

Live Video Interviewing: Empirical Evidence of Opportunities and Challenges Across Seven Major Social Surveys

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the use of video interview (VI) for collecting survey data across seven major UK social surveys that have implemented this mode of data collection, including both cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys. The paper collates rich comparative evidence, on which to evaluate the advancements, opportunities and barriers relating to current and future use of VI in the UK (and elsewhere). The specific aims of the paper are to investigate (a) uptake of, and response rates to, VI compared to other modes; (b) the characteristics of VI respondents to understand representation; and (c) the feasibility of administering particular survey questions and (complex) tasks via VI, such as requesting consent for administrative data linkage and cognitive assessments. Ultimately, the paper aims to evaluate VI's long-term feasibility as a survey data collection mode post-pandemic. The results suggest that, if VI were the only or primary data collection mode, response rates would be notably lower than surveys conducted in person and that this could lead to an increase in sample composition issues and representation bias. There are also encouraging findings. This mode proves to be a suitable approach for obtaining consent for data linkage and conducting cognitive assessments – a key finding because previous research has identified limitations of other remote methods for collecting this kind of data. Overall, the evidence from this study suggests that VI can be a suitable complementary data collection mode in a mixed-mode survey design, offering potentially more cost-efficient fieldwork. We identify particular feasibility advantages for longitudinal surveys.

Keywords: live video interviewing, major UK social surveys, mode selection effects, response rate, representation

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The COVID-19 pandemic led to a rapid move to remote data collection and was a catalyst for further development of both existing and new innovative data collection approaches, including live video interviewing¹ (in the following abbreviated VI; Conrad et al., 2026). In the UK, large-scale social surveys began making use of this method for the first time (e.g., Hanson et al., 2023; Hanson et al., 2026). In addition, in-person² surveys have been facing many challenges, including falling response rates, increasing costs and difficulties with recruitment to the interviewer workforce, prompting increased use of remote data collection. However, introducing new survey modes can introduce measurement inequivalence over time, which is particularly problematic for longitudinal studies (Cernat, 2015; Dillman et al., 2009; Dillman & Christian, 2005), or can introduce representation bias if certain sub-groups are less willing to respond via the new mode. Long surveys or those involving specific tasks or complex measures, such as collection of data linkage consents or cognitive assessments, can be difficult to transition to remote modes. Despite emerging research on VI (e.g., Conrad et al., 2023; Endres et al., 2023; Schober et al., 2023; West et al., 2022), our understanding of its use in major social surveys in the UK and elsewhere remains limited. Therefore, it is crucial to further explore the feasibility of VI for data collection post-pandemic.

Aims of the Paper

To address these gaps, this paper reviews evidence and experiences of implementing VI in all of the major social surveys in the UK that have used the mode to date (seven surveys in total). The majority of the surveys are longitudinal, two are cross-sectional and, together, they provide rich evidence on which to evaluate the advancements, opportunities and barriers relating to current and future use of VI in the UK and beyond. The specific aims of this paper are to investigate (a) uptake and response rate to VI, also in comparison to other modes; (b) characteristics of VI respondents in order to explore sample composition and potential impact on representation; and (c) feasibility of administering particular survey questions and tasks via VI, such as asking consent for administrative data linkage and cognitive assessments. The paper is not about UK surveys *per se* (versus surveys conducted elsewhere) but aims to make, where possible, gen-

¹ In general, three types of VI approaches are being distinguished (only the first option is considered in this paper): live video (personal) interviewing (VI), which resembles in-person interviews but is conducted via a video communication platform; pre-recorded VI, which is a self-interviewing approach using videos embedded in questionnaires (Conrad et al., 2023); and computer-generated agents and/or Artificial Intelligence (AI) supported VI (Höhne, 2024).

² In this study, we use the terminology “in-person” interviewing instead of “face-to-face” interviewing when respondent and interviewer meet in the same physical space, since VI is also face-to-face (albeit mediated by a screen).

eralisable contributions to the VI literature. Ultimately, the paper aims to evaluate VI's long-term feasibility as a survey data collection mode.

Research Questions

Given the above gaps in the current literature, the key research questions we aim to address are:

RQ1: *What response rates (uptake) have been achieved with VI, either as the only interview mode or as an alternative to other modes?*

Specifically, we aim to explore whether response rates achieved using VI are comparable with response rates achieved through in-person interviewing. Additionally, we seek to explore how the uptake of VI varies depending on how it is offered, whether as the sole mode of completion or as an option alongside other modes.

RQ2: *What are the characteristics of participants who respond via VI?*

We aim to determine whether VI respondents differ from those who respond via other modes, particularly via in-person interviewing (and if so, to what extent), i.e. we investigate (differences in) sample composition (or representation) between VI and in-person. This is important for assessing potential impacts on representation (due to issues with coverage and/or nonresponse) of survey data collected via VI.

RQ3: *How well does VI perform in administering (complex) survey tasks, in particular obtaining consent for administrative data linkage, as well as administering cognitive assessments?*

These tasks are an important component of many studies but are challenging to implement when interviewers are not physically present (e.g., in web mode). We aim to compare VI consent and completion rates with those achieved in in-person interviews to assess whether VI could be an effective mode for collecting these measures.

All seven UK surveys examined here introduced VI between 2020 and 2023, using it either as the primary mode or as an alternative, either in parallel with other modes or in sequence. All studies initially implemented VI as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic which prevented in-person contact. The goal was to replicate in-person data collection as much as possible. Additional reasons for implementing VI were to increase response rates and attract respondents who might not have participated otherwise. These surveys, each with different designs, topics, and target populations, provide a rich source for exploring VI.

Whilst the method of VI had been explored to a limited degree before the pandemic (e.g., Anderson, 2008; Jeannis et al., 2013; Schober, 2018) – including in qualitative research (e.g., Deakin & Wakefield, 2014; Irani, 2019) – the approach

has been evaluated in a number of studies since then (e.g., Conrad et al., 2023; Endres et al., 2023; Phillips et al., 2023). During the pandemic, many traditionally in-person surveys explored VI. Post-pandemic, while some surveys reverted to in-person methods, others continued to offer VI as an option. A key attraction of VI is that VI shares many properties with in-person interviewing (Conrad et al., 2023; Schober et al., 2023), implying measurement differences between the two modes should be minimal (Endres et al., 2023). This mode presents a cost-effective alternative to in-person interviewing with several advantages, potentially increasing overall response rates and representation, which will be explored further in this paper.

Review of Existing Evidence

Primary concerns when comparing VI to other modes include survey completion, recruitment outcomes and data quality (Anderson, 2008). In the following, we review the existing literature, elaborating on the factors associated with (a) (unit) nonresponse rate (uptake of VI), (b) representation, and (c) the collection of relatively “complex” survey tasks, relating to RQ1-3 respectively.

Response Rate and Uptake of VI (RQ1)

Response rates to VI could differ from other modes, such as in-person interviewing for various reasons, including scheduling difficulties (Hupp et al., 2026), technical issues like internet connectivity and usability of the video platform, managing distractions remotely, and privacy concerns (Kunz et al., 2024; Schober et al., 2020; Van Zeeland et al., 2021). Despite these challenges, rapport can be established as effectively in VI as in in-person surveys (Sun et al., 2021), and whilst evidence suggests that respondents still tend to prefer in-person interviews over VI (Selvam et al., 2020), certain subgroups such as those requiring sensory assistance (Schober et al., 2020) may prefer VI. Offering VI alongside other modes can, therefore, potentially increase overall response rates (Jeannis et al., 2013). However, the existing evidence suggests that in cross-sectional surveys the challenges around implementation of VI are more likely to negatively impact unit response rates. Guggenheim and Howell (2021) report that VI, as the first mode in a mixed-mode design, yielded lower responses than web-only or a mixed mode approach involving web and phone. Similarly, Conrad et al. (2023) report substantially lower VI response rates than those achieved in a conventional web survey and “pre-recorded video interviews”, in which video recordings of interviewers asking survey questions are embedded in a web survey, in two nonprobability online panel samples. Additionally, Phillips et al. (2023) reported lower VI response rates compared to five other survey modes. These

low VI response rates are likely explained by lack of familiarity with the mode, but as video calls become ever more commonplace in work and day-to-day lives, then willingness to take part via VI could increase. In the UK context, evidence on participation in surveys using VI, for both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies, has been very scarce so far. With respect to RQ1, given that the seven surveys examined in our study were all conducted during a time when VI was emerging as a new mode in the UK we anticipate that VI response rates will be lower than in-person response rates.

Sample Composition and Representation with VI (RQ2)

The discussed variation in VI uptake may result in differing sample compositions between respondents who are able and open to participation via VI and those who are not. VI requires both access to the necessary technology, e.g. internet connection and hardware, and the willingness to participate via that mode (i.e., nonresponse-related issues). Importantly, not everyone has access to video communication technology even if they have access to the internet (Schober et al., 2020), with internet access now being very high (Cabrera-Álvarez et al., 2025). Additionally, internet access and use vary by individual or household characteristics and between geographical regions, at least in a country like the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2021). This implies that individuals from certain socio-demographic groups may face “technological” barriers to participating via VI, despite being willing to do so. To mitigate such representation issues from under-coverage of people without access to the internet or the necessary hardware to communicate via video, providing resources to those without these could be considered. However, this could make data collection more expensive and could risk participants feeling pressured or coerced into taking part in a way they do not prefer which could be an ethical concern (Schober et al., 2020). More specifically, respondents might not be comfortable participating in VI for other reasons including perceived difficulty of use, lack of value or enjoyment, and discomfort disclosing sensitive information via VI (Schober et al., 2023).

On the other hand, some respondents who might be reluctant to let an interviewer into their home (e.g., due to health concerns or safety concerns) might be willing to participate in VI. VI may also offer more flexibility in terms of making appointments (e.g., timing and location); for example, VI interviews could more easily be conducted at a workplace. Certain demographic groups, including those with more technological experience (e.g., younger sample members), could potentially be more attracted to VI (Anderson, 2008), so the mode could potentially be advantageous for drawing in groups otherwise less likely to take part.

Recent evidence on sample composition differences between VI and other survey modes is mixed, which might be associated with the types of surveys that

explored the differences, as well as differences between countries. In the U.S., samples often skewed towards more educated individuals (Conrad et al., 2023, p. 145; Dulaney et al., 2023; Guggenheim & Howell, 2021; Martin & Fradier, 2023; Phillips et al., 2023), and younger participants (Dulaney et al., 2023; Martin & Fradier, 2023; Phillips et al., 2023; Thorolfsson et al., 2023). In contrast, Schober et al. (2023) found no socio-demographic predictors for hypothetical VI participation. Evidence on gender representation is mixed. Guggenheim and Howell (2021) reported consistent overrepresentation of women, with this finding also applying across other modes, including in-person, and web. On the other hand, Martin and Fradier (2023, France) and Phillips et al. (2023, Australia) report an overrepresentation of men in their VI samples.

In summary, with respect to RQ2, while it might be challenging to predict any differences by sex, we expect that younger respondents and those holding a university degree will be more likely to participate via VI than older or less educated respondents.

Complex Survey Tasks with VI (RQ3)

In addition, it is important to understand how VI performs in the collection of particular survey questions and tasks, such as requesting consent for administrative data linkage and administering cognitive assessments. VI may offer advantages over other remote methods, such as web, since in VI interviewers are able to explain these complex tasks, tailoring what they say to particular respondent concerns and confusions, which is not feasible in web surveys. There may also be challenges, such as the difficulty of obtaining consent without the interviewer's physical presence.

Obtaining consent in social surveys, such as for linking administrative data, has been extensively studied in both cross-sectional and longitudinal surveys. However, to the best of our knowledge, there is no evidence on consent rates collected via VI. Nevertheless, the existing literature on requesting consent via different modes consistently shows that consent rates tend to be higher in interviewer-administered modes than in self-administered modes, such as mail or online modes (Al Baghal et al., 2020; Jäckle et al., 2021; Jäckle et al., 2022; Jäckle et al., 2023; Sakshaug et al., 2017; Thornby et al., 2018). Evidence on differences in consent rates between interviewer-administered modes is more mixed with some studies reporting higher consent rates in in-person interviews than telephone surveys (Al Baghal et al., 2020; Sakshaug et al., 2012) and others finding no difference (Thornby et al., 2018). Based on this evidence, we could expect that data linkage consent rates will be lower for VI than for in-person respondents, but higher than via web.

The use of VI for collecting survey data that are more complex, such as cognitive tests, open occupation and industry descriptions, and event histories, has

not yet been sufficiently explored (although some literature starts to exist, e.g., Fomby et al., 2026, discussing achievement assessment of school children via VI). VI has the potential to offer certain benefits, as existing literature suggests that interviewer-administration is generally more suitable for administering such measures than self-administration (e.g., Emery et al., 2023; Ofstedal et al., 2021; Peycheva et al., 2021). Previous research comparing in-person and web modes has shown measurement mode effects when assessing cognitive ability (Al Baghal, 2019; Gooch, 2015; Ofstedal et al., 2021), psychological functioning (Zager Kocjan et al., 2023), and quality of life (Tsakos et al., 2008). VI may help mitigate some of these issues by retaining the advantages of interviewer administration while allowing data to be collected remotely, although in one test of a complex data collection conducted via VI, Silber et al. (2024) report relatively low response rates and differential nonresponse when collecting complex egocentric network data. Therefore, with respect to RQ3, we expect to find in our study similar evidence of lower completion rates for specific or more complex survey tasks. This expectation particularly applies to tasks that require additional effort from VI respondents to complete, compared to in-person participants (such as a requirement to post a letter cancellation task).

Data

The seven studies used in this study are: the National Child Development Study (NCDS), the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70), Next Steps, Children of the 2020s (Cot20s), the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA), the UK European Social Survey (ESS) and the Health Survey for England (HSE). Table 1 provides a detailed overview of these seven surveys, their different design features and the different implementations of VI. Implementation of VI across the surveys investigated varied. NCDS, BCS70 and ELSA all used VI as the sole (or primary) mode of data collection for a period of time, whilst the others offered VI as an additional mode to maximise response. In Next Steps, VI was only offered to those who had not responded via web. In some studies, VI was offered to participants living in particular geographical areas where in-person interviewing was not possible (as no in-person interviewers were available) or not permitted due to national restrictions (e.g., Northern Ireland in ESS).

As a result, the number of VI interviews and the share of the total interviews achieved via VI differed across the studies. For instance, in the BCS70 Age 51 Survey, 3,467 interviews were conducted using VI (48% of all interviews). However, in Cot20s, only 99 (about 1%) of all interviews were conducted using VI, and in ESS Round 10, only 55 VI interviews were carried out (about 5% of all UK interviews). It is worth noting that the ESS is a cross-national comparative study, and in some other countries, the share of VI interviews was notably higher, with

six countries conducting at least 15% of all interviews via VI, and Iceland having the highest share at 37% (European Social Survey European Research Infrastructure, 2023; Hanson et al., 2026). For more information about study designs, please refer to the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (no date, references, a-d), English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (no date.), National Health Service (no date), and European Social Survey (no date).

Analytical Methods

To examine the feasibility of VI, we explore three key data quality aspects: unit response rate, representation, and completion of specific or complex survey tasks (data linkage consent, cognitive assessments), comparing VI to the other survey modes (mostly in-person). Importantly, the analytical possibilities and relevance were shaped by the characteristics of the available data across the seven studies and the sample sizes of VI respondents. Specifically, the unit response rate analysis (RQ1) can be conducted for all seven studies. However, to address RQ2 and RQ3, composition of sample (representation) and response to particular complex survey tasks can only be explored in the three studies with a sufficient VI sample size (i.e., NCDS, BCS70, and ELSA).

Analysis of Response Rates (Uptake of VI) (RQ1)

To explore RQ1 we investigate the impact of VI on participation rates. NCDS, BCS70 and ELSA all had periods where VI was offered as the sole mode with non-respondents later being invited to take part in person. Once in-person interviewing was re-launched, it became the primary mode again, with VI offered as an alternative mode. We compare response rates (RR) for those initially invited to take part during the VI-only phase with those invited to take part in person (with VI available as alternative mode if requested). For Next Steps, Cot20s, HSE, and ESS, where VI was implemented as a supplementary survey mode with the primary aim to increase overall unit response, we show VI respondents as a proportion of the total interviews achieved (see Figure 1), also in comparison to the other modes offered.

Analysis of Sample Composition and Representation (RQ2)

To address RQ2 we compare the demographic composition of NCDS, BCS70 and ELSA respondents who participated via VI with those who participated via in-person interviewing, even if initially invited to take part in the other mode. Fieldwork for NCDS was initially launched in January 2020 and conducted entirely face-to-face. Data collection was suspended in March 2020 before being

Table 1 Overview and characteristics of the seven UK surveys investigated in this study, employing VI between 2020 and 2023.

Study	Wave/ Round	Sample or cohort information	Study manage- ment	Fieldwork agency	Data collection period (VI)	VI designs/conditions	Sample sizes
National Child De- velopment Study (NCDS)	Age 62 (Longi- tudinal)	The birth cohort in Great Britain was drawn from a singular week of births that occurred in 1958. This cohort represents the general population and was not clustered.	Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Uni- versity Col- lege London	NatCen and Verian (formerly Kantar Public)	January 2020 – November 2023	Survey initially launched in-person interviewing in January 2020 but paused in March due to restrictions. Re-launched with VI-only approach between Autumn 2021 and Spring 2022. VI then offered as alternative to in-person interviewing between Spring 2022 and November 2023.	VI: 2,283 In-person: 5,238
British Cohort Study (BCS70)	Age 51 (Longi- tudinal)	The birth cohort in Great Britain was drawn from a sin	Centre for Longitudinal Studies, Uni- versity Col- lege London	NatCen and Verian (formerly Kantar Public)	Autumn 2021 – November 2023	Survey launched with VI only approach, Autumn 2021 to Spring 2022. VI then offered as alternative to in-person interviewing between Spring 2022 and November 2023.	VI: 3,467 In-person: 3,721
Next Steps (NS) (previously Longi- tudinal) known as Longitudi- nal Study of Young People in England, LSYPE)	Age 32 Survey (Longi- tudinal)	Probability sample with boost of minority ethnic groups. At the start of the survey in 2004, sampled children were 13/14 years of age, and in Wave 9, they were 32 years of age.	Centre for Longitudinal Studies, University College London	Ipsos UK	April 2022 – August 2023	Participants first invited to take part online. VI was one of the modes that was offered to those who did not respond online within 3 weeks.	VI: 8 Other modes (online, in-person, second- ary device (tablet), phone): 6,972

re-launched in November 2021, initially using a video-only approach before in-person interviewing re-commenced in April 2022. The sample for the NCDS analysis comprises those who were invited to take part after the study was re-launched ($N = 7,649$). The sample for the BCS70 includes all those who were invited to take part during the main stage of fieldwork ($N = 10,824$), and the sample for ELSA consists of all in-person and VI participants, excluding a small subsample of CATI respondents. The selected demographic variables, namely sex, highest qualification/education, and economic activity, were included due to their availability and comparability across the three studies. The age variable, which was provided by the fieldwork agency in a categorical format, is only relevant for ELSA, since BCS70 and NCDS are birth cohort studies where all participants were born in the same week. To test differences in sample composition, Chi-Square testing was conducted, and Phi is reported as the effect size measure.

Analysis of Response to Consent Requests and Cognitive Assessments (RQ3)

To investigate RQ3 we explore the performance of VI in conducting specific (or complex) survey tasks. NCDS, BCS70 and ELSA participants who had not consented in previous waves of the study were asked to consent to link their survey data with (a) health records held by the UK National Health Service (NHS)³ and economic records held by (b) the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and (c) Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs data. We use chi-square testing to confirm statistically significant differences in consent rates between modes. NCDS, BCS70 and ELSA also included a series of cognitive assessments: (a) immediate word list recall test, (b) delayed word list recall test, (c) animal naming and (d) letter cancellation⁴. The first three tasks were scored by the interviewer during the interview. The letter cancellation task, on the other hand, was self-completed on a paper sheet during the interview and scored after being returned to the study team. In VI interviews this sheet was posted to respondents in advance and participants were then required to return this by post after the interview. During in-person interviews the sheet was provided and collected by the interviewer who was responsible for posting this to the study team for scoring. Again, Chi-Square testing was conducted to confirm statistically significant differences in completion rates between modes.

³ In ELSA, respondents were asked for consent to link their survey data to the following NHS data sources: Mortality, Hospital Episode Statistics and Primary Care data. They were also asked to agree to wear an activity monitor.

⁴ In the letter cancellation task, participants are presented with a grid or sheet of letters arranged in random order. They are instructed to scan the grid and mark/cancel out a specific target letter. Performance on the letter cancellation task is typically measured in terms of accuracy and speed.

Results

In this section, we begin by examining VI uptake and associated response rates for all seven UK surveys. We then explore the socio-demographic composition of both VI and non-VI samples to assess their comparability. We conclude this analysis section by discussing how VI performs in collecting survey data that are traditionally more challenging to obtain in survey modes that are not in-person, specifically securing participant consent and conducting complex cognitive assessments.

Analysis of Response Rates and Uptake of VI (RQ1)

We first present the results of the response rate analysis for the studies where VI was used as the primary mode of data collection and resulted in large samples of respondents participating via VI (NCDS, BCS70, ELSA), and then separately discuss the other studies where VI was included as an additional or supplementary mode, leading to smaller samples of VI participants (Next Steps, Cot20s, HSE and ESS).

VI as a Primary Mode

NCDS. Fieldwork for NCDS Age 62 Survey was conducted in batches, and VI was employed in two different ways. Participants allocated to earlier batches of fieldwork were initially only invited to take part via VI, with non-respondents being invited to take part in person. Later in fieldwork, when in-person interviewing could resume due to the lifting of COVID restrictions, in-person interviewing became the primary mode. Participants allocated to these later batches of fieldwork were invited to take part in person with VI offered as an additional option. First, we present uptake by the mode to which participants were allocated, followed by the overall response rate by allocation mode.

Of the 3,001 eligible participants who were allocated to and invited to take part via VI, just under half (1,432 or 48%) participated through that mode (see Figure 1). In contrast, of the 4,394 eligible participants who were allocated to and invited to take part in person, 3,126 (or 71%) took part via that mode. The response rate for the mode to which cohort members were initially assigned was notably lower for the VI batches (VI: 48%, in-person: 71%, $\phi = .237$, $p < .001$).

Additionally, of the 3,001 eligible participants allocated to earlier batches of fieldwork who were invited to take part via VI, 415 (or 14%) participated in person, giving an overall response rate of 62% (i.e. 48% VI + 14% in-person, see Figure 1). In contrast, of the 4,394 eligible participants allocated to later batches (in-person-first), 29 (or 1%) opted to take part via VI, giving an overall response rate of 72% (i.e., 71% in-person + 1% VI). The overall response rate for those first invited to take part via VI (62%) is significantly lower than the comparable over-

all response rate amongst those first invited to take part in person (72%, $\phi = .108$, $p < .001$). For more information on implementation of VI in NCDS see Table A1 in Appendix A.

BCS70. The Age 51 Survey implemented VI in the same way as NCDS. Initial batches of fieldwork used a video-first approach, and later batches used an in-person-first approach with VI as an alternative option. Of the 6,114 eligible participants who were invited to the VI-first batches, 2,842 (or 46%) participated via VI. In contrast, of the 4,619 eligible participants who were invited to take part in subsequent in-person-first batches of fieldwork, 2,732 (or 59%) participated in person. The response rate for the mode to which cohort members were initially assigned was notably lower for the VI batches (VI: 46%, in-person: 59%, $\phi = .125$, $p < .001$), which is consistent with our findings from NCDS.

Additionally, of the 6,114 eligible participants who were allocated to VI, a further 830 (or 14%) took part in person, giving an overall response rate of 60% (i.e., 46% VI + 14% in-person). In contrast, of the 4,619 eligible participants who were allocated to in-person interviewing, a further 62 (1%) took part via VI. The overall response rate in the in-person-first group was ultimately the same as that of the VI-first group, at 60% (i.e., 59% in-person + 1% VI, see also Appendix A).

ELSA. The Wave 10 Survey took a similar approach to NCDS and BCS70. Initial batches of fieldwork used a VI-first approach, and later batches used an in-person-first approach with VI available as an alternative mode. Unlike NCDS and BCS70, towards the end of fieldwork, non-respondents (from both VI-first and in-person-first groups) were given an opportunity to participate via telephone; for more information see Table A1 in Appendix A.

The results presented in Figure 1 show that in the VI-first group, only 25% (or 1,041 participants) responded via VI. In contrast, amongst those invited to take part in person first, 66% (or 2,177 participants) were interviewed in person. The response rate for the mode to which cohort members were initially assigned was notably lower for the VI-first group, which is consistent with our findings from NCDS and BCS70.

Additionally, amongst those invited to take part via VI, a further 1,432 were interviewed in person (35%) and 81 via telephone (2%), giving an overall response rate of 68% (i.e., 25% VI + 35% in-person, 2% telephone). Amongst those invited to take part in person first, relatively small proportions were interviewed via telephone (33 or 1%) and via VI (14 or 0.4%). The overall response rate was higher for the in-person-first group (68%) than for the VI-first group (62%) ($\phi = .062$, $p < .001$).

This evidence overall shows that response rates are lower for VI compared to in-person interviewing. In the case of NCDS and ELSA, the overall response rates were higher for respondents invited to take part during the in-person-first batches than for those who were invited to take part in the VI-first batches, although this was not the case for BCS70. However, the proportions of those

who were assigned to in-person interviewing and participated via that mode were substantially larger in all three studies, including BCS70, than the proportions of those who were assigned to VI and participated via that mode. In other words, we observe both the negative effect on the propensity to respond via VI compared to in-person interviewing, as well as an increase in the likelihood of responding via the alternative mode if assigned to VI. These findings are further supported by the results presented in the next section.

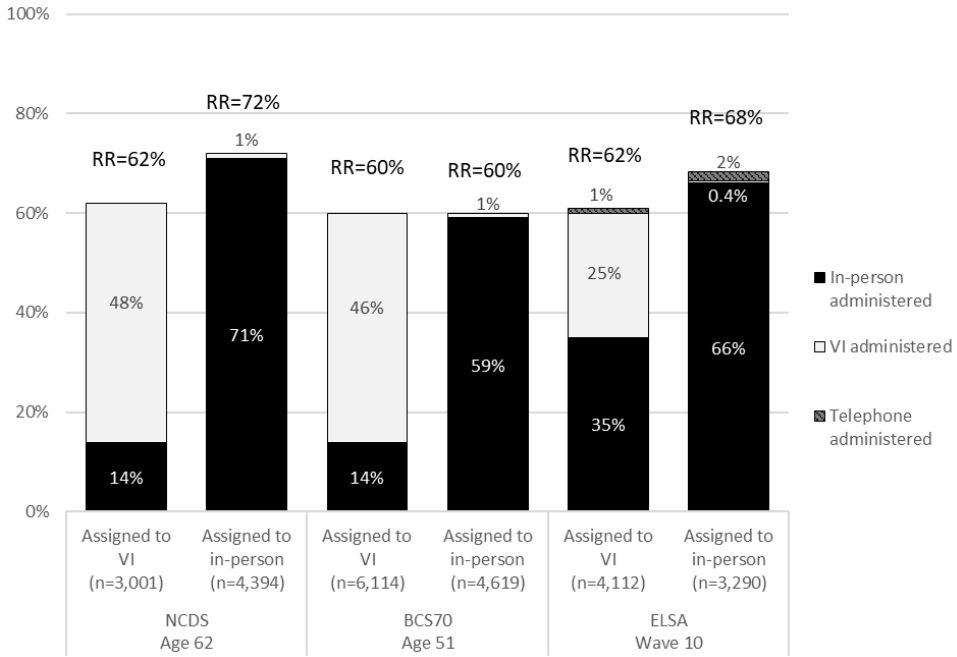


Figure 1 Response rate (RR) in the studies where VI was primary mode – NCDS, BCS70 and ELSA (for during and post-COVID times combined, 2021-2023).

VI as a Supplementary Survey Mode

VI was used as a supplementary mode in Next Steps, Cot20s, ESS and HSE in slightly different ways: Next Steps employed a sequential mixed mode design in which participants were first invited to participate via web. Web non-respondents were then followed up by in-person interviewers who were able to offer VI as an option for completing alongside a standard in-person interview, completion of the web interview via a tablet provided by the survey agency or a telephone interview. In the end, VI contributed only 8 interviews (or 0.1%, see Fig-

ure 2), in addition to 6,096 (or 87%) via web (including 159 or 2% on a tablet⁵ by completing an online questionnaire), 737 (or 11%) in-person, and 139 (or 2%) via telephone. VI interviews represented a very small proportion of all interviews that were not conducted via the primary survey mode (web).

In Cot20s a concurrent mixed-mode design was used. Interviewers were instructed to prioritise the modes via negotiation with respondents as follows: in-person (top priority), VI (next priority), and telephone (lowest priority). In the end, VI contributed 99 interviews (or 1%), in addition to 7,273 interviews (or 84%) completed via in-person interviewing and 1,256 (or 15%) by telephone. Similar to Next Steps, VI interviews accounted for a small proportion of all achieved interviews.

In the ESS (UK), VI was the only approach offered in Northern Ireland as in-person interviews were not permitted but, in the rest of the UK, an advance letter was followed by an in-person visit, and VI was offered as an alternative mode to in-person interviewing. 55 (5%) participants took part via VI, with the remainder taking part in person.

In the HSE pilot, the fieldwork agency responded to the pandemic-related pause to in-person interviewing by providing two remote options (VI and telephone). For this pilot in early-2021 (January-March)⁶, an opt-in approach was adopted for the survey, with sample members invited by postal mail to provide contact information via a portal. In total, 51 individuals participated via VI out of 798 (6%). (For more information see Table A1 in Appendix A.)

The results presented in Figure 2 show that in all of these studies, where VI was offered alongside other modes, the uptake of VI was very low, compared to the other alternative modes (in-person and telephone in NS, telephone in Cot20s). The lowest proportion of respondents participating via VI was in Next Steps (0.1%) and the largest proportion of respondents participating via VI was in the HSE 2021 pilot (6%).

⁵ While the mode of data collection is the same for the standard completion of an online questionnaire and completion on a tablet, there is a notable methodological difference. In Next Steps, tablets were provided and picked up after completion by interviewers, whereas interviewers were not involved in web completion.

⁶ Following the successful implementation of VI in a pilot for BCS70, an approach was piloted that gave sample members the choice of conducting an interview remotely by telephone or VI. Nevertheless, due to a relatively low take-up and the availability of other remote approaches in HSE, VI was not subsequently used on the main stage of the survey in 2021.

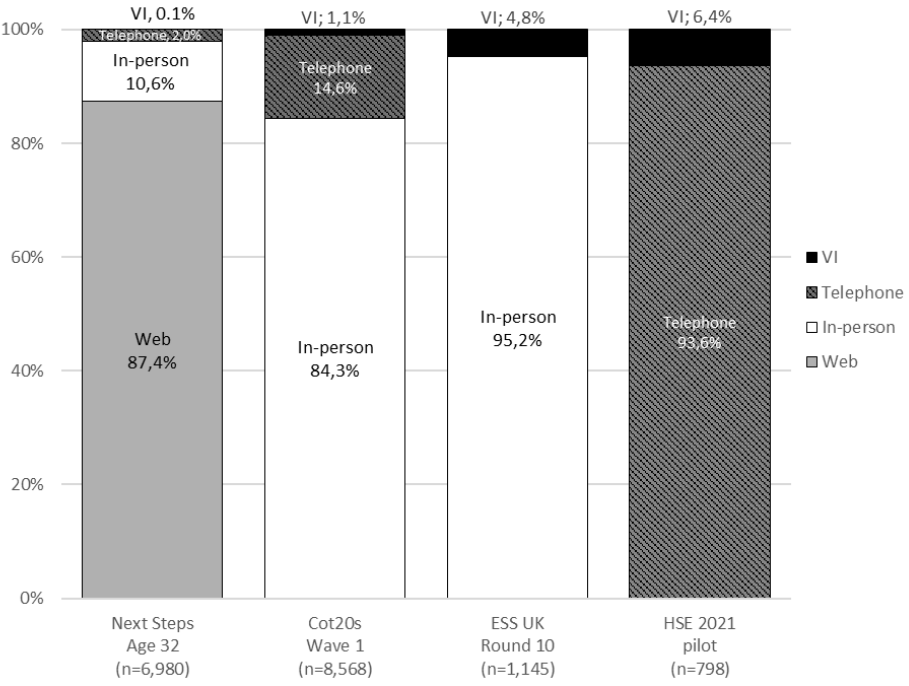


Figure 2 Survey mode in the studies with VI as a supplementary survey mode: uptake (RR) of VI interviews and of other modes (telephone, in-person, web).

Analysis of Composition of VI Samples and Representation (RQ2)

To compare the characteristics of VI and in-person respondents (RQ2), we focus on the studies for which VI was the primary mode for a period of time – NCDS, BCS70, and ELSA (for sample size reasons and variables available). We identified three variables common to the three studies: sex, highest qualification/education, economic activity (for definition and categorisation of the latter see Table B2). We compare the share of in-person and video interviews achieved with females, the employed and those with a degree-level education in Figure 3.

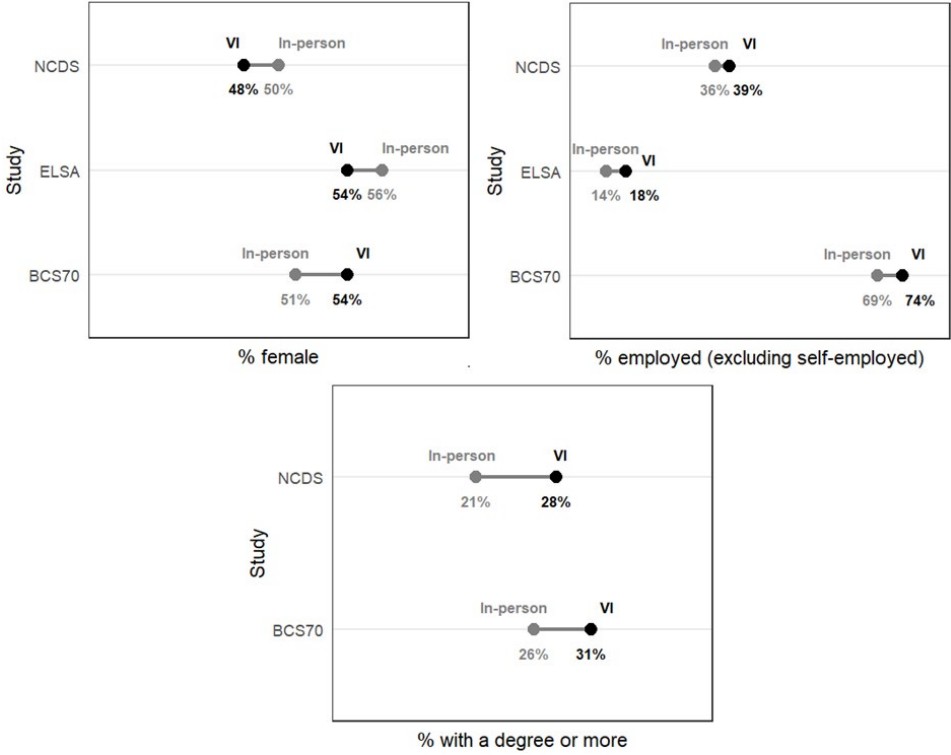


Figure 3 Socio-demographic differences between respondents who were interviewed in person and via VI in three studies – NCDS, ELSA, BCS70 (based on: sex, economic activity (employed), highest qualification/education).

Sex. The analysis revealed minor, statistically insignificant differences in the proportion of women and men who participated via VI and in person in the NCDS and in ELSA. However, women accounted for 54% of VI participants and 51% of in-person respondents in the BCS70, a difference which is statistically significant ($\phi = .026, p = .040$).

Economic activity. In BCS70 and ELSA, VI respondents were more likely to be employed (excluding self-employed) than in-person respondents. In BCS70, 74% of VI respondents were employed compared to 69% of in-person respondents ($\phi = .055, p < .001$). In ELSA, 18% of VI respondents were employed versus 14% in-person ($\phi = .043, p = .004$). The mode difference in employment was not significant for NCDS. In ELSA, retirees were less likely to participate via VI than in person (VI: 70%, in-person: 75%, $\phi = .047, p = .001$), consistent with the effect of age below. The same effects were found in NCDS and BCS70 but the difference was small and not significant. Results for economic activity are provided in Table B2 in Appendix B.

Highest qualification. In both NCDS and BCS70⁷, VI participants were more likely to have a degree than in-person participants, with the gap being between 5% (BCS70, $\phi = .064$, $p < .001$) and 7% (NCDS, $\phi = .082$, $p < .001$).

Age. The distribution by age is relevant for ELSA only, since the other studies are birth cohort studies in which all participants are the same age. ELSA participants are aged between 50 and 100. When grouped into 5-year age bands, all bands up to age 74 were over-represented amongst VI respondents (compared to in-person respondents) and the reverse was true amongst all bands over 75. Overall, significantly more respondents aged 50-74 participated via VI than in-person (VI: 72%, in-person: 58%, $\phi = .118$, $p < .001$). (For more information, see Table B1 in Appendix B.)

Based on these findings, we conclude that respondents holding a university degree and younger participants are more likely to opt for video interviews instead of in-person interviews when VI is the primary mode. Comparing the Phi values, as measures of the magnitude of associations, we can conclude that the most notable differences between VI and in-person modes were observed in age profile (ELSA), followed by highest qualification. Differences by economic activity groups, and especially differences by sex, were less pronounced.

Analysis of Response to Consent and Cognitive Assessments Via VI (RQ3)

Consent rates. In the analysed surveys, respondents were asked for consent to link their survey data with (a) health records held by the UK⁸ (NHS) and economic records held by (b) the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and (c) Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs data. Our third research question asks whether this kind of task could be conducted in VI as well as in person.

In Figure 4, we show the effect of mode on data linkage consent rates in the three surveys for which VI was the primary mode for a period, with average rates presented. The consent rates differ substantially between the studies but no differences in consent rates are identified between VI and in-person interviewing in NCDS ($\phi = .019$, $p = .554$), BCS70 ($\phi = .039$, $p = .105$) or ELSA ($\phi = .001$, $p = .920$).

⁷ We did not receive data for ELSA on highest qualification.

⁸ In ELSA, respondents were asked for consent to link their survey data to the following NHS data sources: Mortality, Hospital Episode Statistics and Primary Care data. They were also asked to agree to wear an activity monitor.

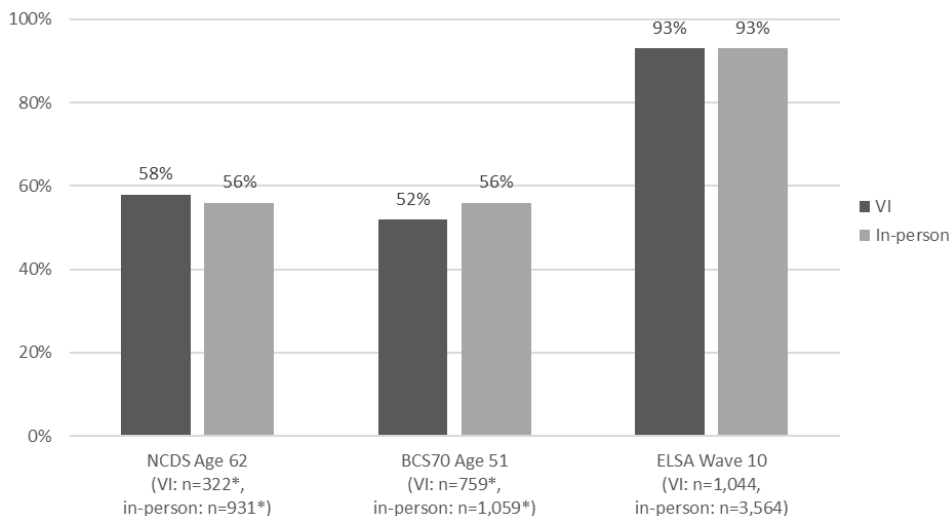


Figure 4 Average data linkage consent rates in NCDS, BCS70 and ELSA by survey mode

Notes: * In NCDS Age 62 and BCS70 Age 51 Surveys, only respondents who did not give consent in a previous wave were asked for consent to data linkage. The numbers of participants asked to give consent differed slightly between different data sources for linkage.

Cognitive assessments. RQ3 also asked about how well cognitive tests can be administered in VI. To address this, we examine completion rates for a series of cognitive tests in the three surveys. The following tests were included in all studies: (a) immediate word list recall test, (b) delayed word list recall test, (c) animal naming and (d) letter cancellation. The first three tasks were scored by the interviewer during the interview, so we combine their completion rate into a single measure – completion of “cognitive tasks”. The letter cancellation task, on the other hand, was self-completed on a paper sheet during the interview and had to be returned to the study team for scoring. In VI interviews, respondents were required to return this by post, whereas in in-person interviews, the sheet was collected by the interviewer who was responsible for posting the sheet back to the study team for scoring.

The results, presented in Figure 5, compare completion and return rates for the cognitive tests between VI and in-person participants in NCDS, BCS70 and ELSA⁹. For the “cognitive tasks” scored by the interviewer during the interview, the completion rates were very high in all three surveys and with no significant differences between modes (with all $p > .05$). However, the return rates for the letter cancellation task, which required VI participants to post the paper sheet, were significantly lower in VI than in-person, in both NCDS (VI: 79%, in-person:

⁹ No letter cancellation test was included in ELSA.

88%, $\phi = .116$, $p < .001$) and BCS70 (VI: 77%, in-person: 88%, $\phi = .146$, $p < .001$). This no doubt reflects the additional burden associated with this extra task.

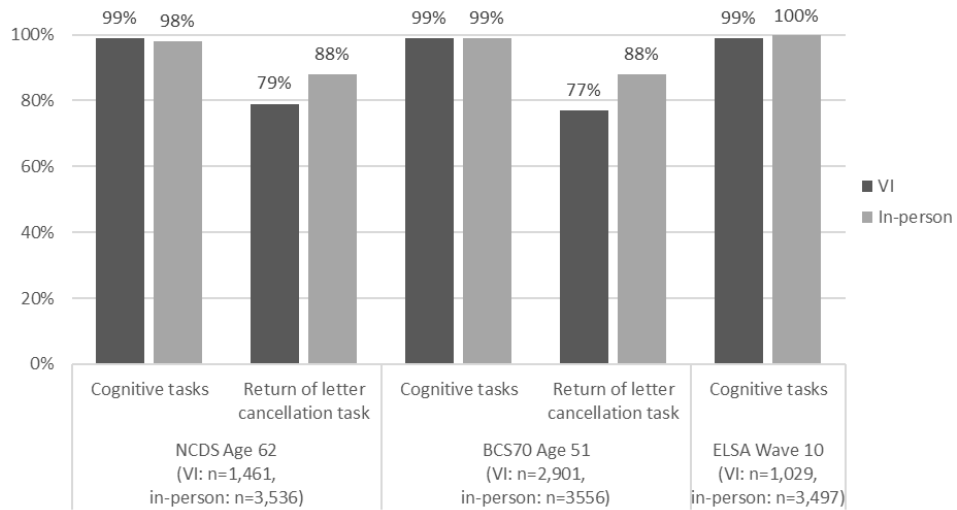


Figure 5 Return rates of cognitive test documents by mode.

Based on these findings, we conclude that respondents participating via VI are no less likely to complete questionnaire sections that are more complex, such as cognitive assessments than those participating in person (unless a paper document must be returned).

Discussion and Conclusions

This article reports evidence on conducting interviews via live, two-way video from the major UK social surveys that have implemented VI and presents key findings on response rates, sample composition, rates of consent to link administrative data and completion of cognitive assessments. We explore VI, either as a primary survey mode or as a supplement to traditional survey modes, such as in-person interviewing, telephone, and web. The main findings and conclusions are:

- VI designs:** The UK studies reviewed used VI in different ways and with different objectives. But they all used VI in a mixed mode design; in no case was VI used as the sole mode of data collection for the full duration of fieldwork. Some studies (i.e., NCDS, BCS70 and ELSA) used VI as the only (or first/primary) survey mode for a period when in-person data collection was not pos-

sible, i.e., in the initial stages of the pandemic. In those circumstances, VI acted as a substitute for in-person interviewing and allowed these studies to proceed with data collection and, based on the literature (Endres et al., 2023), it seems likely that this substitution did not affect measurement equivalence. However, these studies all reverted to in-person interviewing when pandemic restrictions were lifted, with VI continuing to be offered as an alternative mode. Some studies used VI to reach participants in areas where no in-person interviewers were available (e.g., Northern Ireland in ESS) and thus to increase geographical coverage. Some studies used VI as a response maximisation approach in mixed-mode designs; it was either given as an option to attract those who were reluctant to be interviewed in person (e.g., in ELSA) or not suggested until respondents refused to participate via the primary mode(s) (e.g., in Next Steps).

2. **VI response rates (uptake) (RQ1):** The first challenge is that response rates in both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies analysed here are generally lower for VI than other modes, consistent with the previous literature (Conrad et al., 2023; Guggenheim & Howell, 2021; Phillips et al., 2023). VI uptake was highest in studies which offered VI as the sole or primary mode (at least for a period of time, e.g., in certain parts of fieldwork). In NCDS and BCS70 VI response rates of 48% and 46% respectively were achieved using a video-only approach although in ELSA the VI response rate was lower at 25%. In all cases, overall response rates were boosted when non-respondents were later invited to take part in person. However, in NCDS, BCS70 and ELSA fieldwork was later conducted in person first (with VI as a back-up mode) and overall response rates were significantly higher in NCDS and ELSA, despite low VI response rates. The uptake of VI appears to decrease with age, as the participants in the ELSA Wave 10 cohort were, on average, almost 20 years older than those in the BCS70 cohort and about 8 years older than those in the NCDS cohort and their VI uptake was substantially lower (25%). This pattern can also be seen within ELSA: 50-74 year-olds were more likely to be interviewed by VI than in person but this reversed above age 74. The three studies, which had periods of fieldwork where VI was the sole or primary mode of data collection, were all long-established cohort studies. The lower response rates during VI-only part of fieldwork may in part be attributed to the fact that panel members were very familiar with in-person interviewing through repeated participation across multiple waves and so were reluctant to participate via VI, a phenomenon previously discussed for studies conducted in online panels (Conrad et al., 2023; Phillips et al., 2023). Another factor is that for some of the cohort studies here, participants were substantially older than the general population, and so may have been especially unfamiliar with and averse to using new technology.

VI uptake in the studies where VI was offered as one of a range of possible modes was generally low (ESS UK, Next Steps, Cots2020, HSE). From this evidence, it may be concluded that in mixed-mode studies, respondents may be more likely to choose an alternative mode to which they are more accustomed over VI. Uptake will also relate to what is most convenient in the moment, and if an interviewer is present at the doorstep, respondents may well take up that opportunity.

3. **Composition of VI samples (representation) (RQ2):** Another challenge is that the observed lower response rates in VI could lead to an increase in representation bias. Our results suggest that those who are more educated, employed, and to a lesser extent, women may generally be more likely to participate via VI, whereas long-term sick/disabled individuals and older people might be less likely. These findings are based on a comparison of the final composition of the in-person-administered and VI-administered subsamples, while considering that respondents could have been invited to take part in VI-first but responded in person (and vice versa). We conclude that in a longitudinal study context, switching from in-person interviewing to VI for the whole or a larger part of the sample could not only result in an increased loss of sample units but also in differential attrition, meaning that the proportion of already underrepresented and/or smaller subpopulations (e.g., those with chronic conditions) would decrease. This could lead to a limitation in studying certain groups due to an increased loss of statistical power over time associated with the newly introduced survey mode, VI. Another factor to consider is that people with certain characteristics, such as those with technical difficulties and inabilities, do not take part in VI to start with.
4. **Obtaining of consent and cognitive assessments (RQ3):** Promisingly, the analysis of data linkage consent rate and completion rates for cognitive assessments suggested that VI can be used effectively for collecting these kinds of measures. The evidence showed that completion rates/consent rates are generally comparable with those achieved in person. The only notable exception concerns the letter cancellation task which is self-completed on paper during the VI interview and is returned by post after the interview; completion and return rates for this task were about 10%-points higher via in-person interviewing than VI.
5. **Limitations:** While we investigated differences between VI and other modes, with a focus on comparing VI to in-person interviewing, none of the included surveys used experimental designs. Thus, we could not fully disentangle the effects of mode from the effects of the composition of samples that were self-selected or nonrandomly invited to take part via a particular mode. Therefore, most of our findings on the differences between VI and in-person

interviewing warrant further investigation in studies designed to test these differences.

Another important question that should be addressed in a future study is how VI performs if it is the only mode in a survey. Ideally, such a study would be informed by analyses of the cost savings from reduced travel on the one hand and higher levels of differential nonresponse on the other. In addition, the focus of the current article is on errors of representation not errors of measurement including those due to mode effects or interviewer effects, as we did not have access to the necessary data for such analyses. However, there is a small but growing literature on measurement in VI (see Asensio et al., 2025; Conrad et al., 2023; Endres et al., 2023; Kocar et al., 2025) but this is beyond the scope of the current paper. Lastly, VI has the potential to generate substantial cost-savings. In this paper, however, we are not able to address cost-savings because, again, we did not have access to the necessary data.

Overall Feasibility of VI as a Mode for Conducting Large-Scale Social Surveys

Our study has demonstrated that VI has the potential to continue playing a role in large-scale social surveys, including in the UK. Whilst we investigated UK surveys here, we believe that (some of) the findings are generalisable to survey settings in other contexts. Based on the evidence presented in this study, we agree with the authors of similar studies (e.g., Conrad et al., 2023; Endres et al., 2023) that VI has the necessary characteristics to serve as an alternative to the in-person mode, especially with methodological optimisations and further technological developments. Our key generalisable conclusions are:

1. **Longitudinal studies have the potential to deploy VI most effectively.** This is particularly true for those that have typically collected data in person. Such studies have two notable advantages: (a) a previous relationship with participants, which fosters engagement and commitment, making them more likely to trial a new mode, and (b) access to contact details, such as emails and phone numbers, which can be used to make remote contact. In cross-sectional studies that require an in-person visit to arrange a video interview (e.g., ESS UK), VI uptake is expected to be low.
2. **VI appears to be more suitable for mixed-mode surveys.** At present, VI is unlikely to be suitable as a single-mode due to recruitment challenges, non-response, and indicators for potential representation bias identified in our study and others (e.g., Conrad et al., 2023; Guggenheim & Howell, 2021). In mixed-mode surveys, other modes can mitigate certain negative aspects of VI, while VI offers benefits such as response maximization, improved inclu-

sivity and facilitation of participation of certain sub-groups, and recruitment in areas where in-person interviewers are unavailable.

3. **VI can be cost- and time-efficient.** We agree with previous studies (e.g., Conrad et al., 2023) that highlight VI's potential for substantial cost savings compared to in-person interviews due to reduced travel time and expenses. Reduced travel also makes fieldwork more time-efficient, and so we recommend initially pushing sample members to VI before offering other modes in mixed-mode surveys for greater overall efficiency. However, an initial investment in VI technology and training is required, and cost savings can only be fully realised, if contact can be made remotely rather than through in-person visits.
4. **VI can be better suited for specific purposes than many other modes.** Besides cost- and time-efficiency compared to in-person interviewing, VI offers the most measurement equivalence with in-person interviewing compared to modes such as telephone and web (see Endres et al., 2023). It also appears to be suitable for including specific survey tasks or questions (e.g., cognitive assessments, consent), potentially more so than web-surveys into which it can be challenging to integrate complex tasks (Al Baghal, 2019; Emery et al., 2023; Ofstedal et al., 2021).
5. **Interviewer training and the resulting effects have notable implications.** In the analysed studies, VI was conducted by interviewers, who were previously used to conducting in-person interviews. We conclude that the challenges and cost implications of VI interviewer training should not be underestimated, consistent with the recommendations by Schober et al. (2020). Interviewer effects have not (yet) been explored for VI in these UK surveys.
6. **The future of VI looks promising.** VI has the potential to serve as a data collection tool for an increasingly broad range of surveys. This will become even more feasible as video-calling becomes more ubiquitous in our work and personal lives, especially for certain demographic profiles, and with future technological innovations. Nevertheless, evidence from this study suggests that VI is already a suitable alternative to more established survey modes in particular contexts.

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Appendix A

Mixed Mode Data Collection

Table A1 Mixed-mode data collection in NCDS Age 62 Survey, BCS70 Age 51 Survey and ELSA Wave 10

Study	Stage ^a	Data collection period	Assigned to VI	Assigned to in-person
NCDS Age 62 Survey	1. Video-only pilot	Spring 2021	N = 311	N = 0
	2. Video-first main stage waves	October 2021 – summer 2022	N = 1,777 ^b	N = 0
	3. Predominantly in-person-first	Spring 2022 – November 2023	N = 1,002 ^c	N = 4,559
BCS70 Age 51 Survey	1. Video-only pilot	Autumn 2020	N = 60	N = 0
	2. Video-first soft launch	Summer 2021	N = 1,067	N = 0
	3. Video-first main stage waves	October 2021 – early 2022	N = 5,269 ^b	N = 0
	4. Predominantly in-person-first	Spring 2022 – November 2023	N = 894 ^c	N = 4,661
ELSA Wave 10	1. Video-only pilot	May-June 2021	N = 317	N = 0
	2. Video-first main stage waves	October 2021 – early 2022	N = 2,881	N = 1,115
	3. Predominantly in-person-first	February 2022 – March 2023	N = 3,523	N = 426

Notes:

^a the evidence presented in this article is based on all NCDS stages, BCS70 stages 3–4 and ELSA stages 2-3.

^b This excludes cases who were originally assigned to in-person interviewing before COVID and then assigned to VI later. It includes 192 (NCDS) and 419 (BCS70) cases that were deemed ineligible for VI due to the absence of a telephone number or email address and were assigned to an in-person interviewer later.

^c They were due to be assigned to an in-person interviewer first but had to be assigned to VI-first as there was no interviewer available.

Additional Information about the Specifics of VI Fieldwork (VI-First Mode of Invitation)

In addition to the stages described in Table A1, the NCDS fieldwork operation in these periods also included cases that had been assigned to in-person interviewers before the pandemic struck but where an interview had not been achieved by the time fieldwork was paused.

Further, there were cases that were initially earmarked for in-person visits following the restart of this approach, but that were switched to VI due to a lack of available field interviewer resource in specific geographical locations, which was also the case for BCS70 and ELSA. This reflected a cross-sector fieldwork capacity problem at this time following the loss of interviewers from agencies' panels and a challenging labour market for recruitment. A strength of the VI approach is that geographical restrictions do not apply.

The analysis in this study focuses on comparing the VI-first approach with the in-person approach. To maintain comparability and provide a full understanding of non-response to VI, the VI-first groups in NCDS and BCS waves include a group of cases that were part of the sample earmarked for allocation to VI that could not be worked in that mode due to an absence of telephone numbers and email addresses.

Additional Information about the HSE Pilot

The sample frame for the HSE pilot contained no names or other contact information for selected households. In the first stage in January 2021, those who opted in and provided contact information were contacted by interviewers who gave the option of a VI or a telephone interview. Of the initial sample of households ($N = 828$), 24% opted in and interviews were achieved by one or other mode in 76% of these households. Of the individuals interviewed ($N = 237$), 13% were conducted via video with the remainder by telephone. With the February and March samples, those opting in were asked to indicate whether they preferred a telephone or a video interview when opting in via the portal. Of the opt-in sample in these months ($N = 561$) a smaller proportion opted for the video route with this approach (4%, $N = 21$ interviews).

Appendix B

Descriptive Statistics

Table B1 Age distribution of ELSA participants by survey mode.

Age group	VI (N = 1,055)	In-person (N = 3,609)
50–54	3.1%	1.7%
55–59	13.4%	10.8%
60–64	8.5%	7.4%
66–69	22.7%	17.5%
70–74	24.0%	20.6%
75–79	16.2%	19.0%
80–84	8.4%	11.9%
85–89	2.8%	8.4%
90+	0.7%	2.6%
Missing	0.3%	0.1%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Table B2 Economic activity distribution by survey mode in NCDS, BCS and ELSA (Economic activity is a measure of whether or not a person is an active participant in the labour market, with “economic active” being employed or self-employed, and “economic inactive” being unemployed, i.e. currently without employment, permanently sick or disabled, looking after home or family, or retired.).

Economic activity	NCDS		BCS70		ELSA	
	VI (N = 1,453)	In-person (N = 3,487)	VI (N = 2,794)	In-person (N = 2,964)	VI (N = 1,055)	In-person (N = 3,609)
Employed	38.9%	36.4%	73.6%	68.6%	18.1%	14.4%
Self-employed	15.3%	12.3%	16.7%	16.1%	5.7%	4.7%
Unemployed	1.2%	1.8%	0.9%	1.6%	0.7%	0.6%
Permanently sick or disabled	4.5%	8.4%	2.2%	5.4%	1.4%	2.5%
Looking after home or family	7.4%	6.9%	4.4%	4.8%	2.8%	1.8%
Retired	30.5%	31.9%	1.0%	1.1%	69.8%	74.8%
Other	2.1%	2.3%	1.2%	2.5%	1.5%	1.2%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%