>Irish</b>	2	
	Gypsy or Irish Traveller	3	

	Any other White background (please describe)	4	BANGLADESHI BACKGROUND 3 X PARTICIPANTS WITH BLACK AFRICAN BACKGROUND 3 X PARTICIPANTS WITH BLACK CARIBBEAN BACKGROUND GO TO Q9A
	<b>Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups</b>		
	White and Black Caribbean	5	
	White and Black African	6	
	White and Asian	7	
	Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background	8	
	<b>Asian/Asian British</b>		
	Pakistani	9	
	Bangladeshi	10	
	Indian	11	
	Chinese	12	
	Any other Asian background	13	
	<b>Black / African / Caribbean / Black British</b>		
	African	14	
	Caribbean	15	
	Any other Black / African / Caribbean background	16	
	<b>Another ethnic group</b>		
	Arab	17	
	Any other ethnic group (please describe)	18	
	Don't know	19	
	Prefer not to say	20	

## ASK ALL

<b>Q9A</b>	<b>Which of the following best describes your current working status?</b>		
	In full-time employment	1	GO TO Q9A RECORD FOR INFORMATION ONLY
	In part-time employment	2	
	Currently furloughed due to the COVID-19 pandemic	3	
	Homemaker/ look after child/ren	4	
	Currently not in paid employment	5	
	Carer	6	
	Retired	7	
	In full-time education/ studying	8	

## ASK ALL

<b>Q9B</b>	<b>And could you tell me what it is you do for a living?</b>		
	Position/rank/grade		GO TO Q9B
	Industry/type of company		

## ASK ALL

<b>Q9C</b>	<b>And could you tell me what the chief income earner in your household does for a living (if not yourself)?</b>		
	Position/rank/grade		AIM FOR AT LEAST 10 X C2DE GO TO Q10
	Industry/type of company		
	Number in charge of		



	Social Grade	
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## ASK ALL

<b>Q10.</b>	<b>As you may know, many people don't have formal qualifications, but I'd just like to check whether you have any. Please can you tell me which, if any, is the highest qualification you have?</b>		
	READ OUT SINGLE CODE ONLY		
	No formal qualifications	1	RECORD FOR INFORMATION ONLY  GO TO Q11
	GCSEs / O-Levels / CSEs	2	
	Vocational qualifications such as Apprenticeships or City and Guilds (= NVQ1+2)	3	
	A-level, Scottish Higher or equivalent (=NVQ3)	4	
	Diplomas in higher education, HNC/HND/BTEC Higher or equivalent	5	
	Bachelor's degree or equivalent (=NVQ4-6)	6	
	Masters/ PhD or equivalent (=NVQ7+8)	7	
	Other (SPECIFY)	8	

## ASK ALL

<b>Q11</b>	<b>What country are you typically based in (permanent address)?</b> SINGLE CODE. DO NOT READ OUT.		
	England	1	AT LEAST 5 X TO LIVE OUTSIDE OF ENGLAND GO TO Q12
	Wales	2	
	Scotland	3	
	Northern Ireland	4	

## ASK ALL

<b>Q12</b>	<b>Which of the following, if any, best describes the area that your permanent/ main address is in?</b> SINGLE CODE ONLY		
	Urban	1	MONITOR FOR INCLUSION OF PARTICIPANTS LIVING IN BOTH URBAN AND RURAL AREAS GOT TO Q13
	Rural	2	

## ASK ALL

<b>Q13.</b>	<b>Are you still happy to take part in an interview?</b> MULTICODE OK. DO NOT READ OUT.		
	Yes	1	IF YES – TAKE DOWN NAME, NUMBER, EMAIL AND TIME AND DATE OF INTERVIEW AND BOOK IN WITH RESEARCH TEAM.
	No	2	THANK AND CLOSE

**PERSONAL DETAILS:**

Recruitment details	
Date of recruitment:	
Time of recruitment:	
Video call (MS Teams) or telephone	

MOBILE TELEPHONE NUMBER FOR INTERVIEW OR CONTACT	
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LANDLINE TELEPHONE NUMBER FOR INTERVIEW (if preferred) <b>Tel. Number (WRITE IN INCL. STD code)</b>	
<b>E-mail address (WRITE IN):</b>	
Other contact details: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram	

**Additional notes**

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## Participant information sheet

### All about our research and what taking part would involve

We would like to invite fathers to take part in a research study to understand how best to include fathers in future research about children.

For this research we specifically want to speak to fathers:

- **With a child aged under 2; and**
- **Who are not currently living full-time with their child.**

We want to hear from **fathers in a variety of different circumstances** across the UK, ranging from those who have no current contact with their child, to those who have shared care with their child's mother. It does not matter how often (or whether) they currently see their child or whether they are currently in relationship with their child's mother.

#### Who is the research for?

Ipsos MORI, an independent research organisation, is carrying out this research on behalf of a project team led by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) at University College London (UCL). CLS carries out research studies exploring the experiences and development of children as they grow up in the UK. This research will help the planning of a new study by CLS called the Early Life Cohort Feasibility Study. The Principal Investigator at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies is Professor Lisa Calderwood.

#### What do Ipsos MORI want to find out?

**Including fathers in research about children is really important** because collecting data from both parents is crucial for helping researchers understand children's development. Fathers and mothers may have different views about, and experiences with, their child. **All** perspectives are important.

We want to ask fathers about:

- What would encourage or enable them to take part in future research about children
- What would discourage or prevent them from taking part
- How to invite fathers to take part
- Topics that might be covered in future research
- Different ways in which fathers could take part.

#### What would taking part involve?

We would like you to take part in a video interview with one of our Ipsos MORI researchers using MS Teams. If that is not possible, we can also do the interview over the telephone. During the interview we will talk to you in more detail about your views on the topics mentioned above.

The interview will last around **1 hour**, and we can schedule the interview to take place at a time that is convenient for you. As a thank you for your time, you will receive **£40** for taking part in this research. This will be paid as a BACS transfer or can be provided as a Love2Shop e-voucher if you prefer.

#### Do I have to take part?

No. **Taking part is completely voluntary.** You can also choose to not answer individual questions or stop the interview completely at any time. Even if you agree to take part now you can change your mind. You do not have to give a reason why.

Participation in **this research will not impact your child maintenance payments or any state benefits.** Your child's mother will not be told that you are taking part.

### Will you record what I say?

Yes. We would like to audio record the interview, but we will ask you if that is OK before we start. The reason for recording the interview is to help us to remember what you have said when we write up our findings in the report. **Ipsos MORI will keep your personal data and responses in strict confidence.** We will only share recorded material(s) from the interview with the Ipsos MORI research team. Your responses will be used for research purposes and no personal information will be shared with any third parties.

We will follow the current laws, such as the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), when we store and access this information. **You can contact us after you have taken part if you would prefer us to delete your information.**

### What will happen to the information I provide?

Ipsos MORI adheres to the Market Research Society (MRS) code of conduct, which will be followed throughout the research process. We will be collecting personal data such as your name, your contact number, your email address, your gender, age, which part of the UK you live in and ethnicity. All this data will be securely stored and deleted one year after the research study ends.

After the interview, everything you say to a researcher will be anonymised. We will not tell anyone that you have spoken to us, or share anything that identifies you, unless you or someone else is in danger of serious harm.

Ipsos MORI will write a report for CLS to summarise the findings. The report may include case studies and direct quotes from participants - however, **we will not mention any personal details that might identify you or your child.** You can withdraw your consent to take part in this research right up until 8th October 2021, when we will be finalising the report.

### Where can I get more information?

You can find more information about the personal data we will collect, how we will use it, who we share it with and what your legal rights are in the Privacy Notice.

If you would like to speak to someone about taking part in the research, you can contact:

Polly Hollings [contact details]

Faith Jones [contact details]

### Who can I contact if I have concerns before, during or after I take part?

The following provide advice on a range of issues relevant to fathers who do not live full-time with their children:

- [Family Lives](#)
  - Website: [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)
  - Telephone: 0808 800 2222
- [Being Parents Apart | Relate](#)
  - Website: [www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk)
  - Telephone: 0300 0030396
- [Citizens Advice Bureau](#)
  - Website: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)
  - Telephone number for England and Northern Ireland: 0800 144 8848
  - Telephone number in Wales: 0800 702 2020
  - Telephone number in Scotland: 0800 028 1456
- [Families Need Fathers](#)

- Website: [www.fnf.org.uk](http://www.fnf.org.uk)
- Telephone: 0300 0300 363
- [The Association for Shared Parenting](#)
  - Website: [www.sharedparenting.org.uk](http://www.sharedparenting.org.uk)
- [The Mental Health Foundation](#)
  - Website: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)
- [Samaritans](#)
  - Website: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)
  - Telephone: 116 123

## Discussion guide

The discussion guide design included development of stimulus material to introduce the ELC-FS and different elements of the study to research participants. In video interviews, this information was shown on-screen to participants and read out. In telephone interviews, the stimulus was read out to participants.

Questions	Timings
<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>This section is to ensure informed consent is gained.</i></li> <li><i>Please note that all participants have been provided an information sheet and privacy policy outlining how their data will be used and their rights. Please confirm receipt of this.</i></li> <li><i>Please see participant information to confirm how participant will be paid their incentive and confirm this with them during the interview.</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>5 minutes</b></p>
<p><b>Introduce yourself and the purpose of the research project</b></p> <p>I'd like to start by introducing myself, and the purpose of this research project...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I'm [name], and I work for an organisation called Ipsos MORI, an independent research organisation.</li> <li>We are carrying out this research on behalf of a project team at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) at University College London. CLS carries out research studies exploring the experiences and development of children as they grow up in the UK. They have asked us to carry out this research to understand how they can include fathers from a range of circumstances in future research about children.</li> <li>There are no right or wrong answers! We are just interested in your views and thoughts.</li> <li>Please can I check, are you currently in a location where you're happy to take part in this discussion?</li> <li>The interview will last around one hour. We very much appreciate you taking part, and as a thank you, you will receive £40 for your time.</li> </ul> <p><b>Reassurances</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This research project is being carried out in accordance with the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct.</li> <li>It is completely up to you whether you take part, and you can change your mind at any time.</li> <li>Any information collected will remain confidential and will be used for research purposes only.</li> <li>The findings of this research will be anonymous, and you will NOT be identifiable in the published report. Any direct quotes used in in the report will not be attributed to you.</li> </ul> <p><b>Consent to take part in the research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are you happy to take part?</li> <li>Before we begin, do you have any questions?</li> </ul> <p><b>Consent for audio recording</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With your permission, we would like to digitally audio record the interview. We will listen back to these recordings to make notes of our discussion, so we have an accurate record of what we talked about. The recording will be securely deleted after the research project is completed. Is that okay?</li> <li>ONCE RECORDING HAS STARTED, PLEASE CONFIRM THAT YOU ARE NOW RECORDING.</li> </ul> <p><b>Participant introduction</b></p> <p>Now that I've introduced myself and the research project, it would be great if could you tell me a little bit about yourself and where you live?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How do you spend most of your time day to day?</li> <li>Are you currently working (or furloughed)? Do you live with anybody else, such as family or friends?</li> </ul> <p>As you know, we are speaking to fathers with children aged under 2 years old. Are you able to confirm the age of your child? And please can I ask do you have any other children?</p> <p>We know that fathers can have different types of involvement with their children, and we are interested to hear from fathers no matter what their involvement with their child is. When we invited you to take part, we asked</p>	

about any involvement you have with your child aged under 2. I understand that you [*Moderator please read out code from recruitment screener that participants coded at Q5 and check that this is correct. Please then check that this is how participants describe their involvement but be mindful not to spend too long here talking about detailed arrangements*]. Please can I check that is correct? And is that how you would describe your involvement? or in a different way?

*Moderator: throughout the guide where noted please tailor the language in the guide to reflect the current involvement that the father has with the under-2 child e.g., [he does not currently live full-time with his child/ he lives for some of the time with his child/ he stays over sometimes with mother+child/ he has child to stay over at his place ('sleepovers')/ he does not currently live with his child/ he does not currently have contact with his child]. Please reflect father's own language that describes their involvement where possible.*

### About the study

5 minutes

I want to start by giving you a brief overview about **this** research.

As you may already know, the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) carries out research studies exploring the experiences and development of children as they grow up in the UK. They are looking to set up a new study and they want to make sure that fathers who do not currently live with their child full-time or may not currently have contact with their child are able to take part. I would like to talk to you today about how you think fathers such as yourself can be included in this new study.

Just to clarify, we are not asking you or your child to take part in this new study but would value your views on what might encourage or discourage fathers to take part.

Let me tell you some more about the new study that the Centre for Longitudinal Studies are planning to carry out.

#### STIMULUS 1A: A NEW STUDY

The new study will involve several thousand babies all born at a similar time. Mothers and fathers of these babies will be invited by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies to become part of the study when the child is around 9 months old. This includes fathers who don't live full-time with their child and fathers not in contact with their child. Taking part in the study will be optional, and those invited would need to decide if they were interested to take part.

The study will aim to involve both the mother and father of each baby. They will each be asked to take part in a survey which could include answering questions for around 30 minutes about their own circumstances, as well as some questions about any time spent with the child. Mothers and fathers would receive £10 each for taking part in the survey.

The study will then go back to the child, mother and father every few years to ask them to complete further surveys. This means that the study can learn about how children grow up and develop.

- Do you have any questions about this so far?

#### STIMULUS 1B: A NEW STUDY

The aim of the new study will be to explore what it's like growing up in the UK and how to make life better for children today and for future generations. For example, findings from these types of studies have helped governments understand how to improve children's education and health services for fathers and mothers.

Including both birth parents in the study is important because both fathers' and mothers' situations and characteristics affect child development, and fathers and mothers may have different views about, and experiences with, their child. Both perspectives are important.



- We know that there are lots of different parental circumstances. Thinking about fathers like yourself that [*do not currently live full-time with their child/ live for some of the time with their child/ stay over sometimes with their child and the mother/ has child to stay over at their place ('sleepovers')/ do not currently live with his child/ do not currently have contact with their child*], based on the information I've provided so far, how might these fathers feel about being invited to take part in this type of study?
  - What might encourage these fathers to take part? And what might encourage **you** to take part? Anything else?
  - What might put these fathers off taking part? And what might put **you** off taking part? Anything else?
- And how would you feel about your child being invited to take part in the study?
  - What questions or queries might you have about this?

I'd now like to share some more information with you about what taking part in the study could involve for fathers. I'm keen to get your views on this and how you think fathers like yourself might feel about it. All views are welcome and there are no right or wrong answers.

<b>Topics/ activities covered</b>	<b>10 minutes</b>
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We will talk about how the survey might be carried out shortly but for now I'd like to think about some of the topics or activities that fathers like yourself might be asked to complete in a study like this.

The study wishes to understand the experiences of a wide range of fathers, but we would like you to think about fathers in the same kinds of circumstances as your own.

- What sort of topics or questions would you expect to be asked about in a study like this?
- Thinking about your experiences as a father, what types of things do you think the study should be asking about?
  - Why?

I'd now like to go through a list of topic areas that the study might ask about - you might already have mentioned some of these.

*Moderator: go through STIMULUS 4: TOPIC AREAS and check:*

- Are there any topics that you would be particularly interested to answer questions about?
- Any topics that you might have some concerns or reservations about?
  - Would knowing that the study is collecting this type of information encourage or discourage you/ fathers like yourself that [*do not currently live full-time with their child/ live for some of the time with their child/ stay over sometimes with their child and the mother/ has child to stay over at their place ('sleepovers')/ do not currently live with his child/ do not currently have contact with their child*] from taking part in the study?

*Moderator: please note that there is further detail on each of these topic areas in the Annex if needed.*

The survey could be carried out face-to-face with an interviewer in your home. With this in mind, how would you feel about answering questions on these topics in person?

- Why?

**IF RELUCTANT TO ANSWER CERTAIN TOPICS F2F:** For some more personal topics, those taking part would be able to type their answers into the interviewer's computer so that they don't have to say them out loud to the interviewer, or in front of anyone else in the household. Would this change how you feel about answering questions on these topics?

- Why?

**STIMULUS 4: TOPIC AREAS**

Birth cohort studies usually ask a range of questions to those taking part. Answering questions on these topics is optional - fathers would be able to say if they preferred not to answer any questions or wanted to skip any questions. All of their answers would be kept confidential and securely by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies.



There are lots of things that the study could explore. Can you think of any other topics which you would like to be covered in a study like this?

*Moderator please reassure: There are no right or wrong answers - all suggestions are welcome.*

*Moderator: some further information about saliva sample is provided in the annex.*

In addition to asking questions in a survey, these types of studies can sometimes ask parents to take part in other activities. For example, previous studies have asked parents to provide a saliva sample which can help researchers understand more about the father's and the child's genetic background and how this influences health, development, behaviour and things like that. As with all parts of taking part in the study, this activity would be optional.

What would you think if you were asked to provide a saliva sample as part of the new study?

- Why? PROBE: any concerns about this sort of topic/ activity?
- How interested would you be in this?
  - Why? PROBE: would knowing that the study might be collecting this type of information encourage or discourage you/ fathers like yourself that [*do not currently live full-time with their child/ live for some of the time with their child/ stay over sometimes with their child and the mother/ has child to stay over at their place ('sleepovers')/ do not currently live with his child/ do not currently have contact with their child*] from taking part in the study?

Thinking about all of the topics we've talked about...

- Which would motivate you to take part/ would you be most interested in answering questions about? Why?
- Which might put you off taking part? Why?

**Ways to take part**

**10 minutes**

We've spoken about the different things that the study could cover and now I'd like to talk about how the study could ask these types of questions.

- If you were asked to take part in the study, how would you prefer to be asked these questions? I have some different ways in which fathers could be asked to take part in the study to share with you, and I'd like to get your views on these.

*Moderator: for each mode listed at STIMULUS 5 please explore the following:*

- How would you feel about taking part in this way?
  - What would the advantages of taking part in this way be?
  - What would the disadvantages of taking part in this way be?

**STIMULUS 5: OTHER WAYS TO TAKE PART**

All interviews would last around 30 minutes.

Telephone survey	Video call survey	Complete an online survey	Face to face interview
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Studies like this would typically collect information ‘face to face’. This means that a trained researcher would arrange a time to meet you at your home and conduct an interview in person. The interview would last around 30 minutes.

**ASK ONLY THOSE WHO HAVE SOME CONTACT WITH THEIR CHILD** - Your child would not need to be present.

- What do you think about this?

If you were to be interviewed in person, where would you prefer to be interviewed?

- Why? *PROBE: advantages to this location?*

*If not already mentioned:*

- How would you feel about being interviewed at your home? Why?

**ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO HAVE SOME CONTACT WITH THEIR CHILD:** As the study would be about your child, the interviewer would be visiting your child’s [main/other] home to carry out an interview with the child’s mother. What do you think about this?

- How would you feel about taking part in an interview at your child’s [main/other] address? Why? How do you think your child’s mother would feel about this?

When inviting fathers like yourself who [*do not currently live full-time with their child/ live for some of the time with their child/ stay over sometimes with their child and the mother/ has child to stay over at their place (‘sleepovers’/ do not currently live with his child/ do not currently have contact with their child*] to take part in a face-to-face interview, what should the Centre for Longitudinal Studies take into account?

- What could help these fathers take part in a face-to-face interview?
- What might deter these fathers from taking part in a face-to-face interview?

Overall, what would be your preferred way to take part in the study? Why?

- *PROBE:* How strong is this preference?
- If a face-to-face interview was the only option available, how would this impact how you feel about taking part? Why? Would you be more or less likely to take part in the study if you could take part in a different way? Why?

**Participation of new co-habiting partner**

*Moderator note: only ask these questions to OHF who are **not** in a romantic relationship with the mother of their child under 2 years old, and who have said they are **co-habiting with a new partner***

**2 minutes**

**ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO LIVE WITH A NEW PARTNER:**

As the study would be about your child they may be interested in hearing from other people who have a relationship with your child, such as the mother or father’s partner. You mentioned that you currently live with a partner, how do you think your partner would feel about being invited to take part in this study?

- Why? PROBE: extent of relationship/ interaction with the child? Any other specific concerns?
- How would you feel about your partner being asked to take part?

**ASK ONLY TO THOSE WHO SAY THEIR PARTNER MAY BE INTERESTED IN THE STUDY:**

As part of the study, your partner might be asked questions about their relationship with your child, their parenting activities, and their relationship with you. How do you think your partner would feel about answering questions like this?

- Why? PROBE: any concerns about this?
- How would you feel about your partner answering questions like these? PROBE: any concerns?

**Recruitment and inviting OHFs to take part**

**15 minutes**

*Moderator note: the ELC-FS will recruit babies born September-November 2021.*

I’d now like to talk about how the Centre for Longitudinal Studies can invite fathers like yourself who [*do not currently live full-time with their child/ live for some of the time with their child/ stay over sometimes with their child and the mother/ has child to stay over at their place (‘sleepovers’)/ do not currently live with his child/ do not currently have contact with their child*], to take part in the new study.

There are different ways that the study could contact fathers who do not live full-time with their child to ask if they would like to take part.

- How would you expect fathers like yourself that [*do not currently live full-time with their child/ live for some of the time with their child/ stay over sometimes with their child and the mother/ has child to stay over at their place (‘sleepovers’)/ do not currently live with his child/ do not currently have contact with their child*] to be invited to take part?

One option would be to send a letter direct to the father’s home address. To do this, the study would use the contact information listed on their child’s birth registration.

We know that children will sometimes have one parent and sometimes both parents listed on their birth registration. Please can I ask, does your child have a joint registration where both parents are listed on the birth certificate or a single registration where only the mother is listed on the birth certificate?

*Moderator please show STIMULUS 6 OR STIMULUS 7 depending on participant response.*

**STIMULUS 6: MICHAEL: ASK TO THOSE WHERE CHILD HAS SINGLE REGISTRATION/ ONLY THE MOTHER IS LISTED**

To think about how to invite fathers to take part in the study in more detail, I’d like us to think about it from the point of view of a father called Michael...

**STIMULUS 6: MICHAEL**

*Moderator: read out only*

First, let’s think about Michael. To give you some background, Michael is father to a 9-month-old, and he does not currently live with his child or the mother.

One way in which the study can invite babies, mothers and fathers to take part in the study is to use birth registration records because these can include the addresses for fathers and mothers. However, as is the case for some fathers, Michael is not on the birth registration.

In this instance, the study contacts the mother of the child, because the birth registration records include her address.

The study could then ask the mother to share information about the study with Michael. This would involve the mother giving or posting the information to Michael, such as a leaflet or letter about the study.

- How do you think Michael might feel about this?
- Can you think of any concerns that Michael might have about this approach being used?
- *Moderator: PROBE on scenario relevant to participant:*
  - If Michael is not currently in contact with the mother or the child, how would he feel about this?
  - If Michael is currently in contact with the mother and the child and sees them/ talks to them on a regular basis, how would he feel about this?
- Another option would be for the mother to share Michael's contact details with the study team. This would involve her sharing Michaels' name with home address, telephone number and email address.
  - How do you think Michael might feel about this?
  - Should the mother ask Michael for his permission to share his contact details with the study team?
  - How do you think he would feel about his contact details being passed on? Which types of contact details if any do you think he would be happy to be passed to the study team?

#### **STIMULUS 7: SAM: ASK TO THOSE WHERE CHILD HAS JOINT REGISTRATION/ BOTH PARENTS ARE LISTED**

To think about how to invite fathers to take part in the study in more detail, I'd like us to think about it from the point of view of a father called Sam.

#### **STIMULUS 7: SAM**

*Moderator: read out only*

Sam also has a 9-month-old child and does not live with the child or the mother.

As I mentioned earlier, one option for inviting babies, mothers and fathers to take part in the study is by using birth registration records. Sam is on the birth registration. The records include both his address and the address of the mother. The study could use this information to send a letter to both Sam and the mother about taking part in the study.

- How do you think Sam might feel about this?
- Can you think of any concerns that Sam might have about this approach being used?
- *Moderator: PROBE on scenario relevant to participant:*
  - If Sam is not currently in contact with the mother or the child, how would he feel about this?
  - If Sam is in currently in contact with the mother and the child and sees them/ talks to them on a regular basis, how would he feel about this?
- Would you expect the mother of Sam's child to be told that Sam has been invited to take part? Why/ why not? How do you think Sam would feel about this?
- Do you think the contact details for Sam included on the birth registration records would be up to date?
- If Sam's contact details had changed since the birth was registered the study could ask the mother of his child to share information about the study with him. This would involve the mother giving or posting the information to Sam, such as a leaflet or letter about the study.
- How do you think Sam might feel about this?
  - Can you think of any concerns that Sam might have about this approach being used?
  - *Moderator: PROBE on scenario relevant to participant:*
    - If Sam is not currently in contact with the mother or the child, how would he feel about this?
    - If Sam is currently in contact with the mother and the child and sees them/ talks to them on a regular basis, how would he feel about this?

- Another option would be for the mother to share Sam's contact details with the study team. This would involve her sharing Sam's name with home address, telephone number and email address.
  - How do you think Sam might feel about this?
  - Should the mother ask Sam for his permission to share his contact details with the study team?
  - How do you think he would feel about his contact details being passed on? Which types of contact details if any do you think he would be happy to be passed to the study team?

Overall, what do you think about the different ways that fathers could be invited to take part in the study?

- How would **you** want to be invited to take part in this type of research?
- Can you think of any other good ways of asking fathers who do not live full-time with their child to take part?
- Which do you think should be avoided or could deter fathers from taking part in the study?

### Motivations, barriers and communications

10 mins

Thinking about everything we have discussed...

- If you were invited to take part in the new study, how would you feel about taking part?
- What would motivate you to take part?
  - How do you think your child could benefit from you, their father, taking part in this type of research?
  - How do you think you might benefit from taking part? What would you hope to get out of the experience?
- What, if anything, would prevent you from taking part?
  - What concerns might you have?
- Who would you talk to about taking part? Family/your parents/ friends? What do you think they would say about it?
- What sort of information would help you decide whether to take part?  
Those who take part in the study would be given a financial gift to thank them for taking part in an interview. In the past this has been around £10.
  - What do you think about this?
  - How important do you think it is to provide this? Why?

And overall, how would you feel if your child was invited to take part in the study?

- How much involvement would you want in any decision about whether your child took part?
- Earlier on we talked about the study asking parents if they'd be happy to provide a saliva sample. How would you feel if the study asked for a saliva sample from your child?
  - How much involvement would you want in whether you child took part in this part of the study?
- If your child was taking part, how would it make you feel about you yourself taking part?
- What information might you want to know about what your child taking part would involve?
- If the mother of your child was taking part, how would it make you feel about you yourself taking part?
- How much information might you want to know about what the mother taking part would involve?
  - PROBE: would you want to know what types of topics the mother was asked in the survey? Why/ why not?

I'd now like to think about what information the study should send fathers who do not live with their children full-time to invite them to take part in the study. The study team would usually send a letter or a leaflet about the study.

- What type of information do you think should be included in the letter?
  - PROBE: topics covered, what taking part involves, purpose of research, benefits to child or father of participation, £10 incentive, confidentiality of taking part?
- How should this information be sent by the study?
  - PROBE: post, email, telephone, interviewer from the study at doorstep

- What are the **key things** you think the letter should say to encourage fathers like yourself who do not live full-time with their child/don't currently have contact with their child [as relevant] to take part? Why?
  - PROBE: What reassurances do you think these fathers might want?
  - PROBE: How can they make it really clear that they are keen for these fathers to take part no matter what involvement they have with their child?
- As you know, the Centre for Longitudinal Studies want to ensure that a range of fathers take part in the study. How do you think they should talk about the different involvement that fathers might have with their child?
  - PROBE: what words should they use to describe fathers who do not live full-time with their children (whether or not they are currently in contact?) PROMPT: NON-RESIDENT' OR 'SEPARATED' OR 'ABSENT'?
  - How do you describe yourself?
  - What words should they avoid?
  - Some people have started using the term 'Own Household Father'. How do you feel about this term?

**Overall motivations and barriers and wrap-up****5 minutes**

Do you have any final suggestions about how to include fathers like yourself who [*do not currently live full-time with their child/ live for some of the time with their child/ stay over sometimes with their child and the mother/ has child to stay over at their place ('sleepovers')/ do not currently live with his child/ do not currently have contact with their child*] in a study like this?

- How would you describe the study to another father?
  - PROBE: What would you say to encourage them to take part?

Is there anything that we haven't covered that you would like to add?

**THANK PARTICIPANT, CONFIRM INCENTIVE AND CLOSE  
IF NECESSARY/APPROPRIATE, REMIND PARTICIPANT OF ORGANISATIONS ON INFO SHEET - PLEASE  
HAVE INFORMATION SHEET TO HAND SO YOU CAN SIGNPOST IF NEEDED**

**ANNEX**

Further information about the topics is provided below and can be read out to participants if needed:

**Your circumstances:** you may be asked questions about you and your background, such as: your occupation; where and with whom you live; your education; and your ethnicity.

**Your health:** you may be asked questions about your physical health. This might include asking questions and collecting data about your general health, any health conditions as well as questions about alcohol consumption, smoking and use of outdoor space.

**Your wellbeing:** this might include asking questions and collecting data about your general mental wellbeing, day to day worries and any mental health conditions.

**Involvement with your child:** you may be asked questions about how often you see, video call, or stay with your child and any time spent living together since their birth. Fathers who regularly spend time with their child may be asked questions about their child's development and the activities they do together.

**Relationship with the mother of your child:** you may be asked questions about your relationship with your child's mother for example, whether you make decisions together relating to your child, how much you are in contact, and your perception of how good the relationship is.

Further information about saliva sample:



The collection procedures are simple and non-invasive, and carried out as self-completion by the parent using standard collection kits. For the collection of saliva from parents, respondents are required to spit into a tube up to a fill line (the collection kit is likely to be the Oragene OG-500, used successfully in the Millennium Cohort Study Age 14 Survey, although the specific model chosen may vary slightly). They are asked not to eat, drink, smoke or chew gum prior to the sample collection. The sample collection takes about 5 minutes and does not require direct supervision by the interviewer so can often be done in parallel with other data collection elements (indeed respondents may prefer to produce the sample in private).

For the collection of a buccal swab from infants, a parent will be asked to administer the swab themselves to collect cells from the inside of the infant's cheek. This is expected to take no more than five minutes.

It is estimated that the collection of each sample will take around five minutes. Only additional informants who are biological parents of the cohort child will be eligible for the saliva sample collection. Biosample collection is to take place during the household visit, including with OHFs.

## 5.2 Low Income Families materials

### Recruitment screening questionnaire

Good morning / afternoon / evening.

My name is ..... and I am calling you from Criteria fieldwork on behalf of Ipsos MORI, the research organisation.

Ipsos MORI is an independent research organisation, carrying out this research on behalf of the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) at University College London. CLS carries out research studies exploring the experiences and development of children as they grow up in the UK. CLS’s research informs services helping children and families. This will help the planning of a new study by CLS called the Early Life Cohort Feasibility Study.

Because the studies that CLS carry out focus on the experiences and development of children, it is important that they include a diverse group of families in their research.

To help better understand how best to include families in research about children we would like to ask for your views on:

- What would encourage or enable a family like yours to take part in future research about children
- What would discourage or prevent a family like yours from taking part
- How to invite a family like yours to take part in research
- Topics that might be covered in future research

To make sure we understand how to include families like yours in future studies we need to make sure that we speak to a diverse group of families in a range of different circumstances.

The interview will be conducted within the MRS (Market Research Society) Code of Conduct and General Data Protection Regulation 2018. This means that Ipsos MORI will keep your personal data and responses in strict confidence. We will only share recorded material(s) from the interview with the Ipsos MORI research team. Your responses will be used for research purposes and **no personal information will be shared with any third parties**. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and any answers are given with your consent. You can also choose not to answer any questions, that you would prefer not to answer.

The interview will last around **1 hour**, and we can schedule the interview to take place at a time that is convenient for you. We can conduct the interview over Microsoft Teams or by telephone.

As a thank you for your time, you will receive **£40** for taking part in this research. This will be paid by BACS transfer or as a Love2Shop e-voucher depending on your preference. Would you be interested in taking part in this research?

We need to ask you a few questions before we confirm the interview, as we need to ensure that we are speaking to a broad range of individuals.

During this interview I will need to ask specific questions about your ethnicity. This information will only be collected with your explicit consent and is being collected to ensure that the research includes people from different backgrounds.

<b>Q1.</b>	<b>Are you happy to continue on this basis?</b>		
	SINGLE CODE ONLY		
	Yes	1	CONTINUE
	No	2	THANK AND CLOSE

### Screening questions

ASK ALL

<b>Q2A.</b>	<b>How long ago did you last attend a market research group discussion/depth interview?</b> SINGLE CODE ONLY		
	In the last 6 months	1	ASK Q2B MONITOR TO ENSURE NOT ALL HAVE TAKEN PART IN RESEARCH RECENTLY
	6 Months-3 years ago	2	ASK Q2B
	More than 3 years ago	3	ASK Q2B
	Never	4	CONTINUE TO Q3

## ASK ALL CODED 1-3 AT Q2A

<b>Q2b.</b>	<b>What was each of those market research studies about?</b>	
	WRITE IN:	IF ON A SIMILAR SUBJECT AS THIS SURVEY, <u>CLOSE</u> INTERVIEW

## ASK ALL

<b>Q3.</b>	<b>How would you describe your gender?</b> SINGLE CODE		
	Male	1	GO TO Q4
	Female	2	
	Other	3	THANK AND CLOSE
	Prefer not to say	4	

## ASK ALL

<b>Q4A.</b>	<b>Do you have at least one child aged 2 under? This includes both birth and adopted children. Please don't include stepchildren, children who are not your birth children, or long-term-fostered children.</b> SINGLE CODE		
	YES, I have at least one birth/ adopted child under 2	1	CONTINUE TO Q4B
	NO, I don't have a birth/adopted/ child under 2	2	THANK AND CLOSE

## ASK ALL

<b>Q4B.</b>	<b>Can I just check, does your child aged 2 and under live with you full-time?</b> SINGLE CODE		
	YES, I live with my child full-time	1	PLEASE RECORD FOR INFORMATION ONLY
	NO, I don't live with my child full-time	2	
	Other [write in]		CONTINUE TO Q5

## ASK ALL

<b>Q5A.</b>	<b>As part of our research, we would like to speak to families in a range of different circumstances</b>		
	<b>Which of the following brackets does your annual household income fall into <u>after tax</u>?</b>		
	By household income we mean income from earnings and benefits/ tax credits but <u>before</u> housing costs and household bills are deducted.		
	READ OUT. SINGLE CODE		
	Under £12k	1	CONTINUE TO 5B
	£12k – £18k	2	
	£18k – £25k	3	THANK AND CLOSE
	Over £25k	4	THANK AND CLOSE

## ASK IF CODED 1-3 at Q5A

<b>Q5B.</b>	<b>Can you tell me which of the following, if any, you currently receive?</b>		
	READ OUT. SINGLE CODE		
	Universal Credit	1	CONTINUE TO Q5C
	Income-based Job Seekers Allowance	2	
	Income Support	3	
	Income related Employment Support Allowance	4	
	Child Tax Credit	5	
	Working Tax Credit	6	
	Housing Benefit	7	
	Council Tax Support	8	
	Social Fund grant <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sure-Start Maternity Grant</li> <li>• Cold Weather Payment</li> <li>• Winter Fuel Payments</li> </ul>	9	
	None of the above	10	

**ASK IF CODED ANY AT Q5B**

<b>Q5C.</b>	<b>When it comes to your current financial situation which, if any, of the following do you do...?</b> (a) regularly (b) occasionally (c) rarely or never READ OUT. SINGLE CODE		
	Struggle to make ends meet	1	IF CODED ANY 1-9 AT Q5B AND ANY CODED <b>A AT 1-6</b> GO TO Q6 <b>OR</b> IF CODED 10 AT Q5B AND AT LEAST 3 CODED <b>A AT 1-6</b> GO TO Q6 IF CODED ANY 1-10 AT Q5B AND <b>ALL B-C AT 1-6</b> PLEASE THANK AND CLOSE
	Borrow money from friends and family to pay for food or other essentials	2	
	Get behind with paying important bills (e.g., council tax or loan or credit card)	3	
	Use food banks	4	
	Struggle with unexpected or emergency bills	5	
	Borrow money from payday loan companies to pay for essentials	6	

**ASK ALL**

<b>Q6.</b>	<b>Just to check, which of the following best describes your current relationship with your child's birth [mother or father]?</b> [If more than one birth/adopted child under 2 with different parents, ask about the mother/ father of the youngest of these children] READ OUT. SINGLE CODE.		
	We are in a romantic relationship and live together	1	PLEASE RECORD FOR INFORMATION ONLY GO TO Q7
	We are in a romantic relationship and live apart For example, the mother/father may work or reside in a different area or country	2	
	We're not in a romantic relationship and we live apart For example, you may have separated from the mother/father of your child, or were never in a romantic relationship with them	3	

**ASK ALL**

<b>Q7</b>	<b>How old were you on your last birthday?</b> WRITE IN EXACT AGE		
	<b>Exact Age</b>		PLEASE RECORD FOR INFORMATION ONLY GO TO Q8

ASK ALL

<b>Q8.</b>	<b>How would you describe your ethnicity?</b>		
	SINGLE CODE. DO NOT READ OUT.		
	<b>White</b>		PLEASE INCLUDE: 5 X PARTICIPANTS WITH PAKISTANI BACKGROUND 5 X PARTICIPANTS WITH BANGLADESHI BACKGROUND 5 X PARTICIPANTS WITH BLACK AFRICAN BACKGROUND 5 X PARTICIPANTS WITH BLACK CARIBBEAN BACKGROUND 10 X PARTICIPANTS WITH ANY BACKGROUND (RECORD FOR INFORMATION ONLY) IF DUAL HERITAGE [or CODE 8, 13, 16] PLEASE RECORD AND ASSIGN TO MOST FITTING ETHNIC MINORITY GROUP GO TO Q9
	English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British	1	
	Irish	2	
	Gypsy or Irish Traveller	3	
	Any other White background (please describe)	4	
	<b>Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups</b>		
	White and Black Caribbean	5	
	White and Black African	6	
	White and Asian	7	
	Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background	8	
	<b>Asian/Asian British</b>		
	Pakistani	9	
	Bangladeshi	10	
	Indian	11	
	Chinese	12	
	Any other Asian background	13	
	<b>Black / African / Caribbean / Black British</b>		
	African	14	
	Caribbean	15	
	Any other Black / African / Caribbean background	16	
	<b>Another ethnic group</b>		
	Arab	17	
	Any other ethnic group (please describe)	18	
	Don't know	19	
	Prefer not to say	20	

ASK ALL

<b>Q9A.</b>	<b>Please can I ask, what would you consider to be your first language?</b>	
	<b>(WRITE IN)</b>	IF ENGLISH IS <u>NOT</u> THEIR FIRST LANGUAGE GO TO Q9B
		IF ENGLISH IS THEIR FIRST LANGUAGE GO TO Q10 PLEASE

ASK IF ENGLISH IS NOT THEIR FIRST LANGUAGE (Q9A)

<b>Q9B.</b>	<b>Are you happy to conduct the interview in English, or would you prefer for the study team to arrange an interpreter for the interview?</b>		
	<b>(WRITE IN)</b>	IF HAPPY TO DO INTERVIEW IN ENGLISH GO TO Q10 (RECORD FOR INFORMATION ONLY) IF REQUESTS AN INTERPRETOR – PLEASE MAKE A NOTE OF LANGUAGE PREFERENCE FOR TRANSLATION AND GO TO Q10. (BEFORE BOOKING AN INTERVIEW PLEASE LIAISE WITH IPSOS MORI TO ENSURE WE CAN FACILITATE AN INTERPRETER).	

## ASK ALL

<b>Q10</b>	<b>What country are you typically based in (permanent address)?</b> SINGLE CODE. DO NOT READ OUT.		
	England	1	MONITOR FOR INCLUSION OF PARTICIPANTS LIVING OUTSIDE OF ENGLAND GO TO Q11
	Wales	2	
	Scotland	3	
	Northern Ireland	4	

## ASK ALL

<b>Q11</b>	<b>Which of the following, if any, best describes the area that your permanent/ main address is in?</b> SINGLE CODE ONLY		
	Urban	1	MONITOR FOR INCLUSION OF PARTICIPANTS LIVING IN BOTH URBAN AND RURAL AREAS GO TO Q12
	Rural	2	

## ASK ALL

<b>Q12.</b>	<b>Are you still happy to take part in an interview?</b> MULTICODE OK. DO NOT READ OUT.		
	Yes	1	IF YES – TAKE DOWN NAME, NUMBER, EMAIL AND TIME AND DATE OF INTERVIEW AND BOOK IN WITH RESEARCH TEAM.
	No	2	THANK AND CLOSE

**PERSONAL DETAILS:**

Recruitment details	
Date of recruitment:	
Time of recruitment:	
Video call (MS Teams) or telephone	

MOBILE TELEPHONE NUMBER FOR INTERVIEW OR CONTACT	
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LANDLINE TELEPHONE NUMBER FOR INTERVIEW (if preferred) <b>Tel. Number (WRITE IN INCL. STD code)</b>	
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<b>E-mail address (WRITE IN):</b>	
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**Additional notes**

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## Participant information sheet

### All about our research and what taking part would involve

We would like to invite mothers and fathers to take part in a research study to understand how best to include families in future research about children.

For this research we specifically want to speak to mothers and fathers **with a child aged 2 and under**.

We want to hear from a diverse range of **families in a variety of different circumstances** across the UK.

#### Who is the research for?

Ipsos MORI, an independent research organisation, is carrying out this research on behalf of a project team led by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) at University College London (UCL). CLS carries out research studies exploring the experiences and development of children as they grow up in the UK. This research will help the planning of a new study by CLS called the Early Life Cohort Feasibility Study.

The Principal Investigator at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies is Professor Lisa Calderwood.

#### What do Ipsos MORI want to find out?

**Including a diverse range of families in research about children** is crucial for helping researchers understand children's development. Families may have different views about, and experiences with, their child. **All** perspectives are important.

We want to ask mothers and fathers about:

- What would encourage or enable families to take part in future research about children
- What would discourage or prevent families from taking part
- How to invite families to take part
- Topics that might be covered in future research

#### What would taking part involve?

We would like you to take part in a video interview with one of our Ipsos MORI researchers using MS Teams. If that is not possible, we can also do the interview over the telephone. During the interview we will talk to you in more detail about your views on the topics mentioned above.

The interview will last around **1 hour**, and we can schedule the interview to take place at a time that is convenient for you. As a thank you for your time, you will receive **£40** for taking part in this research. This will be paid as a BACS transfer or can be provided as a Love2Shop e-voucher if you prefer.

#### Do I have to take part?

No. **Taking part is completely voluntary**. You can also choose to not answer individual questions or stop the interview completely at any time. Even if you agree to take part now you can change your mind later. You do not have to give a reason why.

Participation in **this research will not impact any state benefits** you may receive.

#### Will you record what I say?

Yes. We would like to audio record the interview, but we will ask you if that is OK before we start. The reason for recording the interview is to help us to remember what you have said when we write up our findings in the report. **Ipsos MORI will keep your personal data and responses in strict confidence**. We will only share recorded material(s) from the interview with the Ipsos MORI research team. Your responses will be used for research purposes and no personal information will be shared with any third parties.

We will follow the current laws, such as the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), when we store and access this information. **You can contact us after you have taken part if you would prefer us to delete your information.**

### What will happen to the information I provide?

Ipsos MORI adheres to the Market Research Society (MRS) code of conduct, which will be followed throughout the research process. We will be collecting personal data such as your name, your contact number, your email address, your gender, age, which part of the UK you live in and ethnicity. All this data will be securely stored and deleted one year after the research study ends.

After the interview, everything you say to a researcher will be anonymised. We will not tell anyone that you have spoken to us, or share anything that identifies you, unless you or someone else is at risk of serious harm.

Ipsos MORI will write a report for CLS to summarise the findings. The report may include case studies and direct quotes from participants - however, **we will not mention any personal details that might identify you or your child.** You can withdraw your consent to take part in this research up until 8 October 2021, when we will be finalising the report.

### Where can I get more information?

You can find more information about the personal data we will collect, how we will use it, who we share it with and what your legal rights are in the Privacy Notice.

If you would like to speak to someone about taking part in the research, you can contact:

Polly Hollings [contact details]

Faith Jones [contact details]

### Who can I contact if I have concerns before, during or after I take part?

The following organisations provide advice on a range of issues relevant to families:

#### Family Lives

- Website: [www.familylives.org.uk](http://www.familylives.org.uk)
- Telephone: 0808 800 2222

#### Citizens Advice Bureau

- Website: [www.citizensadvice.org.uk](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk)
- Telephone number for England and Northern Ireland: 0800 144 8848
- Telephone number in Wales: 0800 702 2020
- Telephone number in Scotland: 0800 028 1456

#### Turn2Us

- Website: <https://www.turn2us.org.uk/>
- Telephone: 0808 802 2000

#### Trussell Trust

- Website: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/>
- Telephone: 0808 208 2138

#### The Mental Health Foundation

- Website: [www.mentalhealth.org.uk](http://www.mentalhealth.org.uk)

#### Samaritans

- Website: [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)
- Telephone: 116 123

#### The Association for Shared Parenting

- Website: [www.sharedparenting.org.uk](http://www.sharedparenting.org.uk)

#### Being Parents Apart | Relate

- Website: [www.relate.org.uk](http://www.relate.org.uk)
- Telephone: 0300 003 0396

#### Gingerbread

- Website: <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/>
- Telephone: 0808 802 0925

## Discussion guide

The discussion guide design included development of stimulus material to introduce the ELC-FS and different elements of the study to research participants. In video interviews, this information was shown on-screen to participants and read out. In telephone interviews, the stimulus was read out to participants.

Questions	Timings
<p><b>Introduction</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>This section is to ensure informed consent is gained.</i></li> <li><i>Please note that all participants have been provided an information sheet and privacy policy outlining how their data will be used and their rights. Please confirm receipt of this.</i></li> <li><i>Please see participant information to confirm how participant will be paid their incentive and confirm this with them during the interview.</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>5 minutes</b></p>
<p><b>Introduce yourself and the purpose of the research project</b></p> <p>I'd like to start by introducing myself, and the purpose of this research project...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I'm [name], and I work for an organisation called Ipsos MORI, an independent research organisation.</li> <li>We are carrying out this research on behalf of a project team at the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) at University College London. CLS carries out research studies exploring the experiences and development of children as they grow up in the UK. They have asked us to carry out this research to understand how they can include a diverse group of families in a range of different circumstances in future studies.</li> <li>There are no right or wrong answers! We are just interested in your views and thoughts.</li> <li>Please can I check, are you currently in a location where you're happy to take part in this discussion?</li> <li>The interview will last around one hour. We very much appreciate you taking part, and as a thank you, you will receive £40 for your time.</li> </ul> <p><b>Reassurances</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This research project is being carried out in accordance with the Market Research Society (MRS) Code of Conduct.</li> <li>It is completely up to you whether you take part, and you can change your mind at any time.</li> <li>Any information collected will remain confidential and will be used for research purposes only.</li> <li>The findings of this research will be anonymous, and you will NOT be identifiable in the published report. Any direct quotes used in in the report will not be attributed to you.</li> </ul> <p><b>Consent to take part in the research</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are you happy to take part?</li> <li>Before we begin, do you have any questions?</li> </ul> <p><b>Consent for audio recording</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>With your permission, we would like to digitally audio record the interview. We will listen back to these recordings to make notes of our discussion, so we have an accurate record of what we talked about. The recording will be securely deleted after the research project is completed. Is that okay?</li> <li>ONCE RECORDING HAS STARTED, PLEASE CONFIRM THAT YOU ARE NOW RECORDING.</li> </ul> <p><b>Participant introduction</b></p> <p>Now that I've introduced myself and the research project, it would be great if could you tell me a little bit about yourself and your family...</p>	

- Where you live?
- Do you live with anybody else, such as any other family members?
- How do you spend most of your time day to day?

As you know, we are speaking to mothers and fathers with children aged under 2 years old. Are you able to confirm the age of your child?

- And do you have any other children?

*Moderator: throughout the guide where noted please **tailor the language in the guide to reflect the family circumstances** e.g., [In a romantic relationship and living with birth father/mother, in a romantic relationship and living apart from birth father/mother, not in a romantic relationship with birth father]. Please reflect participants own language where possible.*

### About the study

5  
minutes

I want to start by giving you a brief overview about **this** research.

As you may already know, the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS) carries out research studies exploring the experiences and development of children as they grow up in the UK. They are looking to set up a new study and they want to make sure that a diverse group of families in a range of different circumstances are able to take part.

I would like to talk to you today about how you think families like yours could be included in this new study.

**Just to clarify, we are not asking you or your child to take part in this new study, but we would value your views on what might encourage or discourage families like yours to take part.**

Let me tell you some more about the new study that the Centre for Longitudinal Studies are planning to carry out.

### STIMULUS 1A: A NEW STUDY

The new study will involve several thousand babies all born at a similar time. Mothers and fathers of these babies will be invited by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies to become part of the study when the child is around 9 months old. Taking part in the study will be optional, and those invited would need to decide if they were interested to take part.

The study will aim to involve both the mother and father of each baby, regardless of whether they live together or are in a romantic relationship at the time. They will be asked to take part in an interview which could include answering questions on a range of topics and taking part in activities.

The interview will likely be split into **3 sections**.

1. Interview with one parent about themselves, their family and their child, which would last about 60 minutes.
2. Interview with the other parent, mainly about themselves, which will last about 30 minutes.

3. Activities for 10 minutes on a mobile app which would include taking a video recording of the parents playing with their children. This could be done on your mobile, or the interviewers mobile.

Mothers and fathers would likely receive £10 each for taking part in the survey.

The study will then go back to the child, mother and father every few years to ask them to complete additional activities and surveys. This means that the study can learn about how children grow up and develop.

- Do you have any questions about this so far?

**STIMULUS 1B: A NEW STUDY**

The aim of the new study will be to explore what it's like growing up in the UK, how to make life better for children today and for future generations. For example, the findings from these types of studies have helped governments understand how to improve children's education and health services for fathers and mothers.

Every family is different, therefore including a diverse group of families in a range of different circumstances in the study is important. We know that both mothers' and fathers' situations and characteristics will affect children's development, and different families will have different views about, and experiences with, their child[ren]. It is important that the study captures the perspectives and experiences of different families in order to reflect the diversity of UK society.

- How would you feel about your child being invited to take part in the study?
  - What questions or queries might you have about this?
- We know that all family circumstances differ. Thinking about your own family and the information I've provided so far, how might **you** feel about being invited to take part in this type of study?
  - What might encourage **you** to take part? Anything else?
  - What might put **you** off taking part? Anything else?

I'd now like to share some more information with you about what taking part in the study could involve. I'm keen to get your views on this and how you think families like yours might feel about it. All views are welcome and there are no right or wrong answers.

<b>Topics/ activities covered</b>	<b>10 minutes</b>
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We will talk about how the survey might be carried out shortly but for now I'd like to think about some of the topics or activities that mothers' and fathers' might be asked to complete in a study like this.

The study wishes to understand the experiences of a wide range of families, but we would like you to think about families in the same kinds of circumstances as your own.

- What sort of topics or questions would you expect to be asked about in a study like this?
- Thinking about your experiences as a parent, what types of things do you think the study *should* be asking about? Why?

I'd now like to go through a list of topic areas that the study might ask about - you might already have mentioned some of these.

*Moderator: Go through STIMULUS 4 with all participants and STIMULUS 5 with ethnic minority participants.*

*Moderator: please note that there is further detail on each of these topic areas in the Annex if needed.*

**Studies about children’s development usually ask a range of questions to mothers and fathers taking part, these might include activities you do with your child, who lives in your home, who looks after your child, your child’s temperament, and their health and development.**

**In addition, the study may ask about some more personal or sensitive topic areas. Answering questions on these topics is optional – Mothers and Fathers would be able to say if they preferred not to answer any questions or wanted to skip any questions. All of their answers would be kept confidential and securely by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies.**

**ASK ALL**

**STIMULUS 4: TOPIC AREAS**

**Your circumstances**  
(e.g. income and benefits claimed, occupation, home ownership and housing conditions)

**Financial hardship**  
(e.g. debt)

**Your physical and mental wellbeing**  
(e.g. pregnancy and birth, mental health or substance use)

**Service use** (e.g. health [GP/ NHS], childcare, local authority [sure start])

**Baby’s health and development**

**Relationship between parents and relationship with baby** (e.g. questions about infant-parent bonding)

**ETHNIC MINORITY ONLY**

**STIMULUS 5: TOPIC AREAS**





*Moderator: Go through all of the stimulus 4 topics together and then ask. **If ethnic minority, please repeat for stimulus 5:***

- Are there any topics that you would be particularly interested to answer questions about? Why?
- Are there any topics that you might have some concerns or reservations about? Why?
  - Would knowing that the study is collecting this type of information encourage or discourage you and your family from taking part in the study?

There are some topics that will be asked to both parents, and some topics may only be asked to one parent. For example, questions about the baby's health and development will only be asked to the parent who spends the most time with the baby. Thinking about the topics we have discussed so far...

- Are there any topics which you would prefer your child's mother/father to answer rather than yourself?
  - PROBE: Which topics? Why?
- Are there any topic areas that you feel your child's mother/father would prefer to answer rather than yourself?
  - PROBE: Which topics? Why?
- Thinking about all of the different topics that the study could cover; can you think of **anything else** which you feel should be covered in a study about children? Why?
  - Can you think of **anything else** which you might want to share with the study about your experience of being a parent?

#### ETHNICITY ONLY:

- People's ethnicity and national identity may be personal to them, and it is important that people feel they are being accurately represented. How do you feel about being asked about your ethnicity?
  - Is there a way you would prefer to be asked? PROBE: select from list of pre-defined ethnic groups or defining your ethnicity yourself?
- Would disclosing your ethnicity change how you feel about answering any of the other questions?

*Moderator please reassure: There are no right or wrong answers - all suggestions are welcome.*

In addition to asking questions in a survey, these types of studies can sometimes ask parents to take part in other activities. For example, previous studies have asked parents to provide a saliva sample. This can help researchers understand more about the parent and the child's genetic background and

how this interacts with health, development and behaviour. As with other parts of taking part in the study, this activity would be optional.

*Moderator: some further information about saliva sample is provided in the annex.*

- What would you think if you were asked to provide a saliva sample as part of the new study?
  - Why? PROBE: any concerns about this sort of topic/ activity?
  - ETHNICITY ONLY: how would you feel if other information about yourself, such as your age, gender and ethnicity, was linked to your saliva sample as part of this study?
- How would you feel if the study asked for a saliva sample from your child?
- How do you think your partner might feel about this being part of the study?
  - Would knowing that the study might be collecting this type of information encourage or discourage you and your family from taking part in the study?

### Ways to take part

**10  
minutes**

I'd now us to talk about different ways of taking part. It is important that yourself and your family feel comfortable talking to an interviewer about your perspectives and experiences.

Studies like this would typically collect information 'face to face'. This means that a trained researcher would conduct the interview with you in person. The interview would last no more than 1.5 hours and would involve a mixture of survey questions and activities. The face-to-face interview would generally take place at your home. This means that a researcher would arrange a time to meet you at your home to conduct the interview in person with you, [if living with partner: your partner] and your child.

During the interview, the researcher would ask you [if living with partner: and your partner] some questions. You [if living with partner: or your partner] may also be given a survey to complete by yourself on the interviewer's tablet/computer.

- How would you feel about being interviewed 'face to face'?
  - What would the advantages of taking part in this way be?
  - What would the disadvantages of taking part in this way be?

#### IF RELUCTANT TO ANSWER CERTAIN TOPICS F2F:

- For some more personal questions, those taking part would be able to type their answers into the interviewer's computer so that they don't have to say them out loud to the interviewer.
  - Would this change how you feel about a face-to-face interview? Why?

#### IF ENGLISH IS A SECOND LANGUAGE:

- How would you feel about answering questions in English?
- How would you feel about the option of using a translator?
  - How would you feel about a translator being there (in person)? PROBE: privacy concerns? any other sensitivities?
  - How would you feel about a relative or friend translating for you? PROBE: privacy?
  - How would you feel about using computer automated translation?
- How would you feel about being able to request an interviewer of the same ethnicity, gender or religion as yourself/ your family?

- How do you feel this might benefit yourself and your family? PROBE: shared understanding? cultural sensitivity? Trust?
- Is this something which you might consider if you were asked to take part in a study like this?
- How would you feel about being interviewed at your home? Why?
  - What would the advantages of taking part in this way be?
  - What would the disadvantages of taking part in this way be? PROBE: practicalities, specific sensitivities, concerns about safety etc.
- IF LIVING WITH PARTNER: How do you think your partner would feel about being interviewed at your home?
- IF LIVING WITH OTHER RELATIVES: How would your [insert relatives] feel about this?
- How would you feel about being interviewed somewhere else, such as a friend or relatives' home? Why?
  - Where would you prefer to take part in a face-to-face interview?
- When inviting families like yours to take part in a face-to-face interview, what should the Centre for Longitudinal Studies consider?
  - What could help a family like yours take part in a face-to-face interview? PROBE: specific assistance? accessibility of materials? Flexibility?
  - What might deter a family like yours from taking part in a face-to-face interview? PROBE: specific barriers (e.g., literacy, language, location of interview, access to mobile/ broadband, work hours)

**Novel ways to take part**

*Moderator note: the ELC-FS will recruit babies born September-November 2021.*

**5 minutes**

We have spoken about the ways in which studies like this typically collect information from families.

In this section we will explore some of the other activities which mothers and fathers could be asked to do as part of the study. I will share these with you and I'd like to get your views on these different approaches.

**STIMULUS 6: NOVEL WAYS TO TAKE PART**

These may be used during, or after, a face-to-face interview.

In addition to answering a series of questions, you and/or your child may be asked to take part in the following app-based activities during the interview:

**Capture videos of you and your baby doing different structured activities** (e.g. playing).  
 These would be filmed via Smartphone and uploaded to **a mobile app** (either by you or the interviewer)

After the interview, you may be asked to take part in some follow up activities:

**Mobile App:**

Fill out a diary about how you spend your time

**Mobile App:**

Answer one-off questions sent via app notifications

*Moderator: for each novel mode listed at STIMULUS 6 please explore the following:*

- How would you feel about taking part in these app-based activities?
  - What would the advantages of taking part in this way be?
  - What would the disadvantages of taking part in this way be?
- Are there any app-based activities that you would be particularly interested to take part in? Why?
- Are there any app-based activities that you might have some concerns or reservations about? Why?
  - PROBE: access to smartphone, concerns about: data, privacy, security etc.
- Would knowing you might be asked to take part in these activities encourage or discourage you and your family from taking part in the study?

**Engagement**

**10  
minutes**

I want to talk to you about the different ways in which studies like this might reach out to families about taking part in research about children.

- Where might you expect to hear about a research study like this?
  - PROBE: community groups, religious groups, specific services (i.e., health centres/ health visitors, playgroups, family support) or other organisations (e.g., charities)

I'm going to read you an example of one way that the study might engage with a family to take part in research about their child. I'd like to get your views on the approach used in this example.

*Moderator: If there is sufficient time remaining, please do both stimuli with everyone. If you are struggling for time, please do either STIMULUS 7 or STIMULU 8 (depending on the sub-group).*

**MODERTOR: ETHNIC GROUP**

**STIMULUS 7: COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

Bolu and Emmanuel have recently had their first child. The couple are of Nigerian heritage and have lived in London all their lives. Culture and tradition is important to the couple, and to help maintain

their connection to their culture and the local Nigerian community they attend a traditional Nigerian 'white garment' church in their local area.

The church plays an important role in their family's life, both in terms of religious practice and community. Since having their baby, the Pastor and the wider church community has provided a wealth of resources and support for the new parents.

- We know that religious and community groups can play an important role in families' lives. How do you think that Bolu and Emmanuel might feel about the study team engaging with them, or families like theirs, via the church or community leader?
  - What would the advantages of engaging with the study in this way be? PROBE: building trust/ cultural/ religious sensitivities/ better chance of engagement?
  - What would the disadvantages of engaging with the study in this way be? PROBE: any concerns?
- How would you feel about the study engaging with your family using an approach like this (i.e., through a community or religious group)?
- Can you think of another way that the study could engage with you/ your family to take part in research about your child?

#### **MODERATOR: LOW INCOME GROUP**

#### **STIMULUS 8: SERVICE-USER ENGAGEMENT**

Tracy and Sam have recently had their first child. Tracy and Sam found their pregnancy quite challenging, and after giving birth Tracy was diagnosed with postnatal depression. The family received regular visits from their designated Health Visitor and community nurses.

Sam was keen to find other resources and support, so he also registered the couple for the 'Baby and Us' programme provided by their Local Authority.

- We know that having a child can be challenging for mothers and fathers for many different reasons. How do you think that Tracy and Sam might feel about the study team engaging with them, or families like theirs, via their designated Health Visitor?
  - What would the advantages of engaging with the study in this way be?
  - What would the disadvantages of engaging with the study in this way be?
- How do you think that Tracy and Sam might feel about the study team engaging with them, or families like theirs, via the Local Authority programme?
  - What would the advantages of engaging with the study in this way be?
  - What would the disadvantages of engaging with the study in this way be?
- How would you feel about the study engaging with your family using approaches like these? (e.g., services, programmes or organisations)
- Can you think of another way that the study could engage with you/ your family to take part in research about your child?

<b>Motivations, barriers and wrap-up</b>	<b>10 minutes</b>
<p>Thinking about everything we have discussed about the study:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you were invited to take part in the new study, how would you feel about taking part?</li> <li>• What would motivate you to take part? Why? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ PROBE: general interest in the study? Taking part in something important? Making a difference, Impact of the (e.g., on policy, knowledge about children’s development, wider society) <b>If ethnic minority</b>: importance of representation?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Those who take part in the study would be given a financial gift to thank them for taking part in an interview. In the past this has been around £10. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What do you think about this?</li> <li>○ How important do you think it is to provide this? Why?</li> <li>○ Those who take part may also be given some small gifts e.g., keyrings, travel card etc with study brand and logo – what do you think about this? Do you have any ideas about small gifts that would be suitable? What about a gift for the baby?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• In what ways do you feel you might benefit from taking part in a study like this? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How do you think your child could benefit from you [if living with other parent] and your partner, taking part in this type of research?</li> <li>○ How do you think your family might benefit from taking part?</li> <li>○ How do you think other families like yours might benefit?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What would you hope to get out of the experience? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ PROBE: insights into their child’s development/ important findings and broader insights about families like theirs or the wider cohort/ support and guidance for parents?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What, if anything, would prevent you from taking part? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What concerns might you have?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What, if anything, would make it easier for you to take part? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What could the study or interviewer do to help families like yours to take part?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• What sort of information would help you decide whether to take part?</li> <li>• What questions might you want to have answered before you take part?</li> <li>• How would you like to receive information about the study? Would this influence your decision? PROBE: letters/leaflets in post, professionally branded, study name, digital content and communication channels.</li> </ul> <p>Now that we have talked more about this kind of research, how would you feel if your child was invited to take part in the study?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As the [mother/father], how much involvement would you want in any decision about whether your child took part in the study? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ How much involvement do you think your child’s [mother/father] would want in the decision about whether your child took part?</li> <li>○ How much involvement do you think your relatives (or anyone else?) might want in the decision about whether your family took part?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

○ Who would you listen to the most? Who would influence your decision?

- Do you have any final suggestions about how to include families like yours in a study like this?
- Would it make a difference to your decision if the study was talked about on television and radio, or promoted publicly by the scientists running the study or other public figures e.g., celebrities, politicians or other public figures
- How would you describe the study to another family?
  - PROBE: What would you say to encourage them to take part?
- Is there anything that we haven't covered that you would like to add?

THANK PARTICIPANT, CONFIRM INCENTIVE AND CLOSE  
IF NECESSARY/APPROPRIATE, REMIND PARTICIPANT OF ORGANISATIONS ON INFO SHEET -  
PLEASE HAVE INFORMATION SHEET TO HAND SO YOU CAN SIGNPOST IF NEEDED

## ANNEX

Further information about the topics is provided below and can be read out to participants if needed:

**Your circumstances:** you may be asked questions about you and your background, such as: your occupation; where and with whom you live; your education; your mother and father's employment and education when you were growing up; your income and whether you receive any benefits.

**Financial hardship:** you may be asked questions relating to financial difficulties, such as: whether you are struggling financially; whether you are in debt; whether you can afford items for your child; and whether you've ever had to skip meals.

**Neighbourhood and home environment:** you may be asked questions about what it's like both in your home and in your neighbourhood, such as: whether your accommodation has problems like damp or a broken boiler; whether you have any outdoor space; how big your home is; and how safe you feel in your neighbourhood.

**Service use:** you may be asked about what services (health services, information services like family centres, baby services like baby swimming classes) your family has used since your baby was born. You may also be asked if you've ever struggled to get help and information from these services.

**Community and belonging:** you may be asked about whether you have people you can count on to help and support you, whether you feel you belong in your community, and whether you feel people in your community can be trusted.

**Your health:** you may be asked questions about your physical health. This might include asking questions and collecting data about your general health, any health conditions as well as questions about alcohol consumption, smoking and use of outdoor space.

**Your wellbeing:** this might include asking questions and collecting data about your general mental wellbeing, day to day worries and any mental health conditions.

**Involvement with your child:** you may be asked questions about how often you see, video call, or stay with your child and any time spent living together since their birth. Fathers who regularly spend time with their child may be asked questions about their child's development and the activities they do together.



Further information about saliva sample:

The collection procedures are simple and non-invasive, and carried out as self-completion by the parent using standard collection kits. For the collection of saliva from parents, respondents are required to spit into a tube up to a fill line (the collection kit is likely to be the Oragene OG-500, used successfully in the Millennium Cohort Study Age 14 Survey, although the specific model chosen may vary slightly). They are asked not to eat, drink, smoke or chew gum prior to the sample collection. The sample collection takes about 5 minutes and does not require direct supervision by the interviewer so can often be done in parallel with other data collection elements (indeed respondents may prefer to produce the sample in private).

For the collection of a buccal swab from infants, a parent will be asked to administer the swab themselves to collect cells from the inside of the infant's cheek. This is expected to take no more than five minutes.

It is estimated that the collection of each sample will take around five minutes. Only additional informants who are biological parents of the cohort child will be eligible for the saliva sample collection. Biosample collection is to take place during the household visit, including with OHFs.



# Our standards and accreditations

Ipsos MORI's standards and accreditations provide our clients with the peace of mind that they can always depend on us to deliver reliable, sustainable findings. Our focus on quality and continuous improvement means we have embedded a "right first time" approach throughout our organisation.



## ISO 20252

This is the international market research specific standard that supersedes BS 7911/MRQSA and incorporates IQCS (Interviewer Quality Control Scheme). It covers the five stages of a Market Research project. Ipsos MORI was the first company in the world to gain this accreditation.



## Market Research Society (MRS) Company Partnership

By being an MRS Company Partner, Ipsos MORI endorses and supports the core MRS brand values of professionalism, research excellence and business effectiveness, and commits to comply with the MRS Code of Conduct throughout the organisation. We were the first company to sign up to the requirements and self-regulation of the MRS Code. More than 350 companies have followed our lead.



## ISO 9001

This is the international general company standard with a focus on continual improvement through quality management systems. In 1994, we became one of the early adopters of the ISO 9001 business standard.



## ISO 27001

This is the international standard for information security, designed to ensure the selection of adequate and proportionate security controls. Ipsos MORI was the first research company in the UK to be awarded this in August 2008.



## The UK General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the UK Data Protection Act (DPA) 2018

Ipsos MORI is required to comply with the UK GDPR and the UK DPA. It covers the processing of personal data and the protection of privacy.



## HMG Cyber Essentials

This is a government-backed scheme and a key deliverable of the UK's National Cyber Security Programme. Ipsos MORI was assessment-validated for Cyber Essentials certification in 2016. Cyber Essentials defines a set of controls which, when properly implemented, provide organisations with basic protection from the most prevalent forms of threat coming from the internet.



## Fair Data

Ipsos MORI is signed up as a "Fair Data" company, agreeing to adhere to 10 core principles. The principles support and complement other standards such as ISOs, and the requirements of Data Protection legislation.

# For more information

3 Thomas More Square  
London  
E1W 1YW

t: +44 (0)20 3059 5000

[www.ipsos-mori.com](http://www.ipsos-mori.com)  
<http://twitter.com/IpsosMORI>

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