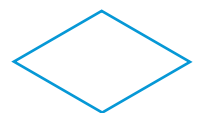




THE  
BEHAVIOURAL  
INSIGHTS  
TEAM



# BIT Review 2021-22



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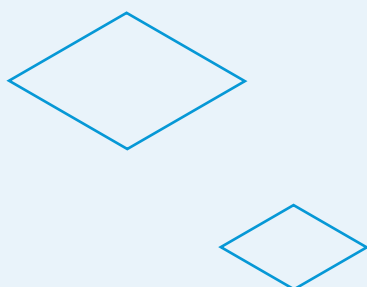
**It is a great pleasure to be introducing the latest BIT Update Report, the first since this unique organisation became a full member of the Nesta family.**

Nesta and BIT have been long term partners. In 2014, Nesta supported the spin out of BIT from the UK government as an independent company. Since then, we've worked closely on a number of fronts, in particular, to support Nesta's work to tackle obesity, educational inequality and climate change. At the end of 2021 we brought the two even closer together through the full purchase of BIT.

The partnership will allow us to share a range of capabilities across the two organisations, from behavioural science, experimentation, and data science, to design and collective intelligence. We hope to be able to help behavioural science evolve over the next decade to tackle major societal challenges across the world, share learning across contexts, and scale innovative solutions.

As this report shows, BIT has never been busier, tackling a diverse set of challenges, and expanding our work into new sectors and places. Over the next year, we look forward to working with partners to design, test and scale new solutions and improving the lives of people across the world.

**Ravi Gurumurthy**  
*Chair Behavioural Insights Team*  
**CEO Nesta**



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**Welcome to the Behavioural Insights Team report for 2021 and 2022. In these pages you will find projects and ideas from BIT colleagues from around the world across multiple policy areas. For those in a hurry, we've also produced a top-10 of some of our favourite trials from over the last couple of years, either because of their impact, surprise, or methodological innovation.**

It has been an intense couple of years. As for many others, COVID-19 hugely changed what we did and how we did it. From early 2020 we were working largely remotely, using much more online testing and trialling which drove a big expansion of our digital platform Predictiv (see Applying Behavioural Insights section). As was widely reported - though often not very accurately - our health teams turned rapidly to supporting efforts to combat the pandemic as there were strong behavioural aspects to almost all aspects of these.

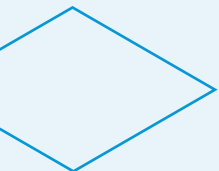
At first behavioural, or 'Non-Pharmaceutical Interventions', were the primary line of defence. Encouraging hand washing, physical distancing, wearing (unfamiliar) masks, ventilating and so forth were all essentially about behaviour. We were very active in boiling down official messages to be as clear, short and informative as possible. This included detailed testing and iteration of those early handwashing posters to see how accurately people judged social distancing.

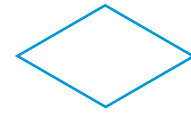
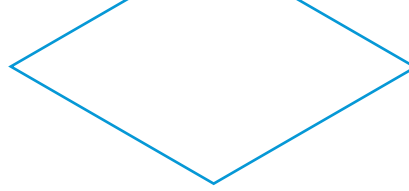
'Second-line' defences against COVID too had major behavioural elements. What's the use of testing if people don't turn up? How can you help people remember who they've been in contact with? And crucially, how do you help people who have tested positive to self-isolate?

Here our work ranged from trials showing the continuing value of human contact to encourage self-isolation, not just texting, through to careful behavioural segmentation to help policymakers identify the most impactful actions.

Our advice and results weren't always taken on board, but we are proud of the contributions we made to the evidence base to enable more informed decisions by policymakers and the public.

Finally, when the heroic efforts of medical researchers delivered vaccines in record time, behavioural issues were still vital. A vaccine is not a vaccination until a person accepts and





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turns up for a job. On this, huge credit also goes to the army of volunteers and local actions that helped deliver the vaccine program, including understanding diverse patterns and concerns behind vaccine hesitancy.

Our UK team found that the vast majority of 'hesitant' were not 'anti-vaxxers'. Most were 'intenders', but hassle and practical issues got in the way. Some were sceptical for other reasons, such as thinking that they had already had it or weren't vulnerable, while others had real worries that needed listening to and addressing. Putting these very different views in the same 'anti-vax' bucket, as some commentators and activists did, was disrespectful and empirically wrong.

Pervasive as the pandemic has been over the last two years, our portfolio of other projects has continued to expand. We are heavily invested in supporting the massive efforts required around climate change given that an estimated two thirds of changes required involve human behaviour, ranging from decisions about which technologies to adopt through to countering the scourge of 'greenwashing'.

Other major initiatives for us include building on our longstanding work supporting consumers, for example our Financial Capability Lab (supported by the UK Money and Pensions Service), to our pioneering work reducing gambling harms (supported by the UK Gambling Commission).

Important though our UK work and origins are to us, BIT is ever more global. We have a growing international footprint with nearly half of our over 250 people based outside the UK and offices in Australia, Canada, France, Indonesia, Mexico, Singapore and the US. BIT has now run trials and supported local partners in over 70 countries, squaring up to some of the most difficult issues across the world today, such as re-integrating former child combatants, fighting disinformation, tackling disadvantage, improving mental health, preserving wildlife, reducing corruption, boosting growth and productivity, and tackling the frightening prospect of antimicrobial resistance and drugs that don't work.

This report offers an overview of the range and diversity of this work and we are very grateful to the partners that have made this possible, whether public bodies, foundations, scholars, or businesses.

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BIT remains a social purpose company, created to harness behavioural science to support people make better choices for themselves and others and yes, to make the world a better place. At the end of last year, social innovation charity Nesta, became BIT's sole shareholder, making it easier for us to work with our Nesta colleagues on their missions on health, sustainability, and a fair start in life while securing our own identity and primary purpose of focusing on social impact.

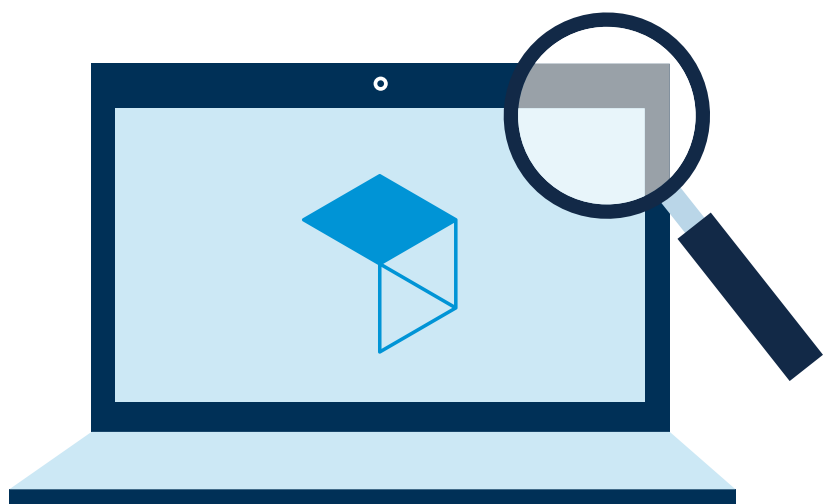
Alongside this core value of social impact, we are passionate about being empirical and humble. Empiricism - testing, evaluating, learning - is critical if we are to understand what does actually work in real life with real people. That is why the work covered in this report doesn't just include successes that delivered great social impact, but also instances where that didn't happen. We need to have the maturity and confidence to share what didn't work along with what did.

I've often felt that, even if you don't care about behavioural science, adopting the humility of testing and empiricism, of doubt, and the methods that follow, can benefit almost every domain in life. Humans, societies and economies are complex and often even the best-seeming ideas don't play out as expected.

The UK's recent creation of an Evaluation Task Force, the US's 2018 Foundations for Evidence-based Policymaking Act and the wider growth of What Works Centres across the world are welcome examples of the strengthening of prototyping, testing and evaluation across multiple fields.

Thank you for your interest in BIT. Whether you have been following us for many years or this is the first time you have come across our work, I hope you will find plenty in these pages to inform, educate and maybe even inspire.

**David Halpern**  
*CEO Behavioural Insights Team*





### **1. Flexible working: Potential scale – An additional 174,000 flexible jobs**

The appetite for flexible working has hit new heights since the COVID-19 pandemic. After experiencing lockdown, 9 out of 10 jobseekers want increased flexibility. However, even during the pandemic, just 22% of quality jobs (that is permanent positions that pay £20,000 or more per year) were advertised with flexible working options. In a large field RCT, conducted before Covid with 55,744 online advertisers, we tested the impact of introducing a prompt in the job listing template to give employers the option to advertise jobs with a choice of nine flexible working options (such as 'job share', 'compressed hours', etc.), compared to the business-as-usual with no such prompt. This increased the proportion of job ads with flexible working options by 17-20%, and these jobs in turn attracted 19-30% more applicants - a great example of a 'double nudge'. If this flexible working prompt was used on all current job vacancies in the UK, then 174,000 flexible jobs would be added to the UK economy in a year alongside an increased talent pool for employers.



### **2. Handwashing in Bangladesh: Potential scale – 540 million more handwashes**

Globally about 1.8 million children under the age of 5 die each year from the top two killers of young children around the world - diarrheal diseases and pneumonia. Handwashing has been found to be very effective at tackling both conditions, reducing the number of people who get sick with diarrhea by 23-40% and respiratory illnesses by 16-21%. In 2020 BIT partnered with BRAC to test ways of increasing the usage of public handwashing stations that were being introduced across Bangladesh.

The project found that while installing signage and mirrors above the handwashing stations didn't seem to have an effect, having promoters highlight the stations and hand out free soap and masks to people who used the stations did. If this approach was rolled out and sustained across Bangladesh, an estimated 540m+ more handwashes per year would take place at the stations.



### **3. National Tutoring Program: Potential scale – 3 million more hours of tutoring**

Tutoring is one of the most effective ways to accelerate pupil progress, but its impact is reduced by low pupil attendance or engagement. In the UK BIT tested a short rapport-building exercise that saw tutors and their pupils take a 5 minute online quiz to identify similarities between them. This had the effect of increasing pupil attendance at tutoring sessions by 4.2 percentage points, which if used by all tutors in the latest extension of the National Tutoring Program would result in approximately 3m more hours of tutoring. This is valued at approximately £30m+ and could result in 600,000 months of additional progress in school for pupils.



### **4. Reducing antibiotic prescriptions by New Zealand doctors: Potential scale – 9.2% reduction in prescriptions**

Antimicrobial resistance (AMR) is a global concern. A World Health Organisation report in 2021 warned that if urgent action isn't taken, drug-resistant diseases could cause 10 million deaths each year by 2050. The over-prescription of antibiotics is a key driver of AMR, and New Zealand had the fourth highest antibiotic use among OECD countries in 2017. In 2019 BIT sent letters to half of the top 30% of prescribers in each region of New Zealand with a personalised graph showing their prescribing rate, broken down by specific antibiotics and by their prescribing rates to Māori, Pacific and all other patients. The other half acted as the control group. Māori and Pacific people are historically at higher risk of infectious diseases and have a greater risk of under-prescription by GPs. These letters reduced prescribing by 9.2% overall, compared to the control group, while not reducing prescriptions among Maori and Pacific patients. If this figure was extrapolated to all high-prescribing GPs, this could translate to around 48,000 fewer scripts over a calendar year.



### **5. COVID vaccine attendance: Potential scale – Additional 42,000 first-dose vaccinations**

Ensuring people book and turn up for their COVID vaccines remains a global public health priority. We tested a series of SMS messages to encourage booking a vaccine appointment and found that the top performing message was the one that informed recipients they had reached the top of the queue for vaccination. The “Top of queue” message was rolled out nationally to people aged 30-37 (n = 4.7 million) and subsequently people aged 18-24 (n = 2.5 million) upon completion of the first trial. We calculated that the real world impact of the two trials combined was an additional 42,000 first-dose COVID-19 vaccinations being received within 14 days of messages being sent.



### **6. Intimate partner violence in Chile: Potential scale – 11,000 fewer victims dropping out of prosecutions**

Most women who experience intimate partner violence do not report it, and when they do, a third drop out before the case has concluded. BIT tested sending reminder phone calls and text messages to victims at key moments throughout their criminal proceedings and found it reduced the victim dropout rate by about 12 percentage points, while increasing the proportion of cases where the Prosecutor’s Office pressed charges by 16%. If this intervention was extended to all women involved in Intimate Partner Violence prosecutions in Chile, an estimated 11,000 fewer victims would drop out of the prosecution process and charges would be pressed in an additional 6,500 cases per year.



### **7. Healthier takeaways: Potential scale – 43.6 billion fewer calories**

Online food delivery platforms have made ordering takeaway meals easier than ever. To discover how these platforms might be designed to encourage healthier orders, Nesta and BIT created a simulated online takeaway platform. This was used to test how changes to the



way restaurant, food and portion size options are presented can affect consumers' food choices. The best performing intervention led to a 177 kcal reduction per order on average, primarily driven by consumers reducing portion sizes. This reduction equates to a significant share of the UK government's estimate of 200-300 excess calories being consumed every day by many adults. If this intervention was used on all online delivery platforms in the UK, approximately 43.6bn fewer calories would be ordered per year.



## 8. France online scams: Potential scale – Reducing vulnerability by up to 50%

Every year, 780 000 people in France buy a product or service that is not delivered, does not meet expected quality standards, or leads to hidden costs. Most of these scams occur in online retail environments, where fraudsters use malicious 'dark patterns' to encourage impulsive purchases. To help protect consumers from online shopping scams before they occur, BIT created and promoted a 'fake' online shopping site full of scams and tricks and ran a three-armed randomised control trial which scammed consumers in a safe environment to prevent future victimisation. Facebook advertising was used to direct real consumers onto a fake marketplace containing multiple dark patterns. The team estimate that this promising approach can cut susceptibility to online scams by half.



## 9. Green pensions: Potential scale – £252 billion more in green investments

There is growing interest in how influencing retirement saving choices can be used to help reach Net Zero targets. While UK pension pots are worth over £2.6 trillion, only 1 in 10 are invested sustainably. We conducted an online experiment that found that 47% of UK customers would stick with a default that opted them into a green pension fund. If every pension holder in the UK was offered this green default, then an estimated 2m more pensions would be green, including approximately £252bn of investments shifting to green pensions.



## 10. Gambling: Potential scale – 184,000 fewer people gambling

Gambling is big business. In the UK it's a £14 billion market, with research finding around 47% of the population gamble every month. In September 2021 BIT launched the Gambling Policy & Research Unit. Over the past year the unit has run a number of trials, including an online experiment testing how betting behaviours are shaped by the way odds information is presented. This trial found that simplifying the way that odds are framed, for example by using pound (£) terms and emphasising what players could potentially lose, increased understanding of odds by 3 percentage points (to 14%). The number choosing to play the slot game also decreased by 7 percentage points (to 68%). If scaled up, the team estimate that better understanding of odds would have resulted in approximately 184,000 fewer people choosing to play the game.



