

## Verian Group

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### Experience in largescale quantitative surveys and educational data collection

**Introduction:** Verian, a world leading, purpose-led and independent research, evidence, evaluation, and communications agency, providing services to government and the public realm, with deep expertise in policy development and evaluation, behavioural and communications, and evidence-based policy making. Verian **work with an extensive array of Government departments** such as DfE, Defra, DfT, DBT, MHCLG, HMRC, DWP, Home Office and DESNZ. We have also successfully completed several projects for the Education Endowment Foundation such as the: **BITUP Efficacy Trial, KS2 Reading Fluency Efficacy Trial, Fluency Focus Efficacy Trial** and **Pupil Premium Statement Research**.

With a professional team of over 150 researchers working in the UK team, Verian is known for undertaking social policy research that combines technical excellence, methodological rigour, innovative design, and impactful communication of findings. It has the capacity and expertise to deliver robust social research surveys at scale and nationally using random probability methodologies. For example, Verian is currently delivering the **Crime Survey for England and Wales (ONS)** - which comprises over **13,000 interviews** as well as the **UK Understanding Society** on behalf of the Institute for Social and Economic Research (University of Essex) – a longitudinal study of **25,000 households**. Many of these studies have Official and National Statistic status such as the **ONS Consumer Price Index**, and **National Survey for Wales**.

Verian is therefore very familiar with the **UKSA's code of practice** and its key principles of ensuring Value, Quality and Trust.

**Experience of conducting education research in school setting/parents and young**

**people:** Verian brings extensive experience of carrying out research in school settings, including observation of school activities. We will draw on this to communicate effectively with school staff in the planning and scheduling of observation sessions and to inform the design of research materials.

**We have recently completed delivery of KS2 Reading Fluency (EEF, 2023–2025)** which entailed independent evaluation of a reading intervention for Year 6 pupils in 168 primary schools. This was supplemented by research in 12 schools, which included interviews with staff and pupils as well as observations of intervention delivery. The rich observational data gathered enabled us to investigate the causal assumptions of the Theory of Change and provided insights to describe the extent to which teachers delivered the intervention with fidelity, including following lesson outlines and giving feedback and praise to pupils.

We are currently delivering the **PE, Sport, and Physical Activity Research and Evaluation Programme** (DfE, 2024-ongoing), which includes two phases of qualitative research with schools' leaders and teachers. As part of the programme, we are also working closely with DfE to refine the process for planning observations in school settings, including observing lessons and broader physical activities during school breaktimes. We are also currently working on the **School Food Standards (DHSC/DfE, 2025-ongoing) project**, a multi-strand research programme which includes in-school observations to obtain an in-depth qualitative understanding of responses to trialled menu changes, including observation of lunchtime serving and food waste.

**Verian also conduct the SCV (DfE, 2023 – ongoing)** as part of the DfE Omnibus panels, which involves relying on schools to help recruit c.10,000 teachers and leaders across each academic year. Survey invitations are sent to schools with clear instructions about how to distribute the invites. As part of the panel, we have also carried out extensive qualitative research with teachers and leaders in schools on specific themes (including on the topic of

how best to engage education professionals in research). We also recruit and interview around 20 school teachers and leaders for cognitive testing for every wave of the panel.

Verian brings a strong track record in researching the **perspectives of parents** (and guardians and carers) to inform DfE decision making across a wide range of policy areas. This includes the **Safety in Out-of-School Settings (DfE, 2023)** which used a combination of depth interviews and focus group discussions to explore parents' use of these out-of-school settings and their approach to carrying out due diligence on the safety of these settings. Of direct relevance to this research, we explored the decision-making process around choosing activities and the factors that could influence this. These factors included age of child and SEND as well as the need to use out-of-school activities as a form of childcare for working parents.

**Verian has delivered PPLV (DfE, 2021-ongoing) as part of DfE's Omnibus surveys since 2021**, which each year involves the recruitment of over 5,000 parents of primary, secondary and special school pupils. Parents are recruited via the NPD. Parents from disadvantaged and hard-to-reach groups are disproportionately sampled, including parents of pupils eligible for FSM, parents of pupils with SEN and parents of pupils classified as children in need. The panel tackles a wide range of questions that the education sector is dealing with, including recently highly relevant topics such as the availability and use of breakfast clubs and wraparound childcare. The panel has also covered questions on the cost of living. Each wave involves rapid, in-depth analysis and insight generation to inform policy makers within DfE and their wider stakeholders.

Likewise, Verian also delivered the **feasibility study for a Survey of Pupil Behaviour and Wellbeing (DfE, 2022-24)**, which was commissioned in response to ministerial and policy interest in patterns of pupil behaviour in wake of the Covid-19 pandemic

**Verian worked with Ecorys to deliver the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme Evaluation (DfE, 2021)**. Verian led the large-scale online parent survey which surveyed nearly 5,000 parents of pupils who were eligible for FSM. Parents were sampled from the NPD, with the sample design taking into account indices of multiple deprivation (IMD) decile, ethnicity and SEN status. At the beginning of the survey, parents were allocated to either the treatment

(child attended HAF club) or comparison (child did not attend HAF club) groups depending on their response to initial questions on holiday club participation. Both groups of parents were asked questions about their experience with activities and food, as well as reasons for using or for not using a HAF club.

**We also bring relevant experience in engaging parents in research for the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF). We conducted an evaluation of BITUP – Updating Parents by Text (EEF, 2023–24)**, evaluating an intervention that aimed to improve KS3 and KS4 pupils' attendance in secondary school, by sending parents information by text message. In addition to carrying out interviews and a survey with school administrative staff, we carried out paired interviews with parents and pupils, and a survey of parents. Verian also delivered an IPE of the **National Tutoring Programme (NTP) (EEF, 2020–2022)**. This was a mixed-methods IPE which included five surveys and over 300 qualitative interviews and focus groups with tuition providers, schools, tutors and pupils aged 5–16, exploring their experiences of the programme. We also completed the **Evaluation of International School Exchange Pilot (British Council & EEF, 2019-2020)**. This evaluation included online surveys of pupils, analysis of management information, and a qualitative research program with pupils, teachers, and school leaders. The research involved 45 in-depth interviews with school staff and pupils, as well as an online survey across 21 participating schools.

Furthermore, Verian recently led the Children's and Young People's Voices, a research programme for the **UK Covid-19 Inquiry** comprising 600 interviews with 9–22-year-olds. Likewise, for Wellcome we interviewed c.4,000 14–18-year-olds to measure knowledge and attitudes towards science education and careers, biomedicine, and machine learning.

## **Field Force Capacity and Expertise**

Verian has a global reach with our UK headquarters having a team of around 150 social researchers. We are a full-service agency with significant quantitative data collection capacity using a variety of modes including **CAPI (face to face), CATI (telephone), CAWI (online), push to web, PAPI (Paper questionnaires), SMS** and the use of **panels**, including our own random probability panel – **Public Voice**.

We have a national panel of over 600 face-to-face interviewers, and a team of 100+ telephone interviewers. We also have highly experienced team of more than 20 specialist qualitative researchers, with substantial experience in conducting interviews and group discussions with learners and educational institutions. As an organisation, we have undertaken a wide range of large-scale evaluations, from formative process evaluations through to impact evaluations. We work collaboratively with consultancies, academic institutions and think tanks in helping to provide quantitative services through our field and lab as well as advisory services.

## Communication Systems

Verian work collaboratively with evaluators when it comes to providing quantitative services.

All our projects are based on the principles of **PRINCE2**. Our approach ensures that project knowledge is not centred within a single member of staff and is documented to ensure continuity of delivery in the event of absence or departures. Verian uses a systematic and structured project management framework, while being flexible and adaptive, to successfully deliver the research.

To ensure successful and timely internal management of quantitative surveys, Verian use its project management tools and processes. This includes weekly client huddles with evaluation partners to review progress towards the timetable and actions from previous meetings. A detailed risk register is created for each contract.

We will provide short weekly progress reports in a word document as standard, highlighting activity in the previous period, upcoming actions and any concerns arising. Progress reports are usually presented as a list of action logs looking back of what has been achieved and forwards based on actions from the meeting itself. There are standard agenda items, with a standard structure. Our **project governance procedures** will include a formal escalation process to ensure that any issues that may arise on the project are dealt with promptly and effectively.

Engagement practice with schools varies according to the specific needs and objectives of each prospective study. It is common for example that we are provided with a key contact point at each school who we can liaise with. We sometimes attend any recruitments events, so schools can meet researchers conducting the evaluation, to boost engagement of those schools that sign up to a specific study. It is common practice that we ask headteachers at each school to sign a **memorandum of understanding (MoU)** that clearly explains what is expected of schools, e.g., schools will be responsible for contacting parents and carers about the study and confirming consent, using template materials developed by Verian or informing relevant class teachers. Schools will also be asked to provide email addresses for class teachers involved in the studies, to facilitate data collection.

Critically our experience of conducting research with school leaders and teachers means we understand the challenges of recruiting education professionals onto a study. These include high workloads, limited availability of school staff, leaders being overburdened with research requests and high drop-out rates. We therefore design materials that help to minimise burden, maximise engagement and are clear with regards to the impact their inputs can have on policy development. To underpin this Verian, employ dedicated Project Coordinators who specialise in recruitment and engagement with research participants (including delivery settings).

## Quality Assurance Strategies

**Best Practice Standards, Inclusivity and Accessibility of the research design:** All our quantitative surveys are conducted in line with industry leading quality and security standards and professional codes of conduct including: **ISO20252, ISO9001, ISO27001, 2018 DPA, MRS, ESOMAR, Social Research Association, GSR, UK Code of Practice for Statistics and AQuA, Magenta and Green Book.** A full ethics review of every survey is undertaken as standard complying with the five GSR principals. Accessibility solutions are embedded in our Verian's survey platform which conforms fully to **WCAG 2.2AA standard.**

All survey materials (invite and reminder letters, emails, and texts) draw on ONS design guidelines to help improve response rates. We use dummy data/data floods to ensure scripts are accurate and routing is correct. This mitigates against missing data. All data preparation and data processing work will conform to the highest quality and information security

standards and will be documented to allow full replication if necessary. All online survey responses will run through our data quality algorithm which identifies: (i) online responses that were completed too quickly for the data to be dependable (outliers), (ii) excessive levels of item non-response. (iii) straight-lines. Cases are deleted from the dataset if they fail checks. Borderline cases (one check fail) are manually reviewed before removal. Paper questionnaires received are subject to likewise stringent quality assurance processes where typically up to 5% are removed due to quality control. Verian maximises response rates through developing materials that are inclusive, providing alternative means of engagement whilst issuing reminders and where appropriate to do so incentives.

## **Project Leadership**

**Simon Maydew, Director, Quantitative Survey Hub Lead Evaluation Practice.** Simon heads up the Verian's Evaluation Practices survey hub team and has over 30 years of experience of delivering quantitative surveys. Simon has led a variety of large-scale random probability surveys amongst households and businesses in the last two years using ABOS/Push to Web, Public Voice, CATI/telephone and CAWI methodologies. Simon oversees all aspects of the quantitative surveys **ensuring that the Verian survey team are working to clear processes with defined roles and responsibilities.**

**Alex Thornton (Senior Director, Head of Education Policy).** Alex has more than 20 years' experience in social research both as an agency researcher and a commissioner. His research expertise spans a wide range of policy areas but with a particular emphasis on education and skills research. His experience on surveys of similar groups and overseeing large scale, complex surveys will be of great benefit to this research. Having spent over ten years with Verian and its legacy businesses, Alex joined the UK Commission for Employment and Skills in 2014 as a Senior Manager, managing the Employer Skills Survey, one of the world's largest and most prestigious telephone surveys. In 2016, Alex re-joined Verian as a Director with overall responsibility for education and skills research. Alex has been the Senior Director on the DfE Omnibus surveys since 2023, and on the Parent, Pupil and Learner Panel since 2021. He's also led several relevant projects in this field, including an Evaluation of an International School Exchange Pilot (EEF, 2019-2021) – involving research with teachers and leaders, the Evaluation

of Pupil Premium and Recovery Premium (DfE), involving a survey of more than 2,000 schools, MATs and SATs, and the PE, sport, and physical activity research and evaluation programme with PE teachers and leaders. Alex also led the 2018 College Staff Survey (DfE) involving large online surveys of college leaders and tutors (including a longitudinal element and feeding findings back to colleges to maximise engagement and response).

**Natalie Gold (Senior Director Behavioural Trials, Evaluation Practice)** has extensive experience of working with policymakers to deliver complex experimental research to develop and test the impact of interventions in fast-moving environments. This includes overseeing the whole lifecycle from literature review, qualitative groundwork, and Theory of Change (ToC) development, through intervention design and recruitment, to trials and IPEs. Natalie has led on several projects for EEF including **KS2 Reading Fluency Efficacy Trial and Pupil Premium Statement Research:**

### **Additional Data Services Offered**

As well as quantitative data collection services Verian provide qualitative research (depth interviews and focus groups), a range of evaluation solutions (process evaluation, quantitative impact evaluation, theory-based evaluation, VFM/economic) as well as services related to Trials and Behavioural.

### **Cost Model and Pricing Structure**

Costs are very much dependant on the scale and complexity of the survey/data collection required and the range of outputs needed. Key variables can include the length of interviews (number of questions) and volume of interviews to be processed. Each costing is provided on a job-by-job basis.

### **Data Protection**

Verian is committed to carrying out research to the highest ethical and professional standards. Good ethical practice is essential to protect the rights, safety, and wellbeing of research respondents, as well as to ensure high quality research and to comply with relevant legislation. **We abide by the Market Research Society (MRS) and European Society for**

**Opinion and Market Research (ESOMAR) Codes of Conduct.** Our procedures accord with ethical guidance/frameworks published by **the Social Research Association (SRA), the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), the Government Social Research (GSR), and the UK Statistics Authority.** These codes cover broadly similar scopes. Our employment contracts include a section on confidentiality, and employees and subcontractors agree to abide by the **UK Data Protection Act, UK GDPR and MRS/ESOMAR Codes of Conduct.** All staff are trained in ethics, data protection, and data security. Staff receive regular briefings on updated procedures or developments and have access to an extensive set of resources to ensure that they are fully familiar with ethical and legal requirements.

**A DPIA (Data Protection Impact Assessment)** is conducted for each survey. Participant materials including the privacy policy and survey invitations are written in plain English and made easily accessible, to reassure participants and encourage participation while making it clear that participation is voluntary, and consent can be withdrawn at any point. Informed consent from respondents will always be sought in terms of the potential to recontact them for future surveys or focus group work in the future.

**Data security and business continuity in general:** Verian's work regularly involves the management of personal data both from client sources and from participants. This includes research amongst sensitive audiences such as young people. As such we have well established processes for ensuring high levels of data security. We take issues of data security, storage, protection, and confidentiality very seriously, and have excellent security and storage controls that integrate our data and network security policies and procedures with the security requirements of our clients and in line with the requirements of the 2018 Data Protection Act and GDPR. Our data security procedures are designed to minimise the risk of data loss and ensure that respondents' confidentiality is always protected.

**Certification:** Verian is certified to ISO 9001, the international standard for quality management systems; ISO 20252, the international market research quality standard; ISO 27001, the international Information Security Management Standard; and Cyber Essentials. We have formal disaster recovery procedures, including a Business Continuity Plan that are compliant with ISO 22301. Personal information is stored by Verian on our exclusion drive,

which limits access to only those who need to use the files and only holds back up files for short periods of time.

**Ethical considerations:** We consider ethical standards to be of fundamental importance to all aspects of our work. We comply with all relevant corporate, legal, statutory, and regulatory requirements, including the MRS and ESOMAR professional codes of conduct. We employ systematic approaches to ensure exceptional data quality and accurate, clearly labelled, comprehensive data outputs. We ensure timeliness, using robust project management processes, ensuring tasks are completed to time and quality.

## **Ethics and Safeguarding**

Verian will use our resources ethics checklist and ethics decision tree to engage with our internal Ethics champions and Research Ethics Panel. The panel is responsible for a detailed review of project design and materials, and for supporting research teams to manage any potential and actual ethical considerations. Each project is assessed against the foundations of ethical research - clear and defined public benefit, sound application of methods, data protection regulations, specific and informed consent, enabling participation and inclusivity and avoidance of personal and social harm. While these fundamental principles of ethical research are upheld across all projects, ethical considerations likely to be particularly relevant on this project include enabling participation, avoidance of harm, and specific informed consent. All work conducted is in line with the GSR Ethics Guide.

All researchers have **DBS clearance** and interviewers are trained to manage situations where participants become distressed or raise safeguarding issues. We have a robust lone worker policy. We recognise the importance of ensuring we protect the safety and well-being of all survey participants and keep our **safeguarding policies** under regular review and reflecting best practice. All staff working on behalf of Verian have an obligation to ensure they:

1. Safeguard our participants, people, and clients
2. Treat people with fairness, dignity, and respect
3. Enable inclusive, informed, and confidential participation
4. Provide unbiased, data-evidenced findings and advice.

## Project Examples

Project	Partners	Phase/Year Group	Data Collection	Description
Staying Close	Heriot-Watt University; Simetrica-Jacobs	16-19	Two-wave survey of care leavers; two-wave admin data from LAs	Coverage: 39 Staying Close LAs + 14 matched comparison areas Survey responses: 356, 595 Admin data: 5,771, 7,409
BITUP Efficacy Trial	N/a	Secondary	Attendance data; baseline and endline school survey; endline parent survey; qualitative interviews	Surveyed schools (teachers/project leads) at baseline (148x) and endline (143x). Surveyed 781 parents at endline.
KS2 Reading Fluency Efficacy Trial	Prof. Kate Cain; Dr. Janet Vousden; ACER UK	Primary (Y6)	Baseline and endline school survey; short pupil questionnaire	Surveyed schools (teachers/project leads) at baseline (90x) and endline (42x). We administered a questionnaire, alongside reading assessments, to 1,147 Y5 pupils. We also conducted qualitative observations, each paired with a teacher interview and 2-3 pupil interviews (34 total), in 12 schools.
Fluency Focus Efficacy Trial (ongoing)	Prof. Kate Cain; Dr. Janet Vousden; ACER UK	Primary (Y5)	Baseline and endline school survey; short pupil questionnaire	TBC – planned 120 baseline and 120 endline surveys alongside a short pupil questionnaire to be administered alongside reading assessments to 4,906
HTQs	Stephen Speckhesser, Tristan Hooley	16–19 (T-levels, schools/ FE)	Qualitative user-testing interviews	We conducted qualitative user-testing interviews with 7 teachers and careers leads at A-level, T-levels, and BTECs, as well as 2-3 students from each class.
Department for Education - Parent, Pupil and Learner Voice (PPLV)		Primary, Secondary, 16-19 FE	Large-scale, repeat cross-sectional online panel survey	The PPLV comprises short, regular research surveys on topical education issues. Respondents are secondary school pupils (years 7 to 13), learners in further education (years 12 and 13) and parents of primary, secondary and special school pupils (years 1 to 11) who have agreed to participate in Participant numbers vary slightly by

				<p>wave, but typically fall within the ranges below:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents of primary school pupils (Years 1–6): ~800–1,400</li> <li>• Parents of secondary school pupils (Years 7–11): ~750–2,000</li> <li>• Parents of special school pupils (Years 1–11): ~500–800</li> <li>• Secondary school pupils (Years 7–11): ~1,500–3,500</li> <li>• Post-16 pupils and learners (Years 12–13 / FE): ~1,000–2,500</li> </ul>
Department for Education – School and College Voice (SCV)		Primary, Secondary, 16-19 FE	Large-scale, repeat cross-sectional online panel survey	<p>Run throughout the academic year to provide rapid feedback to DfE on emerging policy issues. Audience is classroom teachers and senior leaders (headteachers, principals and other school leaders) in state-funded primary, secondary and special schools in England (and colleges in earlier years). Participants are randomly sampled from the School Workforce Census (SWFC).</p> <p>Response volumes vary by wave, but typically include around 3,500–4,000 respondents per survey, split between teachers and leaders.</p> <p>For example, in the January 2025 SCV wave, the achieved sample was:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Primary school leaders: 679</li> <li>• Secondary school leaders: 906</li> <li>• Special school leaders: 214</li> <li>• Primary school teachers: 527</li> <li>• Secondary school teachers: 554</li> <li>• Special school teachers: 803</li> <li>• Total respondents: 3,683</li> </ul>

Department for Education - Evaluation of Pupil Premium and Recovery Premium		Primary, Secondary	Online and telephone teachers and leaders survey, qualitative research	Survey of over 2,000 school leaders and teachers, alongside 48 in-depth qualitative interviews with PP leads across schools, MATs and SATs. The research generated a typology of school approaches and provided DfE with evidence on effective practice, barriers to delivery and implications for disadvantaged pupils.
Department for Education – Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme Evaluation			Largescale parent survey, qualitative research	Online parent survey of nearly 5,000 parents, with parents sampled from the National Pupil Database (NPD) to ensure a robust and representative sample of families eligible for free school meals. The research examined food consumption, wellbeing, childcare benefits and parental employment impacts, generating national evidence that directly informed DfE’s understanding of food provision outside term time and its relevance to disadvantaged families.