

research matters



The values divide in the 2024 election

By **John Curtice, professor of politics, University of Strathclyde, and senior research fellow, National Centre for Social Research and The UK in a Changing Europe**

Politics in Britain used primarily be a battle between ‘left’ and ‘right’. Those on the left, that is, those who feel that there is too much inequality in Britain and believe the government should be attempting to reduce it, were more likely to vote Labour. Those on the right, that is, those who think the government should primarily be creating incentives for entrepreneurs and thereby secure economic growth from which all might benefit were more likely to back the Conservatives. Only the Liberal Democrats tended



to straddle this divide, often garnering not dissimilar levels of support from both left and right.

Brexit disrupted this picture. Immigration and sovereignty were key issues in the debate about the UK’s EU membership, but not inequality. In neither case do attitudes strongly align with the left-right divide. Rather they reflect where people stand on a different dimension – between social liberals and social conservatives. The former are those who largely embrace the equality, diversity and inclusion agenda. The latter group in contrast, believe that a degree of societal homogeneity is important to maintain social cohesion.

The 2017 and 2019 general elections were primarily fought over Brexit – and voters’ choices came increasingly to reflect where they stood on that issue. For some, this meant breaking traditional voting habits, as epitomised by the Conservatives’ success in gaining a number of ‘Red Wall’ seats previously long held by Labour

Consequently, at those two elections vote choice came increasingly to reflect not just where voters stood on the left-right divide, but also whether they were social liberals or social conservatives. Labour and the Liberal Democrats were more popular among the former, the Conservatives, among the latter.

Where people stand on these two value divides is measured on each year’s British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey by a

pair of Likert scales. Meanwhile, in the weeks following the 2024 election, the National Centre for Social Research has recontacted nearly 1,800 of the respondents to the 2023 BSA survey and asked them whether and how they voted. That enables us to identify whether, now that Brexit has fallen back down the political agenda, voters’ choices have returned to being primarily about the divide between left and right, or whether the debate between social liberals and social conservatives still matters.

Table 1 uses the BSA value scales to identify the one-third most left wing and the one-third most right-wing voters and, similarly, to distinguish the one-third most socially liberal and the one-third most socially conservative. Then, for each party, we calculate the difference between its share of the vote among those on the left and those on the right, and similarly the difference between its support among social liberals and its level of popularity among social conservatives. These calculations are shown both for how people voted in 2019 and for the choices they made in 2024.

Table 1: Vote by left/right and social liberal/social conservative value position

Vote Choice	2019		2024	
	% Left – % Right	% Liberal – % Conservative	% Left – % Right	% Liberal – % Conservative
Conservative	-25	-44	-32	-25
Brexit/Reform	0	-1	-10	-22
Labour	+27	+18	+28	+24
Liberal Democrat	+6	+17	+4	+10
Green	+2	+3	+12	+12
Con + Reform	-25	-45	-42	-47
Lab + LD + Green	+35	+38	+43	+46

Source: National Centre Opinion Panel, January 2020 and July 2024.

The left-right division was far from absent in 2019. Those on the left were more likely to vote Labour, while those on the right were more inclined to support the Conservatives. At the same time, however, social liberals and social conservatives also behaved differently. The Conservative party, in particular, was much more popular among social conservatives than social liberals, a reflection of the fact that nearly 80% of those who supported Brexit voted for the party at that election. Indeed, the difference between social liberals and social conservatives in the level of support they gave the Conservatives was markedly greater than the difference between those on the left and those on the right.

This was not the case in 2024. Whether people were on the left or the right made somewhat more difference to the likelihood that they voted Conservative than did whether they were a social liberal or a social conservative. But this was not surprising given that the level of support for the party among

supporters of Brexit was around half of what it had been in 2019. However, support for Reform – the party to which many 2019 Tories defected – was much higher among social conservatives than social liberals. As a result, the difference between the two groups in their combined level of support for the Conservatives and Reform was just as big as the gap between those on the right and those on the left. Moreover, it was just as large as in 2019.

In 2019, Labour’s support did not differ quite as much between social liberals and social conservatives as it did between those on the left and on the right. Much the same was true in 2024, though despite Labour’s inclination to downplay the issue of Brexit, the gap in the party’s support between social liberals and social conservatives was in fact a little bigger than in 2019. However, support for the Greens differed just as much between social liberals and social conservatives as it did between those on the left and those

on the right. Together with a continued tendency for the Liberal Democrats to be more popular among social liberals, this was enough to ensure that the difference between social liberals and social conservatives in their combined support for Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens matched the gap between those on the left and those on the right, while it was actually somewhat higher than in 2019.

The division between social liberals and social conservatives continues to matter in post-Brexit Britain. Although it structured the much-diminished Conservative vote less, the strength of support for Reform among social conservatives made up the difference. Meanwhile, there was little sign of Labour closing the gap between social liberal and social conservatives in its support, while the now significantly stronger Green performance was in part founded on an ability to appeal to social liberals in particular.

Although Brexit may have come off the political agenda, that still leaves plenty of other issues that are helping to ensure that the 'second dimension' of British politics has not disappeared. Immigration is an obvious one. The legal recognition of transgender people is another. The debate about how Britain's imperial past should be remembered is a third

Much of the argument between the candidates in the recent Conservative leadership contest focused on such issues. They are, of course, topics to which social researchers are often asked to apply their expertise. They now need to be aware that they are doing so in a significantly more politicised context.

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Issue 14, summer 2024, is free to download from the [publications section of the SRA website](#).

The overall aim of the journal is to encourage and promote high standards of social research for public benefit. It promotes openness and discussion of problems. We welcome offers of articles and research notes for future issues. [Read the guidelines for authors and download the article template](#).

If you have an idea for an article or research note but are not sure if it's suitable, please email the editor Richard Bartholomew: rbartholomew@btinternet.com



A year of elections



SRA chair, Ed Dunn, on reading *Research Matters* as an antidote to election fatigue

Welcome to this quarter's edition of *Research Matters*. As always, we've an edition packed full of rich and varied content and I'd like to thank all of our contributors.

2024 has been a year of elections. I'm informed by a certain politics podcast that there have, or will have been, national elections in over 100 countries this year including in eight out of 10 of the most populous countries covering over half of the world's population. In the world of elections, Professor Sir John Curtice needs no introduction, and we welcome his analysis of the 'values divide' in the 2024 UK general election. It's a fascinating read. For those who are not exhausted by election fatigue, we also have some insight from Lovisa Moller Vallgarda at NatCen into the election personas used by the BBC for their election research.

Around a month ago I was delighted to attend the Early Career Impact Awards, organised under the Survey Futures umbrella and for which I had been invited to judge – and cast a vote of my own! It turned out to be a process and event that filled me with pride and a sense of optimism about the future health of our sector to read such a wonderful set of nominations and contributions from a talented and enthusiastic group of individuals in the early years of their career. The SRA has offered each winner a free training course from our extensive offering, and we look forward to working with, and supporting them, as they progress through their career. You can read more about the Early Career Impact Awards, and each of the winners, in this edition. I have also been pleased to attend several Survey Futures events and the SRA is playing a role in the programme of associated activity, most notably the training and capability building workstream. Peter Lynn and Olga Maslovskaya, director

and deputy director of Survey Futures respectively, introduce us to the second phase of this fascinating and welcome programme. The continued progress of the first cohort of social research apprentices is a delight to follow. Having been involved in the very first discussions, in my government days, it is a source of personal pride to see the apprenticeship come to fruition and Lavinia Mitton, from University of Kent gives us an update and overview. I do hope that the employers among our readership will be thinking about next year's intake keenly.

The SRA has offered each winner a free training course from our extensive offering, and we look forward to working with, and supporting them

This edition features a number of articles from the National, and Scottish, Centre for Social Research. In addition to the election coverage, Paul Bradshaw introduces us to the new Population Research UK (PRUK) initiative for which he is the new co-chair. PRUK has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Medical Research Council (MRC) to bring together all relevant stakeholders to enhance the UK's longitudinal research infrastructure, thus complementing the valuable resources we have already, such as CLOSER and the UK Longitudinal Linkage Collaboration. Sherine El Taraboulsi-McCarthy and Raffaele Ippolito provide an interesting insight into the work of NatCen International and their non-linear pathways to strengthening research capacity globally. Finally, we interview Michael Davis, the new NatCen chief executive.

We're pleased to also interview Nick Posford, the new executive director of the UK Evaluation Society. Nick touches on the importance of our societies collaborating and I know some of you share that view. We're delighted to be co-hosting a seminar on AI in December and intend this to be the first of many collaborations.

As I write, I am also preparing for an awayday in London with the SRA board. We are discussing, among other items, our future strategy. The SRA will be 50 years old in 2028 and I am very much framing our strategy around 'what kind of organisation do we want to be on that fantastic anniversary?' For the answer watch this space. But I am also keen to involve you, our wider membership.

Our strategy will certainly feature our commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion throughout. The final articles to introduce from this edition are highly relevant in this area – the importance of language and language etiquette from our trustees Lee Chan and Dan Clay, writing with Victoria Harkness, and minimising the exclusion footprint of disabled people, from Nas Allmomen. I was delighted to recently get positive feedback from colleagues at Verian who had piloted a forthcoming training offering from the SRA on inclusive social research. Keep a watch on that in the offering next year – it comes highly recommended!

Finally, several of our existing trustees will step down shortly. I want to thank Ailbhe McNabola, Rosie McLeod, Dan Clay, Jenni Brooks and Martina Vojtkova for all their efforts, commitment and passion for the SRA over the last few years. We are in the process of recruiting new trustees who will be formalised at the AGM in January.

Research to inform social media investigations

By Lovisa Moller Vallgarda, director of analysis, The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen)

Social media is a significant and growing part of our news consumption. One in two UK adults (52%) now state that they use social media as a news source.¹ But how can we, as researchers, start exploring which news people are shown on their social media feeds?



A broad range of data was used to ensure that these fictional characters were a miniature version of the UK electorate.

First, we developed a classification called 'dividing lines', identifying types of UK voters based on the views and values they hold. This was based on a segmentation of British Social Attitudes survey data. As that survey covers Great Britain, we also carried out separate analysis of opinion profiles in Northern Ireland.

We then assessed each character's most likely demographic characteristics using detailed demographic data from the survey sources, including age, gender, ethnicity, education and location.

Finally, we sense-checked the distribution of the demographic factors against census estimates to ensure that the characters' spread of demographic traits were representative of the UK overall.

The BBC's undercover voters

What we all see in our social media feeds depends on social media platforms' assumptions about who we are. For example, the platform X, formerly Twitter, states you 'may see suggested content powered by a variety of signals'² and TikTok describes its 'For You' feed as recommending content 'based on several factors'.³ What you see in your feed is different from what others are shown.

As part of the BBC's election coverage, its disinformation and social media correspondent, Marianna Spring, took on a challenge to interrogate how the election unfolded on people's social media feeds. She created 24 fictional characters, each with a full set of social media accounts. These 'undercover voters' were based in eight constituencies around the UK.

NatCen's research to inform undercover voters

NatCen started working with Marianna and her colleagues to advise on these 24 characters in late 2023. For the 24 fictional characters to provide insights into what people across the country were seeing in their social media feeds, each character needed to have a rich set of views, opinions and personal circumstances that mirrored those of the UK population.

The outcome and lessons learned

In the run-up to the election, the BBC launched 24 fictional accounts based on NatCen analysis and data. Its journalistic research using these accounts reported on several instances of fake content, including that some younger voters were being recommended fake AI-generated content featuring party leaders.⁴ It was also able to reflect on the role of social media in the election more broadly, such as the role of 'accidental election influencers' who were propelled from obscurity to prominence by the algorithms.⁵

We believe this form of journalism is important, and that basing it on good data matters. Our project team can offer three reflections to offer fellow researchers considering similar work.

First, use probability-based survey data. This ensures that your sample is representative of the larger population, allowing for more accurate profiles that are closer to also capturing people who are less likely to be found in opt-in panels. The British Election Study (BES) or the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey are two good examples.

Second, ensure your classification is grounded in a clear, theory-based framework. A theoretical foundation will guide the selection of relevant variables and help ensure that the resulting classifications are more meaningful. The values scales included in the BSA data provided a useful foundation for our work.

Finally, and this is one for more technical readers, take care to ensure that your segmentation approach is robust against local optima. People's views and values are complex and can rarely be divided neatly into clean groups. As such, your initialisation choices will likely matter more than you might be used to from other use of clustering algorithms.

FURTHER RESOURCES

[The overall approach](#)

[Step-by-step discussion on how we generated local predictions](#)

Credit: The full project team was Lovisa Moller Vallgarda, Sir John Curtice, Daniel Fisher, Ekaterina Khriakova, Gianfranco Addario, Bernard Steen, Sam Beardsworth, Joe Crowley, Ian Montagu and Charles Wilson.

¹ Ofcom, 2024. [News consumption in the UK 2024: Research findings](#).

² 'About your For you timeline on X'. © 2024 X Corp.

³ 'For You'. © 2024 TikTok.

⁴ Marianna Spring, 2 June 2024, ['TikTok users being fed misleading election news, BBC finds'](#).

⁵ Marianna Spring, 8 July 2024, ['This wasn't the social media election everyone expected'](#).

Recruiting young people in research

By Jessica Winters, research and evaluation manager and Sarah Simons, participation manager, Brook

Background

Brook¹ is a national charity supporting people with their sexual health and wellbeing. We offer clinical services, relationships and sex education, outreach in community settings, wellbeing and counselling. Researchers at Brook engaged with over 2,000 young people across England and Wales to better understand their attitudes and behaviour relating to condoms and contraception.² The research took a mixed methods approach, using surveys and focus groups.

Researchers aimed to conduct seven in-person focus groups³ to supplement survey findings. In the past, Brook relied on relationships with schools and third sector organisations for recruitment. We planned to take the same approach but encountered challenges which set our research timeline back.

Challenges

We encountered challenges engaging the third sector, education institutions, and young people. Many organisations were unable to support Brook, despite the incentives we offered, mainly due to limited capacity and time. With organisations able to support us, there was limited engagement from young people. Some young people felt too embarrassed, were uninterested or could not relate to the topic of sexual health.

These challenges led us to adapt our recruitment and delivery methods. One approach we trialled was recruiting young people in the moment, at their college, to participate in a focus group during their lunch break. Brook staff were able to talk about the research and consent to take part, rather than relying on a poster. This human interaction broke down barriers, giving young people time to ask questions and find out more about the focus group. This approach led to an in-person focus group, but it was resource intensive

and not feasible for the entirety of the research. The research team then trialled virtual focus groups to reduce participation barriers and increase recruitment. This combination of in-person recruitment and virtual focus groups allowed us to engage with nine young people.

Solutions

Despite adapting our approach, we still struggled to engage with young people who were assigned male at birth (AMAB) and trans young people. We took two approaches to ensure we captured the views and experiences of these young people. Firstly, we offered one-to-one interviews with two young people who had registered for focus groups which did not have sufficient interest to take place. This enabled us to hear from one trans young person and one AMAB young person.

Additionally, we created a targeted survey for AMAB young people which allowed them to contribute to the research in an alternative way. Over 300 AMAB young people responded to our survey. We gave all survey participants the option to be contacted for a follow-up focus group and over 80 participants agreed to be contacted. By doing this we were able to host an additional focus group with AMAB young people, offering us a more detailed understanding of their experiences of condoms and contraception.

Lessons learned

1. Allow more time for recruitment, especially when relying on schools, colleges and youth-based organisations. Some organisations recommended a minimum of four to six months' notice to build recruitment into their schedule.
2. Stay flexible and meet young people where they feel comfortable. Given the sensitive nature of the topics



discussed, some young people didn't feel comfortable speaking in groups. One-to-one interviews allowed them to share their experiences more freely.

3. Consult young people when developing research methods to ensure they're accessible. In this research, we saw higher engagement through surveys and lower engagement in focus groups. Consulting with young people at the outset could have saved time spent adapting our methodology.

What's next

Brook recognises the importance of engaging young people in shaping our research. We are currently conducting a survey to better understand how young people want to participate in future research with Brook. These findings will be analysed in collaboration with young people to ensure our research processes are as inclusive and accessible as possible.

For more information or to partner with Brook, please contact us at Research@Brook.org.uk

¹ More about Brook and our work at: [Sexual Health & Wellbeing – Brook – Fighting for healthy lives](#)

² <https://www.brook.org.uk/campaigns/easy-report/>

³ Chosen to ensure representation of young people of different genders from both England and Wales. We intended to offer a focus group for AFAB people, AMAB and those who identify as trans or non-binary in each country, and a mixed focus group with representation from both countries.

Minimising the exclusion footprint of disabled people

By Nas Allmomen, associate director and EDI lead, Magenta

The context

As researchers, it is our responsibility to ensure that we are capturing and reflecting views from across society. It is, therefore, vital that research meaningfully engages disabled people, people with long-term conditions and people who do not identify as disabled but experience barriers to taking part in research. However, exclusionary research practices often limit disabled people's involvement in research and research often aligns with the medical model¹ of disability which does not always reflect how individuals experience their disability on a day-to-day basis.

Ofcom and the Communications Consumer Panel (CCP) commissioned Magenta to understand how to better conduct and report on research with disabled people and people with long-term conditions in a more inclusive way.

Our approach

There were three stages to the research: a literature review; and interviews and a half-day workshop with a broad range of stakeholders.

What we learned

There is no 'perfect' research approach. Rather than definitive guidelines, the research is a starting point for anyone commissioning or undertaking research and seeking to improve their practices. Below we outline recommendations across the different stages of the research process, informed by our stakeholders' views.

How do we talk about disability inclusively?

Language choices are important in ensuring that people feel included in research and that they take part in research. We recommend:



- ▶ using disability-first language such as 'disabled person', as opposed to person-first language, such as 'person with a disability', unless there is a reason not to
- ▶ reflecting personal preferences in how participants choose to describe themselves if possible, as there is no consensus on some terms.

How should we define disability and what do we need to consider when designing our sample?

If disabled people are not consciously included in research, they will be inadvertently excluded. To mitigate against this, we recommend:

- ▶ considering different ways of asking about disability such as how people choose to describe themselves and/or barriers experienced, if not needing to benchmark data
- ▶ if using the Government Statistical Service (GSS) standard harmonised² definition for benchmarking purposes, also ask about barriers experienced
- ▶ considering more than a person's condition when designing a sample specification, for example, barriers experienced, if appropriate.

How do we minimise barriers to recruitment?

There are many barriers to recruiting disabled people for research. To minimise these, we recommend:

- ▶ setting aside a specific budget to support accessibility in recruitment and fieldwork
- ▶ providing sufficient information about the research upfront to support informed consent and communicate the value of participating
- ▶ using accessible recruitment materials, such as easy read
- ▶ using more than one source of recruitment.

How do we facilitate meaningful engagement?

An accessible research approach should be designed. We recommend:

- ▶ employing a participant-led approach. Where possible, ensure accessibility needs are captured and make necessary adjustments to enable participation
- ▶ involving disabled people in the research design.

What do we need to think about in our analysis and reporting?

Inclusive research extends into how the data is analysed and reported on. We recommend:

- ▶ reporting in accessible formats and sharing with participants, if possible
- ▶ analysing and reporting in ways which bring disabled people's experiences to life, for example, using intersectional analysis and case studies
- ▶ reporting on barriers as opposed to disability type. People with different conditions may experience similar barriers, such as communication difficulties which may be more relevant to analyse and report.

What we hope to achieve

Our hope is that these findings provide anyone involved in research with disabled people and people with long-term conditions with clear guidance on how to incorporate more inclusive research practices, and to take steps forward on what will be an ongoing journey. [Full report and recommendations.](#)

¹ This views disability as an individual's physical or mental condition and limitations. The social model of disability views disability as a result of society barriers.

² The GSS harmonised definition of disability is a person who has a physical or mental health condition that has lasted or is expected to last 12 months or more and reduces their ability to carry out day-to-day activities.

New public polling on attitudes to inclusive language

By Victoria Harkess, senior director, Basis Social and Dan Clay, managing partner, Basis Social, and SRA trustee

Language matters

At Basis Social we are passionate advocates for inclusive research. This means being conscientious in the language we use with and about our research participants. We're conscious that there can be a level of discomfort and uncertainty that surrounds the language used to talk about different social and demographic characteristics, including protected characteristics. 'Official' terminology can often differ from how people prefer to talk about themselves (or others). And what meant one thing 10 years ago, may have a different meaning in the present day.

Exploring terminology with the public

We wanted to understand more about where the public stood on the issue. Working with Yonder Data Solutions, we ran a survey with a nationally representative sample of over 4,000 UK adults. We explored their views and preferences about terminology related to disability and health conditions, ethnicity and sexual orientation, and more broadly about the use of, and importance of, inclusive language.

Headline findings

What did we find? In short, it's a mixed picture, but the data offer some helpful challenges.

On disability, we found differing views on the use of 'person-first' vs. 'identity-first' language. On balance, public opinion appears weighted to the former (of the options listed, 'a person with a long-term condition' is the preferred term to describe someone with a disability or health condition. Of a list of terms offered, half of respondents with a

disability or health condition selected this, with the next top answer being 'a person with disabilities', selected by one in five. But there are some who prefer to be referred to as 'a disabled person' or by their specific disability (for example a 'deaf' or 'autistic' person) (both 13%).

On ethnicity, preferences for terminology differ by ethnic group. This is not surprising, but it reminds us of the need to be cognisant of the language we use in speaking collectively to 'non-White' groups. This includes language used to describe people from a mixed or multiple ethnic group. 'Mixed race' was the top response, cited by 45% of those identifying this way, but there were plenty of other popular terms too. Lee Chan, a fellow researcher and SRA colleague, provides an interesting take on this in her article on page 9.

We also looked at personal identity. From a long list of characteristics presented to participants, the most important to people's sense of self are 'nationality', 'age' and 'gender'. But this looks different when you drill down (for example 'gender' is more likely to be referenced by women; 'sexuality' by those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or who self-describe, and by younger people).

We were also interested in whether the public attach the same level of importance to the language used to describe themselves and others, as we as social researchers tend to. It turns out it's a mixed picture here too. We found that, on balance, the public tends to worry about offending people with the language or terms they use more than they don't (38% vs. 26%). They feel it's right to use language or terms that are preferable to the individuals they are describing rather than their own choice of language (41% vs. 26%).



Embedding learning

Dan Clay, Basis Social's managing partner, explains more: 'We're not trying to be an authority on inclusive language with this research. This isn't about what is "right" and "wrong". But the findings emphasise the importance of being mindful and purposeful in what you say. Language has the potential to empower and disempower. However, we should also speak to people in the terms they prefer. For example, we can't assume that everyone who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual or who self-describes identifies with being "LGBTQ+" – the survey suggests this isn't the case. Together with work others in the sector are doing – such as Magenta's and Ofcom's recent [better practice research](#) – our survey definitely provides some useful direction here. We're already using it within our own team to help improve the way we approach research design – from survey questionnaires and recruitment screeners, to the way we write reports.'

Further information about the research on the [Basis Social website](#), or email social@basisresearch.co.uk

REFERENCE

Magenta for Ofcom and Communications Consumer Panel. (2024). [Paving the way for more inclusive research](#)

Language etiquette: is there a right way?



By Lee Chan, insight lead at UK Health Security Agency and SRA trustee with contributions from Victoria Harkness, senior director, Basis Social and Dan Clay, managing partner, Basis Social and SRA trustee

How language matters

Basis Social's latest research (page 8), looking at the language used to describe different social and demographic characteristics, provides an interesting snapshot of what the public feels comfortable with. The findings offer a springboard into discussing how researchers can refer to characteristics in a way people prefer.

Getting terminology right is not just about respecting people's wishes. It is also about making the research experience as good as possible, and trying to ensure response rates are maintained and participation is equally high across the piece.

But it is not easy, is it? Everyone has a different view. There are numerous examples from the survey which caught my eye, as they show how my preferences differ from the majority.

Disability and health conditions

Respondents who have a physical, sensory, cognitive or other condition or disability selected 'a person with a long-term condition' as the single most common preference to describe someone with a disability or health condition. As a mother of an autistic boy with ADHD, I prefer to say he is 'autistic' or 'AuDHD', because this is how he processes and experiences the world. I don't see it as a long-term illness, but something he needs support with, rather than a cure. My son agrees.

When looking at the general public, the single most common preference when referring to others' disability or health condition is the term 'people with

disabilities'. But, again thinking of my son, we would prefer 'neurodivergent' – as it refers to his difference in cognitive and sensory processing. He understands there is neurodiversity within society and would not identify as disabled.

Ethnicity

What I prefer here depends on the specific context.

The term 'global majority' is not well known and is only chosen by 5% of the wider public in considering the most appropriate language to use when referring to ethnic groups other than White British or White Other (though it is higher among certain ethnic groups). But for me, it works best in some situations. For instance, I am a governor at the local state secondary school and almost half of the students come from minority ethnic backgrounds, ranging from Black-Caribbean to Chinese and lots in between. Over 50 languages are spoken in the school community. The school refers to those students as being from the 'global majority' and that feels appropriate. However, if we were to examine underachievement in school, then we would want to be more specific, and focus on supporting groups of students that consistently underachieve against what they are capable of. Additionally, there are instances when 'people of colour' is appropriate, and it cuts straight to issues of colour rather than culture.

When it comes to my own children, who are mixed Irish and Chinese, my preference is for them to be referred to as having 'mixed ethnicity' rather than 'mixed race'. The latter is the

most popular term selected to describe someone from a mixed or multiple ethnic group by those who identify as such. There is only one race of people and that's the human race. Given the choice, I would not want to support the idea there are different races based on colour by using 'mixed race'.

What next?

I offer a few ideas and would love to hear what readers think.

- ▶ Continue to debate the issues raised by the Basis Social study – to understand what sort of contexts lend themselves better to different terminology.
- ▶ Researchers should show a more concerted effort to check how people like certain characteristics to be referred to, as it may be very important to their sense of self/identity.
- ▶ Explore how to best harness technology to innovate in this area. For example, how can adaptive (AI) survey tools be used to adjust questions based on respondents' preferences about how certain characteristics are referred to?

What I will do

I'll continue to work with the SRA, MRS and special interest groups to reflect on the implications of this research and would like to encourage my contacts to email me at lee.chan@ukhsa.gov.uk if they have reflections we can help share to progress thinking.

Further information online about the Basis Social research, or email social@basisresearch.co.uk.

Survey Futures: early career impact awards

The Survey Data Collection Methods Collaboration, also known as Survey Futures, presented its inaugural early career impact awards in October. These awards were the brainchild of Laura Wilson, principal social researcher in the Government Data Quality Hub at the Office for National Statistics, and the recipients delivered inspiring presentations about their work at an event organised by the Royal Statistical Society.

[More about the Survey Futures programme](#)

The 2024 Survey Futures early career impact award recipients are:

BETH ARMSTRONG, FOOD AND YOU 2 RESEARCH FELLOW, FOOD STANDARDS AGENCY



Beth plays an instrumental role in delivering the Food Standards Agency's official statistic Food and You 2 survey which transitioned to push-to-web in 2020. She has contributed to the survey design by championing the inclusion of new topics including social supermarkets which is featuring in the 2024 UK Food Security Report as it is the only government survey collecting this data. She regularly supports users across government, academia and NGOs through delivering data tutorials and one-to-one sessions. Her dedication has resulted in a series of academic journal articles being produced as well as funding bids with Wellcome and the Natural Environment Research Council (NERC).

What do you enjoy about working in survey research?

'Working in survey research is fantastic! It allows me to discover valuable insights about people's knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. It's so rewarding to analyse data and uncover golden nuggets of insight. Plus, every survey provides new insights and learning opportunities!'

JOANNA BARRY, INSIGHT MANAGER, NHS ENGLAND



Joanna's career began at Ipsos, where she worked on both qualitative and quantitative projects, including the GP Patient Survey, NHS Patient Survey Programme and the Integrated Care Experience Survey. This led her to her current role in NHS England's Insight and Voice team, where she recently managed the design and implementation of the first national survey of people living with type 1 and type 2 diabetes. This involved developing the sampling approach, questionnaire and materials, and methodology. Joanna currently manages the National Cancer Patient Experience Survey and set-up of the future contract, with a focus on methods and questionnaire redevelopment.

What do you enjoy about working in survey research?

'I enjoy the variety and complexity of surveys as every day is different. There are many opportunities to learn and innovate. I also really enjoy the focus on collaboration, with participants and data users, working together to deliver impactful data.'

ORIOI BOSCH-JOVER, POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCHER, LEVERHULME CENTRE FOR DEMOGRAPHIC SCIENCE, UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD



As well as a postdoctoral researcher at the Leverhulme Centre for Demographic Science and Nuffield College, Orioi is a research fellow at the Pompeu Fabra University. He has worked, either as a researcher or consultant, for The Alan Turing Institute, Wellcome Trust, University of Southampton, University of Mannheim, and the Institute for Social and Economic Research. Orioi's research combines survey and computational methods to examine how digital trace data can be used by social scientists, exploring whether these emerging data sources can enhance or replace traditional surveys. In his current role, he is developing a state-of-the-art data donation infrastructure.

What do you enjoy about working in survey research?

'Surveys are among the most powerful tools for understanding the human experience. Working in survey research is deeply fulfilling because it puts us in charge of capturing human phenomena as accurately as possible. Our efforts inform policy, drive scientific progress and capture what it means to be human, for posterity.'

**REBECCA LIGHT,
SENIOR RESEARCHER,
NATIONAL CENTRE FOR
SOCIAL RESEARCH
(NATCEN)**



Rebecca has worked at NatCen for the past five years in its health and biomedical team and more recently in the longitudinal surveys team. She has worked on several large-scale surveys including the Health Survey for England (HSE) and the National Study of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal). Rebecca is responsible for the set-up of these surveys, including the programming, training interviewers and biomedical fieldworkers, and creating documents and websites, as well as monitoring fieldwork response, liaising with clients and co-leading on the data management (for example deriving variables, checking data, quality assuring data and others' work, liaising with clients on requirements and queries).

What do you enjoy about working in survey research?

'Survey research is varied, and I love how it spans topics such as health, finance, education and more. This variation combined with mixed mode data collection, questionnaire design and the problem solving involved in data management and fieldwork makes it at times challenging. But it means we are always growing and learning which is rewarding.'

**TOM LUCKWELL,
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR,
VERIAN**

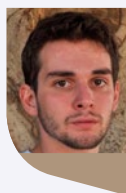


Tom started his career in social research three years ago when he began working at Verian as a research executive. Since then, he has received three promotions and has earned a place as one of Verian UK's go-to for survey design. High-profile projects for which Tom led the survey design include the Public Attitudes to AI Survey for the Alan Turing and Ada Lovelace Institutes and the National Victim Experience Survey for the Home Office. In addition to survey design, Tom routinely leads on cognitive testing and contributes to survey design training at Verian.

What do you enjoy about working in survey research?

'I had not expected social research to be so creative. Coming from a creative background, I assumed that switching to this industry would satisfy intellectual needs only. I have been happily surprised. Survey design, especially, fires both sides of the mind. But also, the everyday problem solving requires a lot of creative thinking.'

**NATHAN REECE,
SURVEY PROJECT
MANAGER, EUROPEAN
SOCIAL SURVEY ERIC,
CITY ST GEORGES,
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON**



Nathan graduated with a degree in economics from Bard College in 2015. He spent four years in Beirut, Lebanon working as a statistician for the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA), with a focus on demographic and social statistics within the Arab region. After completing an MSc in social research methods at the London School of Economics (LSE) department of methodology, he started working for the European Social Survey (ESS) at City, University of London. Throughout Nathan's educational and working experience, he has cultivated an obsessive interest and connection to survey methodology. At the ESS, Nathan's primary focus is on the upcoming mode switch from face-to-face interviewing to survey administration via self-completion web and paper questionnaires.

What do you enjoy about working in survey research?

'Social research attempts to better understand social interactions through the measurement of attitudes and behaviours. This is an imprecise science of uncovering the unknown piece by piece. What I enjoy most about it is the great depth of the unknown; the satisfaction of revealing some of it while knowing much more of it remains to be uncovered.'

**MATT SHAPLEY, SENIOR
RESEARCH EXECUTIVE,
IPSOS**



Matt is a senior research executive in the probability surveys unit at Ipsos. Graduating with a BA in politics from Nottingham University and an MSc in survey methods for social research from Essex University, his work in survey research started in 2015 as an Ipsos interviewer. Towards the conclusion of his masters, he interned at NatCen. This culminated in experimentation with online cognitive interviewing, which he wrote as his dissertation and presented at the 2017 European Survey Research Association (ESRA) conference. After detouring into academia and the civil service, he returned to survey research at Ipsos in 2021.

**MICHALINA
SIEMIATKOWSKA,
SENIOR RESEARCH
OFFICER, OFFICE FOR
NATIONAL STATISTICS**



Michalina has a BSc in psychology, and an MSc in research methods gained from the University of Southampton, and brings vast experience to her role at the Office for National Statistics (ONS). Currently serving as a senior research officer on the survey design and sampling team, she has led impactful projects that have contributed to improving the efficiency of the Transformed Labour Force Survey field operations. Previously, Michalina worked on the 2021 Census and the COVID Infection Survey, in which she has demonstrated her leadership and problem-solving skills, consequently earning her a spot on the ONS high potential programme.

What do you enjoy about working in survey research?

'I enjoy working in survey research because it allows me to explore meaningful data, uncover trends and provide insights that inform decision-making. Designing effective surveys and analysing results is both challenging and rewarding. I am motivated by the impact my research has in guiding strategies and driving positive change.'

Social researcher degree apprenticeship

We spoke to Dr Lavinia Mitton, director, social researcher degree apprenticeship and policy officer higher apprenticeship, University of Kent about the new social researcher degree apprenticeship and what it offers for both apprentices and employers.

Can you explain what the social researcher degree apprenticeship (SRDA) is and how it works?



The SRDA is a new degree course that combines academic learning with hands-on, on-the-job training. The course spans four years, with apprentices spending about 80% of their time in the workplace and 20% studying at university. Upon completion, apprentices earn a BA in applied social research and level 6 apprenticeship certification.

The course has been developed in collaboration with employers, ensuring that the skills taught are relevant to the sector. Apprentices gain expertise in research methodologies, data analysis, survey design, interviewing and research ethics. But beyond research methods, they also learn project management, commercial awareness and how to commission research.

What advice would you give to an organisation considering hiring a social researcher apprentice for the first time?

First, I'd recommend joining the network of social researcher apprentice employers. We work with a wide range of organisations, including government bodies, private sector companies, research institutes and both large and small research-focused charities. By joining this network, you can learn from others and also have the opportunity to shape the course content to meet your specific needs as an employer.

An apprentice doesn't have to be a new hire. Current employees can also be apprentices, and there's no age limit – anyone with the potential to succeed can take part in this programme.

Apprentices bring unique insight and diversity of thought compared to traditional graduate recruits. They're often individuals who might not have had the opportunity to do a full-time university degree, perhaps due to the high cost of tuition fees and student living expenses or because they didn't have the right prior qualifications. For example, we are working with organisations that want to employ researchers from their local community, and marginalised or seldom-heard groups.

If you're unsure about where to advertise your apprenticeship positions, the SRA has a webpage for posting vacancies, and the university can also assist with this.

What are the key things employers should keep in mind when recruiting apprentices?

Although apprentices receive government-funded training through the apprenticeship levy system, they are primarily your employees, and you are investing in their development. There are no fixed minimum entry requirements for the course; instead, we work with you to ensure candidates have the necessary experience to succeed. For example, you might choose someone who has interned with you or an existing employee looking to shift roles.

It's also essential to provide a work-based mentor for the apprentice. Since they are trainees, apprentices need supervision and guidance in the workplace. However, the university supports line managers with training and regular meetings. Before each module, we brief managers on upcoming university assignments and help them see how the academic work aligns with what the apprentice is doing on the job. Coursework assignments are designed to benefit the workplace, and there's no requirement for apprentices to share any confidential or sensitive data.

The next cohort of apprentices will begin in early September 2025, and it's crucial that apprentices have a contract in place by before then. If you're planning to recruit an apprentice, you'll need to make sure that your recruitment cycle timeline aligns with these key dates.

This apprenticeship has proved extremely popular – this year, there were around 100 applicants per successful candidate. So, allow yourself enough time to read a large number of applications!

For more information about the course, timelines and how to get involved, contact the University of Kent: apprenticeships@kent.ac.uk

Interview with Nick Posford, executive director, UK Evaluation Society

What was your career path to the UK Evaluation Society?

I originally trained and worked as a theatre stage manager, before returning to education to study social policy at the London School of Economics (LSE) as a mature student. I didn't fully realise it at the time, but this sparked my interest in evaluation. When I later moved into the charity sector, evaluation captured my interest again. Showing funders and supporters the impact of our programmes and interventions was vital, yet we often felt on the back foot when reporting our results. What we really needed was better use of evaluation to measure our effectiveness.



What attracted you to your new position at the society?

I've always had a keen interest in seeing a more evidence-led approach to public and charity programmes, so the role really appealed to me. It offered me the chance of a lifetime, to advance the development of something I consider hugely important. To draw on my previous experience as a charity leader to support a worthwhile organisation with ambitious plans, makes this the job of my career and I feel that even more after eight months in post.

What are the opportunities and challenges ahead for evaluation research?

Joining the society in its 30th anniversary year has been a time for reflection. It's also provided an opportunity to consider the future of evaluation – both as a practice and as

a profession. Launching our evaluation manifesto earlier this year was a pivotal moment because, regardless of party politics, most people in the UK care whether government policies are effective, efficient and value for money. Despite significant strides in recent years, evaluation is still not seen as a prerequisite for every programme for which it could support better outcomes. With funding tight, we will have to fight hard to make sure the voice of evaluators is heard by those in power.

How might the society help with these opportunities and challenges?

Over the past 30 years, the society has built strong foundations, by influencing decision-making and recognition of the importance of evidence-based reviews to determine what works, what doesn't, and why. This gives us a powerful platform to embed evaluative thinking at the heart of all organisations.

I believe it's our responsibility to inspire and encourage top talent and the next generation to consider pursuing a career in evaluation. We aim to provide the support, resources, training and safe learning environment that evaluators need to make a meaningful impact. It's also our goal to put equitable approaches to professional development and evaluation at the heart of our strategy.

What impact will the change in government have on UK evaluation?

Many of the core structures that have been introduced, such as the Evaluation Task Force, have put evaluation in a good place within the civil service. We will always encourage the government to continue investing in evaluation because it helps bring about better policies and supports good

management. Signs are positive. But we would like to see more support for evaluation across local government and the wider public and third sectors.

How can the SRA and UKES best work together to promote good research and evaluation?

For us both, collaboration is key to achieving our goals, amplifying our reach and increasing our impact. We recently hosted a joint networking session, which was a great success, and we hope to repeat it. We're also excited to be partnering with the SRA and the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS) on a webinar: 'How to evaluate AI'. This is a hot topic for evaluators, researchers and those working in social sciences, as we grapple with the challenges of big data analysis and ethics. While the SRA and UKES have a slightly different focus, we have joint ambitions. Both organisations recognise and support the importance of evidence in public policy. So, it is crucial that we stick together in the face of all the challenges to evidence-led approaches.

What advice would you give to someone just starting out in evaluation?

I would encourage anyone new to evaluation to take full advantage of the extensive support available. Join groups, networks and learning opportunities, such as our free webinars or early career evaluator network. For those just starting out or who have recently started working in evaluation, UKES membership is a great way to make professional connections in a supportive environment. So please get in touch. You may not realise it, but you have chosen a career with potential to change the world (for the better!).

Interview with Michael Davis, new chief executive, National Centre for Social Research (NatCen)

Can you tell us about your career path before you came to NatCen?

My background is in economics, and I have worked in both the private and public sectors and now in the third sector at the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen). Prior to joining NatCen, I held senior leadership positions at Kantar, where in the group executive I was chief business performance officer. I have also led international policy research and consultancy firm, Ecorys, as its UK managing director. For five years I was the chief executive of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills, a public body during the coalition government years (2010 to 2015).



What attracted you to your new position at NatCen?

I have always been a positive advocate for social research and admired NatCen for its keen sense of purpose – to harness the power of social research to make life better. The variety of the organisation's work, spanning health and wellbeing, education, crime and justice, and economic behaviour, makes every day interesting. What has been a real bonus is realising just how passionate and committed NatCen colleagues are to social research. I did a quick survey (of course I would) of colleague perceptions of NatCen and the three most cited words to describe NatCen were 'quality, friendly and research'. And there are other areas that I am keen to explore the potential of, for example, how we support the teaching and learning of social research, the data we collect from our

biomedical fieldworkers, our potential to support combined authorities with more localised insights, and our growing portfolio of international work.

What are some of the challenges for social research in the UK in the next few years?

Recognising I am only eight weeks into my role, there are three key challenges that seem clear. First, constantly striving to make data more inclusive and ensuring that marginalised/seldom-heard groups are listened to and understood in the context within which they live their lives. Second, that while research budgets are under pressure, at the same time we are seeing increased requests from research commissioners asking for more granular statistics by geography, time and socio-demographics (that is, age, gender, ethnicity). And third, the declining engagement of the public who do not have the time and/or trust to take part in large-scale, complex surveys.

How are you hoping NatCen might help support some of these challenges?

I see NatCen at the heart of social survey research in the UK: our sheer scale puts us there, along with our history of delivering innovations in data-collection methods. Our network of clients and involvement in sector-wide programmes like Survey Futures, help us to work in partnership with others to decisively solve the conundrums of falling response rates and hard-to-reach groups, and to actively grow a highly capable interviewer community.

We are supporting our interviewers practically to deliver multi-mode studies, and assisting their professional

development. And we are also intending to look at the role of technology, with our AI project board exploring initiatives that can improve the day-to-day delivery of social research.

What impact do you think the change in government will have on social research?

Much of our survey work contributes to national or public body statistics and I anticipate that this will continue. Looking at the five missions of the new Labour government: economic growth, clean energy, crime, opportunity (young people) and health, all present the opportunity to engage in high-quality social research to both help frame the design and evidence of policy interventions and evaluate their effectiveness.

And finally, what advice would you give to someone just starting out in social research?

There is great value in being curious: the importance of listening and learning from others, while also being prepared to be comfortably uncomfortable in not knowing. Clearly software applications and AI tools are emerging and evolving at a rapid pace, for which my advice would be, 'be a racing engineer' – great if you are an early adopter and prepared to test drive the applications, but better still, be the engineer who really understands how the application works. For anyone who has ever seen the film Ford v Ferrari, the quote 'to drive a car at the limit, you first have to know where the limits are'. This feels more grounded than the often tech-quoted expression of 'move fast and break things'.

NatCen International and non-linear pathways to strengthening research capacity globally

By Sherine El Taraboulsi-McCarthy, director, and Raffaele Ippolito, research director, NatCen International

At a [roundtable discussion on the scope for localisation in the study of war and peace](#), convened by NatCen International and the United States Institute of Peace, participants reflected on the persistent relegation of non-western scholars as ‘eternally emerging’. This status is often coupled with a disconnect in knowledge-building practices between northern and southern scholarship. This disconnect is largely an outcome of continued power disparities between researchers from the global north and those from the global south – [one study, for example, found that between 2008 and 2017, less than 3% of 947 articles in four international journals were written by scholars based in the global south.](#)

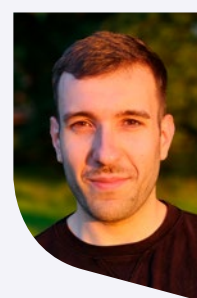
To help address this disconnect, we launched the [NatCen International Academy](#) in March 2024, providing tailored and contextualised training courses aimed at capacity strengthening in research methods and social policy areas. These courses focus on low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) as well as fragile and conflict-affected contexts. At a deeper level, the ambition here was to flip the paradigm of international experts supporting local governments in capacity strengthening, and instead, enable those countries to develop a high-quality evidence base across various social and public policy areas, including education, health and climate change.

Our experience delivering training courses in Kuwait, Vietnam, Saudi Arabia and Yemen is that the path to capacity development or strengthening in research is not straightforward and

needs to be underpinned by a process of contextualisation and co-production. Capacity development does bring important opportunities for global social researchers. The opportunities are clear. Stronger research capacity means better evidence infrastructure in the global south and a larger scope for evidence-based policymaking. In our increasingly interconnected world, challenges such as climate change, pandemics and economic instability transcend national borders. By viewing capacity development as a two-way exchange, we can foster meaningful dialogue and share best practice among all partners. Still, there are a number of challenges that warrant attention.

First, donor engagement in capacity strengthening remains limited.

Investing in local research capacity can feel like a distant, ambiguous target for donors. Western donors typically focus on immediate concrete (measurable and quantifiable) outcomes rather than long-term investments in research infrastructure and human capital. The donor landscape is, however, quickly changing. It is becoming more aware of the need to leverage southern expertise and leadership. [New research on the changing landscape of large-scale giving in Africa by non-African philanthropists](#) has found, for example, that more large gifts from non-African funders are predominantly going to African NGOs in contrast to a history of funders directing capital to non-African organisations operating on the continent. Key research funders like the British Academy and [Canada’s International Development Research Centre \(IDRC\)](#) are successfully shifting



in that direction too. IDRC’s recent calls for proposals have emphasised the need for research leadership to come from the global south. More targeted investments towards capacity strengthening are needed as part of larger research projects as well as in their own right.

Second, building capacity in research requires a shared understanding of the centrality of ethics to research practice. In developing countries, ethical considerations are often sidelined, and emerging technologies like AI highlight ethical challenges that might be particularly overlooked.

While the potential for the application of new technology to global capacity strengthening is vast, governance and regulation remain highly limited, raising ethical concerns about inequalities that could unintentionally [perpetrate harm on marginalised communities.](#) NatCen International is building an ambitious research agenda tackling the ethical and social dimensions of emerging technologies in global societies. Partnering with global key actors in this space, we offer an approach to digital technologies centred around human experience, with special regard to vulnerable sub-groups.

Third, capacity development should take into account the impact of context on the salience of research methods over others. Research methods can vary greatly due to differences in education, culture and traditions. Standardised training programmes may overlook these variations, which is why capacity building must focus on understanding and bridging these differences. By promoting knowledge exchange, we can develop methodologies that are both scientifically sound and culturally relevant. In [a course we delivered with the Alanood Foundation in Saudi Arabia](#), it was fascinating to see focus group discussions with participants of both sexes gaining popularity over the traditionally dominant surveys and key informant interviews.

A call to action

To truly transform global social policy and practice, we believe that the capacity-strengthening conversation must shift toward co-creation. This approach directly addresses issues of inequality, ethics, and contextual relevance by building robust research capacities worldwide through collaborative and reciprocal partnerships. As capacity strengthening can be a lengthy process, it is necessary to ensure that [donors are committed to the long-term vision](#) of building a sustainable and equitable global research infrastructure that includes and benefits all.

REVIEWS

Titles for review



We are always looking for reviewers (SRA members only) to write a short review for us. All books up for review are listed below. If you are interested, please email admin@the-sra.org.uk and we'll send you guidelines. Please note that publications are available as eBooks only. Book reviews need to be submitted within 10 weeks of you receiving the book. Here are a few of the titles on offer:

A 101 action research guide for beginners: demystifying research terminology using a concrete STEM action research project

Saba Ahmed

Peter Lang, 2024

Doing qualitative research online – second edition

Janet E Salmons

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

Doing visual ethnography – fourth edition

Sarah Pink

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021

Dyadic interviews in qualitative research: your practical guide

Joanna Szulc and Nigel King

SAGE Publications Ltd, January 2025

Ethics, integrity, and policymaking: the value of the case study, Research Ethics Forum Series: Volume 9

(ed. with Dónal O'Mathúna, Ron Iphofen)

Springer, 2022

Ethical evidence and policymaking: interdisciplinary and international research

(ed. with Dónal O'Mathúna and Ron Iphofen)

Policy Press, 2022

How to study social life

Russell Hitchings

SAGE Publications Ltd, January 2025

Phase 2 of the Survey Futures research programme

By Peter Lynn, University of Essex, director of Survey Futures and Olga Maslovskaya, University of Southampton, deputy director of Survey Futures

As reported in the September 2023 edition of Research Matters, Survey Futures is a whole-community initiative which aims to ensure that it will remain possible in the UK to carry out high-quality social surveys of the kinds required by the public and academic sectors to monitor and understand society, and to provide a solid base for policy. Survey Futures is led by director Professor Peter Lynn from the University of Essex and deputy director Dr Olga Maslovskaya from the University of Southampton and is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (UKRI-ESRC) for a three-year period until June 2026. Phase 2 of the Survey Futures research programme has now been announced, with £1.28M funding for nine new research projects. The funding went to projects that will help to build evidence in different data-collection techniques and innovative approaches to ensure survey data-collection methods in the UK remain fit-for-purpose. As with the phase 1 research programme, all outputs in phase 2 will have a strong practical orientation, consisting of good practice guidance for survey design and survey implementation for both survey commissioners and survey data users, all backed up by rigorous and well-documented research and with a range of associated activities to ensure that the lessons are disseminated to all relevant stakeholders.

The nine new research projects will explore a diverse set of topics:

- ▶ 'Post-pandemic role of face-to-face survey interviewers: stakeholder engagement' (led by Debbie Collins, National Centre for Social Research)
- ▶ 'Do we still need non-response follow-ups to web surveys of the UK general population? An analysis of cost-quality trade-offs' (led by Gabriele Durrant, University of Southampton)
- ▶ 'Targeted use of differential monetary incentives in social surveys' (led by Alessandra Gaia, University College London)
- ▶ 'Why are respondents less likely to consent to data linkage in web than in-person interviews, and what can we do to increase informed consent in web?' (led by Annette Jäckle, University of Essex)
- ▶ 'Assessing methods for within-household selection in self-administered push-to-web surveys' (led by Peter Lynn, University of Essex)
- ▶ 'Under-represented population sub-groups in social surveys: methods for respondent-driven sampling with probability-based seeds' (led by Olga Maslovskaya, University of Southampton)
- ▶ 'Could the ONS reference data management framework transform how social surveys are conducted in the UK?' (led by Gerry Nicolaas, National Centre for Social Research)
- ▶ 'Harnessing generative AI for questionnaire design, evaluation and testing' (led by Patrick Sturgis, London School of Economics)
- ▶ 'Assessing and disseminating methods for handling mode effects' (led by Liam Wright, University College London)

Six of the new projects will contribute to the existing research strands, which were defined at the proposal stage of Survey Futures, and two new research strands have been created to accommodate the other three new projects. The new structure of the Survey Futures research programme is below:

- ▶ Research strand 1: Enhanced sampling frames and procedures



- ▶ Research strand 2: Post-pandemic role of interviewers
- ▶ Research strand 3: Video-interviewing
- ▶ Research strand 4: Methods for surveys without field interviewers
- ▶ Research strand 5: Complex measurement in self-completion surveys
- ▶ Research strand 6: Reducing and evaluating mode effects
- ▶ Research strand 7: Data integration
- ▶ Research strand 8: Addressing non-response
- ▶ Research strand 9: Generative AI for questionnaire design

The independent panel that selected this set of nine projects concluded that they represent excellent value for money and support the overall objectives of Survey Futures. The new projects should allow Survey Futures, as a whole, to provide a comprehensive view of current best survey methods, so that surveys can continue to deliver high-quality research to inform policy. This supports the UKRI's strategic priority themes of creating opportunities and improving outcomes in communities across the country and securing better health, ageing and wellbeing for everyone.

More information about [Survey Futures](#).

See pages 10 & 11 for news of the Survey Futures early career impact awards.

Introducing... Population Research UK (PRUK)

By Paul Bradshaw, director, Scottish Centre for Social Research/forum co-chair, PRUK

Roughly speaking, the number of longitudinal population studies (LPS) across the social and biomedical sciences in the UK is something like 80-100. That's a big number and includes projects of all shapes, sizes and topics – everything from the 1921 Lothian Birth Cohort, with just 550 participants, to the research goliath of Our Future Health, which hopes to involve up to five million volunteers. Many of these projects have been running for some time whereas others are brand new. The number of studies combined with the duration over which they have been collecting data means that, together, they represent an incredible scientific asset, unique in timespan, breadth and depth, and global in reach and significance.



The challenges faced by LPS

Creating and sustaining these valuable assets is demanding. Each study faces formidable challenges in their day-to-day operation including participant recruitment and retention; collecting and curating complex survey and biomedical data; and negotiating linkage to administrative datasets. Studies and respective datasets must be discoverable and accessible to those with a legitimate need to use them, and these resources have to respond to the needs of their varied stakeholders – data users, study participants, funders, the public and policymakers – demonstrating public value as well as scientific rigour. Furthermore, researchers themselves must find and negotiate access to data and have the skills and software to manage and analyse it. They must effectively translate their findings into meaningful policy messages and ensure these messages are appropriately delivered.

The arrival of PRUK

With such challenges, ensuring the right support is available to maximise the use and benefits of UK LPS is crucial. We are very fortunate in the UK to already have several valuable resources which do that, such as CLOSER and the UK Longitudinal Linkage Collaboration. To complement these existing resources, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Medical Research Council (MRC) have committed funding to a new initiative – Population Research UK (PRUK). PRUK commissions services and serves as a connector – aiming to bring together all relevant stakeholders to enhance the UK's longitudinal research infrastructure. The programme is led by a co-ordinating hub co-directed by Nic Timpson, principal investigator for the Avon Longitudinal Study of Parents and Children and Alissa Goodman, director of the Centre for Longitudinal Studies. It is supported by an expert hub leadership group.

PRUK objectives and workstreams

Through commissioning, the PRUK hub will support activity related to five key workstreams:

- ▶ data discovery
- ▶ data access
- ▶ data linkage
- ▶ co-ordination and advocacy
- ▶ training

PRUK will not be directly funding health or social science research or data collection. Instead, it will provide the resources to facilitate an enhanced research infrastructure that enables ambitious research to be conducted with greater efficiency or to draw on a wider range of UK LPS data assets.

Following bottom-up consultation (HDR UK, 2021) and through co-ordination activities and commissioned investments, PRUK seeks to enhance research capacity, facilitate interdisciplinary research, and strengthen collaboration between researchers and policymakers.

The PRUK Forum

PRUK aims to act as an enabler for the LPS community – to co-ordinate and provide opportunities for innovations and enhancements, and to fill gaps in service provision. To identify opportunities and gaps requires engagement with key stakeholders. This is facilitated through the PRUK Forum – the researchers, evidence users, study management teams, existing platforms and infrastructures, participants and others who make up the LPS community. Initial engagement has taken place in October and November through stakeholder workshops held across the UK and will be ongoing through various means as the programme continues.

What next for PRUK?

The initial consultation phase runs until the end of 2024 with the first funding calls launching in 2025. The calls will be designed to fulfil specific needs that have been prioritised during the workshops. Funded projects as well as new resources and services will be promoted via the [PRUK website](#). You can also sign up to the mailing list to be kept up to date with funding opportunities and the most recent activity.

REFERENCE

HDR UK (2021). [Population Research UK prospectus: potential purpose, activity and approach](#).

SRA training

Unless otherwise stated, all courses are run online using Zoom. In-person courses are held in London or Edinburgh. Online courses run over one day or two half days, and extended courses over two full days or three part-days.

New dates and courses are being added all the time (and only courses with space at the time of writing are shown below), so for latest info please visit www.the-sra.org.uk/training or contact Patricia: training@the-sra.org.uk

Costs: online: SRA members: half day: £90; one day or two part-days: £180; two days or three part-days: £360. Non-members: half day: £117.50; one day or two part-days: £235; two days or three part-days: £470; **in-person:** SRA members: £220; non-members: £290.

If you have any queries, please contact Patricia: training@the-sra.org.uk

Full details of all courses are at www.the-sra.org.uk/training

Evaluation

10 February: Research and evaluation project management for project leaders, with Professor David Parsons

11 February: Management for commissioned research and evaluation, with Professor David Parsons

20 February: Impact evaluation (advanced), with Professor David Parsons

25 & 26 February (2 mornings): Theory-based evaluation: options and choices, with Professor David Parsons

27 & 28 February (2 mornings): Building and using a theory of change, with Professor David Parsons

Qualitative

14 January: Introduction to focus groups, with Dr Karen Lumsden

21 January: Introduction to participatory action research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

28 January: Qualitative data analysis, with Dr Karen Lumsden

6 February (in-person, in London): Interviewing (qualitative data collection), with Professor Karen O'Reilly

6 & 7 February (2 afternoons): Creative methods in qualitative data collection, with Dr Nicole Brown

7 February (in-person, in London): Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

14 February: AI-assisted qualitative data analysis, with Christina Silver

17 & 18 February: Focus group design and moderation, with Dr Karen Lumsden

21 February: Introduction to qualitative interviewing, with Dr Karen Lumsden

25 February: Narratives and storytelling in qualitative research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

26 February: Narrative analysis, with Dr Karen Lumsden

Quantitative

17 January: Introduction to R for social researchers, with Alexandru Cernat

28-30 January (3 afternoons): Cognitive interviewing for testing survey questions, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

4 & 5 February (10am-3pm each day): Questionnaire design, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

Other research skills

22 & 23 January (2 mornings): How to design trauma-informed and inclusive research, with Skye Curtis and Dr Holly Taylor-Dunn

29 January: An introduction to behavioural science, with Dr Bev Bishop

Spotlight on SRA activity

Training

www.the-sra.org.uk/training

Many qual, quant and evaluation courses are online.

Events

www.the-sra.org.uk/events

Blog

www.the-sra.org.uk/blog

Topical posts on researching.

Journal

www.the-sra.org.uk/journal

Read back issues and find out how to write an article for our free journal.

Resources

www.the-sra.org.uk/resources

Good practice guides and more.

Ethics

www.the-sra.org.uk/ethics

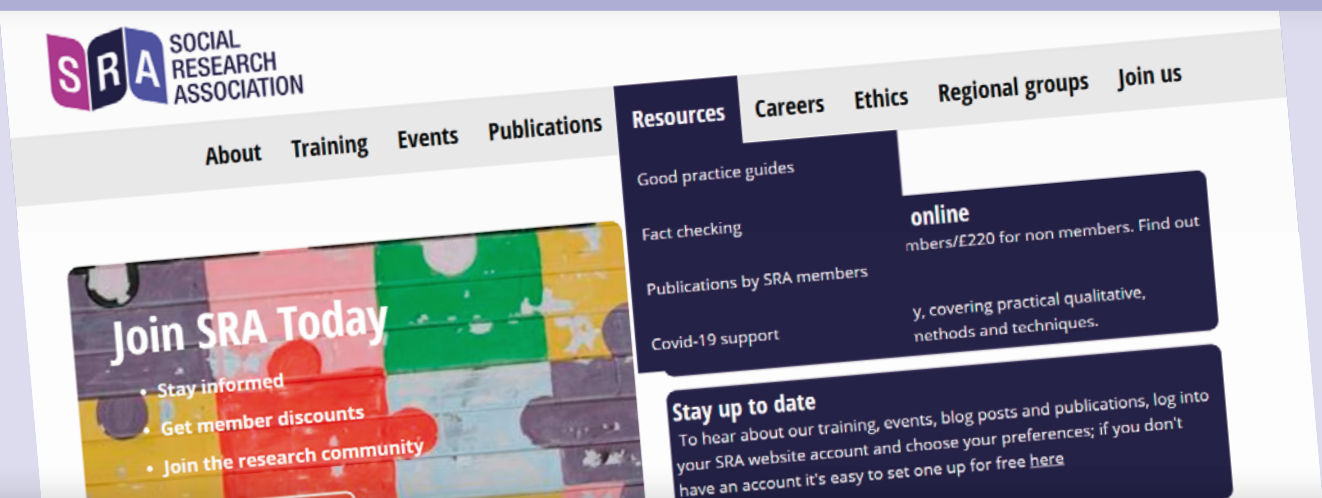
An expert forum for members' queries, good practice guides and more.

Member resources

Log in, go to www.the-sra.org.uk

then see 'members' section.

Free access to 5,500+ social science journals, data science training at a third off, and more.



research matters

Views expressed by individual contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the SRA.

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