

KwikFit >

**Know
before
you go...**



A woman wearing sunglasses and a denim jacket leans into the open rear hatch of a car. She is smiling and looking towards a young child who is sitting in the back seat. The child is looking down at something in their hands. The background shows a bright, sunny outdoor setting with green grass and trees.

Everything you need to know for your next trip

From making sure your car's safe to finding the best route, there's a lot to think about before you set off on a long trip. To see how drivers deal with journey planning, we surveyed 600 people across the UK, asking them everything from which vehicle checks they carry out to what they like to take with them on their travels. Keep reading to find out what they said, and for some essential guidance on what to do before you climb behind the wheel.

Have any journey planning tips or stories of your own you'd like to share? Use the hashtag [#CarSafetyChecklist](#) to join the conversation.

A close-up photograph of a person's hand checking a car's coolant reservoir. The hand is holding the black cap of a white plastic reservoir. A black hose is connected to the side of the reservoir. The background is a blurred green landscape with sunlight filtering through the trees.

Important vehicle checks

To help you stay safe on the highways and avoid unnecessary breakdowns, it's a good idea to perform the following checks on your vehicle before you set off:

Tyre tread

Bald tyres can land you in big trouble. If the tread depth on your wheels isn't above the legal minimum of 1.6mm (which applies across the central three-quarters of the tyre around the entire circumference), you risk fines of £2,500 and three penalty points per tyre. You can see if your tyres meet this standard using the '20p test'. Simply stand one of these coins in the tread groove. If you can see its outer edge, it's time to get new tyres. Also, bear in mind that many safety experts recommend changing your tyres when you hit a tread depth of 3mm to maintain safe braking distances, especially in adverse weather.



While 25% of respondents said they only make long car journeys a few times a year, 22% revealed they take these trips once a month and more than a fifth (21%) said they make long journeys once a week or more.



General tyre condition

Check the overall condition of your tyres, paying attention to any cracks or bulges in the sidewalls, or foreign objects that may be embedded in the rubber. If you spot signs of damage, get one of our expert technicians to examine them.



Tyre pressure

Under-inflated tyres are a common cause of tyre blowouts and when these accidents happen at high speeds, they can be extremely dangerous. Incorrectly inflated tyres can also affect handling, braking distance and fuel consumption, so this isn't an issue you can afford to ignore. Your vehicle handbook will contain the recommended pressure for your front and rear tyres and you can test them at a garage forecourt or at home with your own pressure gauge.

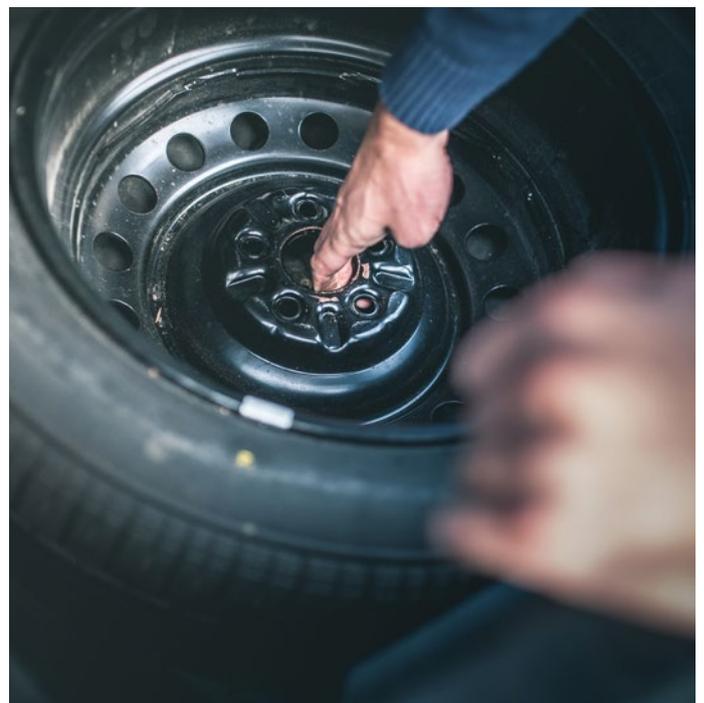


The majority of people (76%) said they know where to find information about how much pressure their tyres should have in them according to UK law.

34% of people said they check tyre pressure every few months, while 28% check it once a month and a safety conscious 12% revealed they check it every week. However, nearly a fifth of respondents (18%) said they never check the pressure in their tyres.

Spare tyre or tyre repair kit

A flat tyre can spoil even the best laid travel plans. This means it's wise to make sure that you have a spare wheel and locking wheel nut or a puncture repair kit handy.



Coolant

Coolant protects your engine from overheating, so it's important to check this fluid isn't leaking. To do this, find the radiator reservoir (found under your bonnet, but you can refer to your car's manual if you're not sure exactly where it is located) and see if the coolant level is sitting between the minimum and maximum lines. If you need to top it up, make sure you use the right type of antifreeze for your vehicle and only attempt this when the engine is cold. Bear in mind that it's not normal for coolant levels to fall in modern cars, so if yours has dropped and you're not sure why, you should take your vehicle in for assessment.



Oil

Oil is essential for lubricating the moving parts of your engine so running low is bad news for your engine and could lead to a big repair bill. To check engine oil levels, locate the dipstick under your bonnet, pull it upwards and see if the oil level is between the minimum and maximum markers. If you can't see the oil level clearly, wipe the dipstick with a clean rag, reinsert the dipstick and try again. If necessary, top the oil up (making sure you use the oil identified in your handbook as you can also cause damage if you select the wrong oil type).

Screenwash

Trying to drive with dirt, grit or insects on your windscreen isn't easy and it can dramatically increase your risk of accidents if you can't see where you are going. So to help ensure you have a clear view throughout your journey, take the time to top up your screenwash reservoir. It's best to use a premixed screenwash as these products contain special cleaning agents and antifreeze.





Windscreen wiper functioning

Windscreen wipers get damaged over time, meaning they become less effective at clearing water and dirt. If you've had yours for a while, it's worth checking the blades for signs of wear and tear, such as splits in the rubber edges.

15% said they check their windscreen wipers before each journey.

43% of respondents said they check their windscreen wipers are in full working order a few times a year, while 21% examine them each month and 22% check them on a weekly basis.

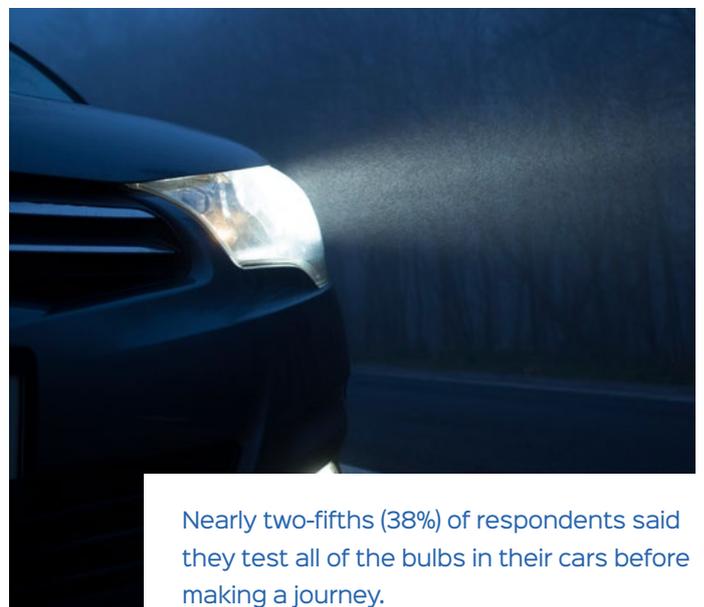
Windscreen condition

If your windscreen has any cracks or damage, you should get this checked and repaired by an expert before a long journey. A single unforgiving pothole could cause a crack to spread across the windscreen, blocking your view of the road.



Lights

To avoid being pulled over by the police and potentially putting yourself and other road users at risk, it's essential to ensure that all of your lights are working, including your brake and reversing lights, indicators, headlights and cabin lights. These checks are quicker and easier with two people, so if you can, get someone to help you test your lights while you apply the brakes, reverse gear and indicators. Also, be aware that indicators blink at double speed when a bulb has gone to notify the driver, so this is something to watch out for.



Nearly two-fifths (38%) of respondents said they test all of the bulbs in their cars before making a journey.

Air con

Especially if you're driving in hot weather, you'll want the comfort of your air conditioning system. If you haven't used yours in a while, check it before you go. You might find it has developed a fault or simply needs a recharge, which you'll be able to arrange at your local repair centre.



Battery

Flat batteries are one of the most common causes of breakdowns in the UK. Often the age of the battery is to blame. Because they lose their charging capability over time, older batteries tend to be less reliable, especially in colder weather. So, if you're concerned about the charging capability or age of your car's battery, don't leave things to chance when you're preparing for a long trip. By getting technicians to carry out a thorough check, you can find out if any parts of your battery charging and starting systems need to be replaced.



Wheel balancing & alignment

If your car's steering wheel wobbles when you're driving at high speeds, it may be that your wheels aren't balanced properly. Also, if your vehicle veers to one side when driving on a straight, flat road it may suggest your wheel alignment is out. Both can lead to irregular and rapid tyre wear and cause suspension issues so to protect your car and increase your driving comfort, it's important to get these problems fixed by a trained technician.



Dash warning lights

There are literally hundreds of different dashboard warning lights depending on the make and model of your vehicle. Before you set off, if a dashboard warning light is illuminated, make sure you get this checked out, especially if it is one you do not recognise. If the engine warning light illuminates, get this looked at immediately as extended driving could potentially cause long term damage.

Servicing

It's generally recommended that cars get a full service every year or 12,000 miles - whichever comes first. Your vehicle might also benefit from interim services to keep it in the best possible condition. For example, drivers who do a lot of frequent short trips are advised to book interim services every six months or 6,000 miles. If your car's due a check-up, don't leave this until after a long trip. Regular servicing means any problems are identified at an early stage, which can prevent more serious and costly damage further down the line.

If you're not sure when your car was last looked over, refer to your vehicle log book to see the most recent servicing stamp.

MOT

You can be fined up to £1,000 if you drive without a valid MOT, so you should never set off on a long journey if yours is about to expire. If you're arranging one of these tests, make sure you leave enough time for any repair work that might be needed before your vehicle is issued a VT20 'pass' certificate. You can get an MOT done up to a month before it is due without losing your expiry date, so it's worthwhile arranging this test early ahead of a long trip.



Emergency supplies

No matter how well-prepared your vehicle is, there's always a chance you'll be faced with unforeseen events on the road. This means it's useful to take some emergency supplies with you just in case - and here are some of the most important:

Water is the most popular 'essential' road trip item, with 22% of respondents saying they would prioritise this, followed by spare cash (19%) and a map (15%).



CHECKLIST



Mobile phone

While many of us don't go anywhere without our mobiles these days, it's especially important to make sure you have a charged phone with you if you set out on a long journey. It's also useful to take an in-car phone charger to top up your battery if it gets low. If you have breakdown cover, store the number in your mobile in case you need roadside assistance.



Water and snacks

If you're unlucky enough to be stranded in your vehicle for a long period of time, you'll need access to water - so remember to take a bottle or two with you. Some snacks could come in handy too.



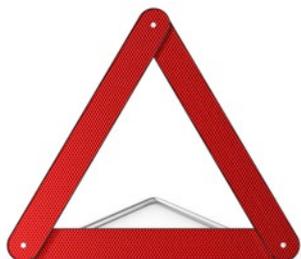
Extra clothes

Especially if you're travelling in winter, it's useful to pack some extra clothes, including a hat and gloves, in case you get stranded.



First aid kit

In case of minor injuries, pack a first aid kit (and make sure it's properly stocked before you set off).



Warning triangle and high-vis vest

A high-vis vest can save your life if you break down on a dark road. In addition, a warning triangle is an important piece of kit. If you find yourself stuck on a highway, this should be placed a minimum distance of 45 metres behind your car - making sure it is on the same side of the road. Bear in mind you shouldn't use these triangles on motorways though.



Ice scraper and spade

If you're travelling in winter, it's wise to take an icescraper to clear your windscreen and, if you have space, pack a shovel. This could help you dig yourself out of snow if you get stuck. Other useful items include car jump leads, a torch, a travel-size fire extinguisher and some spare cash.



A woman with long brown hair, wearing a bright blue puffer jacket, is smiling as she looks at a large map spread out on the roof of a silver car. The background shows a hazy, mountainous landscape. The car's interior, including a black quilted seat and a side mirror, is visible in the foreground.

Planning ahead

As well as making sure your car is up to scratch before you set off, it's important to plan your journey carefully. Here are some tips to help ensure a smooth trip:



Research your route

Relying on your sat nav to get you to your destination is easy, but it's worth doing some extra research before a long journey in case things don't go to plan. For example, check online to see if your preferred route is likely to be subject to disruption caused by roadworks or special events. (Bear in mind that if you need to adjust your sat nav during your journey, you should pull over somewhere safe first. Prolonged adjusting of these devices while you're driving can lead to accidents as it takes your focus off the road.)

65% of respondents said they are likely to check their routes for diversions before setting off on a journey.

Only 14% of respondents said they would have no rest stop in journeys of more than five hours. 44% said they would have one break, while 28% said they would take two stops.

64% of people said they would have no rest stops in journeys lasting less than two hours. A similar proportion (60%) said they would not have a break on trips lasting between two and five hours.

Allow enough time for rest stops

It's essential that you give yourself enough time to have regular rest stops on long journeys.

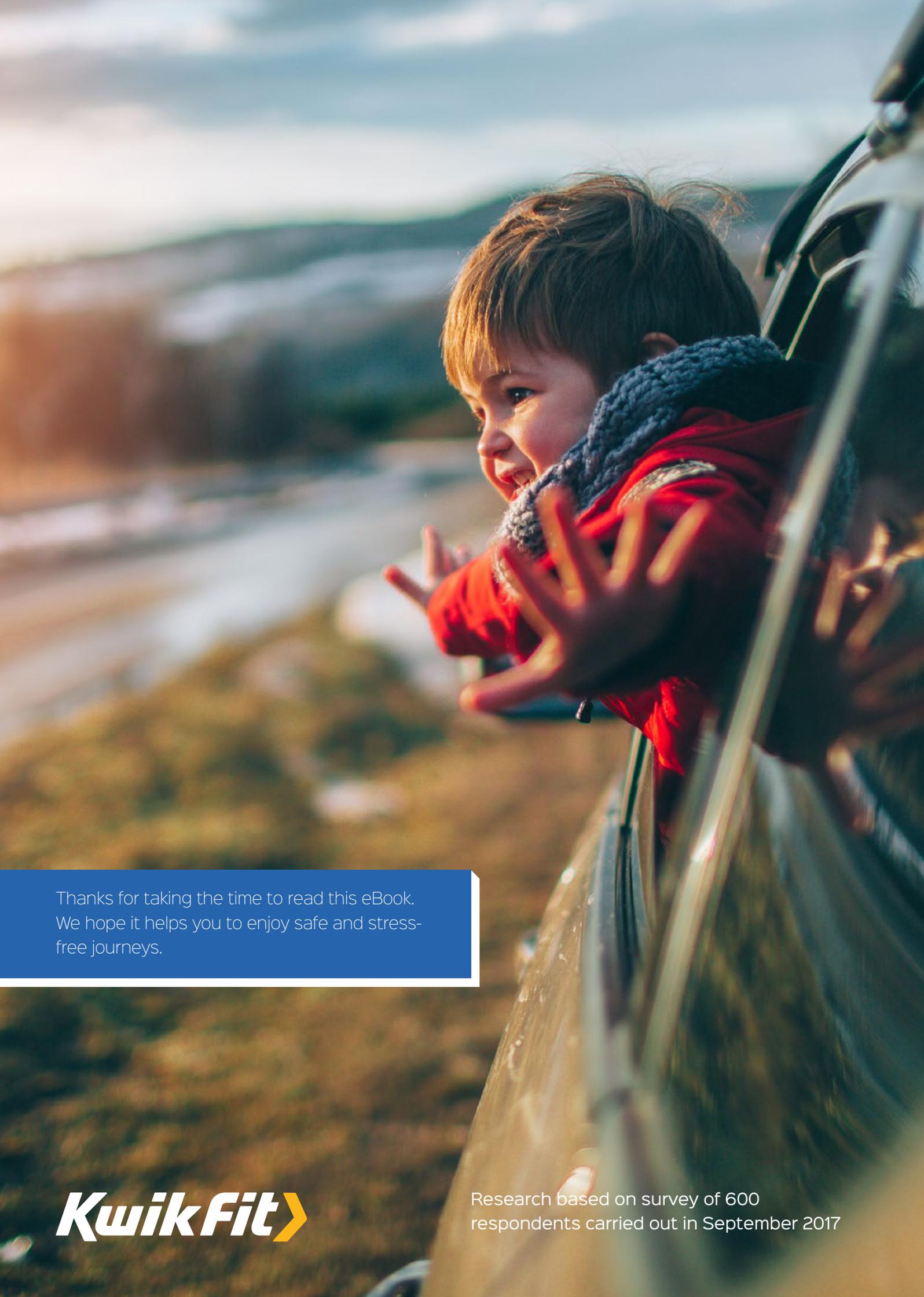


Locate service and fuel stations

It's useful to know where the fuel and service stations along your route are so you don't get caught short, especially in more remote areas.



75% of people said they do not research the locations of petrol or service stations ahead of their journeys.



Thanks for taking the time to read this eBook.
We hope it helps you to enjoy safe and stress-free journeys.

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Research based on survey of 600
respondents carried out in September 2017