

research matters



So, what is Plan S?

By Alison Danforth, publications manager, British Sociological Association



You may have heard rumblings about Plan S – in publisher, funder and learned society circles, it has been a huge topic of conversation since September 2018. However, you may be wondering what all the fuss is about. What is Plan S and what does it achieve?

Launched in September 2018 by a group of research funders, Plan S has a clear target:

‘With effect from 2021, all scholarly publications on the results from research funded by public or private grants provided by national, regional and international research councils and funding bodies, must be published in Open

Access Journals, on Open Access Platforms, or made immediately available through Open Access Repositories without embargo.’ (<https://www.coalition-s.org/about/>)

The plan underwent wide consultation at the beginning of 2019, and a revised set of principles, alongside implementation guidance, was issued on 31 May.

Several [national research funder organisations](#) are committed to Plan S and form ‘cOAlition S’, including Science Europe, UK Innovation and Research (UKRI), the Wellcome Trust and various northern European research councils. The plan is supported by the European Commission and the European Research Council.

Plan S principles

Plan S includes ten main principles which are designed to dramatically increase the publication of open access research and also to control the high and rising costs of academic books and journal subscriptions.

The plan sets out the expectation that all science publications will be made freely available immediately on publication in high-quality open access publications under these conditions:

- ▶ Fees charged will be commensurate with the publishing services provided
- ▶ The copyright will allow unrestricted, free reuse
- ▶ All journals, books and book chapters are included
- ▶ Hybrid (partial OA) journals will not be compliant unless they are converting to an open access model
- ▶ Funders have committed to not use publication venue to assess the quality of a research publication

What does it achieve?

In and of itself – a lot of conversation and not much else ... directly. Plan S is not policy – it is a call to funders, publishers, learned societies, governments and academics to make academic publication freely available immediately on publication and to make major changes to how research is published.

For a plan that does not have any direct influence, it has been very effective at sparking important conversations, and we are likely to see changes in academic publishing as Plan S is converted into policy and practice. It has given new energy to this debate and galvanised action in some major stakeholders.

Funders and policymakers such as UKRI – the body that includes all the UK research councils – will issue statements about how they expect work they fund to be published, and how they will support publishing costs. They may indicate the conditions of publication (e.g. must be deposited in a university repository; must be published with the '[CC BY License](#)') or require it to be published in compliant publications.

On the publisher side, conversations between publishers and university libraries are moving towards open access deals that may see significant changes in how libraries purchase material to read and publish from the large publishers. These new types of deals, which are called Read and Publish or Publish and Read deals, move away from 'pay to read' towards 'pay to publish'.

Plan S wants all research to be free to read anytime, by anyone with decent internet access. However, right now, the support for Plan S is largely in northern Europe. Neither the US nor China, the two largest producers of academic publications, have yet committed to it. Nor have we seen any significant government or funder policy changes to reflect the Plan S principles.

So, the conversations will continue, and the impact of Plan S is, as yet, undetermined. Will it be the catalyst for revolution in academic publishing, or will it be another step along a slower journey towards making information free to all readers?

Moving from ideals to reality

The Plan S goal of free access to funded research is logical and highly desirable. But will it truly achieve this?

There are significant concerns in the academic publishing community that the method of implementation will create less than desirable outcomes:

- ▶ **Exclusivity:** publication of research is not free. An exchange of money for services and products is necessary. Readers currently pay to access academic literature; open access shifts the payment to authors (or their funders and universities). Will authors without funds now be excluded? This could include practitioners, students, early-career researchers, retired researchers, those in the global south, those outside research-intensive universities, those who do not win grant funding, and many more. While Plan S has acknowledged that no one should be excluded from publishing on the basis of financial resources, practical solutions have not been proposed
- ▶ **Copyright:** Plan S requires the 'CC BY license' to allow for clear and open reuse. It removes reuse ambiguity, the challenges and costs of getting permission to use published material, and supports vast data-mining projects. However, the 'CC BY license' also removes any control authors have over their work. They cannot restrict commercial reuse, nor reuse that they are unhappy with – for example that takes comments and conclusions out of context to support a particular agenda. In the social sciences, arts and humanities, where the words matter, these concerns are particularly pointed
- ▶ **Consolidation of publishers:** the Plan S implementation date was proposed as January 2020 – only a year and four months after launch. After consultation it was moved to January 2021. This new timeframe is still extremely short for major changes to an entire industry and all the established relationships and dependencies. Larger publishers are better able to cope with this sort of pressure than smaller ones. The smaller journals, publishers and learned societies, which depend on publishing income, may be lost during the transition period because they do not have the resources to radically modify their business models at speed. Many of these smaller players are focused on ideals and activities that are not wholly commercial, and their loss would be significant to the academic ecosystem. Academic publishing may become even more consolidated amongst the big players, reducing competition and choice for academics. These fears are particularly acute in the arts, humanities and social sciences in which funding for research is not lavish. The open access business models that seem to be working in some disciplines have not been feasible in many others. While most disciplines are hugely in support of freely accessible research, many of them need time to work through how that can be sustainably achieved. The timeframes proposed by Plan S seem unsympathetic to those needs

There was a consultation about Plan S at the beginning of 2019, and there are likely to be consultations with various funding bodies as they translate Plan S into policy. For the UK research community, the [UKRI Open Access Review](#) is significant. Publishers and university libraries are negotiating new deals for access to content and publishing services. There are also projects and organisations combining to research and understand how publishing can and should change to make open access a reality. With all this activity, the speed of change is likely to slow down, but hopefully, we'll also see resolution for some of the major issues.

In all likelihood, the utopia dreamed of by Plan S supporters is some way off. However, Plan S has created opportunities for discussion and change. We now wait to see how sizeable and wide-reaching those changes will be.

Alison Danforth is publications manager at the British Sociological Association, which publishes four academic journals and two book series. She has been involved in the open access debates on behalf of the BSA since 2012, and is working to help voice the social science perspective on open access publishing.

EDITORIAL

On new discussions and unexpected questions



SRA chair, David Johnson, writes about some of the topics that continue to exercise social researchers

Welcome to the autumn edition of SRA Matters.

We have a packed issue leading with Alison Danforth's article on the Plan S ambition to achieve open access to scholarly publications. As she describes, there are issues of both strategy and implementation in considering how best to meet the ambition. The resulting institutional concerns, and market threats and challenges, will have to be carefully considered. But the initiative has generated new and valuable discussions about the merits or otherwise of making high-quality scholarly work widely available.

We follow this with several articles about different aspects of the ethics of social research – which social researchers have, rightly, continued to take seriously, and want to spend time discussing. These variously consider ethics in the context of social media and of research data; and introduce an ethics self-assessment tool. SRA trustee Jane Evans provides



some tips about seeking research ethics committee (REC) approval for conducting research with vulnerable people. What Jane says resonates with my own experience of presenting a research proposal to an NHS REC.

I'd also add that, however well you have prepared, you should be ready to answer questions about (the sometimes unpredictable) areas of particular interest to panel members. My team and I were questioned for 25 minutes about patient-facing material and how we were promoting our work as a trial and not a service, including a question about whether it was realistic to suggest that a person could be an astronaut as a result of our intervention (which we weren't suggesting!). We weren't asked at all about data, despite our ambitious plans to collect and join up a range of personal data. The other thing for social researchers to note is that RECs, especially in health, deal with very diverse applications. When we were talking to the research team presenting directly after us, they mentioned that their research was about transplanting organs into humans from animal sources – about as far

away from social policy research as you could imagine!

This issue also carries articles about the perceived crisis in social research; theory-based evaluation (for those interested, the new SRA course: 'theory-based evaluation: options and choices for practitioners' runs on 5 November); the SRA's summer event; and the excellent SRA work going on across the country. An interview with Sioned Lewis, director of Arad Research explores her experiences as co-founder of a small research agency. Growing a diverse social research market is clearly vital for the future health of our discipline. In that vein, but moving from one end of the spectrum to the other, I would like to add my congratulations to NatGen for its 50th year and its continuing influence on social research. I was fortunate to be at the celebratory event at the House of Lords in April, and it was great to see so many people who have been associated with NatGen and who have contributed to social research in so many ways over the years.

Until next time, happy researching!

Planning ethical social research: a checklist

By Jane Evans, SRA trustee

What are the main considerations when planning for ethical social research that has more chance of passing a research ethics committee (REC) first time? Here are my top three tips as vice chair of a REC dealing with highly sensitive ethical issues on a regular basis.



1. So what?

Why are you conducting this research? Start research planning with a good clear reason about why the research is worthwhile and who it will benefit. The key issue that RECs weigh up is benefit versus harm. By asking people to give up time and energy to take part in research, you are automatically intruding on their lives and that's before you ask any awkward questions or put them through onerous surveys or inventories. So, what are you doing the research for? It is not good enough to simply 'explore' an issue, or to test a method, such as 'here's a really good chance to try out the Delphi research method'.

It's a win-win too. If you start with a clear and valid rationale, research planning should fall into place more readily than if there is no real reason to do it.

2. Leave your assumptions behind

This is a big problem for policy research, especially when commissioned by policymakers or influencers. To them it's obvious what the problem is and what should happen

to resolve it. They just need to get a bit of research to prove their point and make it look respectable. Argue back if commissioners insist on this approach. There really isn't any point in doing research if everyone knows all the answers: that just makes it a waste of the participants' time which isn't ethical. Research must be designed to find out new things, not confirm what you already think you know. That might mean finding out stuff which is awkward or unexpected. It's all good. Setting out with prior assumptions really isn't.

3. Realistic timeframes

Being ethical takes time. Firstly, take time to find out whose permission you need to conduct the research and who your gatekeepers are. For example, in England, if you are doing research with local authority children's services, you may need permission from the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) as well as each of the individual departments. If you are doing research in the family court system in England, you need to apply to the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS). Are you working with more than one NHS trust or board? Do you know who you need permission from, or can one trust/board act as a lead body to authorise permission?

Then, who do you need to obtain ethical review from? Your institution definitely, plus probably the places where research is conducted. For example, in the NHS in England, you need to apply for review by the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) by using the Integrated Research

Application Service (IRAS). If you are conducting research in prisons in England, you need to apply through the HMPPS National Research Committee (NRC). Charities may have their own RECs.

You may well need to allow time to make multiple ethical applications. Different RECs work to different timescales. Some will meet just to discuss your application, in which case you are lucky, because larger bodies will wait until there is a batch to consider to make reviewers' time worthwhile. This means you may be waiting for approval for longer than expected. Again, don't assume that it will be granted – there may be considerable amendments that you had not predicted.

Think about how your applications should vary if you are making multiple applications. Universities have different priorities to children's charities or hospitals for example. So, just because you have passed your university's ethical review, don't assume that that will work for other committees. Never cut and paste from one to the other. Like a job application, write a separate application tailored to the values of each body you are applying to.

In brief

To sum up, my three tips are:

1. Say why
2. Don't assume
3. Be realistic

A fresh look at theory-based evaluation

By David Parsons, principal consultant, P&A Research and Consulting

Despite its label, theory-based evaluation, or TBE, is not 'theoretical' but a practical approach to applying programme theory to impact evaluation in complex settings. In the 1990s, Chen, Weiss, Pawson and Tilley and others variously promoted TBE approaches, lauded by many as a breakthrough in tackling complexity of relationships and impact effects. So why, over 20 years on, do these methods remain little used even for evaluations which seem to cry out for the insights they offer?



way through: helping evaluators get to grips with complexity by surfacing often hidden assumptions, alongside expectations, context and mechanisms underlying the intervention. With these 'theory' roots, a well-planned TBE offers the chance to go beyond measuring impacts to better understand what works (and what doesn't), why and, crucially, diagnosing what in the original assumptions needs to change for it to work better.

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This is not to say TBE is the answer to all evaluation needs, or that, where it fits well, it is easy to do. How to put together the 'theory' (context, assumption, mechanisms, and risks) can be confusing. It also needs both

time and stakeholder engagement which might be in short supply. I see this confusion, and the lack of experience to draw on, as an important brake on the wider use of a potentially valuable tool in the evaluator's toolkit.

With interventions becoming more complex, and impact evaluation expectations rising, perhaps it is time for a fresh look at TBE. The prism for this is where there has been early successful use of TBE (especially in aid, international development and energy programmes). Drawing on these can provide the insights that would-be TBE evaluators feel are missing on the options available for practical 'theory' setting; where these options fit well; and on making best use of them for proportionate TBE designs. SRA's new one-day course 'options and choices for theory-based evaluation' aims to provide a starting point.

David Parsons runs the SRA's popular courses on foundation of evaluation and impact evaluation, and will run the new course on options and choices for theory-based evaluation later this year. See page 17.

SRA blog

Cath Dillon is moving on from SRA North to become editor of the new SRA blog. She's looking for proposals for blog posts from SRA members in any of the SRA regional groups. Please contact cath@briestdillon.co.uk or jessica.nelligan@the-sra.org.uk



Replication crisis: what crisis?

By David Johnson, head of trialling and evaluation, Work and Health Joint Unit, UK Government

One year ago, the journal *Nature Human Behaviour*, a respected, peer-reviewed journal, published an issue focusing on a study conducted by Colin Camerer and colleagues called 'Evaluating the replicability of social science experiments in [the journals] *Nature* and *Science* between 2010 and 2015'. This study, as its name suggests, presented findings from a 'social sciences replication project' which sought to replicate findings of 21 experimental social science studies. Despite the use of considerably bigger samples and study power, the replication studies were not able fully to replicate the findings of the originals. In only 13 of the studies did they find effects in the same direction as the original work, and effect sizes were also, on average, about half the size of those found by the studies.



In many ways the design part of a trial is the easy part. Implementation to fidelity in a socially diverse, multi-agency and changing political and socio-demographic pluralist landscape provides quite a challenge for the applied researcher. The thought of perfectly replicating the multi-agency trial I've been working on for three years seems to border on the heroic!

Even if possible, would it be helpful? An expectation of perfect replication as the only way to 'prove' the effectiveness of an intervention or accuracy of a hypothesis seems naïve. The authors of course were not saying that but the implication made by commentators is still there – if it's not replicable it's not 'true' nor 'scientific'.

In my view, learning about the applicability of a particular approach in a wide variety of contexts is actually an important aspect of learning about effectiveness. In my own trial, which is testing whether Individual Placement and Support (IPS), can support people to return to work over and above business-as-usual provision, the strength of the evidence base comes from the fact that 11 or more international studies have shown IPS to be effective for people with severe and enduring mental health conditions in a wide variety of labour market and country contexts. As such, we have taken IPS and asked: might it also be applicable to people with mild to moderate health conditions? It wasn't the replication of IPS in any one context that led to the current trial, but its efficacy in a range of different situations.

It is also important to think about why we undertake applied research in the first place. For some, it is curiosity driven, but for many, it is to improve decision making, often in situations in which the decision will be taken anyway and, as such, the researcher is seeking to make an evidence-informed contribution to that decision when there are many competing priorities and pressures on the decision maker beyond social science evidence.

The article also caused me to reflect on the differences between disciplinary understandings of the nature of knowledge. I don't have the space here to delve deeply into the relationship between philosophy and social science as to the nature of knowledge, but it is useful to remember that the scientific method is based on hypothesis generation, testing, refinement and refutation. The randomised control trial (RCT) is one such method of investigation, but it is not in and of itself entirely an embodiment of all aspects of the scientific method. Equally, clinical trials in the medical sphere don't necessarily set the benchmark to which social science should aspire, coming as they do from a different methodological tradition. Indeed, RCTs, which are often seen as the gold standard in clinical trials, only started to be used regularly in medicine in the 1960s, some 80 years or so after they started to be used in social science, and 40 years after R.A. Fisher's work in the 1920s that formalised the theory.

So, what are we to take from the 'replication crisis' debate? My sense is that panic over the state of knowledge generation in social science is unjustified. Instead, it is a useful reminder of the challenges and contested nature of knowledge generation, the complexity of so doing in an applied discipline, and the need to triangulate evidence wherever possible. Perhaps too, it can act as a call to self-reflection and to seek quality, transparency and the appropriate use of the full range of methods we have at our disposal to understand social phenomena from a range of different viewpoints.

References

- Nature Human Behaviour 2(9). September 2018. <https://www.nature.com/nathumbehav/volumes/2/issues/9>
- Camerer et al. (2018). Nature Human Behaviour <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41562-018-0399-z>

There ensued headlines about a replication crisis in social science, even if, in many cases, the articles behind the headlines took a more measured approach and saw this as an opportunity to reflect on practice; to appreciate that no single study should be considered definitive; and to continue to improve methods and understanding.

The editorial in *Nature Human Behaviour* took a similarly measured view. It encouraged further high-quality replication studies and supported the learning from Camerer et al's work as an opportunity to, as they put it, 'improve science' through detailed reporting and the resulting conversations.

So, what are we to make of this in our own applied research work? In some ways the article came as no surprise to me, not because I don't think it raises some important questions for the nature of knowledge generation, but because the thought of replicating the various trials in which I work would seem to be beyond ambitious.

An interview with the co-founder of a small research agency

Andrew Phelps, commissioning editor of SRA Research Matters, asked Sioned Lewis, director and co-founder of Arad Research, about her experiences as co-founder of a small research agency.

Q. Can you tell us a bit about Arad Research: when did you start, how many staff do you have, and what sort of research do you do?



A. Arad is an independent research company based in Cardiff. Five of us started the company in 2004, and we have built a reputation for independence, creativity, reliability and expertise with clients in Wales and across the UK. Our team of ten staff researches what works well in policy and programme development and how to improve our clients' services.

Q. What did you do before Arad started?

A. We had all previously worked in research and policy development, for a range of companies and organisations in Wales and further afield. We had quite a mix of backgrounds and interests including economics, arts and culture, adult education and political research.

Personally, I started my career as a researcher in the Welsh Government's housing and communities department before joining an independent research company, and then went on to set up Arad.

Q. Why did you decide to start your own research company?

A. We had worked together for another research company, and decided that there was an opportunity for us to develop our own as our employer was moving into other sectors. We got on well together, which is always a good start; had some shared goals about

owning and developing a business; and some ideas of the work we could do. It was an interesting time, with devolution developing and organisations taking more control about policy and programme development to meet the needs of Wales and its people. We felt it was a good time to try and support this by providing research and evaluation services to help clients improve their programme design and delivery and to contribute to Wales' economic and social development.

Personally, I started my career as a researcher in the Welsh Government's housing and communities department before joining an independent research company, and then went on to set up Arad

Q. What have been some of the benefits of having your own company?

A. The freedom to decide what topics or methods to focus on is a benefit. We all have different research interests, for example, education and community development and, having our own company, gives us the flexibility to develop business in these areas. We encourage all our staff to take this approach, and this gives us good opportunities to do interesting projects, not just in Wales but at UK-level and sometimes internationally. It's nice to be independent, to work directly with a range of clients, and to contribute to the debate about future policy developments.

Q. What have been some of the challenges?

A. We didn't really have any clients to start with so that was a challenge! The first few years were about building a client base, developing trust, and refining our offer – and submitting lots of tenders! Breaking into some markets was, and remains, difficult. Sometimes it's a bit dispiriting to take a lot of time to write a strong tender but for that to be unsuccessful. We also face similar challenges to other small companies such as ensuring that we offer CPD to our staff, and have the time to network, stay on top of research and policy developments, and identify new business opportunities, while making sure that we prioritise current projects.

Q. What practical advice would you give to someone who is looking to start their own research company?

A. Go for it! The quality of the research you do is obviously the most important aspect, but you don't just need research skills. We're quite lucky in that we have individuals who are good at finance and business development so we can manage the other aspects of having a business. We work with other small businesses to help us with the rest, such as accounting and our website, and these are things you have to consider early on. Good communication with your clients is essential, and working with partners such as academics, experts and other research organisations can enhance your offer and help you learn as a company especially in the early days.

50 years of shaping social change

The National Centre for Social Research 50th anniversary

By Guy Goodwin, chief executive, NatCen

Half a century ago, the National Centre's co-founders, Sir Roger Jowell and Gerald Hoinville, had a vision for an independent organisation that would design, deliver and analyse in-depth studies within the field of social and public policy. They established SCPR (Social & Community Planning Research), now the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), from Roger's Belsize Park flat.



That vision turned into reality, and NatCen has become Britain's largest independent social research agency. Today our work and influence are easy to see, most notably through the nation's household surveys such as the Health Survey for England, the National Travel Survey, the Family Resources Survey (run jointly with the ONS), the English Housing Survey, and key longitudinal studies like the British Cohort Study and Growing Up in Scotland.

We believe social research has the power to make life better, and are proud that our impact is achieved through creating high-quality research that can inform policymakers and decision takers across society. We have been recognised for ground-breaking work on mental health, gambling, the gig economy, gender and equality, children and families, and racial prejudice, to name a few. Our British Social Attitudes Survey, the UK's longest running survey of public opinion and the gold standard for attitudinal research, and our more recent innovation, the NatCen Panel – Britain's first random probability web panel – continue to reflect what the British public thinks about critical issues.

We entered our anniversary year with great confidence and, throughout 2019, we are celebrating our 50 years at the forefront of social research, as well as looking ahead to the challenges to come, through high-profile stakeholder events including:

- ▶ '50 years of shaping social change': our 50th anniversary stakeholder reception hosted by Lord Lipsey and including speeches by Chris Skidmore MP (then minister of state for the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy), Jennifer Rubin (executive chair, ESRC) and Matthew Taylor (chief executive, RSA)

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- ▶ Sir Roger Jowell Memorial Lecture: Professor Alissa Goodman and Rt Hon David Laws delivered the sixth annual lecture in memory of NatCen's co-founder, focusing on the causes and consequences of social inequalities in education
- ▶ Women in social science: in partnership with the Academy of Social Sciences, we brought together social scientists to explore the challenges women have faced and to celebrate their achievements. Our speakers considered the changes feminism has brought, key achievements, and what remains to be done

- ▶ British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey report launch: the event examined our changing attitudes to religion and belief, science, poverty, sex, sexuality and relationships, and women and work, alongside our shifting political identities
- ▶ Brexit: what Britain thinks: Professor Sir John Curtice launched findings on attitudes to Brexit from our award-winning NatCen Panel. He also unveiled results showing how divided the country has become in the wake of the Brexit process
- ▶ Suicide and self-harm prevention: in partnership with the Royal Statistical Society, we hosted a conference, bringing together commissioners and data users to discuss challenges of data quality and accessibility in suicide and self-harm reduction policy

For the remainder of the year, our programme will include more events, supported by public-facing publications, briefings, blogs and media pieces, including on social trends in the UK and the impact of mental health and life satisfaction on educational attainment. We will be hosting a hack-style event for early year researchers to develop innovative approaches using survey and big data to answer key social policy questions.

Finally, as we move towards 2020, we will conclude our anniversary by showcasing, along with ONS and ISER (Essex University), three evidence-based views of the unresolved public policy issues that continue to challenge our society.

We would love you to get involved. You can do this in various ways, including attending events or through becoming a [friend or supporter](#) of the organisation. [More on our anniversary.](#)

Enabling the ethical use of data for research

By Simon Whitworth, head of data ethics, UK Statistics Authority

Advances in technology, skills and legislation are providing researchers with opportunities to access and use data to produce new research and statistics which can have real value for the country.



In maximising the research and statistical uses of these new opportunities, it is important that consideration is not just given to what research we can do, but also to what research we should do, to ensure that we use data in ethically appropriate ways which are for the public good.

Consideration of the 'should'

Recent high-profile cases from different sectors around the world illustrate that failure on the ethical dimension is likely to result in a loss of trust from the public and data suppliers alike, restricting the analytical possibilities open to the research community in the future. This was highlighted in December 2018's [Research Matters](#), which discussed how the changing landscape around data protection legislation and emerging technologies have increased concern about ethical social research practice among practitioners, commissioners and funders.

National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee (NSDEC)

To help answer the 'should' question, the National Statistician established [NSDEC](#) in 2015 to help those

accessing and working with data to ensure their work follows accepted ethical standards. NSDEC provides independent and transparent advice about the collection, access, use and sharing of data, ensuring it is ethical and for the public good. NSDEC consists of expert members in research ethics, statistical research, data and information law, data science and data protection. To ensure external perspectives and challenges to the uses of data for research and statistical purposes, the majority are independent members. A lay member also sits on NSDEC to provide a valuable non-expert perspective to its discussions.

To provide a consistent ethical framework to enable NSDEC to assess the ethics of research, the UK Statistics Authority has developed six principles for using data in an ethical way:

1. The use of data has clear benefits for users and serves the public good
2. The data subject's identity (whether person or organisation) is protected, information is kept confidential and secure
3. The risks and limits of new technologies are considered and there is sufficient human oversight so that methods employed are consistent with recognised standards of integrity and quality
4. Data used and methods employed are consistent with legal requirements
5. The views of the public are considered in light of the data used and the perceived benefits of the research
6. The access, use and sharing of data is transparent, and is communicated clearly and accessibly to the public



The UK Statistics Authority's ethics self-assessment tool

It is essential to consider ethics in the research design phase. To help researchers do this, the UK Statistics Authority has developed an [ethics self-assessment tool](#) which asks researchers to score their research against different components of the ethical principles at the research design phase. Researchers consider each principle on a scale which provides the necessary granularity to reflect ethical decisions that often are not binary. The self-assessment tool provides an overall ethical risk score for a project. This is used to help identify areas where changes to the research design can be made to reduce the ethical risks of research projects. Those projects that are considered more ethically risky are reviewed by NSDEC to enable such projects to benefit from the independent ethical advice and assurance that the committee can offer.

The UK Statistics Authority provides expert user support and training to researchers in applying the ethics self-assessment tool to their work and to help mitigate any potential or actual ethical risks. If you would like any advice or guidance about the work of the UK Statistics Authority's ethics programme and the NSDEC, then please do get in touch: NSDEC@statistics.gov.uk

Practical ethics in social media research

By **Steven Ginnis**, research director, head of Innovation, Social Research Institute at Ipsos MORI; and **Tara Beard-Knowland**, research director, head of Social Intelligence and Analytics, Ipsos MORI

Social media is a rich and often colourful data source, but important questions remain around the legitimacy of analysing this vast and readily accessible data source. At Ipsos MORI we've been exploring what can and should be done to ensure social media data research is as conscientious as it is revealing.

Tick this box to admit you haven't read the T&Cs

We know that, although the public are more aware that their social data is being used for research purposes, they are no more accepting of this. In line with attitudes from 2015, our polling in 2018 showed that 60% of people felt that individuals' social media data should not be used for research purposes and just under a third (32%) thought the same even if research would be conducted at an overall aggregate level.

However, we also know from our work on data science ethics that the public do see value in social media research when their data is treated responsibly and the questions are appropriate. Beyond new regulations such as GDPR, this reminds us that our research should be grounded on what is publicly acceptable, not what is technically possible, or legally permissible.

Pragmatism over idealism?

The balance must be between pragmatism and integrity. Our overarching principle is: 'would I be OK with this being done with my data/ my parents' or my children's data?' We always encourage people to ask for a

second opinion if they're not sure. This tends to be a good litmus test for most social media projects.

Having passed this test, a key further principle is to avoid revealing things about 'participants' that would cause them harm. Given the wide range of potential project objectives it may be fine to reveal something in some cases, which wouldn't be appropriate to disclose in others. For example, if what is reported could cause someone to become uninsurable because we have revealed something about their health, then this shouldn't be used. However, if the project is on behalf of a public body about health, then it may be legitimate to do so as long as it is aggregated and anonymised.

If a client wants to identify specific individuals, this should be treated with the utmost care. Ipsos MORI, as a rule, does not reveal details of any individual with fewer than 1,000 fans/followers and, from forums, never reveals user-names at all. We don't use quotes that are likely to be from children, unless we have a user's direct permission. And, of course, we never report anything that could incriminate someone.

When it comes to the raw data itself, it should be stored securely and not transmitted to third parties without serious consideration. If it is shared with the client, this should be as anonymised as possible, with clear written explanation of how the data will be used, accessed and destroyed.

Comments will be moderated

The discipline of social intelligence is still emerging. We must, therefore, create



and adhere to some simple principles to ensure that we are protecting the interests of research participants. With this in mind, our guiding principles are:

- ▶ If the topic of conversation is likely to be sensitive (e.g. health or politics) consider what additional steps could be taken to anonymise or protect individuals' data
- ▶ Align the purpose of the project with how it will be reported, and keep the data anonymised
- ▶ If the topic is likely to attract comment from those under 16, pay extra attention to any verbatims used. To the best of our ability, we should not quote any children in reporting if it's not been possible to get direct consent from them and their parents/guardians
- ▶ Do not engage in anything that could incriminate an individual
- ▶ Bear in mind that what a person posts does not define who they are – when categorising a post, you are not categorising a person
- ▶ Be careful with the raw data, even if user-names and other personally identifiable information are removed. Ask someone outside the project for an opinion on the reasonableness of any requests (including by clients) for the raw data

‘Blurring boundaries and crossing frontiers in social research’

There’s a lot to learn from research taking place across boundaries and at new frontiers – of methods, roles, disciplines and more. How is UK social research being enhanced by these boundary and border crossings?

The SRA annual conference is the only forum the UK has for bringing together social researchers from all sectors and disciplines to share knowledge and ideas, to debate our most pressing professional issues, and, of course, to meet and talk.



1 Keynote speaker

Sir Adrian Smith, Director of the Alan Turing Institute, will be speaking on what the new frontiers of data science and AI may mean for social researchers.

2 Plenary speakers

Pamela Cox, social historian at Essex University and author and presenter of the BBC2 series ‘Shopgirls’ and ‘Servants’, will describe the essential ingredients for a successful interdisciplinary research project.

Lorraine Whitmarsh, environmental psychologist and director of the new Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations, on why working beyond traditional research boundaries is critical in tackling climate change.

4 Masterclasses

In-depth learning sessions:

- ▶ Using creative methods in qualitative data collection
- ▶ A taster in narrative inquiry: Exploring the power of stories in social research
- ▶ What are complex systems evaluations?
- ▶ Escaping the echo chamber

12 Paired workshop presentations

The real-world experiences of your peers:

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- ▶ Research in sensitive settings
- ▶ Moving online
- ▶ 6 degrees of participation
- ▶ Innovation in disability research
- ▶ The time dimension

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Bookings at: www.the-sra.org.uk/SRAConference2019



New ways of seeing: the SRA summer event

By Jessica Nelligan, SRA communications manager

The SRA's summer event, 'New ways of seeing: social research in a digital, visual age' brought together 45 participants keen to understand the key issues and debates in working with digital visual data.



Chaired by Nicole Brown, lecturer in education at UCL, we heard from speakers, Tim Highfield, assistant professor, new media, University of Amsterdam; Helen Lomax, professor of childhood studies, University of Huddersfield; and Dr Christina Silver, director of Qualitative Data Analysis Services.

Tim Highfield set the scene, describing how research is exploring how social media has enabled new ways of using the visual and the digital in everyday life. As social media has pushed visual content, how are people using this to communicate and share what they do in their everyday lives and to

create their identity? Drawing on widely recognisable examples, Tim highlighted the key issues, opportunities and challenges that such visual content provokes; the criteria for critical visual methodology; and questions of ethics and accessibility, of responsibility and accuracy.

Helen Lomax looked at the analytic challenges of working with digital visual data in research with children. She considered the analytical possibilities of the digital for seeing and understanding children's lives. She introduced a theoretical methodological approach to the digital image, which goes beyond the content of the image to consider what we bring as the audience, and how readings are filtered by the historical, technological and social context in which they are produced, circulated and consumed.

Dr Christina Silver shifted the focus by taking us through the tools which allow us to manage and analyse images, discussing how we can systematically analyse visual materials with software

designed for this purpose. Focusing on CAQDAS packages, the session considered data management and analytic and representational tools to show how digital tools can be used to produce robust findings. Christina's parting comment highlighted the deficiencies in the packages currently available to social researchers and our responsibility to make a change by giving our feedback: 'If we want better tools, we need to ask for them'.

Nicole Brown rounded up by giving participants the opportunity to summarise the event in one sentence. Main takeaways included a list of references to follow; a sense that working with visual data is 'doable' by combining information from many different sources including visual; and a sense of excitement in learning the new ways in which social media can be used in research.

The presentations are on the events archive at www.the-sra.org.uk/archive

Social Research Practice: next issue

Issue 8 is due in September/October

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. It is free to download at: www.the-sra.org.uk/socialresearchpractice.

We welcome offers of articles and research notes for future issues. Read the guidelines for authors and download the article template at the link above. If you have an idea of an article or research note but are not sure if it's suitable, please email Richard Bartholomew, the editor: rabartholomew@btinternet.com



Doing excellent social research with documents: practical examples and guidance for qualitative researchers

Aimee Grant

Routledge, 2019

Reviewed by Helen Kara, independent researcher

This is a practical how-to book aimed at students and researchers, from any discipline or field, who want to use documents as data. It is the first book on the subject for many years; its predecessors are Scott (1990) and Prior (2003), both of which effectively predate the internet.

The book is well written and structured, clear, accessible and user-friendly. There is a useful glossary, with terms defined in it, and rendered in bold every time they appear in the text. That started to annoy me after a while, but this was probably because I was reading the whole book rather than using it for reference.

I think the book's great strength is that it equips you to use documents as data. Issues of theory, quality, bias and ethics are threaded through the text. It covers many types of documents: traditional media, historical and official; created by individuals; in ethnographic research; participant-created. Case studies show how documents are used in practice, and Grant explains various analytic techniques that can be used with documentary data.

Chapter 8, on participant-created documents, is openly accessible as a PDF, available for download from the publisher's website.

Initially, Grant states her aim as being to help students, teachers and supervisors. Later she mentions the book's potential use to researchers, and indeed, I think it could be very helpful in practice. She has the foresight to have invited feedback from readers for later editions: I think it would benefit from more explicit acknowledgement of the different challenges and opportunities facing practice-based researchers in this context.

Overall, I would wholeheartedly recommend this book for anyone interested in using documents as data.



Investigative research: theory and practice

Derek Layder

SAGE, 2018

Reviewed by Imogen Birch, senior researcher, Citizens Advice

This book is a largely academic explanation about using a more holistic method of doing social research. Its main premise is that, to really get under the skin of a research issue, the research needs to look much deeper into the 'psycho-biography' of research participants. This mapping of people's psycho-biography determines people's personal identity – their motives, personal style, and how they behave, react and cope in different settings such as work, family, leisure or other social situations.

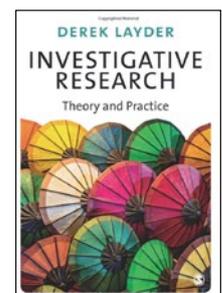
Layder criticises most research projects as being too one dimensional and simplistic. Investigative research is a largely exploratory method of research. It encourages researchers to

map the relevant psycho-biographies of individuals to formulate an initial 'conceptual scaffold' that is the basis for the explanation of the social behaviour under investigation. This guides and directs data collection processes. But Layder also advises being open to new concepts, and encourages researchers to keep researching to test and/or revise theories and hypotheses.

Research questions to explore might be: how are the self-identities (psycho-biographies) of participants influenced by different encounters? What situational meanings, rules and roles are created and shared? What effects do social settings (such as offices, prisons, hospitals and so on) have

on encounters and situated activities? Does the language or the formality of a setting have an effect? What is the emotional response? How do participants react to power and authority in different situations?

Much of the book compares investigative research with other theories of research and becomes repetitive. As a practising social researcher, I found this less interesting, and I would have liked more and varied practical examples of how investigative research is used. It was an interesting subject but, at times, it was hard to balance with the academic style.



Practice-based research in children's play

Wendy Russell, Stuart Lester and Hilary Smith (eds)

Policy Press, 2017

Reviewed by Lucy Ellis, research and evaluation officer, Youth Sport Trust

Practice-based research in children's play sets out 12 different empirical research studies considering play, topped and tailed with an introduction to the perspectives of play, and the final chapter looking at future possibilities. The final chapter also draws on thoughts from those in the sector on what they would like research in play to look like, grounding the research in real life. The foreword by Berry Mayall advocates the importance of letting children play free from adult constraints.

The individual authors of the studies come from various backgrounds and bring with them a depth of practical

experience in children's play. Most of the studies included are small-scale, but the authors acknowledge this, and highlight the depth of relevant insight and discussion they stimulate.

Each research study presented explores play differently, using a variety of methods. For the reader this is exciting, providing creative examples of practice that could be replicated in a range of settings or research studies. For example, chapter five presents observations of a painter, writer and dancer in an urban town-square setting. The diagrams of movement showing the pathways of adults and children

encourage the reader to consider their own lives and movement.

One study in chapter two explores the differences between adults' memories of play and children's current play in the same geographical location.

The presentation, as a collection of research studies, means the book is easy to dip into. The figures and images bring the research to life. It will appeal to a wide readership: it's insightful and accessible, and suitable for practitioners and researchers. I highly recommend it to anyone with an interest in children's play.



Qualitative data analysis: from start to finish

Jamie Harding

SAGE, 2019

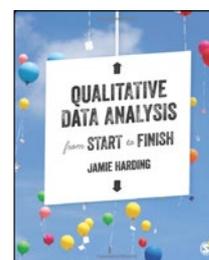
Reviewed by Lizzy Winstone, University of Bristol

This textbook, in its second edition, is designed to give undergraduate students and others new to the field a comprehensive overview of analysing qualitative data. A clear and friendly writing style makes the material accessible. The graphic design is novel and attractive. Each chapter is well structured and neatly summarised with an easy-to-follow step-by-step approach in places. Extensive suggestions for further reading are provided at the end of each chapter. However, the first five chapters focus on background theory, practical issues such as ethics, sampling and recruitment, and data collection, with chapter 12 addressing dissemination. While I found these chapters informative and relevant to my own research, the

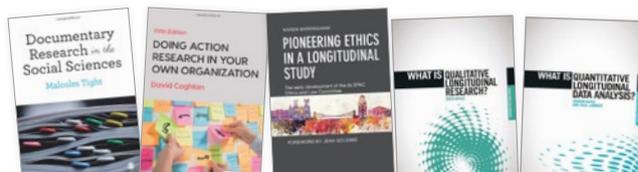
title of the book is reflected mainly by chapters six to 11, and thus, is a little misleading.

The author uses nice examples from his own work to demonstrate how and why to apply his tips and principles. This is particularly useful in demonstrating coding in section three (the six chapters focusing on analysis). I welcomed the inclusion of NVivo screen shots, although more attention could have been given to other software packages together with their strengths and weaknesses. There was also a lack of attention to qualitative data derived from sources other than interviews and focus groups, such as text from print or digital media, historical records and non-textual data. Given its title, I would

have appreciated less space dealing with other stages of the research process, and more dedicated to the actual analysis stage, with the concentration on interview and focus group data made clear in the title. I enjoyed the content and step-by-step format of section three and, as a researcher expecting a comprehensive guide to qualitative data analysis, I would have been happy to find simply an expanded version of these six directly relevant chapters. Nonetheless, this is a useful and readable textbook on the practicalities of conducting a qualitative research project, and one to which I will certainly return for reference.



Books for review



We are always looking for reviewers. Write a short review for us and you get to keep the book. 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. Here are a few of the titles on offer:

Documentary research in the social sciences

Malcolm Tight
SAGE, 2019

Doing action research in your own organization

David Coghlan
SAGE, 2019 (5th edition)

Pioneering ethics in a longitudinal study: the early development of the ALSPAC ethics and law committee

Karen Birmingham
Policy Press, 2018

Qualitative secondary research: a step-by-step guide

Claire Largan and Theresa Morris
SAGE, 2019

What is qualitative longitudinal data analysis?

Vernon Gayle and Paul Lambert
Bloomsbury Academic, 2018

SRA REPORTS

SRA Scotland

By Karen Kerr

The SRA 40th anniversary lecture took place in May with Audrey MacDougall, chief researcher at the Scottish Government, as our main speaker. In June, at a joint event with Evaluation Network Scotland, we discussed 'from analysis to reporting'. And in July, Faye Gracey, Welsh Government and chair of SRA Cymru, spoke on 'adhering to the government social research code'.

As part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science we're holding an event in Edinburgh on 7 November on the core population surveys (Scottish Crime and Justice Survey, Scottish Health Survey and Scottish Household Survey). [See SRA events](#) for further information.

To find out more about SRA Scotland go to www.the-sra.org.uk/sraScotland and follow us on twitter [@SRAScotland](https://twitter.com/SRAScotland). If you'd like to get involved with our organising committee, have any suggestions for future events, or would like to give us feedback, please get in touch with me: karen.kerr@sds.co.uk or 07584 470028.



SRA Cymru

By Faye Gracey

Hopefully, lots of you will be able to join us at our next event in Cardiff on 1 October when Luke Sibieta (IFS) will present new analysis on education funding.

Fantastic news: the Government Social Research Award 2019 has come to Wales. This recognises the value of analytical support related to government-funded childcare policy, delivery and legislative decision making. I am super proud to have worked with Sarah Crocker, Hannah Davies, Katrina Morrison, and 'diolch' also to Arad Research and Gartner Consulting for their contribution. You can learn more in the next issue of Research Matters. Follow us [@SRACymru](https://twitter.com/SRACymru) to be the first to hear our news. See www.the-sra.org.uk/events for details of events. If you want to get more involved with our organising committee, do get in touch: faye.gracey@gov.wales or 03000 257459.



SRA North

By Leanne Dew

Jenni Brooks (Sheffield Hallam University) is taking over as co-chair to work alongside Bev Bishop. Our thanks to Cath Dillon who has provided fantastic drive and leadership as co-chair – we look forward to continuing the good work. Our job-shadowing pilot is in progress, with placements taking place over the summer and a review in autumn. We are busy planning our upcoming events – an event on creative dissemination in Liverpool in the autumn and a seminar on participatory methods towards the end of the year. We hope to see some of you there. As ever, please do get in touch have any questions, ideas for events or want to get involved [@SRANorth](https://twitter.com/SRANorth) and sranorth@gmail.com.



SRA Ireland

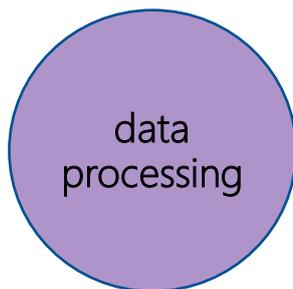
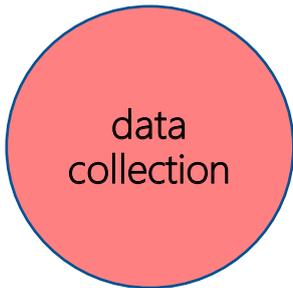
See the SRA website for further details of events. Email us on SRAIreland@the-sra.org.uk or follow us on Twitter [@SRAIreland](https://twitter.com/SRAIreland).



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9 October	Research with children and young people	Dr Louca-Mai Brady and Berni Graham
CARDIFF		
5 November	Qualitative interviewing	Professor Karen O'Reilly
6 November	Qualitative data analysis	Professor Karen O'Reilly
7 November	Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings	Professor Karen O'Reilly
EDINBURGH		
24 October	Qualitative interviewing	Dr Karen Lumsden
30 October	Designing a qualitative study	Dr Karen Lumsden
31 October	Conducting focus groups	Dr Karen Lumsden
25 November	Understanding statistical concepts and essential tests	Dr Valerija Kolbas
LONDON		
2 October	Cognitive interviewing	NatCen Social Research
7 October	Qualitative interviewing	Professor Karen O'Reilly
9 October	Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings	Professor Karen O'Reilly
18 October	Impact evaluation: understanding options, choices and practice (advanced) fully booked	Professor David Parsons
21 & 22 October	Designing and moderating focus groups	NatCen Social Research
24 & 25 October	Depth interviews	NatCen Social Research
29 October	Introduction to data visualisation and infographic design	Nigel Hawtin
30 October	Public involvement in social research and evaluation	Dr Louca-Mai Brady and Berni Graham
4 November	Project management in research and evaluation	Professor David Parsons
5 November	Theory-based evaluation: options and choices for practitioners (advanced)	Professor David Parsons
13 November	Designing a qualitative study	Professor Karen O'Reilly
14 November	Conducting focus groups	Professor Karen O'Reilly
14 November	Evidence reviews	NatCen Social Research
21 November	Introduction to sampling and weighting	Dr Alexandru Cernat
22 November	Questionnaire design	NatCen Social Research
4 December	Narratives and storytelling in qualitative research	Dr Karen Lumsden
5 December	Qualitative data analysis	Professor Karen O'Reilly
5 December	Narrative analysis	Dr Karen Lumsden
5 December	Introduction to grounded theory	Professor Karen O'Reilly
6 December	Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings	Professor Karen O'Reilly
6 December	Ethnographic methods	Professor Karen O'Reilly
9 December	Ethnographic methods	Professor Karen O'Reilly
9 & 10 December	Basic statistical analysis for social researchers	NatCen Social Research
11 December	Impact evaluation: understanding options, choices and practice (advanced)	Professor David Parsons
13 January	Introduction to participatory action research	Dr Karen Lumsden
16 January	Introduction to grounded theory	Professor Karen O'Reilly

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Publication dates 2019

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Copy deadline: **7 October**.

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