

## Contents

<b>1.0</b>	<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Changes to the questionnaire .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>3.0</b>	<b>The sample .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.1</b>	<b>Quality issues .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>3.2</b>	<b>English Housing Survey questions.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>3.3</b>	<b>Address cleaning .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3.4</b>	<b>Issued sample .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Data collection .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4.1</b>	<b>Fieldwork dates .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4.2</b>	<b>Interviewers used .....</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>4.3</b>	<b>Making contact .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>4.4</b>	<b>The questionnaire.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>4.5</b>	<b>Interview length.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Response.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5.1</b>	<b>Overall response .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>5.2</b>	<b>Response rates by face-to-face and telephone interviewers .....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>5.3</b>	<b>Response rates by status of respondent.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>5.4</b>	<b>Response rates by EHCS/EHS interview year .....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>6.0</b>	<b>Data quality .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>7.0</b>	<b>Development of a Weighting Methodology for the PLS 2010.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>7.1</b>	<b>Private Landlord Survey Design .....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>7.2</b>	<b>Stage 1: Modelling for loss of dwellings .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>7.3</b>	<b>Stage 2: Adjustment due to landlord/agent portfolio size .....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>7.4</b>	<b>Stage 3: Adjustment for landlord/ agent non-response.....</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>7.5</b>	<b>Calibration of landlord/agent weights.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>8.0</b>	<b>Implementing Recommendations from 2006 PLS .....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>9.0</b>	<b>Recommendations from 2010 PLS .....</b>	<b>27</b>

## **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 The Government seeks to increase the size, quality and management of the private rented housing sector. It does this by aiming to retain good landlords in the sector, persuading investors to expand the supply of decent rented homes and by helping the worst landlords perform better or prevent them from operating. The aim of the Private Landlords' Survey (PLS) is to provide information to help the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG) monitor progress towards these aims and to develop initiatives that meet the needs of different sorts of landlords.

1.2 The PLS is one element of the English Housing Survey (EHS) and its precursor the English House Conditions Survey (EHCS). The PLS uses the information from the main EHS/EHCS household interview to identify addresses that are privately rented and to obtain contact details of the tenant's landlord or agent. From 2002, DCLG moved the EHCS to a continuous format and commissioned the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to run the survey. The EHCS was merged with the Survey of English Housing (SEH) in 2007-08 to form the present EHS. In close co-operation with DCLG, ONS revised the PLS questionnaire to focus on the key policy interests of the department.

1.3 The 2010 PLS is based on a sample of landlords and agents collected from the main EHCS in 2007/08 and the EHS in 2008/09. This report describes the technical aspects of the sampling, fieldwork and processing of the 2010 PLS. Analysis and reporting of the PLS is undertaken by ONS. The main sections of the report cover the questionnaire changes, preparation of the sample, fieldwork issues, response rates, a comparison of the characteristics of responding and non-responding landlords/agents, post-field preparations related to data delivery and the weighting procedure developed and adopted for 2010. Definitions of key terms used in this report are provided in the glossary (see Appendix A).

## **2.0 Changes to the questionnaire**

2.1 A number of changes were made to the PLS questionnaire for 2010. Firstly, some existing questions were modified or updated. For example, responses to questions which provide information on current letting practice were amended to mirror those on the main EHS survey. Furthermore, several new sets of questions were included. Landlords were asked about their current practices regarding choosing

a letting or management agent and what form of charges apply, why they were planning to make improvements to their property and whether an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) had been carried out on their property. New questions were also added concerning the Housing Health and Safety Rating System (HHSRS) and the provision and modification of private rentals to meet the needs of disabled tenants. Landlords were asked about their experiences of letting to disabled tenants, what adjustments they had made or were willing to make to make such tenancies possible and their understanding of the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Following results from the 2006 PLS which indicated a reluctance by landlords to provide accommodation to housing benefit claimants, landlords were also asked about what singular factor would most influence them to take on Housing Benefit/Local Housing Allowance claimants. Finally, questions which did not reflect current policy interests or where sufficient data was available elsewhere e.g. on the main EHS survey were removed from the 2010 PLS questionnaire. The entire neighbourhood module and several individual questions were removed.

2.2 Full details of all of the changes made to the questionnaire can be found in Appendix B and in the Private Landlords' Survey Questionnaire Documentation<sup>1</sup>, which covers the surveys run in 2002-03 and 2003-04 and 2006 and 2010.

### **3.0 The sample**

#### **3.1 Quality issues**

3.1.1 Similar to the 2006 PLS, the sampling frame was assembled from information provided by respondents to the main household interview survey over a two-year period. Thus private rented tenants participating in the main EHCS/EHS household interview survey in 2007-08 and the main EHS household interview sample for 2008-09 indicated whether they were willing for us to contact their landlord. The sampling frame for the PLS comprised all the cases which fulfilled the criteria above. It should be noted that the sample excluded landlords of properties that were unoccupied at the time of the EHCS/EHS household interview survey. Also excluded were landlords of properties that were occupied but whose tenants could not be contacted or refused to participate, or interviewed but refused to give landlord contact details. Consequently the PLS, as a proxy for a sample frame of private landlords, could be assumed to suffer from under-coverage (See page 7 for details of

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<sup>1</sup> Private Landlords' Survey 2009-10: Questionnaire Documentation – <http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/pdf/2026831.pdf>

the issued sample) .

3.1.2 There could be further potential non-response bias arising from the fact that a proportion of landlords/agents approached for the PLS could not be contacted or refused to take part. For example, "problem" landlords may be under-represented because their tenants were less likely to provide contact details or, if provided, less likely themselves to take part in the PLS. It was also assumed that "problem" tenants might also be less likely to provide their landlord's/ agent's contact details.

3.1.3 It should be noted that cases on the PLS dataset represent landlords of participating dwellings. Individual landlords may appear more than once in the final sample because they own more than one property included in the participating EHCS/EHS household interview sample. However, for 2010 a flag was provided to identify and track the characteristics of multi-landlords within the sample.

3.1.4 A weighting procedure was developed to adjust the data for both differential sampling probability and differential non-response. Details of the methodology and how the weights were allocated are available in section seven of this report. This weighting process allows for some national and regional estimates to be provided for private landlords in England. Thus, though we have been able to sample at the dwelling level, for purposes of weighting we have aggregated within each portfolio to weight at both the landlord and dwelling level.

## **3.2 English Housing Survey questions**

3.2.1 During the course of the main EHS household interview, occupied dwellings that were privately rented were identified. The tenants of these properties were then asked to provide the name, address and telephone number (if known) of the person (or company) to which they pay rent. The respondent was also asked if this person or organisation was the owner of the property. If they were the owner then the address information became the contact details for the landlord and no further questions were asked.

3.2.2 If the rent recipient was not the owner of the property then the same questions (name, address and telephone number) were asked in relation to the owner. This information became the contact details for the landlord and the information previously collected was flagged as the agent's. Finally, the tenant was asked if they gave their permission for the landlord to be contacted. Information was fed into the final issued

sample only if permission was given.

3.2.3 The full questionnaire wording of this section of the EHS household interview is provided in Appendix C.

### **3.3 Address cleaning**

3.3.1 In some cases, interviewers were only able to obtain partial contact information from respondents (e.g. the landlord's postcode or telephone number was not known) or the information that was collected was incorrect (e.g. road names were spelt incorrectly or the postcode was incomplete). A desk-based address cleaning exercise was conducted at ONS headquarters. The cleaning team ensured that, wherever possible, a complete name (or contact name in the case of agents or companies), address and telephone number was available for the landlord/agent to enable the PLS interviewers to successfully make contact. The process of cleaning address contact details was started 20 weeks prior to the commencement of PLS fieldwork, during November 2009, and took around eight weeks to complete.

3.3.2 Where complete contact details were already available for both the landlord and the agent of a property no further action was necessary and these could be issued direct to PLS interviewers. For cases where only partial contact information was collected at the EHCS/ EHS household interview, address cleaners used a variety of techniques to obtain full information:

- where addresses for landlords or agents were incomplete (e.g. postcode or town missing), Royal Mail software or the Internet were used to look-up the missing information
- missing telephone numbers for landlords or agents were obtained from Directory Enquiries<sup>2</sup>
- agents or organisations were telephoned to obtain the number of the best person within the organisation to contact
- where tenants had provided only a telephone number, landlords and agents were telephoned to obtain a full address
- in the worst cases, where telephone numbers were unobtainable and the address was unusable for the landlord or agent, contact with the tenant was attempted via telephone in order to obtain better information.

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<sup>2</sup> Cases with a full postal address that were not listed on Directory Enquiries were still passed into the issued sample

3.3.3 In a few cases address cleaners identified:

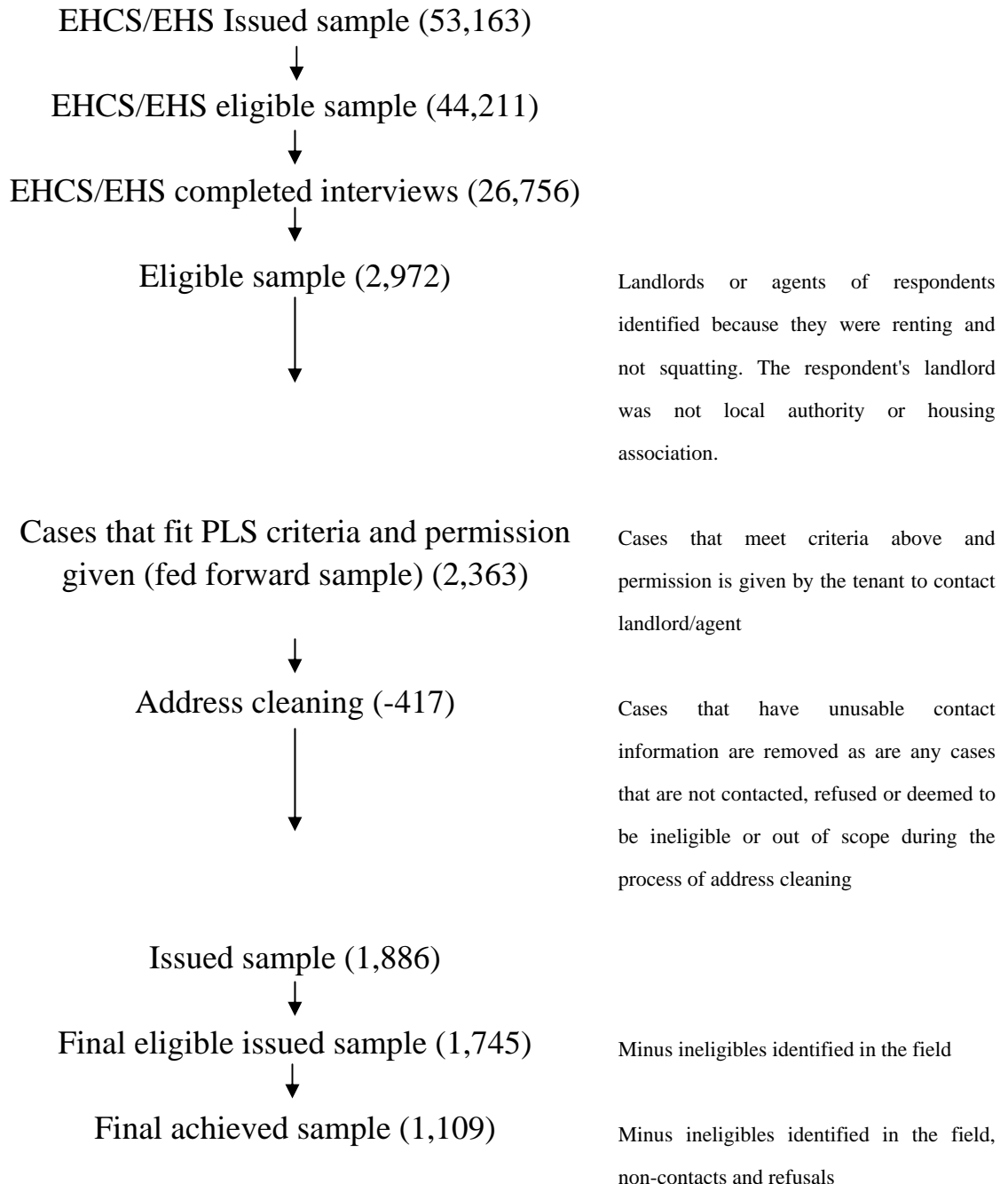
- ineligible cases (for example, social landlords that had been incorrectly identified at the household interview or mobile homes/ caravans)
- cases out of scope of the survey (for example, landlords who lived outside England)
- cases where no contact could be made with anybody
- landlords who refused to divulge their address over the telephone.

These cases were excluded from the issued sample.

3.3.4 In some cases, landlords were contacted who had sold the EHCS or EHS property and/or had ceased to be a landlord in the period between the main household interview and the PLS. In these instances, address cleaners were instructed to keep the details in the sample because we would still be interested in their reasons for leaving private renting.

### 3.4 Issued sample

3.4.1 The procedure for arriving at the final sample is summarised in the flow diagram below. Please note that this information relates to the combined datasets of the 2007/08 EHCS and 2008/09 EHS.



3.4.2 There were 26,756 cases from the 2007-08 EHCS and 2008-09 EHS for which unedited interview data was available. During the course of the main household interview, private sector renters were identified as those who were renting, not squatting, and whose landlord or rent recipient was not a local authority or housing association. Respondents living rent-free in owner-occupied accommodation were also included in this definition. The landlords or agents of these respondents provided the *eligible sample* for the PLS (n=2,972).

3.4.3 Of the 2,972 cases making up the *eligible sample* of landlords of properties rented by private tenants, 2,363 (79.5%) granted their permission for ONS to contact their landlord or agent (*fed forward sample*). From the fed forward sample, 1,886 cases passed through address cleaning successfully and were issued to PLS interviewers (*issued sample*). The issued sample represented 63.5% of the eligible sample. The equivalent figure for 2006 PLS was 68.1%.

3.4.4 Of the fed-forward sample:

- 1.0% of cases were classed as ineligible by address cleaners. This category included landlords not in the scope of the survey (e.g. those living outside England or where the property is owned by a registered social landlord).
- 1.6% of cases refused to divulge their address details to the address cleaning team. These percentages were similar to those obtained during the 2006 PLS address cleaning exercise.
- However, 17.6% of cases could not be contacted with the information that was available. This was higher than in 2006 when 10.1% of cases could not be contacted with the information provided. One reason for this could be the longer duration from the collection of the EHCS/EHS data to the data cleaning for the 2010 PLS (36 months) when compared with 30 months for the 2006 PLS.

3.4.5 **Table 3.1** below provides a summary of the response from the data cleaning process for PLS in 2010 and gives the results from 2006 for comparison.



**Table 3.1 Response from the data cleaning process for 2006 and 2010**

Category	2006*			2010**		
	Cases	% of eligible sample	% of fed forward sample	Cases	% of eligible sample	% of fed forward sample
Eligible sample	2,468			2,972		
Permission given	1,928	78.1%		2,363	79.5%	
Permission not given	540	21.9%		609	20.5%	
Fed-forward sample	1,928			2,363		
Non-contacts						
(address cleaning)	196	7.9%	10.1%	416	14.0%	17.6%
Refusals (address cleaning)	31	1.2%	1.6%	37	1.2%	1.6%
Ineligible						
(address cleaning)	21	0.8%	1.0%	24	0.8%	1.0%
Total final issued sample	1,680	68.1%	87.1%	1,886	63.5%	79.8%

\* 2006 PLS includes two years EHCS data (2004-05 and 2005-06)

\*\* 2010 PLS includes two years data (2006-07 EHCS and 2007-08 EHS)

#### 3.4.6 Comparing 2010 responses with those achieved in 2006:

- 79.5% of the eligible sample in 2010 gave permission to contact the landlord/agent compared with 78.1% in 2006;
- 79.8% of the fed forward sample was issued in 2010 compared with the 87.0% issued in 2006.

## 4.0 Data collection

### 4.1 Fieldwork dates

4.1.1 In a similar way to the main household interview survey of the EHS, the PLS was conceived as an annual survey, using EHCS data from the corresponding year to form the sample. However, to achieve a larger sample size, landlord/agent contact details collected during both the 2004/05 and 2005/06 EHCS were added together to

form the sample for the 2006 PLS. This trend has continued for the 2010 PLS. The 2010 PLS field period was conducted in one batch covering all addresses compiled from both 2007-08 EHCS and the 2008-09 EHS surveys.

4.1.2 The field dates for the 2007-08 EHCS, the 2008-09 EHS and the 2010 PLS were:

<b>EHCS</b>		<b>PLS</b>	
Quarter	Year		
	2007-08		
1	5 Apr 07 to 26 May 07	6 Apr 10 to 7 Jun 10 *	
2	2 Jul 07 to 26 Aug 07		
3	1 Oct 07 to 18 Nov 07		
4	2 Jan 08 to 17 Feb 08		
<b>EHS</b>			
Quarter	Year		
	2008-09		
1	7 Apr 08 to 31 May 08		
2	7 Jul 08 to 30 Aug 08		
3	6 Oct 08 to 29 Nov 08		
4	5 Jan 09 to 28 Feb 09		

\* The main PLS face-to-face fieldwork period lasted for six weeks from 6 April 2010 while the Telephone Unit fieldwork mop-up period lasted two weeks from 24 May 2010. Both phases of field work were integrated to maximise response rates.

For 2010 PLS, fieldwork was designed to integrate both face-to-face and telephone interviews. The main PLS face-to face fieldwork period lasted six weeks. At the end of this six week period all cases which had not been contacted or where the respondent had indicated a preference for a telephone interview were transferred to the Telephone Unit. There were 208 cases left at the end of the face-to-face fieldwork period. Of these, 40 cases had contact telephone numbers which were either invalid or incomplete and were therefore excluded resulting in 168 cases being forwarded to the Telephone Unit. **Table 5.1** below provides a summary of the final response rates achieved.

4.1.3 As the 2010 PLS fieldwork sample was based on contacts from the 2007-2008 EHCS and 2008-2009 EHS fieldwork, the longest elapsed time between the collection of landlords' and agents' details and the PLS interviews was 36 months.

4.1.4 The gap between the EHCS/EHS and the PLS fieldwork was longer than the 2006 PLS, where the longest elapsed time between the collection of landlords' and agents' details and the PLS interviews was 30 months.

4.1.5 The process of cleaning address contact details (Section 3.3) took around eight weeks. This took longer than the 2006 PLS data cleaning exercise which took around six weeks. This was primarily because the gap between the EHCS/EHS fieldwork and the PLS was longer and presented some challenges in terms of valid contact details for the landlords/agents. In order to address these issues, the exercise was started around 20 weeks prior to the commencement of PLS fieldwork.

## **4.2 Interviewers used**

4.2.1 During the 2010 PLS, a total of 274 face-to-face interviewers were used on the PLS. This was a significant increase on the 138 face-to-face interviewers used on the 2006 PLS. On average six cases were allocated to each interviewer; a reduction from the nine cases allocated to each interviewer in 2006.

4.2.2 Previous experience had shown that it was sensible to use interviewers on the PLS who also had experience of the main household interview of the EHCS/EHS. All of the 274 interviewers used had worked or were currently working on the main household interview of the EHS.

4.2.3 Twenty-two telephone interviewers were trained to conduct the mop-up interviews. Most of these had volunteered for the opportunity due to personal involvement in the private renting sector as landlords of properties. As these had little previous exposure to the EHS, a detailed face-to-face briefing and hands on training was designed to bring them up to the required level of expertise.

4.2.4 Face-to-face interviewers were briefed on the survey by post. This method was adopted because the small number of PLS cases that individual interviewers were allocated and the cases were scattered across the country. The cost of a face-to-face briefing for the large number of interviewers would be disproportionate to the number of final interviews. Further, it was felt that the content of the PLS questionnaire was fairly straightforward, especially since interviewers had previous experience of the EHS household interview survey, and that therefore the cost of a face-to-face briefing could not be justified. Interviewer instructions are included in Appendix F.

### **4.3 Making contact**

4.3.1 An advance letter (Appendix D) and purpose leaflet (Appendix E) was sent to landlords and agents from ONS HQ about a week prior to the commencement of fieldwork. Interviewers were then instructed to make initial contact (preferably face-to-face, although telephone could be used) in order to make an appointment to conduct the interview at a later date convenient for the landlord/agent. Strategies for making contact and guidance on special cases were included in the interviewer briefing material.

4.3.2 All respondents were called on repeatedly in an attempt to obtain an interview (around 6-10 times) before the end of the field period.

### **4.4 The questionnaire**

4.4.1 The PLS interview was conducted using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) on a number of general topics, some of them about the landlord and some about the rented property. There were also questions about the landlord's property portfolio and about their letting experience. The interviews were mostly conducted face-to-face. However, in order to maximise response rates and ensure that hard-to-reach respondents participated, the Telephone Unit was used during the last two weeks of field work to conduct a mop-up exercise. The field interviewers were briefed by post while the telephone unit interviewers received a face-to-face briefing. The face-to-face briefing involved going through the questionnaire in great detail, to highlight potential problems with conducting the interview over the phone. An example of this is response options on show cards. The interviewers were briefed to read out each one response option in turn until the landlord/agent agreed with the response category being read out.

4.4.2 Since some landlords own several properties it is possible that a respondent may be subjected to repeat PLS interviews<sup>3</sup>. The interview was programmed to take this into account. The interview issued to the field grouped all properties within the sample which belonged to the same landlord into a single case. Thus, for landlords of single properties, the case contained just the one dwelling. However, for multiple landlords, the case was compiled to contain the number of properties for which the

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<sup>3</sup> Due to random selection, EHCS/EHS addresses with the same private landlord can be selected and, therefore, passed into the final PLS issued sample. The probability of this happening increases with landlords with larger property portfolios.

landlord/agent was responsible. A variable was included to highlight if the case was for one address or for several addresses. In conducting the interview for landlords of multiple addresses, many of the sections of the questionnaire were collected just once for the first address and then retained for other dwellings in the landlords/agents portfolio.

## **4.5 Interview length**

4.5.1 Interviewers record the length of time spent on each call. Where an interview was successfully conducted, interviewers spent an average (mean) of 39 minutes (which included time explaining the survey) on each call. In making this calculation, outliers of less than 10 minutes and more than 240 minutes were removed. There was a small difference in the time spent interviewing landlords compared to agents. The average (mean) time spent interviewing landlords was 40 minutes, compared to 38 minutes for agents. In 2006 the overall average (mean) length of an interview was 54 minutes with 56 minutes for landlords and 51 minutes for agents. The decrease in length of interview between 2006 and 2010 is most likely due to the removal of significant segments of the questionnaire e.g. the entire module on the neighbourhood, which were either no longer policy relevant or where the information could be obtained from the main EHS household interview.

## **5.0 Response**

### **5.1 Overall response**

5.1.1 A detailed breakdown of final outcome from fieldwork for cases in the 2003-04, 2006 and 2010 PLS is shown in **Table 5.1**. Response is defined in terms of the standard rules recommended by the ONS and the National Centre for Social Research for household surveys<sup>4</sup>. In particular, respondents who were away for the whole field period are classed as non-contacts, not as ineligible. Section 3.4 described how the final issued sample was formed. It was assumed that cases where the interviewer was unable to locate the address would have been eligible for the survey.

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<sup>4</sup> Lynn, P. Beerton, R. Laiho, J. and Martin, J. 2002. *Recommended Standard Final Outcome Codes and Standard Definitions of Response Rate for Social Surveys* (unpublished).

**Table 5.1 PLS 2003-04, 2006 and 2010 Response summary from fieldwork**

Category	Cases	% of eligible sample	% of fed forward sample	% of final issued sample	% of final eligible issued sample
<b>2003-04</b>					
Eligible sample	1,382				
Fed forward sample	1,099				
Final issued sample	954	69.0%	87.3%		
Final eligible issued sample <sup>1</sup>	892	64.5%	81.2%	93.5%	
Co-operating	624	45.2%	56.8%	65.4%	70.0%
Partly co-operating	0	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Non-contacts	81	5.9%	7.4%	8.5%	9.1%
Refusals	168	12.2%	15.3%	17.6%	18.8%
Other non-responding <sup>2</sup>	23	1.7%	2.1%	2.4%	2.6%
<b>2006</b>					
Eligible sample	2,468				
Fed forward sample	1,928				
Final issued sample	1,680	68.1%	87.1%		
Final eligible issued sample <sup>1</sup>	1,596	64.7%	82.8%	95.0%	
Co-operating	897	36.4%	46.5%	53.3%	56.2%
Partly co-operating	7	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.4%
Non-contacts	218	8.8%	11.3%	12.9%	13.7%
Refusals	423	17.1%	21.9%	25.2%	26.5%
Other non-responding <sup>2</sup>	51	2.0%	2.6%	3.0%	3.2%
<b>2010</b>					
Eligible sample	2,972				
Fed forward sample	2,363				
Final issued sample	1,886	63.5%	79.8%		
Final eligible issued sample <sup>1</sup>	1,745	58.7%	73.8%	92.5%	
Co-operating	1,087	36.6%	46.0%	57.6%	62.3%
Partly co-operating	25	0.8%	1.1%	1.3%	1.4%
Non-contacts	87	2.9%	3.7%	4.6%	5.0%
Refusals	389	13.1%	16.5%	20.6%	22.3%
Other non-responding <sup>2</sup>	157	5.3%	6.6%	8.3%	9.0%

1 Excludes ineligible cases identified in the field

2 Includes other non-response (e.g. respondent unable to take part) and unknown eligibility e.g. unable to locate address

5.1.2 Response to the 2010 PLS survey was similar to that achieved in the 2006 survey but lower than that was achieved in 2003-04. Full co-operation was obtained from 1,087 landlords/agents in 2010. This represents:

- 36.6% of the *eligible sample* of landlords of properties rented by private tenants included in the 2007-08 EHCS and 2008-09 EHS household interview survey sample. For 2006 it was 36.4% of the estimated eligible sample and 45.2% in 2003/04
- 46% of the fed forward sample of landlords of properties rented by private tenants in the 2007-08 and 2008-09 household interview survey agreed to be interviewed on the PLS . This proportion was 46.5% in 2006 and 56.8% in 2003-04
- 57.6% of the sample of landlords of properties rented by private tenants interviewed in the 2007-08 and 2008-09 household interview survey for which complete and clean landlord/agent address information was collected (*final issued sample*) co-operated on the PLS. This was an increase from 2006 when full co-operation was obtained for 53.3% of the final issued sample but down from 65.4% in 2003/04
- 62.3% of the *final eligible issued sample*, minus ineligibles identified in the field co-operated in 2010. This was up from the 56.2% achieved in 2006 and much closer to the 70.0% achieved in 2003-04.

5.1.3 For the 2010 PLS, 4.6% of the *final issued sample* (5% of the *final eligible issued sample*) could not be contacted by interviewers while in 2006 this was 12.9% of the *final issued sample* (13.7% of the *final eligible issued sample*). There were less refusals in 2010 with 20.6% (22.3% of the final eligible issued sample) refusing to take part. For 2006, 25.2% (26.5 % of the final eligible issued sample) refused to take part. The PLS coded incomplete cases as partials so that some collected information could be used. Therefore partials are included with the fully responding sample in the overall response rate. There were twenty-five cases coded as partials in 2010 compared to seven in 2006.

5.1.4 It is important to note that the figures above do not always compare like-with-like due to the introduction of a multi-landlord case switching programme within the CAPI for the 2010 PLS. Furthermore, the manner in which telephone interviews were used in 2006 and 2010 were slightly different. In 2006, telephone interviews were adopted as a last minute ad hoc option whereas it was a component of an integrated fieldwork design in 2010. Response rates were examined separately according to the type of interview and are presented below.

## 5.2 Response rates by face-to-face and telephone interviewers

5.2.1 To maximise response to the PLS, the Telephone Unit interviewers, based in Titchfield, assisted in the interviewing of landlords and agents. **Table 5.2** shows a comparison of response rate by respondent for telephone unit and face-to-face interviewers.

**Table 5.2 Comparison of response rates by type of interviewer**

	Face-to-face		Telephone		Final response	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Final response rates</b>						
Co-operating	1,034	65.5	53	32	1,087	62.3
Partly co-operating	24	1.5	1	0.6	25	1.4
Non-contacts	55	3.5	32	19.3	87	5
Refusals	332	21	57	34.3	389	22.3
Other non responding	13	8.5	23	13.8	157	9
<i>Base=100%</i>	1,579	100	166	100	1,745*	100

\*Final eligible issued sample

5.2.2 As can be seen in Table 5.2, the incidence of both non-contacts (19.3%) and refusals (34.3%) was much higher for telephone interviews than for face-to-face interviews (3.5% and 21%) in the 2010 PLS. It should be noted that these were cases for which sufficient telephone contact details were available but the telephone interviewers were unable to establish contact with the respondents or the respondents refused to participate once contacted. However, it is acknowledged that cases that were passed across to the Telephone Unit are usually those which were difficult to access during the face-to-face exercise or non-contacts and may be considered a fairly resistant sample. This exercise was therefore bound to return lower response rates than the main face-to-face interviews.

5.2.3 Despite trying all the usual avenues, including the electoral roll, the British Telecom Phone Disc, and Directory Enquiries, the Telephone Unit were not able to obtain telephone numbers in 23 cases (13.8%). As a copy of the advance letter and the PLS purpose letter had been sent to addresses for these cases during the main fieldwork providing the contact details for the PLS field office with a request to contact the office with their telephone details, these cases were coded as 'other non-responding'.



5.2.4 In the 2006 PLS the sample of Ministry of Defence (MOD) and Church addresses proved particularly difficult to contact and was responsible for the 24.9% non-contact rates. Drawing on the experience from 2006, several emails and telephone calls were exchanged with regional MOD offices and Church commissioners to establish the appropriate contact for each address and ensure their commitment in providing responses to multiple properties owned by their institutions. These actions may have been responsible for the drop in non-contacts from 24.9% in 2006 to 19.3% in 2010.

### 5.3 Response rates by status of respondent

5.3.1 **Table 5.3** shows response rates for agents and landlords separately. The status was defined by the address cleaning team who decided whether the contact details were that of a landlord or agent based on the available information. This information was subsequently verified by interviewers during the PLS questionnaire (*see* Paragraph 4.4.3).

**Table 5.3 PLS 2003-04, 2006 and 2010 Response by status of respondent**

	2003-04		2006		2010	
	Landlord	Agent	Landlord	Agent	Landlord	Agent
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Co-operating	73.4	67.9	56.7	62.4	68.4	71.8
Non-contact	9.8	6.5	17.1	7.9	7.0	2.7
Refusal	16.9	25.6	26.2	29.8	24.6	25.5
<b>Base = 100%*</b>	<b>623</b>	<b>246</b>	<b>1,050</b>	<b>484</b>	<b>1,049</b>	<b>514</b>

\* Does not include partly co-operating, other non-response, unknown eligibility or non-eligible.

5.3.2 It was observed in the 2006 PLS Technical report that there seemed to be a gradual decline in agents' participation over the three previous PLSs and a sharp drop in landlords' response in the 2006 survey. However, for 2010 there was an increase in the response rates for both landlords and agents from the 2006 levels. There was 68.4% of co-operating landlords in 2010 compared to 56.7% in 2006. Similarly, 71.8% of agents co-operated in 2010 up from 62.4% in 2006. During the 2006 PLS, the difficulty in contacting and interviewing landlords of multiple properties was considered to have had a negative impact on response rates. The recovery observed in 2010 could be attributed to measures implemented during data cleaning to correctly

identify a contact person for the property portfolio and gain their commitment to completing the interviews. Also there were changes in the CAPI instrument to capture the entire portfolio of multiple landlords in a single case, thereby ensuring that achieving an interview was much more straightforward. Response rates were therefore improved despite the widespread and ongoing decline in response rates across social surveys in general.

#### **5.4 Response rates by EHCS/EHS interview year**

5.4.1 **Table 5.4** compares response rates according to the year that the EHCS/EHS household interview was carried out in.

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**Table 5.4 Comparison of response rates by EHCS/EHS year**

2006 PLS	EHCS 2004-05		EHCS 2005-06		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Fed forward sample</b>	990		938		1928	
Non-contacts (address cleaning)	117	11.8	94	10.0	211	10.9
Refusals (address cleaning)	19	1.9	12	1.3	31	1.6
Ineligibles (address cleaning)	5	0.5	1	0.1	6	0.3
Final issued sample	849	85.8	831	88.6	1,680	<b>87.1</b>
<b>Final eligible issued sample</b>	805		791		1,596	
Co-operating	450	55.9	447	56.5	897	56.2
Partly co-operating	2	0.2	5	0.6	7	0.4
Non-contacts	109	13.5	109	13.8	218	13.7
Refusals	222	27.6	201	25.4	423	26.5
Other non responding	22	2.7	29	3.7	51	3.2

2010 PLS	EHCS 2007-08		EHS 2008-09		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Fed forward sample</b>	887		1475		2,363	
Non-contacts (address cleaning)	159	17.9	257	17.4	416	17.6
Refusals (address cleaning)	3	0.3	34	2.3	37	1.6
Ineligibles (address cleaning)	8	0.9	16	1.1	24	1.0
Final issued sample	717	80.8	1169	79.3	1,886	79.8
<b>Final eligible issued sample</b>	660		1085		1,745	
Co-operating	415	62.8	672	61.9	1,087	62.3
Partly co-operating	8	1.2	17	1.6	25	1.4
Non-contacts	34	5.1	53	4.9	87	5.0
Refusals	143	21.7	246	22.7	389	22.3
Other non responding	60	9.1	97	8.9	157	9.0

5.4.2 At the address cleaning stage, there was little difference between the years with regard to cases on the fed-forward sample where address cleaners were unable to make contact. 17.9% of the fed-forward sample from the 2007-08 EHCS household interview and 17.4% from 2008-09 EHS could not be contacted. However, this was an increase in the percentage of non-contacts from the fed-forward sample from the 2006

PLS where just 11% could not be contacted. Of the 2010 fed-forward sample there was no difference in the proportion of the final issued sample between the two years with around 80% of the fed-forward sample issued into the field. This figure was down from what was achieved in 2006 where around 87% of the fed-forward sample formed the final issued sample. These differences may be due to the longer time lag between the EHCS/EHS household interviews and the 2010 PLS address cleaning exercise when compared to the 2006 PLS

5.4.3 However, response rates at the PLS interview stage showed differences across the two years. In 2010 response was 62.3%, up from 56.2% in 2006 (Table 5.1), while the percentage of refusals in 2010 was 22.3%, compared with 26.5% in the 2006 PLS. This suggests that an increased time lag between the EHCS/EHS household interview and PLS interview is more likely to influence ability to contact landlords and agents than the likelihood of them taking part in the PLS.

## **6.0 Data quality**

6.1 Checks were programmed into the Blaise programme to enable responses that appeared unlikely or inconsistent to be queried with the respondent during the interview and information re-entered if appropriate. These checks were either *hard* or *soft* checks. Values that failed a hard check had to be changed in order for the interviewer to proceed. Soft checks could be suppressed if the interviewer had checked that the information was correct to the best of their knowledge, or the respondent's.

6.2 Checks generally fall into the categories of *range* and *consistency* checks. Range checks were triggered where an unlikely value was entered on a single variable and this prompted an appropriate warning message. For example, soft checks were triggered if the interviewer entered a value for gross rent that seemed abnormal, i.e. if rent was either above £300 a week or less than £25 a week.

6.3 Consistency checks compared the values with respect to different variables that were often in different sections of the questionnaire or the survey process. For example, for the question that asks for the year that the respondent first started letting the property, a hard check was triggered if the respondent had already stated that they had acquired the property more recently than the answer given. Similarly, a soft check was raised if the interviewer coded the respondent as a landlord at the address

cleaning stage when the case was marked as an agent.

6.4 Extraction and testing of the PLS data took place during end of July and August 2010. The client was provided with a test dataset and fed back comments. A weighting programme by ONS Methodology was begun in August 2010 to deliver landlord and dwelling weights and completed by December, 2010. A final 2010 PLS weighted dataset was compiled to client specification by the end of December 2010 and delivered to DCLG in January 2011.

6.5 A number of questions have 'other specify' categories. These get used when interviewers or respondents are unable to identify a category to place a response into. As part of general quality checks before data delivery, ONS recode as many of the 'other specify' responses as possible into the existing response categories.

6.6 Data from face-to-face and telephone interviews were compared to identify any potential differences in data quality. No differences were found between the two modes of interview.

## **7.0 Development of a Weighting Methodology for the PLS 2010**

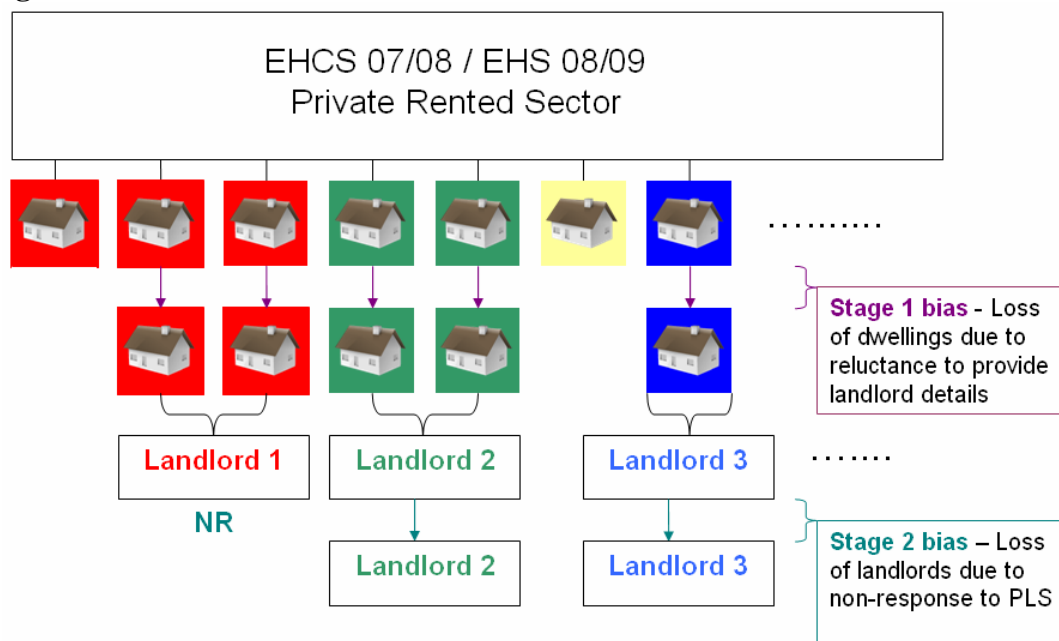
### **7.1 Private Landlord Survey Design**

7.1.1 The PLS is a follow-up survey to the EHS or the EHCS and collects information about the ownership, occupation and management practices of landlords of privately rented dwellings in England. There is no comprehensive list of names and addresses of landlords in England from which to draw a sample, therefore the 2010 PLS was based on a sample of landlords/agents derived from combining responses to the 2007-08 EHCS and 2008-09 EHS - surveys which provide information on the condition and energy efficiency of housing in England. Private rented sector tenants responding to the EHCS and EHS were asked whether they would be prepared to provide contact details for their landlord/agent and the resulting contact list was based on the number of tenants willing and able to provide contact details. This contact list served as a sampling frame, from which landlords/agents were selected for the PLS. The EHCS and EHS have weights that enable information collected from these surveys to provide national estimates. These were used as the base from which to construct PLS weights.

7.1.2 The private rented sector plays some key roles in local housing markets and concerns over its size and quality have led to demand for more information on private

landlords including their characteristics, motivations, skills, experiences and attitudes towards renting property. Traditionally, the PLS has been concerned with dwelling based estimation. However, as the policy focus of the survey has shifted from dwelling condition and maintenance to landlord letting and management practices it has become necessary for the development of a landlord/agent weight in addition to the existing dwelling weight.

**Figure 1: Potential sources of bias into the PLS**



7.1.3 Figure 1 illustrates how bias could be introduced into the PLS at various stages. A reluctance or inability to provide landlord/agent details would cause bias in the survey if those tenants who provide landlord/agent details differ in outcome from those who do not provide landlord/agent details. This is Stage 1 bias and bias adjustments can be made through use of a weight constructed from the statistical modelling of the tenants’ data. This procedure is described in section 7.2. It is also important to accurately represent selection probabilities of landlords/agents. The larger the landlord/agent’s portfolio of properties, the higher the probability of selection. This is because there is a larger probability of at least one of the dwellings owned by the landlord/agent appearing in the EHCS/EHS sample and providing landlord/agent contact details. This issue was addressed in the construction of the landlord/agent weight and is discussed in section 7.3. When landlords/agents are approached to take part in the PLS, certain types may be more likely to respond to the survey than others. Non-response bias would occur if responding landlords/agents differ in the outcome variable from non-responding landlords/agents. This is Stage 2 bias and the method for dealing with landlord/agent non-response is presented in Section 7.4.

## 7.2 Stage 1 bias: Modelling for loss of dwellings

7.2.1 A logistic regression model was conducted to model the probability of receiving landlord/agent contact details. Extensive analysis was previously conducted by DCLG to identify the characteristics of tenants who were most likely to provide landlord/agent contact details. These were considered in the logistic regression along with a few other variables:

- region of the dwelling - tenants in London and the South-East have been found to be less likely to provide landlord contact details
- ethnicity - tenants whose ethnic origin fell within the Black or Asian categories have been found to be less likely to provide landlord details
- housing benefit - tenants in receipt of housing benefit have previously been found to be less likely to provide landlord details
- property type
- satisfaction with the service provided by the landlord
- whether the dwelling is rented furnished or unfurnished
- employment status of the household reference person
- age of the household reference person
- marital status of the household reference person.

7.2.1 The variables identified as predictors of a tenant's propensity to provide their landlord/agent's contact details were:

- region of the dwelling
- housing benefit
- satisfaction with the service provided by the landlord
- age of the household reference person
- marital status of the household reference person.

The probability of receiving landlord/agent details is given by the standard logistic function:

$$P_i = \frac{1}{1 + e^{-(\beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{1,i} + \beta_2 x_{2,i} + \dots + \beta_5 x_{5,i})}}$$

where  $\beta_k$  are regression coefficients obtained from the logistic model for the explanatory variables  $x_{k,i}$ .

The Stage 1 weight for dwelling  $i$  on the PLS is:

$$d_i = \frac{w_i}{p_i}$$

where  $w_i$  is the survey weight for dwelling  $i$  on EHCS/EHS.

### 7.3 Adjustment due to landlord/agent portfolio size

7.3.1 The larger a landlord/agent's portfolio of properties, the more likely it will be on the PLS frame. This is because it has a higher probability of at least one of its dwellings being on the base EHCS/EHS sample and providing landlord/agent contact details. An adjustment was required to correct for this over-representation of large landlords/agents.

The initial weight for landlord/agent  $L$  is:

$$u_L = \frac{1}{P(\text{landlord/agent } L \text{ in sample})}$$

$$u_L = \frac{1}{P(\text{Contact details received from at least one of landlord/agent } L\text{'s tenants})}$$

$$u_L = \frac{1}{\sum_{i=1}^{P_L} \frac{k_i}{d_i}}$$

where  $P_L$  is the portfolio size of landlord/agent  $L$ ,  $d_i$  is the Stage 1 weight for dwelling  $i$  and  $k_i$  is an adjustment factor for dwelling  $i$  to correct for over-representation of large landlords/agents.

The adjustment factor  $k_i$  for each dwelling uses the Stage 1 weight to apportion the portfolio size of their landlord/agent across each of the dwellings owned by the landlord/agent that are on the PLS sample:

$$k_i = \frac{d_i P_L}{\sum_{i=1}^{P_L} d_i}$$

### 7.4 Stage 2 bias: Adjustment for landlord/ agent non-response

7.4.1 Analysis of the 2010 PLS highlighted significant variation in landlord/agent response rates across regions and by landlord/agent portfolio size. As the PLS is a small survey of just over 1,000 landlords/agents it was not desirable to have a large



number of classes which could result in small cells. Figure 2 displays the landlord/agent response rates to the 2010 PLS over nine Government Office Regions with a breakdown of small (owns fewer than 100 dwellings) and large (owns 100 or more dwellings) landlords/agents.

**Figure 2: Landlord/agent response rates to the 2010 PLS**

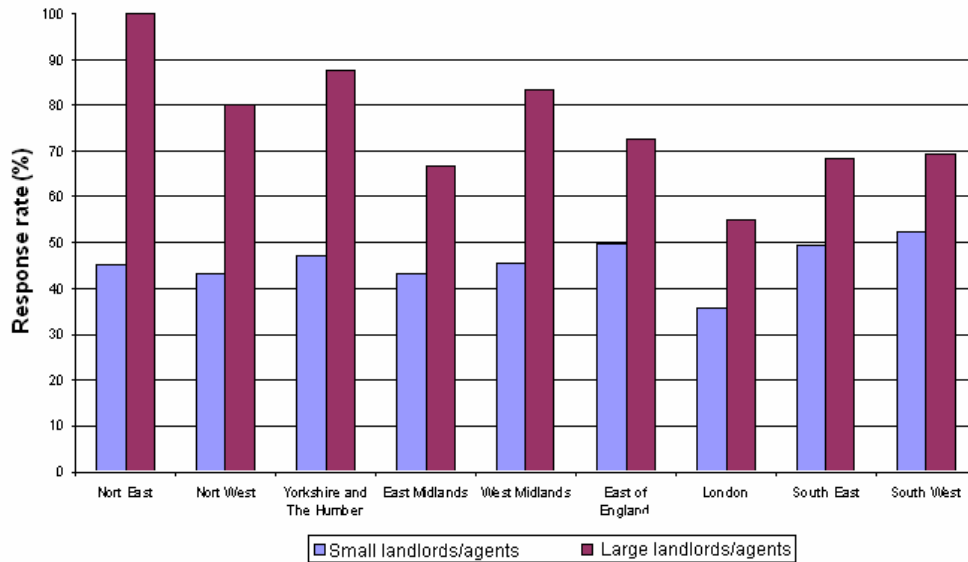


Figure 2 highlights that smaller landlords/agents were less likely to respond to the survey. There is also a regional variation with landlords/agents in London the least likely to respond to the survey.

7.4.2 Non-response adjustments were produced for 18 classes defined by Government Office Region and landlord/agent portfolio size group.

Non-response adjustments were applied to initial landlord/agent weights:

$$w_L = \left( \frac{N_{g,z}}{n_{g,z}} \right) u_L$$

where  $N_{g,z}$  is the number of sampled landlords/agents in GOR  $g$  sizeband  $z$ , and  $n_{g,z}$  is the number of responding landlords/agents in GOR  $g$  sizeband  $z$ .

## **7.5 Calibration of landlord/agent weights**

7.5.1 Final landlord/agent weights were produced using a GES software programme to calibrate the adjusted landlord/agent weights to predetermined LFS private renter household totals. An assumption made here was that all dwellings are located in the same region as their landlord/agent. Although this is unlikely to always be the case, the assumption was necessary as regional information was unavailable for every dwelling owned by the landlord/agent.

7.5.2 Thus, in summary, the sampling frame for the PLS is derived from EHCS/EHS respondents willing and able to provide landlord/agent contact details. A shift in policy focus from dwelling condition and maintenance to landlord letting and management practices has led to the requirement to develop unique landlord/agent weights for the PLS. The new landlord/agent weight minimises bias where tenants were reluctant to provide landlord/agent contact details; where there was over representation of landlords/agents on the PLS; and where there was a loss of landlords/agents due to non-response to the PLS. Final Landlord/agent weights were produced by calibrating to predetermined LFS regional private renter estimates.

7.5.3 As a result, any analysis conducted using landlords/agents will be based on unique landlord weights which have been adjusted for non-response, and calibrated to LFS private renter totals.

## **8.0 Implementing Recommendations from 2006 PLS**

8.1 There were three recommendations from the 2006 PLS which were evaluated and adopted during the set-up of the 2010 PLS. These include:

- a) Considering the use of the Telephone Unit as a viable complement to face-to-face interviews especially if response rates to social surveys continue to decline and respondents become increasingly mobile and hard to reach.
- b) Ensuring that interviewers working on the EHCS/EHS should be briefed on the importance of collecting full address details for landlords and agents.
- c) Investigate how best to interview landlords and agents of large organisations/multi-landlords, therefore addressing the number of refusals encountered among landlords/agents. Particular consideration should be given to improving co-operation with MOD and Church commissioner contacts.

The actions taken in implementing these recommendations are captured below:-

8.2 Though the response rates from the Telephone Unit exercise in 2006 were rather low when compared to the face-to-face interviewers, it was acknowledged that it fulfilled a crucial function in reaching out to respondents who would otherwise not participate in the PLS. For 2010 PLS, it was decided to incorporate the Telephone Unit with the face-to-face exercise to achieve an integrated data collection model.

8.3 The 2006 survey consisted of two years worth of data. At the data cleaning stage a number of addresses were lost, as contact details for the landlord collected in the main EHCS interview were not accurate. In light of this, new and existing interviewers working on the main EHCS/EHS were briefed on the importance of collecting full address details for the landlords and agents. In addition they were asked to probe the respondent for a main contact person. Furthermore, validation checks were implemented in the EHS CAPI from 2010 to ensure that only valid telephone numbers were collected during interviews.

8.4 In previous PLS Technical Reports, it was noted that the inability to identify the appropriate contact or interview landlords that have a large number of properties had an impact on response rates. As noted in the PLS 2003-04 and 2006 Technical Reports, consideration should be given to the procedure for interviewing landlords with large portfolios such as the MOD or the Church of England. In particular interviewers sometimes found that the contact letter did not reach the named individual. For the 2010 PLS where address cleaners experienced difficulty in identifying the most appropriate person to interview, they were encouraged to follow-up with telephone calls and emails to confirm the right contact person for the portfolio of properties. This approach hopefully encouraged a sense of commitment from these contacts to participate in the survey. Furthermore, interviewers were advised to specifically contact landlords with large portfolios to ensure that the contact details provided were accurate. Most importantly, the redesign of the CAPI programme to make interviewing of landlords with large portfolios more straightforward was an improvement for the PLS.

## **9.0 Recommendations from 2010 PLS**

9.1 Following the successful design and implementation of a multi-case interview protocol on the CAPI which eased interviews with landlords with large portfolios, it is

recommended that this is continued for future PLS interviews.

9.2 Integral to the success of this process is efficient data capture of landlord/agent contact details during the main EHS household interview and a detailed data-cleaning exercise prior to the PLS. This should incorporate processes to contact landlords with large portfolios such as the Ministry of Defence and Church establishments.

9.3 Accuracy of the contact information collected is important. The EHS should continue to validate telephone numbers collected from respondents.

9.3 Though the response rates from the telephone interviews remain lower than interviews conducted face-to-face, it remains a useful tool to improve total response to the PLS. As such it is recommended that telephone interviews are incorporated as part of an integrated fieldwork design.

9.4 To further ensure coverage and ease of response to the survey, an online version of the PLS should be considered for any future runs. This is also likely to provide significant cost savings from fieldwork. Contact details, including an e-mail address, could either be collected at the time of the EHS interview, although respondents may not be aware of these, or at the stage of address cleaning.