

International Passenger Survey:

Sample expansion in August 2012 for the London 2012 Olympic Games

Context

The International Passenger Survey (IPS) samples international passengers at over twenty airports (at nearly thirty terminals), on twenty sea routes and all tunnel routes connecting the UK with overseas. The IPS methodology involves conducting between 700,000 and 800,000 interviews with passengers a year, of which over 250,000 are used to produce estimates of Overseas Travel and Tourism patterns.

The rate of sampling each port and route is determined by factors such as the profile of passengers, considered in combination with all other ports sampled on the survey. No single route or port terminal is sampled every day. The most heavily sampled port terminal is Heathrow terminal 3 departures, with over 200 interviewing shifts a year, but the majority of ports and routes are sampled less than 100 times a year.

This design enables the production of estimates at month, quarter and annual reporting periods. However, it does not lend itself to producing estimates of visits to individual events which involve passengers leaving the UK in a localised or clustered pattern. For example, consider an extreme situation where the majority of people who visited the UK for an event left the country on the same day through a single port which is sampled by the IPS once every three days. If the IPS sampled that port on the day of departure the IPS sample would contain a non-representatively high percentage of visitors to that event; if the port was not sampled on that day these visitors would be under-represented in the IPS sample. The result would be inaccurate estimates.

Because of the situation described above, the IPS does not include any estimation of visits to individual events in its standard reporting. However, the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games was a unique event, attracting a substantial amount of interest. Therefore ONS, with the backing of the IPS Steering Group including Department for Culture Media and Sport and VisitBritain, took actions to extend sample coverage in the first half of August. Details of how the sample was expanded are as follows.

Planning

A review of expected passenger flows around the time of London 2012, produced from non IPS sources was conducted in 2011. This analysis identified expectations that:

- The majority of international visits to the UK for London 2012 would be completed by 16 August
- The majority of passengers would travel via ports in the South East of England
- That some ports not covered in the IPS sample may be used by people visiting the UK for London 2012, particularly the Olympic Games.

The conclusions from this analysis were that:

- Coverage of some ports and terminals in the normal IPS sample was inadequate for producing sufficiently accurate estimates of visits to London 2012, and

- Some additional ports should be sampled in August 2012.

This analysis was followed by planning to allow additional interviewing shifts to be run by the IPS field force and to gain access to additional airports and terminals, namely London Southend Airport, Biggin Hill, Farnborough and the temporary athletes' terminal set up at Heathrow. ONS would like to thank the operators of these ports for their assistance in facilitating the additional sampling.

Sample revision

During the period 1 to 16 August 2012 the following additions were made to interviewing shifts run at certain ports:

- The number of departures shifts run at each of Luton, Stansted, Gatwick North, Gatwick South, Heathrow terminals 1, 4 and transits, together with St Pancras Eurostar terminal, was doubled relative to the standard IPS sample.
- The number of departures interviewing shifts run at each of London City, Southampton and Bournemouth airports and Ebbsfleet and Ashford Eurostar terminals was increased by a factor of four relative to the standard IPS sample.
- Southend, Biggin Hill and Farnborough airports were each sampled four times in that period.
- Passengers passing through the temporary athletes' terminal at Heathrow airport were sampled as they entered the main departure terminal (terminals 1, 3, 4 or 5) after being transported there from the temporary terminal.

In order to facilitate this additional sample coverage within the IPS field force the rate of selection of passengers at most of these ports was widened during this period. The revised probability of selection was reflected in the weighting of IPS data.

Use of data

Data collected at Biggin Hill and Farnborough provided useful insight but was not included in the final processed sample because of challenges in recruiting sufficiently large and representative samples at these ports. However, all other data was utilised.