

# research matters



## Research integrity matters

By Jil Matheson, member, UK Committee on Research Integrity

### Research integrity and why it matters

Honesty, rigour, transparency and open communication, care and respect, accountability. These principles underpin research carried out with integrity. They allow all those involved in the research process, including funders, other researchers, participants and those who are impacted by the findings, to be able to assess the trustworthiness of the research.

At a time when many research organisations are under increasing pressure, we need to maintain our focus on these principles and how they are applied. Every day, research including social research, is used to inform decisions which affect people's lives. A loss of trust in the integrity of research, whether among funders, researchers or the wider public, would be serious. Abiding by the integrity principles is a way to help maintain confidence in what we do. And it provides a tool to help address misinformation. That's now a mission more important than ever.



### Concordat to support research integrity

The [Concordat](#), first launched in 2012, and refreshed in April 2025, provides a national framework and reference document for the practice and governance of research integrity, and describes the principles more fully. It is aligned with international frameworks to facilitate international collaboration. It applies to research of all kinds – STEM, social sciences and social research, arts and humanities – to help cross-disciplinary working. It is supported by funders of research and research organisations in academia, businesses and large charities, and includes commitments to upholding the principles. Supporting organisations are asked to publish an annual statement on actions they are taking to put the principles into practice in their own settings.

In addition, the government has issued guidance on how the principles should be applied to research commissioned or carried out by government departments and agencies.



## UK Committee on Research Integrity: our role

The Concordat can be found on the website of the [UK Committee on Research Integrity](#) (UKCORI) – an independent body, funded by UK Research and Innovation, that works to promote and support research integrity across the UK. Its mission is to ensure that research is conducted in a trustworthy, ethical and responsible manner, enhancing the quality of research and safeguarding public confidence in the research system.

The committee wants its work to be useful, including to researchers themselves. We want to highlight good practice and to encourage people and organisations to share their examples publicly. Our website contains some case studies – we welcome more. Our current work includes [AI and research integrity: enabling trust and innovation](#), and poor research practice and research misconduct.

Details of who we are and of all our work are on our website.

## Your role: researchers and professional bodies like the SRA

The research community has an important role in preserving confidence in what we do and how we do it. The Concordat gives examples of how researchers (as well as employers and funders) can exercise their responsibilities. For example, by:

- ▶ ‘designing, conducting, and reporting research in ways that embed integrity and ethical practice throughout’
- ▶ ‘collaborating with others to build and maintain research environments that encourage research integrity, including seeking support from their leadership and supervisory roles, as needed, to resolve issues’.

Social research has a strong history of developing and applying ethical principles. One of the best training courses I did as a young survey researcher involved discussion of various ethical dilemmas we could face, and how to think about them. In our most recent annual statement, the committee said that there needs to be more consideration of training need. The SRA is important for providing support and training in the context of rapid social, technological and methodological change.

UKCORI is here to help: [Guidance to implement the Concordat to support Research Integrity within government](#)

# What do you think of Research Matters?

**Research Matters** is for anyone interested in social research, whether working as a social researcher, using social research or just wanting to learn more about it.

The editorial team is keen to hear from readers what you think about the magazine. Are there any industry sectors, methods, or disciplines you would like to see included more often? Or other features or series you would like to suggest? Or would you like to write a regular column on an industry hot topic? Please email [admin@the-sra.org.uk](mailto:admin@the-sra.org.uk) with any ideas. You do not necessarily need to contribute to any future features but are more than welcome to do so if you would like!



# Curiosity, credibility and connection

**SRA chair, Ed Dunn, highlights the crucial role of social research.**

Welcome to the summer 2025 edition of Research Matters. As the summer sun emerges and a new season unfolds, so too does this vibrant edition of Research Matters, packed with insight, inspiration and important reflections for our community. At a time when public trust in information is increasingly under strain – from misinformation online to contested data in public debate – our role as social researchers has never been more crucial. Therefore, we're pleased to lead with a piece from Dame Jil Matheson, former UK National Statistician, who offers an important update on the work of the UK Committee on Research Integrity and a recent update to the research Concordat. Her article reflects on how this shared framework for good research practice can evolve to meet the demands of today's social landscape, where the public's confidence must be earned and continually nurtured. As Dame Jil makes clear, the concordat is not just a document, it's a call to action – one that invites each of us to uphold the rigour, ethics and transparency that underpin trustworthy research.



**Here's to a summer of curiosity, credibility and connection**

In this context, the SRA continues to champion quality, integrity and inclusivity in our work. This edition celebrates those values and highlights the unique contribution that researchers, supported by bodies like the SRA, make in helping society understand itself better.

Curiosity may have killed the cat, but in social research, it gives birth to knowledge. That's why we're excited to hear about the new initiative from the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM), designed to help researchers cultivate curiosity and turn ideas into tangible, impactful projects. It's a skillset too often taken for granted but nurturing it deliberately can unlock entirely new ways of thinking and working. It will be fascinating to hear how this works out.

This edition also continues our regular focus on inclusion – highlighting how research can and must be made more accessible and representative. Danielle Colcombe writes powerfully about ensuring research designs are adapted for people with sight loss, offering both practical tips and deeper reflections on inclusive design. Inclusive research is not a bolt-on – it's fundamental to getting meaningful answers.

If you haven't yet saved the date, make sure 9 July is in your diary! That's when our annual conference returns – this year with a programme entitled 'Embracing Change to Drive Discovery'. Expect keynote speakers, hands-on sessions and an opportunity to connect with colleagues from across the research spectrum. Research Matters includes a sneak peek at what's in store and why this year's conference might be our most timely yet.

We're delighted to feature exclusive interviews with two of the UK's leading research figures: Craig Watkins, CEO of Verian UK, and Kelly Beaver, CEO of Ipsos UK & Ireland. Their reflections on their own leadership journeys, the evolving challenges and opportunities of research, and the balance between commercial and public value provide plenty to chew over.

On the more experimental side of the research spectrum, we spotlight the work of the Bridge Foundation, who've flipped traditional hierarchies by involving primary school children as lead researchers. Their piece offers a refreshing, and at times humbling, reminder that research isn't the sole preserve of adults in formal settings. Similarly, Raj Hazzard from the McPin Foundation shares a passionate argument for involvement as a research method, grounding their contribution in mental health contexts but offering insights relevant across the board.

I've been pleased to be involved in some of the work taking place within the ESRC-funded Survey Futures programme into the future of role of the face-to-face interviewer. Adele Bearfield from Ipsos provides us with some insight into the responsibility felt by those who work in offline data collection to ensure that it is future-proofed, sustainable and agile.

Rounding out the issue, Naomi Clemons and Aileen Cook share their research career journeys – personal, honest and rich in lessons. Their stories are a reminder that there's no one path into or through social research, and that the field is richer for that diversity of background and experience.

So, whether you're poolside, deskbound or somewhere in between, we hope this edition of Research Matters will both inform and inspire you. As ever, we welcome your thoughts, feedback and future contributions.

# Research Methods Rendezvous: a new initiative to explore curiosity

By Sandra Gogacz, project manager, National Centre for Research Methods

Where do research ideas originate and how are they turned into projects? These important questions are often overlooked in research training, with little insight available on how others' ideas emerge and are brought to fruition.



Turning a curiosity into a viable project is not straightforward and there are few opportunities on offer to demystify this part of the research journey.

This autumn, the National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) is launching a new initiative that will provide a space for researchers to share early-stage ideas, develop them and see how peers navigate this process.

The Research Methods Rendezvous (RMR) is a three-phase online activity designed to nurture curiosity. The free event will enable researchers to transform initial wonderings into research that is important, feasible and impactful.

Rather than running a typical one-off event, the NCRM team decided to create a new type of activity with a dynamic structure that gives participants time to think, connect and develop ideas. Our chosen format – with two online sessions seven weeks apart – allows presenters to build their ideas into something more tangible by gathering input from participants and exploring possibilities.

## Background and aims

The concept for the rendezvous emerged from ongoing conversations within NCRM about the lack of attention given to the genesis of research ideas. We wanted to create a format that would offer inspiration to presenters and participants, give insight into how other disciplines approach idea development and foster a dedicated environment for exploring curiosity.

NCRM runs more than [50 training courses and events a year](#), both in-person and online. And in line with the centre's commitment to innovation in research methods and capacity building, we wanted to offer something new to complement this particular topic.

The three-phase approach will, we hope, provide a more exploratory and collaborative alternative to conventional training. It supports a process of research incubation, from sharing initial or unformed ideas, through to shaping them into more concrete projects.

## The format

The activity will span two half-day sessions: Rendezvous One on 10 September and Rendezvous Two on 29 October, with a seven-week interregnum for development and collaboration.

Unlike traditional events that deliver predefined content, the RMR will be more flexible. Presenters will not arrive with polished projects, rather with questions and early-stage concepts. They'll receive input from participants, with the potential to develop ideas together.

Participants will gain insight into how ideas emerge and evolve, hear about emerging questions in their fields and get involved in exciting new projects.

## Rendezvous One

The first session, which has the theme 'I wonder...', invites contributors to present their ideas, puzzles or questions. These might stem from theoretical or methodological wonderings, empirical observations or persisting ideas from previous projects.

Topics will include AI, organisational studies and decolonising methods.

The full programme is [on the NCRM website](#). Talks will be delivered in plenary, ensuring that every attendee is introduced to all the topics and can choose which ones to engage with further.

## The interregnum

During the interregnum, contributors will continue to develop their ideas, either independently or collaboratively. Participants can contribute suggestions or questions and offer to take a more active role in a project. Speakers will then prepare session submissions for Rendezvous Two.

Each of the topics presented will have its own discussion board on the RMR's online platform. Attendees can use these forums to spark conversations, share resources and help develop sessions for the second meet-up.

## Rendezvous Two

The theme of the second day is 'How can we...?'. Contributors' sessions will explore how to take their original wonderings forward, turning curiosities into researchable questions and identifying suitable research methods. The format is flexible, and contributors can choose from a range of session styles or propose their own.

Contributors will consider how their ideas might progress beyond the RMR, whether through developing bid applications, forming networks or submitting paper proposals.

## Take part

The RMR should be valuable to a wide range of researchers, whether they're seeking collaborators, feeling stuck in their work or are curious about exploring alternative ways of doing things. It is open to people at all career stages and from across different sectors.

Applications to participate in the RMR are open until 2 July. To apply, [visit the RMR page on the NCRM website](#).

As this is a new initiative, we plan to publish a post-event reflection on our website. This resource should prove useful to others involved in research development or considering implementing a similar format.

# Making research accessible for people with sight loss

By Danielle Colcombe, senior insight officer, insight and customer voice, RNIB

**R**NIB (Royal National Institute of Blind People) is a UK-based charity that supports people with sight loss, their families, and carers.



In social research, inclusivity isn't just a nice-to-have. It's fundamental for collecting diverse and representative data. Conducting research that is fully accessible to blind and partially sighted people is necessary for generating high-quality findings that represent the nearly two million people in the UK living with sight loss. This article examines the importance of best practice for inclusive research and practical tips for researchers.

## The importance of inclusive research

By including disabled participants, researchers can obtain a more holistic understanding of behaviours, have a broader range of insights and produce more meaningful recommendations.

People with sight loss bring unique perspectives and problem-solving skills, leading to better design and more innovative solutions. For instance, inclusive research practices involving blind and partially sighted participants contributed to the development of Amazon Alexa, making it accessible and user-friendly for everyone. The partnership resulted in an Alexa skill that allows users to access thousands of audiobooks from the RNIB Talking Books library and to call the RNIB Helpline directly.

## Best practice for inclusive research

To ensure research is inclusive and accessible to people with sight loss, integrate the following considerations into the planning and execution phases:

- ▶ Engage with blind and partially sighted experts and advocacy groups during the planning stages to gain insights into specific accessibility needs. This helps design research that accommodates diverse needs.
- ▶ Assistive technology (AT) empowers blind and partially sighted people to access digital content. Websites and survey platforms should meet global accessibility guidelines, such as WCAG 2.2. Popular AT tools include screen magnifiers, used by partially sighted people and those with low vision to help consume content visually, and screen readers for those with limited vision, which converts all content to audio.
- ▶ Recruitment strategies should be inclusive, offering multiple options for participation.
- ▶ Training researchers on accessibility best practices, including survey design and scripting, is essential to ensure all aspects of the research process are accessible.

## Practical tips for conducting accessible research

### Quantitative research:

- ▶ For online surveys, use platforms compliant with WCAG 2.2, level AA or higher (visit [Gov.uk understanding-WCAG](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/67222/understanding-wcag.pdf) for more information), and ensure they have a formal accessibility statement.
- ▶ Use simple fonts, high colour contrast, and add 'alt text' to images. Keep questions short and written in simple language.
- ▶ Provide necessary survey instructions on the introductory page, indicate the number of questions, and provide an accurate estimate of the survey duration.
- ▶ Enable the ability to save and resume for longer online surveys and ensure error messages are accessible.
- ▶ Pre-test online surveys using different types of AT.
- ▶ For paper surveys, provide alternative formats such as large print or braille, or provide an option to complete over the phone.

**Qualitative research:**

- ▶ Follow MRS's [diversity-and-inclusion-guides-for-clients](#).
- ▶ Always check accessibility requirements in advance and send the name and credentials of staff members in the participants' preferred format.
- ▶ Choose accessible venues with good lighting, accessible toilets and provisions for Guide Dogs, and offer assistance such as taxi services or guiding to the venue.
- ▶ When meeting in person, ensure staff speak directly to the participant by introducing themselves each time they speak.
- ▶ When relevant, use familiar online platforms like Zoom or Teams, provide accessibility instructions in advance, and help set up the technology.

- ▶ Use clear and descriptive language, audio describe any stimulus and allow extra time for responses. Keep focus groups small to ensure effective participation and manage any accessibility tools or assistance required.
- ▶ Train facilitators on how to include blind and partially sighted participants actively, such as by describing visual aids verbally and ensuring everyone has an equal opportunity to contribute.

**Ethnographic studies:**

- ▶ Conduct studies in environments familiar to blind and partially sighted participants to minimise navigation challenges and ensure comfort.
- ▶ Use descriptive notetaking to document observations in a way that can be easily translated into accessible formats.

**Post-research considerations**

On completion, ensure the findings and reports are accessible to blind and partially sighted audiences.

- ▶ Prepare research reports and presentations in accessible formats (visit RNIB's website for [making information accessible](#)), ensuring that all visual data, such as charts and graphs, are described textually.
- ▶ Use accessible channels to share research findings with participants and the wider community, including accessible websites, audio and braille publications.

Remember, making research inclusive and accessible is not just the right thing to do. It's necessary for capturing the full spectrum of human experiences and leads to richer insights and more innovative solutions. So, let's embrace these practices and make our research accessible to all.

# 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](mailto: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 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

# SRA annual conference 2025

## Embracing change, driving discovery

It's not too late to register for the UK's leading social research conference. This is a dynamic, in-person event bringing together researchers, practitioners and policymakers for a day of learning, connection and inspiration through presentations, workshops and masterclasses. Whether you're a seasoned researcher or early in your career, our conference promises insightful discussions, practical takeaways and opportunities to connect with peers across sectors.

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Royal College  
of Physicians,  
London

### Keynote speakers



**Professor Claire Alexander:** Professor of Sociology, University of Manchester: 'Revisiting the Asian gang: 30 years on'.



**Professor Sir Geoff Mulgan:** Professor of Collective Intelligence, Public Policy and Social Innovation, University College London: 'Interpreting the world or changing it: the role of social research in shaping the future'.



**Phil Sutcliffe:** managing partner, Next Intelligence | inca: 'How AI enables a reimagining of research to deliver deeper insight at scale'.



**Rachel Leaver and Maro Mouameletzi:** Dentsu Media UK: 'Enhancing people understanding through generative AI' blending innovation, media and AI to deepen audience insight.



### Breakout sessions

Spotlighting real-world social research by sharing successes, lessons learned and actionable outcomes:

- ▶ empowering inclusive partnerships
- ▶ transforming disability research
- ▶ applying behavioural insights through innovation
- ▶ overlooked data
- ▶ masterclass: doing research with children and young people
- ▶ striking a balance in evaluation
- ▶ new observation-based methods
- ▶ integrating AI and lived experience
- ▶ challenges for our profession
- ▶ research innovation opportunities in value for money evaluation

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# Interview with Kelly Beaver MBE, chief executive, UK & Ireland, Ipsos

## Q. Can you tell us about your career path?

**A.** My background in economic consulting and evaluation (PwC, KPMG, Coffey International Ltd) provided a strong foundation for joining the Ipsos public affairs team in 2011. While there, I supported the establishment of our policy and evaluation team, a relatively new area for Ipsos at the time, before moving on to head up the public affairs team where I oversaw a wide range of social research projects with incredible impact. This included everything from work for the Royal Foundation looking at supporting children in their early years, to the REACT studies which tracked Covid-19 prevalence during the pandemic.

Since then, I've had the privilege of leading various teams and projects, culminating in my current role as chief executive for the UK and Ireland. Having developed my career within Ipsos, making sure staff across the business continue to have those opportunities to grow is particularly important to me.

## Q. What do you enjoy about your position at Ipsos?

**A.** I relish the sheer variety that my role offers and the constant opportunities for growth it presents. But what makes it special is the remarkable team of people I work with. Our organisation is somewhere people tend to come, stay and build careers, which means I am surrounded by different skillsets and capabilities, and extensive research experience. I'm also particularly proud of our inclusive and diverse culture. We strive to create an environment where everyone feels valued and empowered.

## Q. What are some of the opportunities and challenges for social research in the UK over the next few years?

**A.** As with other industries, research is susceptible to the changing times we're living in – socially, economically and politically. This makes being able to provide up-to-date, high-quality data to our clients even more important. In addition, changing technology provides us with more ways to collect, understand and share data. But we need to make sure we're maximising the benefits of these technologies, while understanding the limitations and risks.

## Q. How are you hoping Ipsos might help support some of these opportunities and challenges?

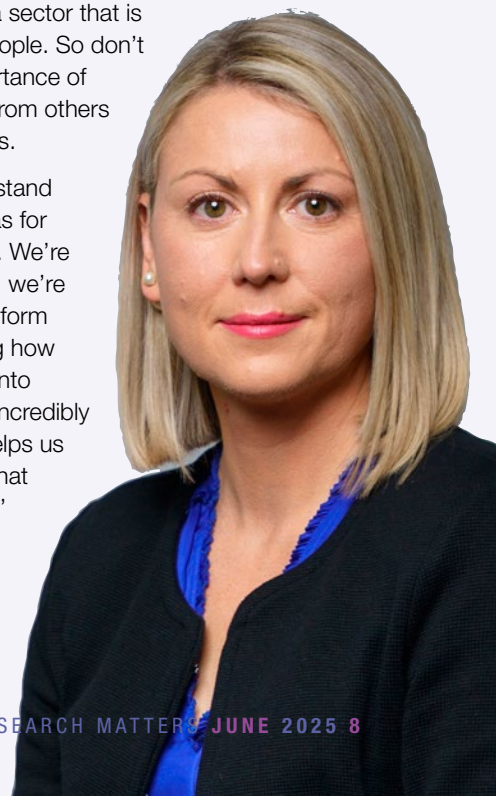
**A.** We're fortunate to be able to draw on many different areas of expertise to meet these challenges. Within our public affairs teams, we have policy experts delivering research, evaluation and strategy and advisory work for clients across government. With Ipsos celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, we have longstanding trend data to contextualise our work. We can also draw on our global expertise (Ipsos has offices in 90 countries across the world), and our work for business clients, such as our employee experience experts.

We are also investing in cutting-edge technologies and expanding our data analytics offerings to allow clients to make the most of the new advances in big data and generative AI. For example, we've established Ipsos data labs to support our clients to maximise the benefits of all the data sources they have available.

## Q. What advice would you give to someone just starting out in social research?

**A.** For anyone starting out in social research, I'd say be brave and try lots of different things. Don't be afraid to push yourself outside your comfort zone to build new skills and experience. We're a sector that is about understanding people. So don't underestimate the importance of spending time learning from others and building connections.

**A.** It's also crucial to understand the impact your work has for people using the results. We're not just generating data; we're providing insights that inform critical decisions. Seeing how our research translates into real-world outcomes is incredibly motivating, but it also helps us design better research that truly answers our clients' questions.



# Interview with Craig Watkins, CEO, UK Verian



## Q. Can you tell us a little about yourself and your career journey to date?

A. Coming from Newport, South Wales my upbringing in a Welsh working-class family undoubtedly shaped my interest in societal issues and my career. This has been varied, spending over 30 years working in or with the public sector, first in the civil service, then professional services at EY and now Verian. Most recently I've been part of the team that established Verian as an independent agency, taking us out of the Kantar group.

## Q. Establishing Verian sounds interesting. Can you tell me more about Verian and the transition to an independent business?

A. Verian is a global research agency working with governments and public sector organisations to tackle complex policy challenges. We specialise in designing and delivering public policy research and population studies, evaluating programme delivery and effectiveness, and designing behavioural interventions. We combine expertise in human understanding with advanced technologies and data science to give clients the best evidence to make decisions.

Verian is the next exciting chapter, building on over 90 years as BMRB, TNS and Kantar Public. The name has changed, but our mission remains the same.

The transition has been both exciting and challenging! It is a major feat to separate from a large organisation as an independent. An advantage of this change has been our ability to focus on our purpose. For instance, we decided not to work with tobacco companies because of the ethical implications. Another benefit is our ability to move quickly and flexibly as the world changes, increasingly important as technology advances at pace and policy challenges shift. Testament to our success through this transition is that customer satisfaction scores have remained high and often improved.

## Q. What are some of the opportunities and challenges for UK social research over the next few years?

A. Social research is evolving rapidly through changes in participant behaviour and societal priorities, technological advances and new methods. These present challenges and opportunities.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) will potentially revolutionise data collection, processing and analysis, enabling nuanced insights at scale. However, as with any disruptive technology, this opportunity needs balancing against the challenges raised by ethical questions about AI-driven research, such as bias and data privacy. Our research must be reproducible, not created in a 'black box'.

Engaging with participants is more challenging, partly through reduced trust in research as misinformation and disinformation increase. We must challenge traditional methods and develop more adaptive, digital and interactive approaches to improve participation and increase engagement.

As society becomes more polarised, it is increasingly important we reach and engage with minority and marginalised communities. We have a long history of successfully doing that and enabling all voices to be heard. Our research must be inclusive. We need to continue to meet this challenge through more innovative approaches to engagement.

## Q. How is Verian helping to support some of these opportunities and challenges?

A. The government's new mission-led approach is an interesting development. The missions offer the chance to explore complex policy challenges, whether health inequalities, economic resilience or justice reform. We've brought together our leading experts into centres of expertise aligned to the government's missions, enabling us to bring the very best of Verian to our clients' policy needs.

One example is our Centre for Value for Money (VFM). With the upcoming spending review, there is inevitable scrutiny on budgets and priorities. Evaluation plays a crucial role, demonstrating whether programmes are designed appropriately, policies are working, and tangible benefits justify the investment. We've developed thinking about VFM evaluations and have worked with many departments on our new approach. For AI, we're collaborating with our partners, Faculty, to automate processes and ensure responsible practices shape how we conduct research.

## Q. What advice would you give to someone just starting out in social research?

- A. Firstly, congratulations on choosing an interesting and rewarding career! Starting a career in social research is both exciting and daunting as we deal with some sensitive and difficult topics. So:
- ▶ build a strong foundation, understand the methodological and ethical basics and develop data skills
  - ▶ gain practical experience on projects
  - ▶ keep up with emerging trends such as AI
  - ▶ develop your communication skills
  - ▶ network and engage with your community

Ultimately, embrace the unexpected as it's often where the best learning comes from. Every experience is a development opportunity. Above all, be curious.

# Primary school children as lead researchers

By Jessica Maliphant, senior child and adolescent psychoanalytic psychotherapist, The Bridge Foundation Bristol

The Bridge Foundation has been providing high-quality psychodynamic therapy to children, young people and their families since 1983, both from a clinic setting and in schools. We strive to understand how we can best support our clients. As part of this endeavour, we conducted a pilot project with a partner school inviting primary-aged children to participate in and lead their own research exploring what they knew and felt about emotional support on offer to them. We called this project 'Your Voice'.



## What we hoped to understand

Our aim was to understand if the children were aware of emotional support already provided at their school and to hear if they had ideas about what might offer further support. We hoped that undertaking this pilot would provide:

- ▶ information for the school team to use the pilot outcome to guide it to consider how the children are/ are not making use of the emotional support already on offer
- ▶ feedback about further avenues of support to the school and ourselves
- ▶ an opportunity for children to lead their own research and for us to evaluate the impact this had on them

## What happened during the project

A small team worked together to design the pilot, pooling together research and clinical skills. Our intention

was to put the voice of the children at the heart of the project, with an emphasis on hearing from those who may often find it hard to make themselves heard. We worked with school staff to identify a group of 12 children (two from each year group, excluding reception) ensuring diversity across the group and making sure to include a sample of more reserved children. We referred to this group as 'Your Voice Researchers'.

We wanted to empower the children by introducing them to the idea that they could be at the forefront of their own research. All children involved were briefed about the project; they were clear that they could opt in or out. In addition, their parents were informed about their child's participation and could withdraw their child if they wished. Following this process, three children withdrew from the project. We adhered to strict rules of confidentiality, maintaining anonymity unless a safeguarding concern arose, in which case we had a system to raise concerns. Psychotherapeutic principles were embedded into the project, ensuring safety and an opportunity for growth.

One of our therapists led an assembly introducing the project to the whole school. The children heard that their opinions would be gathered using a questionnaire which would be designed by the 'Your Voice Researchers'. Four workshops gave the researchers time to build a sense of themselves as a team. Together, they explored their thoughts about the emotional support on offer to them, designed the questionnaire to capture the thoughts and feelings of their peers, and distributed paper copies of the questionnaire to their schoolmates.

## What we learned

In addition to learning so much from the children about what makes them feel safe and happy at school, their enthusiasm for being involved in a research project like this was clear. As one remarked, 'It's cool to be part of something bigger than just you!' As a team, we learned a great deal about the design of the pilot including:

- ▶ The process of inputting the large quantity of data from the paper questionnaires was more time consuming than we had anticipated. We learned that we needed to dedicate more time to this process to ensure tighter procedures around the timeline for inputting data.
- ▶ Unfortunately, many children did not complete the questionnaire. This led us to consider whether the questionnaire was inclusive of all children's learning styles. In the future we would consider other methods for completing the questionnaire including enabling children to use electronic tablets which may support better engagement. In addition to potentially supporting more children to complete the questionnaires, collecting the data on tablets would enable us to receive and input the data more promptly.
- ▶ This pilot took place in the autumn leading up to Christmas. On reflection, we recognise that this is an incredibly busy time for schools. We would now plan any future project for the spring term to avoid conflict with Christmas activities, school exams or end-of-year trips.

# Lived experience involvement: some fundamentals

Raj Hazzard, senior researcher, McPin Foundation

The McPin Foundation is a mental health research charity that champions lived experience involvement in the 'doing' of research. Different to participation, where people might answer questions or supply data, involvement means people use their lived experiences to create knowledge alongside researchers.

Involvement is well recognised as a research method; it is often recommended by research commissioners, grant award bodies and specified in government policies. There is a [growing body of evidence](#) that shows how involvement can improve the quality of research by positively impacting factors such as accessibility, acceptability and relevance.

This development owes a deep sense of gratitude to the work of survivor researchers and disability rights activists striving for social and epistemic justice throughout the 20th century.

There are different ways of incorporating involvement into research projects, from consultation to co-production. All forms of involvement in mental health research include a degree of self-disclosure of experiences. These can include diagnosis, symptoms, treatment, support networks and caring for others.

Consultation work involves people with relevant lived experience giving periodic advice to researchers and clinicians on things such as research tools and processes in group meetings throughout a research project. For example, members of an involvement group can be presented with study material, such as questionnaires and recruitment documents, for comment and can provide feedback on elements of design, accessibility and language based on their collective

lived experience and knowledge. This work is sometimes referred to as being a critical friend; a form of activism that collaborates with those that represent systems of power. For some, this can be frustrating and challenging as it requires a tempering of ideals in favour of a more pragmatic, incremental approach to change. This has led to different types and models of involvement evolving over time.

More embedded forms of involvement include researchers who are trained in traditional research skills also actively bringing their lived experience to all parts of a research process. For example, researchers can share relevant information about themselves to build trust with participants during recruitment and data collection in a subtle and purposeful way. Researchers in such roles are skilled at using their experiences in a compassionate way, being mindful of what may be appropriate (and non-triggering) for others and themselves.

Reflexivity is another important element of involvement, particularly during analysis. Lived experience researchers know that similar experiences do not mean the same experiences as others. They use reflexivity to explore their own biases and assumptions, to provide a form of check and balance to the analysis process.

A common critique of involvement, from those who have been involved, is that it can be tokenistic – something professional researchers include as a 'tick-box' exercise to secure funding. McPin has been using involvement as a research approach for ten years and has learned a lot about how to make involvement meaningful in mental health research.

It is important that those advocating, facilitating and supporting lived experience involvement appreciate the emotional labour and power dynamics at play. Sharing personal mental health experiences with medical and research professionals can be a vulnerable process. Stigma and discrimination may be shadows in the room. If one is committed to using this research technique the following tips can support the development of meaningful involvement within research projects:

- ▶ include involvement partners from the start of a project, and beyond the obligatory 'report' to co-deliver impact
- ▶ choose an appropriate method of decision-making in the group – consensus is often used but there are others, such as consent from sociocracy
- ▶ be reciprocal – provide mentoring and training for involvement partners to develop their professional skills and support emotional labour
- ▶ develop ways of working that enable people to work actively with their professional and lived experiences and expertise. This can do much to challenge stigma, develop trust in teams and wellbeing in the workplace.

There are many different aspects to involvement research and this article represents only the tip of the iceberg. If you are interested in delving deeper into any of the ideas presented in this article, please do check out [McPin's resources](#).

# The future of face-to-face

By Adele Bearfield, deputy managing director of operations and head of offline data collection, Ipsos

The often-heard rhetoric around face-to-face fieldwork, is that it's an outmoded dinosaur on the brink of extinction. The thing is though, that's been the rhetoric for 20 years.



If the pandemic didn't banish face-to-face fieldwork to the history books, my guess is that it's going to be here to stay for a little while longer yet.

The responsibility of those of us who work in offline data collection is to ensure that it is future-proofed, sustainable and agile in meeting the needs of our clients and the needs of society, and the voices we should be striving to ensure are heard.

Doggedly ignoring the obvious drawbacks of face-to-face, namely cost and time compared to other modes, is backward thinking and innovation stifling. Similarly, bullishly ploughing ahead with online as a one-size-fits-all approach, refusing to acknowledge the need for face-to-face in some, not all, programmes of work, does a disservice to commissioners and participants alike. Some surveys simply don't need face-to-face data collection. When you do need robust, quality data, face-to-face is king.

Quality in today's terms means more than skilled interviewers adept at administering complex questionnaires. Increasingly it means representativity

with a capital R. Response rates are in decline among all modes, with some notable exceptions by survey. But response rates are only part of the story. Strong participation rates without the desired profile doesn't cut it. We need to represent hard-to-reach groups such as young people, those from Black, Asian and Mixed Ethnic backgrounds and those from lower income groups. Face-to-face data collection still tends to achieve more representative samples compared to other modes.

## At Ipsos, almost all the face-to-face data collection we undertake has some form of mixed-mode element

At Ipsos, almost all the face-to-face data collection we undertake has some form of mixed-mode element. Our longitudinal studies may start face-to-face, and those cohorts are great examples of where quality and robust data are vital. The quality of that initial building block means that, with the right level of engagement, some later waves can adopt push-to-web for some or all elements of a survey, or we can reach easier-to-engage cohorts via online methods, reserving more expensive and time-consuming face-to-face data collection for those harder-to-reach groups where face-to-face really adds value.

So, the case for face-to-face is compelling, but it needs to deliver quality that justifies the time and cost. Our interviewer panels need to be supported and engaged to thrive in the changing landscape. We need to continue to evolve how we upskill our interviewer panels to equip them with the resilience and tools to engage harder-to-reach groups.

Synthetic data is artificially generated data that mimics real-world data but is created through algorithms rather than from real-world events or observations.

The role of synthetic data will change how face-to-face is used and valued. As synthetic data grows in acceptance, prevalence and sophistication, it's likely there will be many occasions where cost and speed will tip the balance in favour of synthetic data for commissioners of face-to-face fieldwork. But synthetic data needs high-quality reliable profiles to model, and the basis for that modelling needs real people. It's likely face-to-face data collection will have an increasingly important role to play to support synthetic data.

The need to reach and engage real people face-to-face, is likely to become increasingly valuable as a single source of truth.

# Career journeys: from fieldwork to office-based role

Andrew Phelps, commissioning editor for Research Matters, interviews Aileen Cook, assistant methodologist, qualitative data collection methodology, Office for National Statistics (ONS) about her experience as a social researcher and the move from being a field interviewer to a more office-based role.

## Q. When did you start in social research?

**A.** I started as a field interviewer for the National Centre for Social Research (NatGen) in 2019 after my MSc in social and cultural theory while still shelf-stacking part-time at Sainsbury's. It involved interviewing in and around lovely Bristol on surveys like the Department for Work and Pensions' Family Resources Survey and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's English Housing Survey. I hadn't been doing this for long when the pandemic hit. Fortunately, I was given the opportunity to continue working on ONS's Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Survey (CIS), which included collecting swabs and (self-administered) blood samples. Due to the change in nature of appointment scheduling, the timed sample drops and being sent further afield on the CIS, this conflicted with my main role and source of income at Sainsbury's. I was also constantly in fear of contracting Covid-19 with working in two keyworker jobs, and it started to take a toll on my mental and physical health, as well as raising concerns about job security if or when the pandemic subsided.



## Q. Why did you decide to make the move from being a field interviewer to a more office-based role and what sort of research do you now do?

**A.** It was always my goal to move into an office-based role as I was interested in what went on behind the scenes in survey design, question testing and so on. Field interviewing was my way of gaining experience of how surveys worked in practice. This then helped me to gain my (safer and more secure) role as a telephone interviewer for the ONS, where I'd wanted to work since the start of my degree. From there, I secured my dream role as an assistant social research methodologist in the qualitative data collection methodology (QDCM) team. In this team we use qualitative methods to develop and test survey questionnaires while following the [respondent centred design framework \(RCDF\)](#). This includes [mental models research](#), question design, and cognitive interviewing and question testing. I also conduct analysis, write reports and deliver presentations on the qualitative methods and findings of our projects.

## Q. What have been some of the benefits? What field skills do you find are useful to have in your current role?

**A.** Less driving, bad weather and generally safer working conditions, on a practical level. However, the interview skills I obtained have no doubt helped me when speaking with participants in my current role. And I'd like to think I have at least some insights into the entire survey respondent journey, from the invitation to receiving the incentive, because of my work in the field. I now also try to consider how surveys operate from an interviewer perspective, as well as the respondent's. My interviewing experience was partly what helped me get 'poached' into a team that focuses on survey methodology, rather than economic statistics, which was exactly what I wanted.

## Q. What have been some of the challenges?

**A.** Imposter syndrome. It's taken me perhaps longer than most to get to where I want, and I sometimes still have doubts about whether I'm good enough to be in this 'backstage' role. That's not to say that fieldwork and interviewing aren't as hard nor any less important. If anything, field and telephone interviewers are the front line and without them, it doesn't really matter what we do sat at our desks. Each role has its unique challenges and benefits. I also struggle to sit still!

## Q. What practical advice would you give to someone who is looking to make a similar move?

**A.** Shadow, network, ask questions. If you're interested in a certain project, team or role, reach out and take any opportunities to put out the feelers. I can guarantee no one will mind taking some time to have a conversation and offer guidance about their area. My manager when I was a telephone interviewer was very supportive and signposted connections for me, so speak with them. I'd also recommend taking the move in steps, rather than a jump, if you're able.

# Career journeys: freelance social research



Andrew Phelps, commissioning editor for Research Matters, interviews Naomi Clemons, managing director, N2 Research and Analytics about her experience of social research and her progression to research consultancy.

## Q. Can you tell us about when you started in research and the sort of research you do now?



**A.** I am a freelance social researcher and the managing director of N2 Research and Analytics, an independent consultancy specialising in research and evaluation in the public sector. My journey into research wasn't exactly traditional. I didn't start out with a clear plan to become a researcher, and I certainly didn't see myself working in academia or consultancy when I first started my career.

My first exposure to research was during my undergraduate degree in psychology, when I became fascinated by criminal justice research and the different ways information and data were gathered, analysed and used to inform decision-making. Towards the end of my degree, I knew that I wanted to work in criminal justice and explored options with the probation, prison and police service. This ultimately led me to a role as an intelligence analyst with Kent Police, where I honed my skills in quantitative data and intelligence analysis, report writing in various forms, and how to use the data and information to make actionable recommendations and inform decision-making at a local and strategic level.

Over the years, I moved between roles in academia (such as teaching criminology), and the public sector with my most recent role before transiting to consultancy work being the head of evaluation at Kent County Council. During this time, I completed a master's in research in policing, followed by a PhD in criminal justice, while my day-to-day job allowed me to continue working in areas that interested me. Now, as a research consultant, I undertake a variety of projects that draw together the skills I have built up over the last 17 years.

## Q. Why did you decide to set up on your own?

**A.** After spending 17 years in public sector research, I reached a point where I wanted more flexibility and variety, and more control over my career. I realised freelance research could allow me to work across multiple sectors,

collaborate with a diverse range of professionals, and focus on projects that interested me, while continuing to work with the public sector. I took a strategic approach – networking, reaching out to other freelancers, and learning about the business side of consultancy. Like any research project, I identified what I needed to learn and tackled it step by step. The more I explored, the more I realised that this was the right path for me at this point.

## Q. What have been some of the benefits and challenges?

**A.** One of the biggest benefits has been the ability to shape my own career focusing on projects that align with my interests and values. I've also found that the freelance research consultancy community is incredibly supportive. I've been able to collaborate with other freelancers, learn from their experiences, and develop partnerships that wouldn't have been possible in a traditional job. Transitioning from employment to self-employment isn't without its challenges. One of the biggest hurdles was getting comfortable with the business side of things – marketing myself, managing contracts and handling the financial aspects of running a consultancy.

## Q. What practical advice would you give to someone looking to become a research consultant?

- ▶ Start networking early – connect with other research consultants, attend industry events and reach out to people who have already made the leap.
- ▶ Treat it like a research project – identify the gaps in your knowledge, whether it's business skills, pricing or client management, and take steps to learn and upskill.
- ▶ Be open to different types of work – the best way to gain experience is to say yes to opportunities that align with your skills, even if they are outside your comfort zone.
- ▶ Trust yourself – if you have experience in research, analysis and evaluation, you already have the skills needed to succeed as a consultant. The challenge is in applying them in a new way.

Starting my own consultancy has been exciting, challenging and rewarding, and I'm looking forward to what comes next.

# 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 are shown below), so for latest info please visit [www.the-sra.org.uk/training](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/training) or contact Patricia: [training@the-sra.org.uk](mailto: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](mailto:training@the-sra.org.uk)

Full details of all courses are at [www.the-sra.org.uk/training](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/training)

## Evaluation

**30 June:** Research & evaluation project management for project leaders, with Professor David Parsons

**1 July:** Management for commissioned research and evaluation, with Professor David Parsons

**2 July:** Foundations of evaluation, with Professor David Parsons

**3 July:** Effective learning partnerships, with Miranda Lewis

**11 September:** Foundations of evaluation, with Professor David Parsons

**12 September:** Impact evaluation (advanced), with Professor David Parsons

## Qualitative

**18 June:** Digital qualitative interviews, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**18 June (in-person, in London):** Conducting focus groups, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

**19 June (in-person, in London):** Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

**19 & 20 June (2 afternoons):** Creative data analysis, with Dr Nicole Brown

**20 June (in-person, in London):** Interpreting and writing your qualitative findings, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

**25 June:** Foundations of qualitative research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**27 June:** Introduction to ethnographic methods, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

**1 July:** Depth interviewing skills, with Dr Sarah Jasim

**1 July:** Qualitative data analysis, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**2 July:** Writing up qualitative data, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**4 July:** Grounded theory, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

**21 July:** AI-assisted qualitative data analysis, with Christina Silver

**2 September:** Introduction to qualitative interviewing, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**3 September:** Narratives and storytelling in qualitative research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**4 September:** AI-assisted qualitative data analysis, with Christina Silver

**5 September:** Narrative analysis, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**16 & 17 Sept (2 afternoons):** Creative methods in qualitative data analysis, with Dr Nicole Brown

**30 September:** Introduction to focus groups, with Dr Karen Lumsden

## Quantitative

**17 & 18 June (2 afternoons):** Web survey design, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

**25 June:** Cognitive interviewing, with NatCen trainers

**8-10 July (3 afternoons):** Advanced questionnaire design, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

**9 September:** Understanding statistical concepts and essential tests, with Valerija Kolbas

**10 September:** Inclusive social research practice, with Dr Nena Foster and Hannah Marcus

**19 September:** Introduction to sampling for social surveys, with Alexandru Cernat

**26 September:** Data management and visualisation with R, with Alexandru Cernat

## Other research skills

**10 & 11 July (2 mornings):** How to design trauma-informed and inclusive research, with Skye Curtis and Dr Holly Taylor-Dunn

**10 September:** Inclusive social research practice, with Dr Nena Foster and Hannah Marcus

**11 September:** An introduction to behavioural science, with Dr Bev Bishop

**23 September (3.5 hrs) & 7 October (2.5 hrs):** Designing a communication plan for disseminating research findings, with Mihaela Gruia

# Spotlight on SRA activity

## Training

[www.the-sra.org.uk/training](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/training)

Many qual, quant and evaluation courses are online.

## Events

[www.the-sra.org.uk/events](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/events)

## Blog

[www.the-sra.org.uk/blog](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/blog)

Topical posts on researching.

## Journal

[www.the-sra.org.uk/journal](http://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](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/resources)

Good practice guides and more.

## Ethics

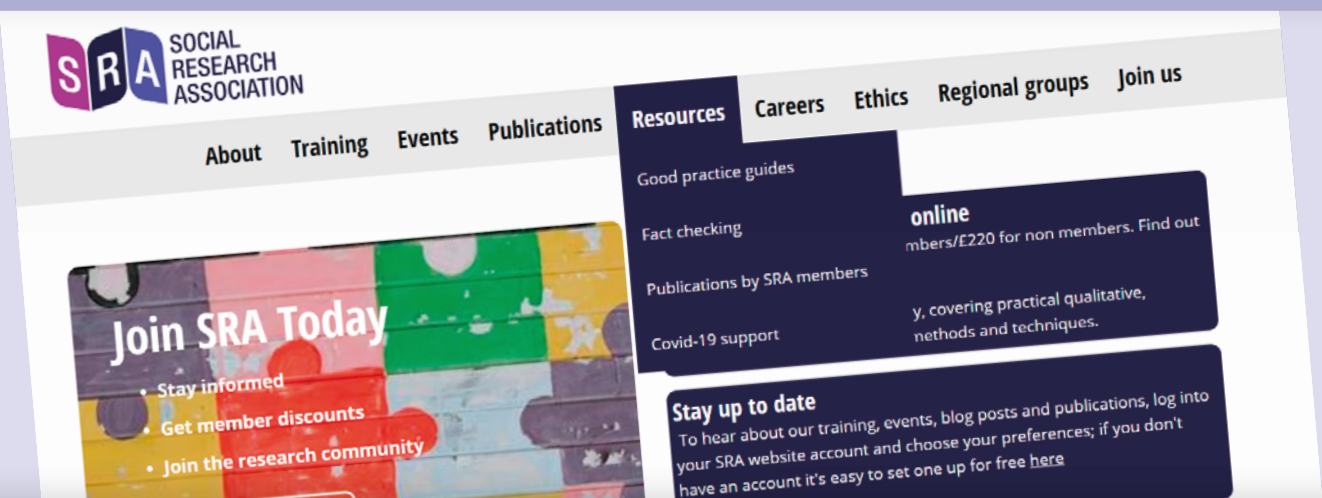
[www.the-sra.org.uk/ethics](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/ethics)

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

## Member resources

Log in, go to [www.the-sra.org.uk](http://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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