**Behavioural Data – Key points**

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[All commentary and data below relate to SAM, except where indicated]

- Initially the behavioural response to the recent wave of cases was slow. However, there has now been a substantive behavioural response.
- Figure 1 shows that close contacts have reduced by c.20%, partly due to people working from home, but also because of people taking more care both at work and during visits to other homes. Unsurprisingly, however, close contacts in hospitality venues have increased since early October.
- There has been a more marginal fall in the number of locations that people go to and the number of people that individuals meet from outside their household (Figure 2).
- The greater contribution comes not from meeting fewer people, but from being more careful when meeting people (Figure 3). This includes workplace behaviour.
- Encouragingly, these observations apply also to those who are most socially active (Figure 4).
- The magnitude of behavioural change is not particularly large, with most SAM indictors changing by perhaps 10-20%. However, because social contact would typically increase in this period leading up to Christmas, the degree of commitment to change is perhaps more substantive.
- The population is now fairly evenly split on whether the government response to the latest wave has been sufficient (Figure 5).
- The Amárach data suggest that the population is divided on whether there should be further restrictions (Figure 6).
- The majority nevertheless expect further restrictions (Figure 7).
- In the context of the possible reintroduction of restrictions, it is worth noting the public’s view about the relative fairness of specific restrictions. Limits on important once-off family gatherings (funerals, weddings, etc.) were regarded as the least fair of the restrictions still in place in mid-Summer 2021 (Figure 8).
- While the public has become significantly more worried over the past two months, there is little sign yet that Omicron has increased that further (Figure 9). The Amárach data concur with this. Figure 9 also shows that, consistent with feeling protected by the vaccine, people have become more worried about the health system than about friends, family or themselves catching Covid-19.
- In addition to worry, whether people perceive the restrictions that are presently in place to be coherent or contradictory is a consistent predictor of people’s behaviour. Figure 10 indicates that perceived coherence has fallen to its lowest level since SAM began and is no below the mid-point of the scale.
• Difference in behaviour by age-group are much smaller than is reflected in public commentary (Figure 11). The somewhat higher incidence of close contacts among younger people is mainly due to work and there is little difference in how many people they meet.
• However, younger people are becoming more disaffected. A cluster analysis of multiple psychological scales reveals that most people in Ireland are broadly supportive of the public effort, with a second and growing group that is not (Figure 12). This trend is driven by younger adults.
• Low wellbeing is an important factor in this trend. Young adults now have much lower overall self-reported wellbeing than older adults, especially among the non-supportive group (Figure 13). Note that this is not the pattern of “normal times” – wellbeing is generally lowest among the middle-aged.
• SAM records a positive trend in willingness to take the booster vaccine (Figure 14). (This trend is not apparent in the recent Amárach data - SAM picks it up because it has been asking the booster question over a longer period).
• Both SAM and the Amárach data record that the majority of individuals who take an antigen test are symptomatic.
Figure 1: Proportion who had a close contact the previous day – overall and by location

Figure 2: Mean number of people individuals met from outside their own household in the previous 48 hours.
Figure 3: Frequency of engaging in mitigation behaviour (wearing a mask, keeping 2m, hand sanitation) when visiting locations outside the home.

Figure 4: The proportion of the population classified as “socialisers” (those who inhabit the tail of the distribution of social activity) and the proportion who are both socialisers and do not engage in mitigative behaviours at least 50% of the time in locations outside the home.
Figure 5: Policy preferences regarding strength of response.

Figure 6: Should there be more restrictions?
Figure 7: Expectations for further restrictions next month.

Figure 8: Proportion perceiving specific restrictions to be fair (at end-July).
Figure 9: Trends in different components of worry

Figure 10: Perceived coherence of restrictions.
Figure 11: Differences in behaviour by age group.

Figure 12: Likelihood of belonging to “supportive” cluster based on positive responses to multiple psychological scales.
Figure 13: Wellbeing by age-group and whether people fall into the “supportive” cluster

Figure 14: Willingness to take a booster vaccine