



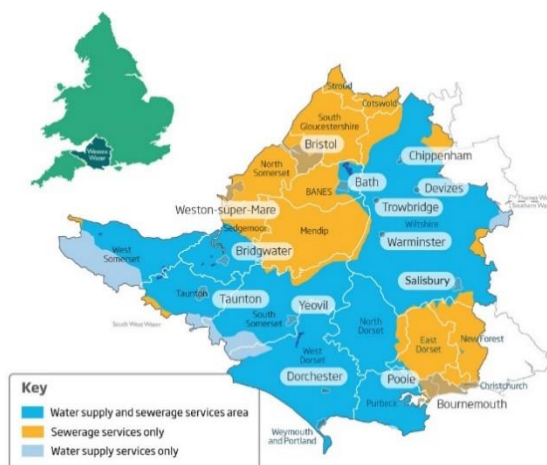
Research proposal: PR24 Acceptability & Affordability Testing Prepared for Wessex Water & Bristol Water

Revised 13th February 2023

1. Introduction and scope of the project

In previous Price Reviews, water companies have undertaken their own Acceptability Testing with customers on the final plan. However for PR24, Ofwat – with CCW – has issued guidance for plan testing, with a prescribed method for Acceptability & Affordability Testing (AAT). A more uniform approach will enable a clearer comparison of how customers of each water company respond to individual business plans and the impact on their bills.

Another feature of using a more prescriptive approach to AAT, and in line with the regulator's requirement for water companies to collaborate where possible, is that companies who share customers can jointly commission research. This proposal is prepared for Wessex Water and Bristol Water (which is now part of the Pennon Group). This is because Wessex Water provides sewerage services to approximately 1m people in Bristol Water's region.



While there is no requirement for Wessex Water to conduct research in the Bournemouth Water region, this is an area for consideration as the guidance states: *where the overall coverage of this research represents less than two thirds of a WaSC's overall customer base, and/or there is an area with a water/wastewater provider combination which covers more than 10% of the company's overall customer base then the WaSC should endeavour to conduct additional research, testing the acceptability of the water or wastewater part of their overall plan with these customers, as appropriate.* The Bournemouth/Wessex overlap is c.400,000 people which is 16% of Wessex Water's total customer base (of c. 2.5 million people). Hence, we provide a cost option to include Bournemouth Water customers.

There are some specific implications relating to competition law that will be carefully managed throughout this project: water and sewerage companies (WASCs), which now includes Bristol Water as it is part of Pennon Group, must not share any information relating to their costed plans – even though research respondents will be shown the costed plans for both companies. We set out later in this document the processes we will undertake to mitigate employees of each company seeing the plan of the other.

We also set out our approach to project management and where we envisage joint working, and where the project will be managed separately for the two client teams. This will be particularly relevant at key stages: developing research materials that include descriptions of the plans; observing (qualitative) fieldwork; and reporting.

In preparing this proposal, we have followed the Ofwat/CCW guidance¹ and draw attention to any areas where the guidance indicates companies can use discretion e.g. with sample sizes. Similarly,

¹ <https://www.ccwater.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/Guidance-Acceptability-and-affordability-of-PR24-business-plans.pdf>



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we highlight any areas where there are still some questions about how the guidance should be followed (at the time of preparing this proposal we are still seeking clarification on some issues). In these instances we have made working assumptions which we specify.

Specifically, at the time of preparing this proposal, the guidance states that testing should cover a Single Water Affordability Scheme (using the approach and assumptions it specifies on p14 of the guidance).

2. QUALITATIVE STAGE

Considerations

While the AAT guidance is fairly prescriptive, there are a number of considerations that we have factored into the proposed design. We list these briefly here but these are areas we may need to discuss with you further:

Minimum sample sizes: the guidance is clear on the minimum expectations to allow for sub-group analysis, with some flexibility on how to incorporate e.g. low income or other vulnerable customer segments. For the purposes of this proposal we have stuck to the minimums for each company (using the WaSC minimums for Wessex Water customers and the WoC minimums for Bristol Water customers), only going above these where it is expedient to e.g. because the group size doesn't divide naturally to the minimum number required). Keen to propose a 'best in class' approach, we are nevertheless conscious that this is a literal interpretation of the guidance and that it might be permitted for Wessex Water to use a smaller sample in its water and wastewater region because of its coverage in the Bristol Water region. This is one area where further guidance is needed and which might result in revising this proposal accordingly.

Methodology: the guidance is open about the use of online or face to face methods. We are proposing a mix with the following rationale:

- Face to face: for deliberative events with household and future customers because the act of deliberating is more effective face to face; it allows for observers; and as this is the largest element, we are able to cover many locations. Additionally, we can include digitally excluded consumers this way
- Online: for harder to reach samples, particularly non household customers and those with a health vulnerability for whom the ability to participate from home (with support of a career/family member) tends to work best

Group length: we have provided costs for the minimum length required - 3 hours - on our understanding that neither Wessex nor Bristol is considering testing an additional plan over and above a 'must do' and a 'preferred' plan, and that the discretionary elements are limited. It will be more cost efficient to stick to 3 hour groups however if a third plan is included or other elements expand the content, we will need to consider the group/depth lengths.

Sample recruitment: as required, the guidance is for the water company to invite customers to participate in the research following email and letter despatch. We will require Wessex Water and Bristol Water to provide a database of customers then Blue Marble (via its fieldwork agency) will manage the letter/email despatch. The guidance gives 2 options (p19) for managing this process: we would like to use the second approach whereby the letter/email includes key information (identifying code, bill amount, PSR and ST indicators) which they can use when they opt in to the research – via an online link or telephone number). We detail anticipated scale of invitation despatch later in the proposal.



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Piloting and cognitive testing: We have drafted a timetable to allow for the materials to be cognitively tested. This will be especially important for the pre-read material and the plan 1-pager – but will include all of the materials to be used in the deliberative events and depth interviews. We will use depth interviews for this as we need to understand comprehension issues at an individual level (and these can be masked in the group environment).

Capacity for a second qualitative 'dip': should fundamental issues emerge in the mainstage fieldwork we have included provision to revise the materials and get further customer feedback prior to the quantitative stage. This will need to be implemented very quickly to meet the deadlines, hence we include provision for:

- Reconvening a proportion of the qualitative sample (this means putting the permissions in place for re-contact at the recruitment stage)
- Capacity for 4 online groups (90 minutes and c.6 respondents per group) to allow time to recap on the plan with detailed discussions on the elements that have changed
- Quick turnaround feedback to build into the survey stimulus

Accessibility: There are a number of considerations relating to making the research accessible for all

- a) Not relying on complex stimulus material as this could act as barrier to participation – and following guidelines from e.g. British Dyslexia Association. We will take time to ensure stimuli is accessible, for example:
 - Plain English
 - Not using italics
 - Using high-contrast
 - Only using 'sans serif' fonts
 - Incorporating 8 cognitive depth interviews ahead of the pilot stage
- b) We will ask participants in advance if they have any specific communication needs – and if so what would be useful (we would also make clear there is time and budget to support this). Bespoke support could include:
 - Sharing email or hard-copy materials in advance for those with particular mental health or neurodiversity needs, or high-contrast copies for certain visual impairments.
 - Providing agendas and questions in advance, to give participants time to prepare in a way which suits them.
 - Technical support to practice using Zoom (for the online samples)
 - An incentive for carers or supporters to take part
 - Working with interpreters for participants who speak English as an additional language

NB There would be cost implications for some of these support options – for example arranging for interpreters to sit alongside respondents who are not confident English speakers. We would discuss the best approach to incorporating specific needs (where there is a cost or timing implication) with the client team on a case by case basis.

A consideration for the companies is whether the invitation email should be sent using the same language and format as the bill. There are some complex logistics with this approach so for now we assume that a generic letter will have a highlighted sentence (in large font) explaining that respondents can request additional support if they require this in order to participate.



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Rotating company plans: for the fieldwork in the Bristol Water region, we propose to rotate the order of the wastewater (Wessex) vs supply (Bristol) plans across the sessions. This will enable us to get a clean read of the acceptability and affordability of each plan.

ICG involvement/assurance: we have indicated where we anticipate the input/assurance of ICG members in the timetable. Once the timetable has been agreed, we will identify key dates where documents require review (however we do not anticipate that there will be as much time as we would like to include for document review and would like the client teams to manage expectations accordingly.)

Proposed sample & methodology

The following table sets out the proposed approach which includes the option to conduct this work in the Bournemouth Water region. The table lists each sample segment, how each will be recruited, the fieldwork method and where we propose to hold the face to face elements (though location details will be agreed with the client team). We also highlight the numbers of respondents for each element with the sample size requirement in brackets.

We have followed the guidance with one variation:

The guidance includes an option to include 8 in-depth interviews per company with household customers who are economically vulnerable (either on a social tariff or eligible for one). The guidance also suggests consideration be given to boosting the low income groups within the main household sample (A). We have included the optional low income households but rather than depths, our experience is that this segment works well within the deliberative group format (Bi).

SAMPLE RECRUITMENT METHOD		Fieldwork method	Wessex - Wessex	Wessex - Bristol	Wessex - Bournemouth OPTION
A	HOUSEHOLD CUSTOMERS CUSTOMER LISTS	3 hour <u>f2f deliberative groups</u> , each comprising 2 tables of 8 customers – with a 20 minute pre-read	Salisbury Bath Taunton	Bristol Cheddar	Bournemouth
Respondent numbers (guidance requirement)			48 (48)	32 (24)	16 (-)
Bi	HOUSEHOLD CUSTOMERS IN VULNERABILITY: on low incomes (on or eligible for a social tariff) MIX OF FREE FIND AND CUSTOMER LISTS	3 hour <u>f2f deliberative groups</u> , each comprising 1 table of 8 customers – with a 20 minute pre-read <i>NB These will be held as part of the same Household customer events (A)</i>	Incorporated into one of the locations at (A)	Bristol	Bournemouth
			8 (8)	8 (8)	8 (-)
Bii	HOUSEHOLD CUSTOMERS IN VULNERABILITY: with health vulnerability (on or eligible for PSR)	1 hour <u>online depth interview</u> , with assistance from carer/family support – with a 20 minute pre-read	Recruited from across region	Recruited from across region	Recruited from across region



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<p>[**see full definition below]</p> <p><i>MIX OF FREE FIND AND CUSTOMER LISTS</i></p>				
		8 (8)	8 (8)	8 (-)
C	<p>FUTURE BILL PAYERS</p> <p>3 hour <u>f2f deliberative groups</u>, each comprising 8 customers – with a 20 minute pre-read</p> <p><i>FREE FIND</i></p>	Bath	Bristol	Bournemouth
		8 (8)	8 (8)	8 (-)
D	<p>MICRO NHH (Under 10 employees)</p> <p>Reconvened 1.5 + 1.5 hour <u>online deliberative groups</u>, each comprising 6 customers – with a 20 minute pre-read</p> <p><i>FREE FIND</i></p>	1,2 & 3 Recruited from across region	4 & 5 Recruited from across region	6 Recruited from across region
		18 (16)	12 (8)	6 (-)
E	<p>SME NHH (10+ employees)</p> <p>1 hour depth interviews (<u>phone/video</u>) with 20 minute pre-read</p> <p><i>FREE FIND</i></p>	8 Recruited from across region	4 Recruited from across region	4 Recruited from across region
		8 (8)	4 (4)	4 (-)
Respondent numbers (guidance requirement)		98 (96)	68 (60)	50 (-)

Sample recruitment

We have indicated the method of recruitment for each sample. In terms of the **bill-paying customers who will be recruited using the customer database**, we envisage the following process:

- Once locations and dates are agreed, we will specify the postcode radius to pull customer contacts for each deliberative event
- As per the guidance, the lists will need to include customer name, address (postcode), email, current bill amount (unmetered for the current financial year; metered for the previous year excluding arrears); ST and PSR flags. We would also ask for any phone contact details too
- We will request the number of contacts required per location (this will be based on an estimated strike rate of c.1 in 25)
- We will agree the essential wording for the email/letter communication – and are happy to assist in developing the ‘top and tail’ wording to achieve maximum impact. This letter/email will be despatched by QRS [as discussed in the quantitative stage]
- The letter/email will include a link for all customers to use to register their interest (opt in) online – and a freephone telephone number (managed by QRS) will also be included in the letter
- Both the letter and the email will include individual information for the customer to use when they opt in to the research
- Our fieldwork partner, Beam, will then contact and screen all participants, checking availability and allocating them to the relevant strand of fieldwork



Other samples, namely **the non-bill payers (Future customers) and the non-household customers** will be recruited via other methods, using regional field recruiters and for the businesses, commercial databases.

BEAM Fieldwork will manage the opt in screening and free find recruitment of households and businesses to take part in the research. BEAM works closely with Blue Marble on much of its water sector research and is well versed in delivering high-quality samples similar to those described in this proposal. With over 15 years qualitative and quantitative recruitment experience, BEAM is a provider of top-quality recruitment. It is an MRS Company Partner and a member of the AQR, BIG & ICG and so strictly adhere to their codes of conduct.



BEAM have recruited countless samples of water customers and consumers for Blue Marble. A handful of examples from recent years are outlined below:

- Sample of c.140 comprising of HH, NHH, future and vulnerable customers for CCW
- A series of 6 community events (15-20 participants in each) across Affinity Water's region
- A sample of 16 group discussions over two stages at 8 different locations across Wales for DCWW
- Sample of 25 in-home paired depths with customers in vulnerability for Bristol Water
- Numerous projects for Wessex Water (recently managing the longitude behaviour change work) over the last decade

We have already discussed the requirements of this brief in detail with BEAM and agreed how specific aspects of the recruitment approach will need to be conducted.

Incentives: all respondents will be given a cash incentive (paid via BACS following the fieldwork). Incentive costs are set at £100 for HH deliberative events (3 hours + 20 minute pre-task); £200 for SME deliberative events (3 hours + 20 minute pre-task); £100 for NHH 1 hour interview; £50 for 1 hour interview with vulnerable customers with a further £50 for carer/supporter.

Quota details:

When recruiting from lists, and when the sample relies on customers opting in to the research, we cannot apply quotas that are unrealistic or that might exclude too many people from participating. Our intention is to draw on a good cross section of age, gender and socio-demographic groups within each deliberative event, while also collecting other key information to assist in the analysis and to monitor the characteristics of the sample.

NB: the guidance does allow for additional top up recruitment using free-find methods should we find that the profile of the opt-in sample has gaps e.g. younger age groups.

The following sets out the quotas and the other characteristics we propose to record. Full screeners will be prepared and signed off prior to fieldwork commencing.



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	Quotas per table	Other characteristics recorded
A HOUSEHOLD CUSTOMERS <i>CUSTOMER LISTS</i>	4 under 45; 4 over 45 4 males; 4 females SEG: 2 x AB; 2 x C1; 2 x C2; 2 x DE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of meter • 'green' attitudes (using a simple 4 point scale) • Digital use ** • Vulnerable indicators *
**Digital exclusion – code statements 3 or 4 Thinking about your life and how you use digital channels such as email, websites, Apps, text messaging etc, which of the below would you say relates to you? 1. I prefer to use digital channels 2. I am able to use digital channels even if it is not my preference 3. I prefer not to use digital channels if an alternative is available 4. I don't use digital channels		
**Health vulnerability indicators <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health conditions that impact daily living e.g. the ability to work, the need for either daily care; or the need for targeted support to carry out tasks associated with normal living (shopping, cleaning, getting around) • A mental health condition that sometimes or always impacts daily living in terms of working or managing certain tasks/situations • A physical disability affecting daily living e.g. sight loss, hearing loss, limited mobility • Short term health issue: injury, surgery/post op recovery or serious illness that is temporarily impacting the ability to carry on with life in the normal way • On a company PSR 		

	Quotas per table	Other characteristics recorded
Bi HOUSEHOLD CUSTOMERS IN VULNERABILITY: on low incomes (on or eligible for a social tariff)	4 on ST (list recruited) 4 eligible for ST (freefind) 4 males; 4 females 2 under 45; 6 over 45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of meter • 'green' attitudes (using a simple 4 point scale) • Vulnerable indicators * • Digital use **
ST eligibility criteria (proxy for non-list recruits): 2 or more apply <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Household income less than £18k pa • Struggle to pay household bills (to the point of being in arrears with some/all, using debt consolidation services) • In receipt of benefits i.e. Universal Credit/pension credit payments 		

	Quotas per company region	Other characteristics recorded
Bii HOUSEHOLD CUSTOMERS IN VULNERABILITY: with health vulnerability (on or eligible for PSR) <i>MIX OF FREE FIND AND CUSTOMER LISTS</i>	4 on PSR (list recruited) 4 eligible for PSR (freefind) 4 males; 4 females 2 under 45; 6 over 45	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of meter • 'green' attitudes (using a simple 4 point scale) • Vulnerable indicators * • Digital use **



	Quotas per table	Other characteristics recorded
C FUTURE BILL PAYERS <i>FREE FIND</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Must be 18-30 • 4 males; 4 females • Not currently responsible for the water bill • Expect to be responsible for paying water bills in future 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Across sample, 8 x tertiary level educated; 8 x secondary level educated • Record 'green' attitudes (using a simple 4 point scale) • Record vulnerable indicators • Record digital use

	Quotas per table	Other characteristics
D MICRO NHH (Under 10 employees) <i>FREE FIND</i> recruited using commercial and recruiter databases	Representing 4 quartiles of water use and volume (spend) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic use – low spend • Domestic use – high spend • Non domestic use – low spend • Non domestic use – high spend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread of sector • Range of locations

	Quotas across sample	Other characteristics
E SME NHH (10+ employees) <i>FREE FIND</i> recruited using commercial and recruiter databases	Representing 4 quartiles of water use and volume (spend) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic use – low spend • Domestic use – high spend • Non domestic use – low spend • Non domestic use – high spend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spread of sector • Range of locations

Developing research materials

Whilst there is a lot that is prescribed in the guidance document, there are also elements that will need careful consideration and collaboration. We list all of the research materials that will need design and sign off here:

1. Invitation letter/email – sent out by Wessex/Bristol Water
2. Opt-in link with short screening element and GDPR reassurances
3. Sample screeners: specific to segment
4. Stimulus materials (with some adaptations for the different customer segments)
 - a. Pre read document
 - b. Pre task link for participants to complete ahead of the group (paper option for digitally excluded)
 - c. Engaging 1-page summary of the proposed plan
 - d. Explanation of long-term picture
 - e. Explanation of short-term picture (proposed business plan)
 - f. Expanded explanation of any enhancements
 - g. Explanation of the 'must do' business plan
 - h. Post task (ideally using survey link at the end of each group)



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We highlight the design phase in the time plan and will be looking to have a number of working meetings as we draft these materials. There is also 1 week for CCG sign off however with so many materials we propose to submit documents for review throughout the period.

Cognitive testing

We include a set of 6 cognitive depths per company i.e. 6 depths for the Wessex/Wessex materials, 6 depths showing Bristol materials and 6 depths showing Bournemouth materials. These will be used to 'dry run' the materials as they are in development. We propose to recruit these using free find methods as we don't want to disappoint any customers who have been invited to have their say (and who may feel that the cognitive depth is not what they signed up for). The 6 depths per company will reflect a good cross section of customers in terms of age and socio-demographic group.

These depths will be held online and last 1 hour. We will provide some pre-read information as part of this process. We have noted this inclusion in the timetable showing that this will be running in parallel with CSG giving their feedback.

Fieldwork

We will agree dates and locations with the client teams at the project outset. For the face to face elements (the deliberative events) we will book central locations such as community halls or local hotels for the events. We are putting together a team of experienced moderators to work alongside the Blue Marble team – these will be our table moderators as well as supporting with the depth interview work. All are highly experienced freelance researchers, well known to Blue Marble and we will be happy to provide further details of the moderating team in due course.

Much of the consumer fieldwork will take place in the evenings while the depth work with NHH and health vulnerable samples taking place during the day.

All the research, both online and face to face, will be recorded to allow the researchers to take notes and populate the thematic analysis grid for the project.

Observers are welcome where it is possible (the Wessex and Bristol groups pose particular challenges for clients viewing however external parties such as CCW could do so).

Analysis process

The foundation of our analysis and reporting is a rigorous, structured process:

- With respondents' permission, we will record all groups and interviews that we conduct during this study, via audio and video (where appropriate).
- Our researcher moderators will then record full notes from the interviews into a thematic analysis grid – including descriptive summary of key topics, verbatim quotes and their analysis of non-verbal cues (e.g. body language).
- This thematic grid also includes key sample quota variables (i.e. future customers, economically vulnerable groups etc.) to enable easy manipulation of the data to make comparisons between different types of consumers. The themes will include:
 - What respondents most support about each version of the plan
 - Areas of dislike about each version
 - Optimal version of the plan
 - How different groups respond and what this means for the optimal plan (bill payers, consumers, citizens, NHH etc.)
 - Views on phasing and intergenerational fairness
 - Plan performance relating to affordability
 - Acceptability of each version of the plan



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- The moderators will then review all notes prior to the initial analysis session which will follow the completion of the fieldwork, reflecting on themes and comparisons.
- The moderators will then meet for one or more extended analysis sessions, using the completed codeframe as the basis of a brainstorm to identify the key emerging themes from the research. This meeting will last 2 to 3 hours and will be chaired by one of the Project Directors: Emma Partridge or Olivier Boelman, with input from the whole project team. Focusing on each of your objectives in turn, we will draw on the full range of data to discuss and then pin down the 'story' of the research findings.
- The Research Directors will lead the reporting process, providing direction to the Project Manager and conducting quality assurance checks before any drafts are sent to the clients.

The Project Director will oversee the report development process. The senior members of the team will then each review the draft in full, providing comments and suggested amends, before the lead author finalises the full draft for final Director sign-off. As part of this final review, the Project Director will examine the report particularly for clarity of the language and story, narrative flow and use of clear supporting evidence throughout.

Using the qualitative stage to modify the plan

The timetable shows that there is provision for an additional round of 'lighter touch' qualitative research, should this be necessary following the mainstage. Reconvening part of the sample to 4 online groups where the focus will be on the elements of the plan that have changed. As the timetable shows, this would impact the timing by 2 weeks but we would still provide early top line data from the quantitative survey on the original deadline – although note that this will be partial data.



3. QUANTITATIVE STAGE: proposed sample and methodology

Like the qualitative stage, the guidance from Ofwat around the quantitative stage is prescriptive. We will not repeat the full guidance here but, instead, focus on those elements that do need further consideration and be factored into the design. It should also be noted that Ofwat prescribes an initial round of qualitative research, followed by round of quantitative research. In this proposal we have costed for one round of quantitative research only because there may not be a need for a second round, and if there is a need it will likely be at a smaller scale.

Methodology

Household Customers

The guidance from Ofwat is predicated on a 'push to web' method. The initial contact will be by email where possible, but by letter where an email address is not available. The letter is to include a link to the online survey but also an option to request a paper copy of the survey. While the expectation is that most surveys will be completed online, there will be implication for the timetable arising from the postal option. Ofwat also suggests that companies include a face to face element to maximise the opportunity for vulnerable and seldom-heard customers to take part. Our proposed fieldwork partners, however, are confident that the mix of web, push to web and postal options will suffice to pick up these specific customers groups. We have, therefore, not included a face to face option in our proposal. In the event that any face to face interviews are determined to be necessary (for example if a customer requests a face-to-face interview as the only mode of data collection that enables them to participate), our fieldwork partners are able to offer face-to-face interviewing services. We would envisage that if this were to happen it would be on a very small scale and costs would be provided on an ad hoc basis.

Additionally, if customers request translated versions of the survey to enable them to take part (in the event that it is not possible for a family member or friend to translate the survey for them) it is possible for us to organise translation of the survey into (an)other language(s). Each translation would require c. 1.5-2 weeks and costs would be provided on an ad hoc basis.

Non-Household Customers

For non-household customers the guidance is, again, less strict and leaves it very much up to agencies and water companies to decide what the best approach is.

We have assumed a mixed method will be required based on a 'push to web' approach. The approach will, however, be slightly different to household customers. As acknowledged by Ofwat in the guidance, the introduction of the retail market has made it difficult for the water companies in England to survey their non-household customers. The sample will be sourced differently and that also requires a slightly different approach to fieldwork. Reliable and robust online business panels are scarce, and our approach is based on a combination of telephone push-to-web and an online business panel. We do not think that there an online panel that can offer the number of business interview we require in the different areas. To supplement this, we will approach businesses by phone and try to get them to then complete the interview online.

Sample sizes

Ofwat guidance is clear where it concerns minimum sample sizes with the aim of allowing for sub-group analysis. In line with our proposed approach for the qualitative stage, for the purposes of this proposal we have stuck to the minimum sample sizes for each company. This means using the WaSC minimums for Wessex Water customers and the WoC minimums for Bristol Water and Bournemouth Water customers.

In addition to minimum sample sizes, Ofwat also offers (strict) guidance on how the household sample should be drawn with a view to oversampling in areas of high(er) deprivation to counter the expected lower response rates in those areas. Based on discussions with you we have assumed that Blue Marble will not need to be involved in drawing the sample, but we would be very happy to provide advice where needed. As opposed to the qualitative stage, future bill-payers will not need to be included in the quantitative research.

For the non-household sample, guidance is less strict around sampling. It only states a minimum number for WOCs and WaSCs which we have adhered to in this proposal.

Sample structure

Key considerations for the sampling structure are that:

- some parts of the Wessex Water region have water supply and waste (sewerage) services from Wessex,
- some parts are covered for water supply by Bristol Water, and
- some parts are covered for water supply by Bournemouth Water

This means that we have, in effect, three geographical areas to include in the research. The minimum sample sizes to achieve every across the areas:

Area	Water supply provider	Sewerage service provider	Household surveys	NHH surveys
'Wessex/Wessex'	Wessex Water	Wessex Water	500	200
'Bristol/Wessex'	Bristol Water	Wessex Water	500	100
'Bournemouth/Wessex'*	<i>Bournemouth Water</i>	Wessex Water	500	100
Total			1,000 - 1,500	300-400

* Bournemouth/Wessex element is included as an optional extra.

For each area a sample needs to be drawn that is representative household bill payers using a statistical sample survey. The guidance is clear and set out on page 25 of the Ofwat Guidance for water companies: testing customers' views of the acceptability and affordability of PR24 business plans. The exact sampling structure will vary for each area, and we will agree this during further meetings with you.

Sample Sources

In a departure from previous years, and in line with the qualitative research, sample should be drawn from company customers lists (household customers) or other sources like Dun & Bradstreet (non-household customers).

Questionnaire considerations

The Ofwat guidance is also very clear and strict when it comes to the questionnaire that should be used. There are, however, some specific elements that need careful consideration and will impact on the design (and length) of the survey.

Must do (or least cost) & Proposed Plans



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Guidance states that companies, where applicable, must make it clear which parts of the business plan are discretionary and which parts are statutory. This applies to the actual plan as well as the proposed bill. It needs to be clear to customers what the amount is that relates to the discretionary part of the proposals. For some companies the plan may not include any discretionary elements, in which case the assumption is that the 'must do' plan is the same as the 'proposed plan' with no additional cost implications. Even though in that scenario the plan is based solely on work that the regulator demands from water companies, it is still important to gauge views of the affordability and acceptability of the proposed plan.

In the survey, Ofwat expects companies to use specific phraseology such as 'least cost' or 'must-do' plans for the statutory elements and 'proposed plan' for the discretionary elements. For this proposal, we have assumed that there will be statutory and discretionary elements. We have, however, also assumed that we do not need to include a further version of the plan.

Single Water Affordability Scheme for household customers

Ofwat guidance states that companies need to allow for two versions of the business plan in relation to social tariffs and the new Single Water Affordability Scheme. To this end, the sample is expected to be split whereby one part of the sample is shown a plan and associated bill impact based on the current, but for most water companies updated, social tariff cross subsidy. The other half will be shown a universal £20 uplift (or £10 for water or sewerage only) in relation to the Single Water Affordability Scheme. Importantly, those currently on a social tariff will be shown the bill profile based on current (or proposed) schemes and no split sample approach will be used.

Assumptions on showing water-only bill and sewerage-only bill in the questionnaire

Blue Marble are awaiting clarification from Ofwat on whether, in the case of a WoC and sewerage provider collaborating on the quantitative AAT research, it is permissible to ask in the same questionnaire affordability of the water-only bill and the sewerage-only bill (followed by total combined affordability, which we understand is a definite requirement).

For the purposes of our proposal, we are assuming that this will be permitted. However, if this is not the case, Wessex Water and Bristol Water would not be able to have a quantitative read on their respective sewerage-only and water-only bill affordability, only the total bill (which neither company would be able to see the stimulus for).

Screening out employees of water companies from taking part

Given the commercially sensitive nature of information contained within the questionnaire, we will need to agree with you whether to actively screen out employees of the water companies from taking part in the research. While Ofwat guidance stipulates only those who have opted out of research should be out of scope, in the particular circumstances of Wessex Water and South West Water companies, to minimise risk of sharing confidential plans we would suggest putting in place exclusions either in the sample selection stage or in the form of a questionnaire screen out question.

Incentives

Ofwat suggests that a £5 incentive is needed to boost response rates and ensure a representative sample. It also states that in reminders a £10 incentive should be offered.

After discussion with our fieldwork partners, our proposal is based on an assumption that will not need any reminders for the household survey and that we will only use £5 incentives. For the non-household part of the sample, a £10 incentive will be offered.



Our fieldwork partners will issue the incentives, likely to be vouchers that can be used in high street shops. Our costs include the handling fee related to this.

Questionnaire length, development, and testing

We estimate the questionnaire will take 12-15 minutes to complete.

The questionnaire template is detailed in the Ofwat guidance (Appendix F). For each area the questionnaire will be largely the same expect for the stimulus materials and we will build in a different algorithm to calculate the bill profile chart that customers are to be shown. We will use the template to build the bespoke questionnaires per water company. A key factor to be considered here is the confidentiality of plan details. Our approach to this is set out in detail in section 6 (Project Management).

Once the questionnaire has been developed and signed off by you, we will programme the questionnaire ready for a final testing phase. Under normal circumstances we would always ensure that clients have a chance to test the questionnaire in its final form (ie how customers will experience it). The issues around commercial sensitivities means that we will not be able to share links to the scripted survey with you for the 'Wessex/Bristol' and, if included, 'Wessex/Bournemouth' areas as it will include details on both plans. However, we will be able to create an early interim test survey using placeholder stimuli (not including any actual plan details or bill prices) that enables you to check the structure and flow of the questionnaire - if required.

Fieldwork Partner

QRS will be Blue Marble's fieldwork partner for the quantitative components of this project. QRS is a trusted, high-quality fieldwork provider with strong experience in all modes of data collection. Blue Marble have worked with QRS on numerous large-scale data collection projects, including historically the Wessex Water tracker.



QRS has comprehensive quality standards accreditation:

- ISO 27001 and ISO 20252 certification
- MRS Fair Data Certification
- MRS Company Partners

QRS are fully GDPR compliant, and their [Privacy Policy can be viewed at https://qrs-research.co.uk/privacy-policy/](https://qrs-research.co.uk/privacy-policy/)



As QRS will play a central part on handling customer data and also will hold business plan information, Blue Marble will put in place a bespoke data processor agreement with them ensuring they adhere to the same principles and processes as Blue Marble.

QRS will be responsible for:

- Formatting, merging and selecting customer sample for email and letter invitations (optionally conducting append of Index of Multiple Deprivation and sample selection)



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- Scripting digital survey script, including development of the automated chart and the algorithm to create this from customer bill information
- Administering email and letter invitation mail out (including printing)
- Paper questionnaire printing, mail out and processing returns
- Data processing
- Conducting the non-household survey (sourcing sample, invitation telephone calls and reminder calls, provision of adapted NHH survey script)
- Administration of incentives

Data Processing & Analysis

Data for all elements of the survey (online, postal, household and non-household) will be collected in the same platform (Forsta) and will be combined together into single data files for each area. From this we will create data tables (a separate version of each area). In practice this means two versions for the Bristol/Wessex area, two versions for the Bournemouth/Wessex area (if included) and one version for the Wessex/Wessex area.

We will be able to draw survey results throughout the fieldwork, so that we can begin our analysis at an early stage.

For closed questions, our analysis will include the following:

- Overarching analysis, including the number and proportion of respondents giving each answer to each question.
- Sub-group/cross-tab analysis, including comparisons between the answers given by all the different groups in our sampling. We will highlight statistically significantly different opinions between groups (for instance age or gender). We will also consider in our analysis the impact of the Single Water Affordability Scheme versus the individual companies' Social Tariff scheme.

For open questions, our analysis will include the following:

- Thematic analysis of open questions, we will thematically code all open text responses and report on the themes that emerge
- Quantitative summary of issues raised by survey quota

We will provide raw survey data to you, with cross-tabs showing responses by sampling quota, enabling you to scrutinise the data at every level. Our cross-tab analysis will include statistical significance testing.

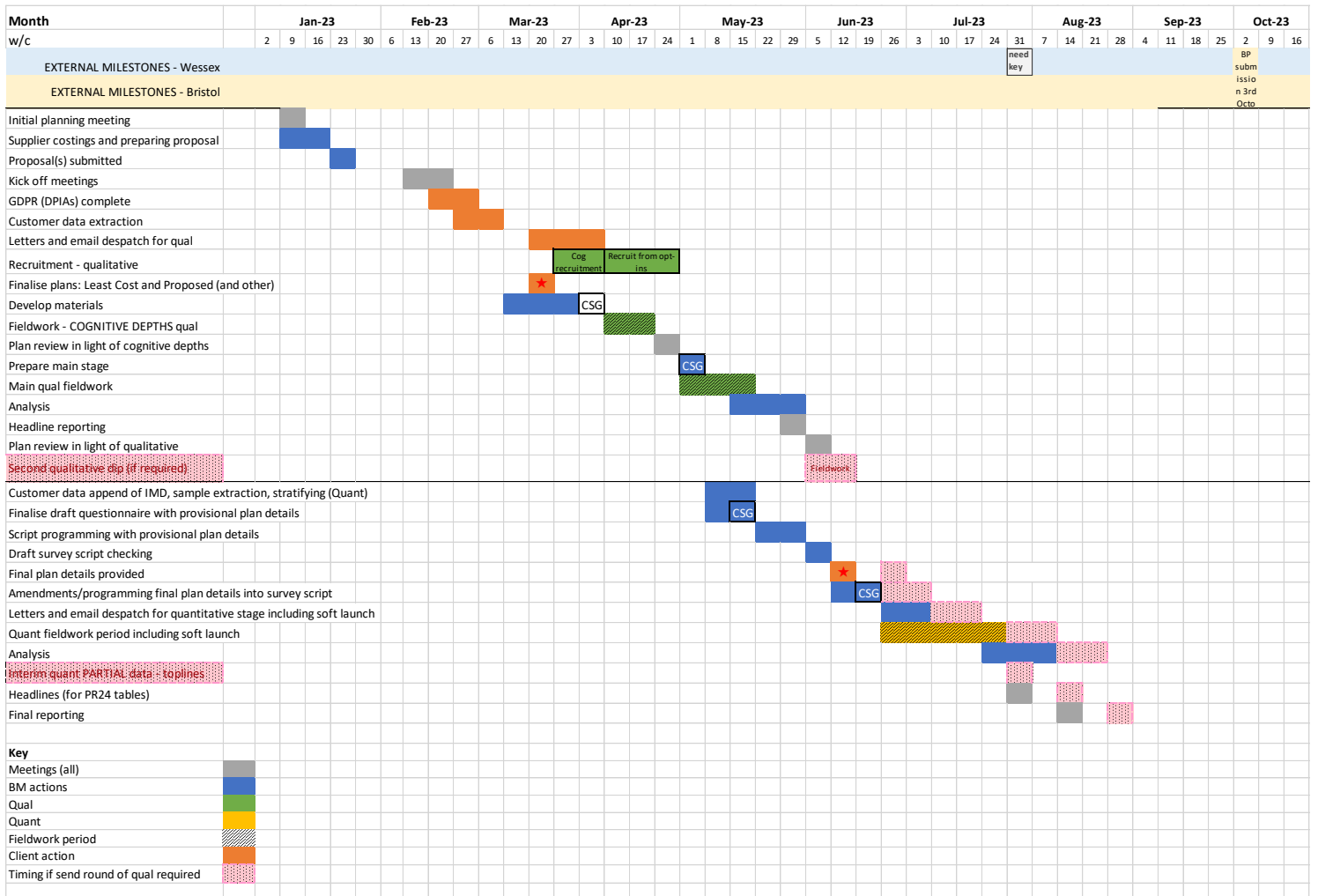
We will check each file that contains raw data to make sure none of the answers reveal elements of one of the company's plans where this would be inappropriate to report on. The same checks will be done on the coded data, we will ensure that code frames are drawn up in such a manner that it will not pose issues.

Weighting will be applied to the data for household customers to ensure that groups that will be oversampled are not over-represented in the final survey results.

TIMETABLE (DRAFT)

The following sets out an overview of the draft timetable. Following our meeting we have:

- Considered w/c 31st July as the critical date for delivery of data to feed into the business plan submission
- Indicated (with a ★) when we will need plan details (first and final iterations)
- Included a set of cognitive depths ahead of the main qualitative stage
- Included a soft launch phase for the quantitative survey
- Indicated (roughly) key moments when CSG input will be required
- Indicated how a second phase of qualitative research would fit into the timetable (pink)





4. PROJECT MANAGEMENT

There are a number of special measures we are taking in order to ensure that there are no breaches of competition law in the joint research elements. We will build on this register as we set up the project should any other areas of potential risk occur.

	Wessex Water	Bristol Water
Project team	<p>Emma Partridge will be the Director responsible for managing Wessex Water</p> <p>No documents will be sent to Wessex Water without clearance from Emma</p>	<p>Olivier Boelman will be the Director responsible for managing Bristol Water</p> <p>No documents will be sent to Bristol Water without clearance from Olivier</p>
Document development and sign off	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All research materials that refer to or detail business plan information will be prepared as 2 separate copies, with dummy placeholders used until both have been signed off. Only then will documents be merged for use with consumers – but these will not be shared with client or CSG teams 	
Supplier	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> And data required from companies by suppliers will be sent via Blue Marble to eliminate any risk of e.g. links including surveys being passed back to either client We will include an additional clause in our supplier contracts that no direct contact will be made with the client organisations – as this might constitute a risk 	
Document labelling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working drafts: WW internal only Drafts for review: WW + Dummy FOR REVIEW Final signed off version: WW + Dummy FINAL Final versions: WWBW SENSITIVE NOT FOR RELEASE 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Working drafts: BW internal only Drafts for review: BW + Dummy FOR REVIEW Final signed off version: BW + Dummy FINAL Final versions: BWWW SENSITIVE NOT FOR RELEASE
Assurance processes, link checking	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each client will only see the draft materials relating to their plan We will have a colour highlighted dummy plan which will always appear in the draft research material documents Final checking of materials in entirety will not be possible: this includes survey links which will include both plans 	
Observers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We do not believe it is feasible for members of the client teams to attend any part of the joint company deliberative events (customers will have seen both plans in the pre-read and may comment on either plan at any point in the discussion) Other observers, such as representatives from CCW or Ofwat could observe 	
Reporting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Separate reports will be prepared for each client Appendix will show final signed off version e.g.: 'WW + Dummy FINAL' Commentary will not allude directly to other company plan Overall Acceptability and Affordability analysis will used generalisations e.g. 'acceptability increased/decreased on seeing Bristol Water's plans'; 'drivers for overall low acceptability included specific aspects of Wessex Water's plans' 	



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Uncontrollable risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customers may talk to members of staff about the plans following the fieldwork. We will screen out those who opt in if they tell us they have close friends or family working for either company • Staff will also be screened out of the research however this relies on staff completing the screening question accurately
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Our more general approach to project management is based on the following principles:

Senior-level involvement primarily from two Directors: **Emma Partridge, Partner & Director**, will take responsibility for leading the project and be closely involved at all stages – she will also manage the Wessex Water account, with all communications sent through or signed off by her. **Olivier Boelman, Director**, will work closely with Emma on the design, leading the Bristol Water account in the same way. Having two senior-level executives provides an additional layer of quality assurance and ensures continuity in the event of absence - and reflects the importance and value we place on this contract. **Ben Potts (Director and Head of Quantitative research)** will act as a consultant to the project, supporting the design stage and providing quality assurance for key deliverables.

Regular communication with you: while the wider team will be working on specific elements of the project, for communication purposes and for clear lines of responsibility, we will have 2 teams. On the Wessex Water side, **Sonali Patel Associate Director**, will assume the role of Project Manager – assisted by **Brigid Eades, Research Executive**. On the Bristol Water side, **Nadia Chan, Research Manager**, will act as project manager, assisted by **Kathrynn Zhang (Research Executive)**. We will provide weekly project updates, (via email or call, as preferred), and will schedule additional calls at key milestones, as agreed with the client companies. The updates will clearly set out:

- Work delivered that week, including progress against agreed timelines
- Work planned for the following weeks, including upcoming deadlines and projected timescales
- Emerging issues or challenges and proposed steps to address these
- In addition, we will agree upfront the sign-off processes for key deliverables (e.g. the research materials), which we expect will be an iterative process.

Strong quality controls: We take our obligations in relation to data quality, processing and protection very seriously, and always ensure that the ethical implications of the research we carry out are fully assessed at the set-up stage. Our approach to quality is further underpinned by a series of policies and procedures in which all our staff are trained. As a Company Partner of the MRS, all research is conducted in line with the MRS Code of Conduct. Because much of our work is conducted for the public sector and clients in regulated sectors, we also ensure that all projects are carried out according to the Government Social Research Code and the GSR Ethical guidelines. We have a documented Quality Management Process and our quality management system mirrors ISO20252, based on experience of systems used by large agencies. We are registered with the Information Commissioner’s Office and we are committed to processing all personal information in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and UK data protection laws.

Going above and beyond in the delivery of our projects: We pride ourselves on our ability to deliver to even the tightest of deadlines, as many of our clients will attest to. This has included exceeding project timescales, delivering extra presentations, stakeholder workshops and debriefs at no additional cost, and being prepared to work outside normal working hours to deliver fast turnaround insights.

Data security: we take our commitments under GDPR very seriously. We are very happy to provide a copy of our data protection policy if useful. We are Cyber Essentials Certified, with robust data security and data handling processes.



5. DELIVERABLES AND REPORTING

Overview of deliverables

At the outset of the project

- Outline methodology: we will update our final methodological approach in writing following the project set-up meeting, to be signed off by the client team
- Full project delivery plan: alongside the approach, we will also provide a detailed Gantt chart outlining key responsibilities and dependencies in full – ensuring that any known pinch points are planned for and that the division of labour between the client teams and Blue Marble is clear at all stages.

During fieldwork

- Weekly progress updates: including updates of recruitment, response rates, quota management, deliberative event attendance, any areas of concern and key upcoming actions.
- Management and delivery of qualitative and quantitative fieldwork

Upon completion

The outputs that we will deliver will be aligned to the Ofwat guidance. In addition to the Ofwat requirements, we will work with you at the outset of this study to identify the most impactful deliverables that we can provide for you – and discuss how we can best support you with your reporting of this research. Below we have outlined the various deliverables we have anticipated providing:

- *Plan review in light of qualitative pilot* (in w/c 17th April): an informal meeting for each client where we share dominant themes, providing early insight into the findings and discussing implications for the main stage (qualitative)
- **Verbal debrief of the main qualitative stage (in w/c 5th June)**: presentation of the findings and discussion of implications – one to each client. We will have completed the analysis and developed a client-specific PowerPoint report. Ofwat/CCW invited for assurance purposes. This will include:
 - An overall analysis of the qualitative data
 - Drawing out sub group themes for both acceptability and affordability of plans
 - Recommendations on where customers would like to see improvements to the plan
 - Implications for the quantitative survey
- There is then a week in the timetable for the client teams to review and update the business plan in light of the findings and in time for the quantitative survey
- **Headline debrief (w/c 31st July)**: short document delivered to each client with a meeting to discuss any specific analysis requests as we continue with the full data analysis. Ofwat/CCW invited for assurance purposes
- **Final report**: Full report including detailed thematic analysis of the data, including subgroup analysis and verbatim quotes. The report will comprise:
 - An integrated analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data
 - Acceptability of each version of the plan
 - Affordability of each version of the plan
 - Comparative acceptability and affordability
 - Broken down by customer segment
 - Response to phasing and inter-generational fairness
 - How acceptability could be improved
 - How affordability could be improved
 - Anomalies between the qualitative and quantitative analysis
 - Recommendations on where customers would like to see improvements to the plan



6. TEAM



Emma Partridge, Founder & Director

Wessex Water team

Emma will have oversight of all aspects of the project, particularly at the qualitative design stage, while leading the Wessex Water account, working closely with the client team, leading project meetings, acting as lead moderator for a proportion of the deliberative events and leading the analysis and report writing.

Emma has worked in market research since 1989. Prior to setting up Blue Marble Research in 2007 she worked agency-side for NOP, IFF and The Research Business International (known as TRBI, now part of Kantar) where she was latterly a Board Director and head of its specialist Corporate and Financial division. During Emma's 30+ years in the research industry she has specialised in service sectors (such as financial services and utilities) and public sector research.

Blue Marble, launched by Emma 15 years ago, is a thriving agency conducting research and engagement for public and private sector clients. Throughout this time, Emma has directed insight projects from strategic brand development to tactical product positioning; consumer attitude studies; and stakeholder engagement - for clients as diverse as Environment Agency, Welsh Water, Cooperative Bank, Costa Coffee and RNIB. Emma has been responsible for designing and overseeing the delivery of large programmes of research and engagement using both qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as more consultative projects helping to design research programmes or conducting desk research – always focused on driving commercial or policy-grounded strategic implications.

Emma has been involved in many industry-wide projects for industry bodies and regulators including Ofwat, CCW, UKWIR and Water UK, and has worked with many water companies throughout the country. She led the 2020 work (for CCW) on creating a more meaningful approach to water industry engagement² that has been a central reference point for PR24 engagement. She was also on Ofwat's expert panel as it developed the guidance for Acceptability & Affordability research.



Olivier Boelman, Research Director

Bristol Water team

Olivier will have oversight of all aspects of the project, particularly at the quantitative design stage, while leading the Bristol Water account, working closely with the client team, leading project meetings, acting as lead moderator for a proportion of the deliberative events and leading the analysis and report writing.

Olivier is a Research Director at Blue Marble and a specialist in research for the utilities sector. He has joined from Traverse where he was Head of Utilities for just over 3 years. Before joining Traverse, Olivier worked at several agencies in both the United Kingdom and The Netherlands. He is a Member of the Market Research Society and Social Research Association.

Olivier has over 20 years' experience of designing, managing and delivering national and international research projects across a wide range of sectors, including utilities, transport, and professional services, and across multiple business and policy areas, including pricing, service optimisation and regulatory research.

² <https://www.ccwater.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Engaging-water-customers-for-better-consumer-and-business-outcomes.pdf>



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He has built up extensive experience and deep knowledge of quantitative methodologies including research in support of business planning processes in the utility sector (such as stated preference and other conjoint methodologies and acceptability testing), creating and managing customer panels, communications testing and customer satisfaction research. He is also highly experienced in qualitative methodologies including online focus groups, B2B and B2C focus groups, workshop facilitation and depth interviewing (with audiences ranging from C-Suite executives to vulnerable consumers).

He has worked for many clients in regulated sectors as well as for several of the regulators. Over the last 3 years he has worked for clients including Cadent, Western Power Distribution, Northern Powergrid, Citizens Advice, BEIS, Scottish & Southern Electricity Network (SSEN), Bristol Water, Welsh Water and Ofgem. He has previously also worked for other clients in the utility sector including UK Power Networks (and UK Power Networks Services), Southern Water, Affinity Water, Wessex Water and Portsmouth Water.

Ben Potts, Research Director



Project Assurance: a second (or third) pair of eyes to give added assurance to the research.

Ben heads up quantitative research at Blue Marble. Ben has spent 25 years in the industry specialising in quantitative methods with major agencies including BMRB, HPI and as a Director at GfK NOP and The Source (M&C Saatchi's research arm). Ben has a wealth of experience in survey design, analysis and reporting employing all kinds of methods across sectors including food and drink, financial, charity, water, environment, health, automotive and communications. Ben has expertise in

managing large-scale projects including general population tracking, usage & attitude, and segmentation studies, as well as bespoke surveys investigating specific customer and stakeholder groups. Whilst specialising in quantitative research, he has a huge amount of experience working alongside a qualitative team, making him an expert in bridging the two disciplines.

Since joining Blue Marble in 2017 Ben has built up a wealth of experience in designing, managing and reporting both primary quantitative research and structured desk research for clients in the water industry. Clients include Dwr Cymru, Wessex Water, Affinity Water, Environment Agency, Portsmouth Water and Hafren Dyfrdwy. As well as long term tracking studies, Ben has conducted large regulator-facing projects such as acceptability testing; social tariff cross subsidy surveys; setting up customer panels; consultation surveys and bill profiling studies. The work Ben has done is often in close conjunction with qualitative investigation, with analysis and reporting that carefully considers and builds on in-depth qualitative insight.

Sonali Patel, Associate Director



Wessex Water team

Sonali will be responsible for the day to day management of the qualitative fieldwork, coordinating closely with Nadia (on the Bristol team), managing the liaison between Beam, Blue Marble and our associates (acting as table moderators). Sonali will be supporting Emma with materials design, acting as lead moderator and supporting the analysis process and reporting.

Sonali is an experienced qualitative researcher who has worked across a range of industries, from telecoms to charities to utilities. She joined Blue Marble after working for 4 years at Basis Research working with clients including BT, GSMA, P&O Cruises and Google. Sonali has a strong track record of delivering high-quality qualitative research – using methodologies including discussion groups, workshops, depth interviews, online communities and longitudinal research conducted over WhatsApp. Specifically, Sonali is an online qualitative research specialist, following her experience working at incling, a platform provider for online qualitative research.

Sonali has worked extensively with organisations in the water sector, including Wessex Water, Affinity Water, and Portsmouth Water. She has recently led two major studies to explore garden water usage in detail, using



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motion-sensitive cameras to understand the effectiveness of behaviour change interventions. She is currently managing CCW's Citizens Forum looking at campaign messages to influence 'good' behaviours around FOGs, water saving and the environment. The project involves the engagement of 80 customers across all water company regions. She is also managing an UKWIR contract looking specifically at sewer misuse behaviours and understanding effectiveness of behaviour change programmes here and internationally. Sonali has also been involved in deliberative projects, using various methodologies. For example, she was project manager on a piece of deliberative work that included a 1-week online community with 36 Portsmouth Water customers and reconvened focus groups with the same set of customers.

Nadia Chan, Research Manager at Blue Marble Research



Bristol Water team

Nadia will be responsible for the day to day management of the quantitative fieldwork, coordinating closely with Sonali (on the Wessex team), managing the liaison between fieldwork and data processing agencies and Blue Marble. Nadia will be supporting Olivier with materials design, and supporting the analysis process and reporting.

Nadia recently joined Blue Marble from Kantar Worldpanel, where she worked extensively with Unilever. Nadia has conducted major quantitative studies across a range of sectors, including utilities, media, food & drink and gaming. A graduate of Psychology with an MSC in Cognitive and Decision Sciences, she has used advanced survey techniques and behavioural science to help her clients to better improve customer experience. Nadia is broadening her research skills, working on qualitative projects too. During her time at Blue Marble Nadia has working on various water company projects:

- **Vulnerable Customers (Portsmouth Water):** Nadia conducted multiple in-depth interviews with Portsmouth Water customers who were classified as vulnerable to understand their water related needs and how Portsmouth Water could better support them in the future
- **Water Resource Management Plan (Severn Trent):** Nadia assisted in a mixed methodology piece, looking at customers' acceptance of the proposed water resource management plan that Severn Trent had devised. She focused on the quantitative side, reaching out to customers via Severn Trent's customer base and via a panel to reach Severn Trent's non-household customers
- **Lead replacement (Severn Trent):** Nadia conducted in-depth interviews and group interviews to understand the residents' needs and expectations from their water supplier and their acceptance of replacing lead water pipes in the near future
- **Health and Safety Programme Evaluation (Yorkshire Water):** Nadia assisted in running face to face and online focus groups to understand how colleagues within the Yorkshire Water view how occupational health and safety is managed within the business and identify need gaps and areas of potential improvement
- **Tracker (Wessex):** Nadia assists in managing a quarterly tracker for Wessex, which tracks customer satisfaction and perceptions of the company, as well as topical issues within the water industry
- **Cross subsidy (Portsmouth Water):** Nadia assisted in setting up and running a quantitative survey amongst Portsmouth Water customers to gauge acceptance of the concept of Social Tariffs (i.e. financial support funded by other customers), which included a willingness to pay exercise to understand what the optimal contribution to the Social Tariff would be



Brigid Eades, Research Executive

Wessex Water team

Having spent six years teaching geography and leading on sustainability issues in schools Brigid undertook a Masters in Anthropology as a step towards a career in research. Since joining Blue Marble she has conducted a series of projects relating to the water environment using both qualitative and quantitative methods. These include:



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- **Customer experience Synthesis (CCW/MOSL):** Brigid was involved in the evidence review and analysis of NHH customers' experiences as part of CCW & MOSL's water retail business market synthesis.
- **Wessex Water YPP:** Brigid analysed the findings of the Young People's Panel days and assisted with reporting to inform Wessex Water's strategy for future customers.
- **Yorkshire Water:** Brigid is currently working alongside Sonali supporting on this project and leading a proportion of the fieldwork. She moderated a section of participants online and is moderating face to face group discussions.
- **Bristol Water Under 30s:** Brigid is currently supporting with the analysis of this mixed methods project.
- **Behaviour change review (UKWIR):** Brigid is currently involved in the evidence review and desk research as part of UKWIR's behaviour change review.
- **Woodland Trust:** Brigid is currently assisting on a mixed methods project that seeks to understand landowner attitudes and behaviours towards tree planting. The primary purpose of this research is to inform the design of the future development of a Woodland Trust landowner 'offer' based on insight collected from depth interviews and a survey of stakeholders.



Evie Fleck, Research Executive

Bristol Water team

An Oxford graduate, Evie has recently completed an MA in Gender, Society and Representation at UCL.

Evie has strong experience on both qualitative and quantitative projects. Recent projects include: research for Citizens Advice exploring vulnerable energy consumers' experience of the cost of living crisis; a desk review for Heathrow airport systematically identifying customer needs; and research for CCW (the water industry consumer body) exploring businesses experiences of the water retail market. Some other water sector work includes:

- **Future Customer Panel (Portsmouth Water):** Evie set up and managed a youth board of future customers during this project, liaising with schools in the region, managing the application process and supporting the lead facilitator during face to face workshops, then assisting with analysis and reporting.
- **Pennon Group Youth Board:** managing four separate workshops for sixth formers.
- **CCW: Citizens Forum.** Evie is currently supporting Sonali on this project and leading a proportion of the fieldwork.
- **Portsmouth Water: priorities for vulnerable customers.** Research with vulnerable customers: conducting qualitative depth interviews, then supporting with the analysis and reporting
- **Garden Water Behaviour Change:** conducting fieldwork, engaging with respondents via WhatsApp conversations and contributing to the analysis and reporting phase of the project
- **Portsmouth Water Customer Advisory panel:** conducting online focus groups and depth interviews for this ongoing customer group, assisted analysis and reporting.
- **Yorkshire Water Health and Safety Review:** assisted with recruitment.



7. Risk management

Below we outline key risks and how they will be mitigated.

1) *Not meeting the needs of Wessex Water / Bristol Water*

- Project objectives, timelines and deliverables will be formally agreed following a full briefing and inception meeting
- All project materials to be approved by the client team (and the Challenge Group/Panel where appropriate) prior to use
- Progress to be shared in weekly update meeting and through ongoing communication, enabling client expectations and concerns to be identified and addressed swiftly

2) *Project is not delivered to timeline*

To avoid slippage from misaligned expectations:

- Detailed timetable drawn up on project commission
- Clear sign-off process, milestones and expectations agreed with client teams at start of project
- Weekly updates to identify potential problems early

3) *To avoid delays from staff absences and capacity issues:*

- We have specified a team with two lead directors both of whom have the experience to lead the project should the proposed lead Director become unavailable. We can draw on other directors at Blue marble should this be required
- The Directors are supported by experienced researchers providing the ability to spread workload within original team in the case of short-term or longer-term absence
- We also have a wider resource of highly experienced associates who have social research and/or water industry experience who will be assisting with table moderation at the deliberative events
- We have regular weekly planning meetings to ensure we are aware of any pinch points well in advance and are able to avoid any unnecessary capacity problems

4) *Inadequate representation from respondents*

To ensure reaching the proposed number and quotas of respondents:

- High quality invitation wording (with our experience of email invitations for list-based recruitment)
- Incentives used to encourage participation
- Use of partner recruitment agency: we have very high turnout rates based on high quality recruitment; clear instructions; and confirmation process
- Quotas set based on what we know to be reasonable from previous experience
- Close working with recruiter to develop effective screener, tailored for each sample type. This is especially relevant for recruiting customers in vulnerable circumstances as sensitive and careful recruitment is essential

5) *To avoid suppliers failing to deliver*

- We will use suppliers with whom we have worked for many years and who have proven themselves to be reliable
- We have solid relationships with other suppliers and could transition tasks to an alternative if necessary

6) *Respondents find it difficult to engage in unfamiliar or abstract concepts*

- At all stages we will use our extensive experience of research in the water sector to ensure that the research materials (both qualitative and quantitative) are relevant and engaging
- Our team of experienced moderators facilitate the deliberative approach where consumers can ask questions and debate with others

7) *Non-adherence to General Data Protection Regulation and/or data security breaches*

- We are fully compliant with GDPR data legislation.
- Our Privacy Notice is published on our website and our Data Protection Policy is available on request and all projects comply with the MRS Code of Conduct and the data protection guidelines which underpin it.
- All our staff are trained in these guidelines and updates are communicated across the company.
- We are certified under the Cyber Essentials Scheme which means the security of our IT systems, servers and storage meet stringent data security criteria.
- We will use secure transfer processes such as FTP sites and encryption software and have processes for ensuring data is deleted from any mobile devices once stored on secure server and destroyed at project end.
- We have a process of investigating any breaches and informing appropriate bodies (and data subjects) of any breach
- Specifically, we have set out our processes designed to mitigate any breach of competition law

8. Data security



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We are GDPR compliant and have updated our policies and processes to reflect a number of new processes to ensure data handling is secure and where personal information is concerned, we are acting (and documenting) within our GDPR compliant data protection policy.

As a research agency, routinely processing data relating to our clients' customers, data security has always been core to our internal processes. For instance:

- We use secure transfer processes including FTP sites (according to client requirements), secure keys and encryption software
- We have processes for ensuring data is deleted from any mobile devices once stored on secure server
- Hard copies of reports remain in our (secure) office
- In response to GDPR, we have adopted recording and deleting processes both for 'PI' but we have extended this to client-sensitive data
- Agency & staff work under confidentiality agreements (and where required, client NDAs)



We are a **Cyber Essentials Certified** organisation with high levels of data security and data handling processes. These include:

- Network Security - industry leading Unified Threat Management device to block unauthorized access or attacks through the implementation of the inbuilt Intrusion Detection and Prevention, Anti-virus and Firewall modules.
- Secure Configuration - When new devices are configured, a fresh factory image of Windows is installed and then only the required applications and runtimes are installed for users. All factory default passwords are changed and any default admin accounts are removed.
- Access control - All PC's require Active Directory authentication password credentials in order to log on. In addition to this, there is a defined length and complexity policy in place exceeding NCSC recommendations. Share/NTFS permissions control what data users have access to. Once configured, only the intended user will have a login configured on that device
- Patch Management - critical patches are installed within pre-agreed timescales
- Malware Protection - Windows Firewall is used on all Laptops/Workstations, along with BitDefenderAV. On-access scanners monitor all system activity and automatically scan for virus/malware files which may have been downloaded from the Internet or through email. External devices are automatically scanned upon insertion.