



Back in the field after Covid-19

What's changed and how data collection is evolving

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TweetMRS





Today's session

- Current situation
- Where we were pre-Covid-19
- Where we are now
- What this means for the future





Current Situation

The Governments across the four nation have removed domestic restrictions

The UK Health Security Agency is now responsible for the *Guidance for living safely with respiratory infections including coronavirus (COVID-19)*

Focus on vaccines, letting fresh air in (ventilation), the basics of good hygiene, and when to consider wearing a face covering or mask

MRS Covid-19 Guidance still in place

The guidance was last updated in April 2022





Current MRS Guidance

- Removed some of the mandatory requirements and restrictions such as for travel and overnight stays
- Changed the requirement to wear facial coverings - these must be worn where they are mandatory/required
- An option for facial coverings not to be worn when participants express a willingness to take part without face coverings and research practitioners are happy to proceed on this basis
- Changed the participant screener requirements reducing the prescription of what needs to be covered
- Specified social distancing as 1 metre plus





Current MRS Guidance

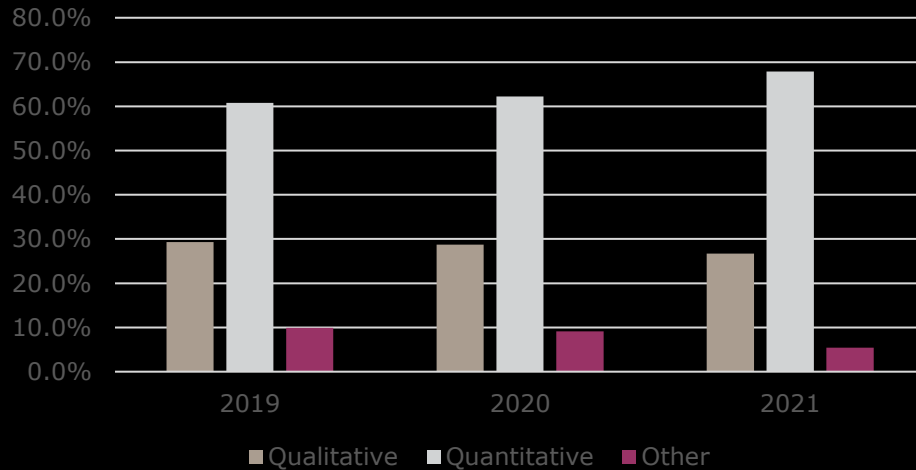
- Reduced the requirements regarding support materials removing the requirement to place stimulus materials on garden walls, etc.
- Reduced to best practice the requirements for incentives and hygiene measures needed before incentives are transferred to participants
- Removed references to specific environmental Government safe working guidance
- MRS monitoring the situation





Some trends since Covid-19

Share of Spend: by Method



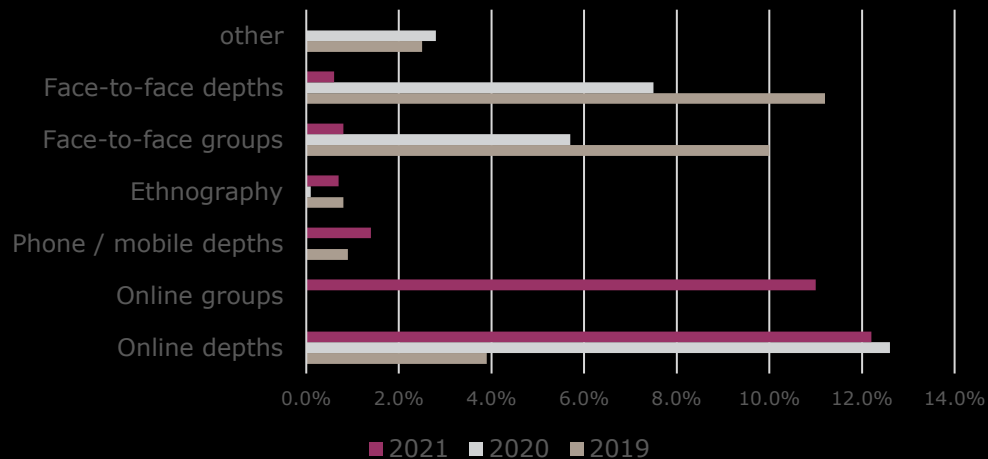
Source: MRS Annual Survey





Some trends since Covid-19

Total Qualitative Spend: By Method

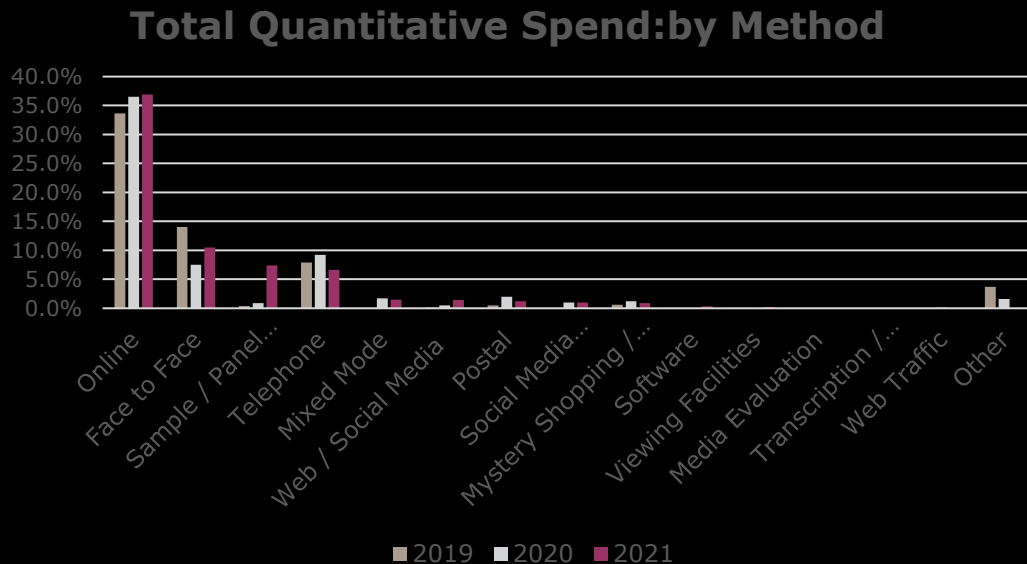


Source: MRS Annual Survey





Some trends since Covid-19



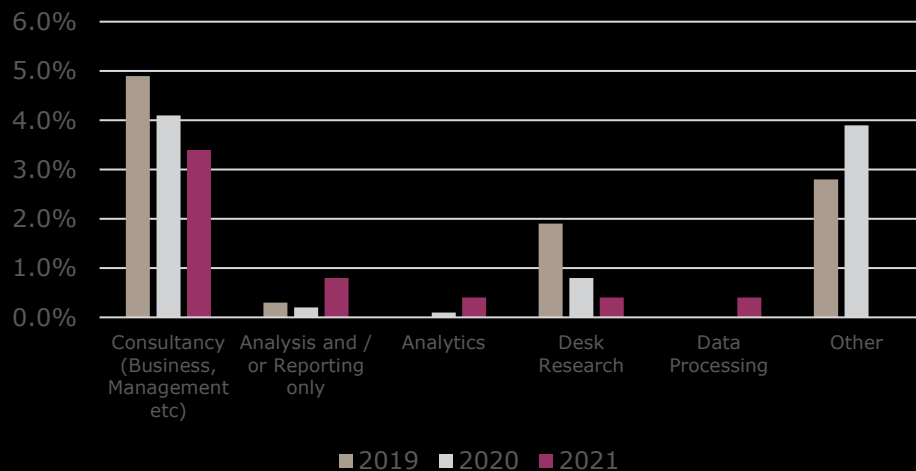
Source: MRS Annual Survey





Some trends since Covid-19

Other Spend: by Method



Source: MRS Annual Survey



Where we are now – projects and protocols



- Face-to-face projects, including in-home data collection, have returned across the country
- Scotland was the last to resume to in-home data collection
- The levels of in-home data collection has not returned to pre-Covid-19 levels
- Some projects have moved permanently to other modes
- Knock to nudge or doorstep/garden interviewing a preference for some participants
- No significant issues with the practice of in-home data collection including the Covid-19 protocols
- The field force adapted well to the Covid-19 protocols including when these have been refined over the last year or so
- There remains some challenges with the interviewer panels



Where we are now – interviewers & recruitment



- Many interviewers were furloughed during lockdown:
 - MRS research found that 1 in 6 research companies furloughed staff during 2020/21
 - For many this was something that affected a high proportion of their people overall, with four in ten furloughing more than half of all staff at some point
- Some interviewers either found other jobs during lockdown, others left the sector (some by retiring)
- Some workers from overseas returned to their home countries during the pandemic
- Some interviewers still yet to return to in-home, particularly in Scotland which was last to return to the field



Where we are now – interviewers & recruitment



Recruitment of new interviewers is very challenging due to:

- Competition from other sectors e.g., care homes, hospitality & retail
- Increasing number of roles with flexible working conditions similar to interviewing
- More attractive payment terms and conditions in other sectors – and with inflation the higher paid roles are more attractive
- Other non-research roles can be less challenging than interviewing
- Concerns about health and safety, particularly face-to-face interviewing
- Concerns about travelling to and from face-to-face appointments
- Lack of status and career progression with interviewing
- BUT – a good 'top up' source of income for a second job



Where we are now – response & strike rates



The knock-on effect of having panels of newer interviewers:

- Response and strike rates are lower
- Higher levels of participant refusals – due to interviewer inexperience rather than other factors such as Covid-19
- Managerial staff spending more time recruiting new interviewers than providing training and support for new interviewers – this has a domino effect on response rates, efficiency levels, etc.
- Interviewers covering larger areas due to interviewer shortages – increasing mileage costs, which are already higher due to petrol costs
- Interviewers become stretched and stressed





Where we are now – participant attitudes

Participants have changed:

- Participants less willing to have interviewers come into their homes
- Changes in lifestyle make in-home data collection less convenient e.g., people working at home
- Higher levels of participant refusals – due to interviewer inexperience rather than other factors such as Covid-19??
- Generally, projects that require less time are performing better in terms of response rates
- Overall data collection takes longer due to Covid-19 protocols
- More broken appointments – double in some instances – leading to more stress on interviewers





What this means for the future...

- Fluid situation
- Pre-Covid-19 conditions unlikely to return?
- Some projects may never return fully to in-home
- More mixed mode projects
- Circumstances continually changing as new society norms evolve
- MRS aims to remove all MRS Covid-19 guidance from end of 2022



Questions? Thank you