Are randomised control trials essential in policy making?

Nick Axford, senior researcher at the Social Research Unit at Dartington, and Ray Pawson, professor of social research methodology at the University of Leeds, debate the pros and cons of the use of randomised control trials (RCTs) in policy making.

Nick Axford

If we assume that policymakers want to know whether policies and programmes are effective, which seems reasonable, then RCTs are a useful tool. They are arguably, the best method for assessing the causal relationship between an intervention and outcome. Why? Because they control for extraneous factors, including unknown or unmeasured variables. Any difference in outcome between the intervention and control groups at post-test can be attributed to the intervention.

What if we don’t do RCTs? There is a danger of over- or under-estimating effectiveness or, worse, suggesting a benefit when there is a possibility of harm. Indeed, uncontrolled studies often yield exaggerated effect sizes due to ‘regression to the mean’ (variables that are extreme at the first measurement tending to be nearer the average on the second measurement) or temporal effects – for instance, things just ‘getting better’.

Many, if not the majority of, RCTs show no difference, and where differences in outcome are identified they often favour the control group. Though frustrating for evaluators, this is immensely valuable information. It helps us to abandon ineffective or harmful interventions and devote energy to finding other solutions.

Of course, RCTs are not the only valid form of research into ‘what works’: multi-method studies and qualitative research also have a place. Nor are RCTs always practical, ethical or appropriate. Further, not all RCTs are equal: they can be poorly designed, poorly executed or poorly reported (or all three). Lastly, policymakers need to know more about interventions than their impact on outcomes before making decisions about their use. RCTs are therefore necessary but not sufficient.

Ray Pawson

Randomistas occupy a somnolent world, which they assume can be tightly controlled and from which unknowns can be dispatched. The truth is that programmes are complex systems thrust into complex systems.

Consider the reality:

 It is not programmes that work but the endless interpretations of their endless stakeholders that generate their effects
 The job of practitioners is not to reproduce programmes; rather they strive for constant improvement. The very next incarnation will be different
 What works in Wigan on a wet Wednesday will often not work in Thurso on a thunderous Thursday. These and a million other contextual differences will shape intervention outcomes
 Policymakers try and try again. Programmes gain reputations. History weighs on interventions turning some into silk purses and some into sows’ ears.

 Intervention outcomes are deeply politicised. They often turn into performance indicators. Programme participants often react to being measured rather than the policy measure
 We live in a policy-saturated world. Right now you are in receipt of a thousand other policies which may enhance or undermine the ambitions of the programme under research
 Programmes change the conditions that make them work in the first place. Lessons from successful interventions are absorbed into the social fabric rendering repeated application uncertain

Given this, the results of any RCT are quite inconsequential. Policy evaluation needs the full repertoire of techniques to scratch the surface of social complexity. It helps to begin with the right questions – what works, for whom, in what circumstances, in what respects and WHY?
Nick Axford

It is precisely because programmes are thrust into complex systems that RCTs are necessary: they control for observed and unobserved factors that may affect the outcomes and thereby help to disentangle the effect of the programme. Without them we risk kidding ourselves and confusing association with cause.

So, ‘what works, for whom, in what circumstances, in what respects and why?’ are the right questions, but without randomisation it is hard even to get to first base (what works?). ‘Randomistas’, meanwhile, are busy trying to go further.

For example, good trials state clearly the socio-demographic characteristics of study participants, and examine whether some sub-groups benefit more than others. A new version of the CONSORT reporting guidelines for RCTs (www.consort-statement.org) will (rightly) require greater attention to context.1

Further, more studies are seeking to open up the ‘black box’ of how programmes work. Statistical ‘mediator’ analyses2 and qualitative methods help to tease out the mechanisms through which a programme achieves its impact – effectively testing the underlying theory of change.

Researchers are also looking at whether programmes work in a variety of geographical settings, or with different populations. Some programmes transport well, others less so. Study design and quality are partly responsible, but so are implementation fidelity and context – for example, the experience and skills of delivery staff.

One RCT showing positive effects does not mean that the programme in question will work anywhere, but nor is it helpful to suggest that nothing can be generalised beyond unique local conditions. A more fruitful path, increasingly well-trodden by trialists, involves identifying the factors that contribute to impact and helping policymakers and practitioners to use that information.

Ray Pawson

Why is randomisation assumed to get us to ‘first-base’? RCTs hardly figure at all across huge swathes of natural science and engineering. And where they do feature significantly, as in clinical research, they have a profoundly different function from the impoverished versions conducted on social interventions. Spot the difference:

Curing cancer: before a treatment is devised, years of basic research go into building understanding of the nature of the disease (the uncontrolled subdivision of susceptible cells) and its causes (virological, genetic and environmental). Therapies are then devised in further years of research conducted under the microscope, in petri dishes, in pre-malignant cells, in animals, and on human volunteers. These establish the explanatory base for treatment long before it gets put to test. This assessment takes the form of 4/5 stage trials, only the latter two involving randomisation. Population trials, thankfully, often record progress but always a proportion of relapse and mortality. And it is failure, partial refutation, which renews the whole cycle. True science requires iterative sequences of basic research tested progressively by a multiplicity of methods.

Scaring straight: a policymaker gets the bright idea that potential delinquents might be deterred from crime by witnessing the harsh realities of prison life. Prisoners respond vigorously devising two-hour, taunting ‘rap sessions’. Some of these have to be abandoned. Despite the massive heterogeneity in implementation (educational visits to one-to-one confrontation) a handful of trials are conducted (1960-80s). Decades later the Campbell Collaboration conducts a meta-analysis and declares that such programmes are ‘more harmful than doing nothing’. Given the reliance on ‘gold-standard’ RCTs, the explanatory basis for the half-baked conclusion is completely absent. This is pseudo-science’s finest hour.

More information

For those interested in knowing more about the topics see:


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2 This involves testing whether the relationship between an intervention and outcomes is mediated by other variables – for example, whether the observed positive impact of a parenting programme on children’s behaviour can be attributed, at least in part, to the programme improving parenting skills.
Remembering Roger

SRA chair, Patten Smith, remembers Roger Jowell

As reported on page 5, on 27 March, Sir Andrew Dilnot gave the inaugural Roger Jowell memorial lecture, organised by NatCen Social Research, the SRA and City University. I attended this, as did many others who had worked with Roger. Both Sir Andrew and Jil Matheson, the chair, were at pains to highlight what a force for good Roger had been for UK social research, a message I fully endorse on the basis of my ten years at SCPR (now NatCen Social Research).

Roger was charismatic, highly analytic and a natural leader, and used these abilities to inspire teams of talented individuals to excellent effect. He jointly founded SCPR and rapidly transformed it into a dominating presence in UK social research. He was also the major force behind a number of high profile initiatives, notably (but not exclusively) the founding of the SRA, and the creation of both the British Social Attitudes Survey and the European Social Survey.

Roger’s activities were guided and energised by the belief that debate in a healthy democratic society must be informed by the collection and dissemination of rigorously collected social data. These values are every bit as relevant today as they were in the early SCPR years, and those of us who practise social research should continue to proclaim them. Strong social data is essential both for tethering social policy and social theory to reality, and for undermining demagogic attempts to dress up hyperbole as fact.

I like to think that Roger’s influence lives on in two ways. First, in the last decades of the 20th century, SCPR/NatCen’s open insistence on methodological rigour set standards that competitors had to meet, and helped put pressure on commissioners to keep quality standards high. These standards have now become institutionalised through much of the social research sector. Secondly, Roger personally inspired, and through SCPR/NatCen, helped recruit, train and launch a cohort of social researchers who now work in senior positions across the social research industry, and continue as passionate advocates of rigorous research.

Our job now is to ensure that we continue to uphold these core values and prevent them from being eroded by the forces of cost-cutting, ignorance (wilful or not) and hype. It is as important as ever that we keep alive the dual message that collecting social data is essential to healthy societal functioning, and that the only data worth collecting is data collected with care and rigour.

SRA events

1 July // Summer event

Living with austerity: what does research tell us?

Come and hear Danny Dorling (Oxford University) on an economically divided society, Hilary Burkitt (Shelter) on what welfare reform has done to housing choices, Suzanne Hall (Ipsos MORI) on families facing food poverty, and Richard Douglas & Sarah Taylor (NAO) on Council Tax Support and adult social care.

The SRA Summer Event is chaired by Helen Barnard (JRF).

Join us on Tuesday 1 July at the LGA, Smith Square, London, 2-5pm, followed by a drinks reception on the roof terrace.

£45 to SRA members (£65 otherwise) – use the members-only Promo Code ‘Summer2014SRAmember’ when booking online.

SRA seminars

24 JUNE // Progress and challenges in social research

Manchester, 11am to 1pm. Free
Inaugural event of the SRA’s north and central England group
More details and booking: http://the-sra.org.uk/event-registration/?ee=149

27 JUNE // Positives and negatives in the Welsh government’s drive for bilingualism

Cardiff, 1pm to 4.15pm. Fee: £30 (free to SRA members)
A balanced look at the potential for both positive and negative outcomes from these language policy interventions, based on recent research
More details and booking: http://the-sra.org.uk/event-registration/?ee=171
SRA Scotland update

Report by Sophie Ellison

Training courses in Scotland have gone well this quarter and have included qualitative research modules and research project management. We have dates lined up for later in the year for both qualitative and quantitative courses: check out the training page of the SRA website for details: [http://the-sra.org.uk/training/](http://the-sra.org.uk/training/). Plans are progressing for a social research social evening, careers in social research event, and a seminar on using social media for research impact. We’d love to hear from you if there are other SRA training courses you’d like to see in Scotland, or if you would be interested in speaking at one of our seminars. Please contact branch chair, Sophie Ellison, Sophie.ellison@gmail.com. And don’t forget to join us on LinkedIn or follow us on Twitter! @SRA_Scotland; [www.linkedin.com/groups/SRA-Scotlands-network-Social-Researchers-4973959](http://www.linkedin.com/groups/SRA-Scotlands-network-Social-Researchers-4973959)

SRA Ireland update

Report by Noelle Cotter

SRA Ireland held its AGM in April when David Silke stepped down as chair, and I was elected in his place.

I began my professional career as a researcher working on an inter-university project, and have since been employed in NGOs, non-statutory bodies and also as a freelance consultant. Currently, I am a public health development officer with the Institute of Public Health in Ireland.

SRA Ireland is very grateful to David for his years of service, and is delighted that he will still be involved as an active member. David Harmon of Insight Statistical Consulting remains as treasurer and Martin Keane of the Health Research Board as secretary. We discussed a programme for training events and seminars for 2014/15 and are now developing this.

Following the AGM, SRA Ireland held an excellent seminar on polling – a particularly pertinent topic coming just before May’s local and European elections. Damian Loscher, managing director of Ipsos MRBI, spoke about the integrity of polling, giving an insight into the history of polling right through to present-day use of social media for research. Professor Kevin Rafter, associate professor at the School of Communications at Dublin City University, focused on the complexities and methods used both to conduct polls and to research their media coverage.

Find out more at the SRA website [sra.org.uk/training](http://sra.org.uk/training)

SRA Cymru update

Report by Jennifer Evans

In Wales we have held two evening seminars with our next half-day seminar planned for 27 June. If you’re quick, you can still register – it’s free for members; just use the Promo code: CymruSeminarFree when you register at: [http://the-sra.org.uk/event-registration/?ee=171](http://the-sra.org.uk/event-registration/?ee=171)

We hope to open up our sessions through video conferencing. We’d be really interested to hear what you think of this idea and whether any members outside Wales would like to participate in these.

Our informal breakfast socials take place every couple of months, giving local social researchers the opportunity to meet and talk, or and to find out more about branch activities. Even with a last-minute change of venue, we’ve had very successful discussions, inspiring future events and providing a professional sounding board for colleagues across sectors. There always seems to be at least one new person at the table, so do keep an eye on our Twitter feed (@sracymru), web page [http://the-sra.org.uk/home/sra-cymru](http://the-sra.org.uk/home/sra-cymru) and LinkedIn Group (Social Research Association (SRA) Cymru).

Over the next few months we’ll be planning our autumn sessions which will include the SRA/Welsh Government longitudinal series, more evening seminars and breakfast socials, and our annual event celebrating careers in social research.

More info: sracymru@the-sra.org.uk
Roger Jowell: memorial lecture

The first Sir Roger Jowell memorial lecture took place at the end of March at St Martin in the Fields in London. Over 150 people who had worked with or known Roger attended to hear Sir Andrew Dilnot, chair of the UK Statistics Authority, give an impressive and wide-ranging address which touched on many aspects of Roger’s life and work.

The event was chaired by Jil Matheson, the national statistician. She began with her memories of Roger who, as well as being huge fun to work with and a very supportive colleague, inspired her with the desire to use social science work to help inform the world.

The title of Sir Andrew’s talk was ‘Social Statistics and Public Policy’, which he felt was a vital part of Roger’s social science work and an area where he had made important contributions, both as an academic and in his role as deputy chair of the UK Statistics Authority. In a fascinating lecture, he gave us several examples of the way in which key social policy issues such as immigration and crime have been frequently dominated by the misuse of social statistics. He reminded us that Roger had fought hard through his career to present good data to help us better understand the society in which we live, and that this remained an important challenge for us as well. And this, of course, was something the Statistics Authority was set up to support – protecting the integrity of how government used official statistics.

The lecture was jointly organised by NatCen Social Research, the Social Research Association and City University to honour Roger who, with colleagues, had founded both NatCen Social Research and the SRA and been a key originator of the European Social Survey based at City. Links to Sir Andrew’s talk are on the NatCen website at www.natcen.ac.uk/events/past-events/2014/march/roger-jowell-memorial-lecture/

The SRA hopes that this will be the first of a lecture series which will provide an opportunity every year for the social research community to come together publicly and to honour Roger through talks which reflect and develop his many rigorous contributions to social science research and ethics.

Ceridwen Roberts, SRA

Call for workshop papers

SRA annual conference 2014: Changing social research: evolution or revolution?

MONDAY 8 DECEMBER, BRITISH LIBRARY, LONDON

The SRA annual conference is a unique event: it is the only UK forum 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. Every social researcher who wants to keep abreast of what is happening in our profession should be there.

There is much talk of technology-driven revolution in the world of social research. Will big data, web surveys, mobile surveys, neuroscience, social media research, and related digital methods change the ground-rules of research practice? Are established practices becoming obsolete? Or will it be more a matter of assimilating new technologies to established principles of research?

The conference will showcase examples of high quality UK social research covering the full range of innovative and traditional approaches, highlighting both ruptures and continuities in our changing research practice.

We are looking for engaging workshop presentations which will address the broad theme of the conference, with a focus on one of the following areas:

- Methodological challenges
- Innovation
- Maintaining quality
- Research ethics
- Making an impact
- Evaluation
- Funding and commissioning issues

Presentations are for workshop sessions of 20 minutes (followed by a 10-minute Q&A). One presenter will receive a discount on the delegate fee.

Email a Word document with your abstract of a maximum of 500 words to admin@the-sra.org.uk by 18 August. Put ‘SRA conference abstract’ in the subject line of your email, and include your name on all attachments.

The document must include:

- Title of presentation
- Summary outline of content and areas of learning
- Description of your research methodology, if appropriate
- Name, affiliation, email and phone contact for each presenter
- 80-100 word biography for each presenter.

Do not send completed presentations or papers.
In February, the SRA supported an invitation-only international event held by NatCen and Sage focusing on ethics in online research using social media. This was part of the New Social Media, New Social Science? network (NSMNSS – www.natcen.ac.uk/nsmnss).

While the event centred on research using social media, most of the points made were relevant to online research in general (a very wide and expanding field including, but not limited to, online surveys, web-based experiments and focus groups in dedicated ‘chat rooms’). One main point of agreement was that every researcher involved in working online is on a steep learning curve.

Seven inter-related themes developed from the ethics-based discussions of the NSMNSS, which culminated in February’s event. The first five themes are methods-related and the last two are wider issues. These seven themes are set out below, together with a few of the relevant questions for each theme.

- **Research site**: researchers are sometimes tempted to work in online environments because it is cheap and quick – no travel costs; just copy and paste your data. But it is important to consider questions such as: when is an online setting best for research? What are the implications of each platform’s terms and conditions, and its culture of participation? Should some research be conducted using both online and offline environments?

- **Participants**: how do you find, screen, and select participants online? How do you make sure potential participants are appropriate for your research? How can you verify this? Researching online or through social media effectively excludes some people from the opportunity to participate; does this matter? Not everyone who uses online environments is digitally literate – some don’t know that what they can post may be accessed by others, or how else it might be used or archived – does this matter?

- **Identity**: how can you establish the identity of a participant online, particularly in environments where pseudonyms and misleading avatars are regularly used? Is it always necessary to establish participants’ offline identities? How can you establish your own identity as a researcher, and verify this in such a way as to give confidence to potential participants?

- **Informed consent**: if information is individually generated and in the public domain (eg blog posts or tweets), do you need consent to use it as secondary data? When and how do you negotiate consent for collecting primary data in online environments? Can it be ethical to negotiate consent retrospectively? Do we need to use the ‘informed’ part of the consent process to ensure that potential participants are digitally literate?

- **Data**: who owns data generated or placed online – the user, the platform (eg Facebook), or someone else? When does data collected online belong to a researcher? Where is the boundary online between public and private data? How do data protection laws apply to online data? Do images and photographs need to be treated differently from textual data? How do we ensure anonymity when a search engine can be used to track a quote straight back to a participant?

- **Research guidance**: how do research funders, commissioners, academies and ethics committees decide whether research with an online component is adequate or appropriate? How do researchers conduct ethical, good quality research online in the absence of clear guidelines or support? To what extent can researchers educate funders, commissioners, supervisors, and ethics committees? Who is responsible for researchers’ safety and wellbeing online?

- **Methods and methodologies**: how can we ensure that research conducted online is high quality? Given that many types of research are now conducted online, from short quantitative surveys to full qualitative ethnographies, how do researchers’ experiences of this affect the ways we think about research methods and methodologies more widely?

These themes provide a useful framework to help researchers to think about the ethical aspects of using social media for research. But there are more questions than answers. Currently, doing research online seems to have more ethical pitfalls than doing it offline – but no research will ever be free of ethical risks. The key is to consider all the relevant questions, and to keep ethical considerations at the forefront of your mind throughout your research practice.

See page 15 for details of our research ethics consultancy service.
We live in a world where the use of online technologies and social media is continually evolving. According to the ONS (2013), 83% of UK households have internet access. This opens up opportunities for researchers to use platforms such as Facebook and Twitter and new methodologies, including online focus groups and collaborative tools such as virtual research environments (VREs), which give projects an online space where participants can interact with the research team and each other.

We are also seeing changes in the way that established surveys collect data, and even the census is moving away from the traditional paper method to collecting data primarily online.

These changes do not come without challenges. ONS research shows that over seven million adults in the UK have never used the internet and that access is more limited among certain groups, such as people aged 65 and over, and those with disabilities (BBC News, 2013). We also know that some people lack digital literacy, or cannot use the internet because of financial difficulties.

However, there are many benefits to online data collection tools – the internet can remove geographical and time constraints; facilitate communication for people who may otherwise be reluctant or unable to discuss particular topics face-to-face; and it is less burdensome for research participants. But engaging people in this kind of research can be difficult.

So how do we do it?
Below are some methods that NFER researchers have found effective in encouraging and maintaining participation when using online collaborative tools, such as VREs, and in online surveys:

- **Use social media for qualitative recruitment.** This can be very effective particularly with ‘hard to reach’ groups. Participants can share the links with others, which ‘snowballs’ recruitment. For example, Twitter and Facebook were used to recruit parents of vulnerable children to take part in research about the school admissions process. See [www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/OCCV01](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications/OCCV01) for more details.

- **Plan a strategy for explaining the purpose of the research to participants.** This is incredibly important, especially when recruiting participants to a longitudinal project. A face-to-face approach or telephone discussion can be a useful ways to gauge interest and understanding. Alternatively, you could send an introductory video to potential participants or host a short webinar.

- **Consider the use of incentives** to encourage participation, including monetary incentives, extra information on a topic, or feedback about their results on a survey.

- **Inform participants about requirements before they sign up.** They need to understand the activities, timescales and time commitment, especially for longitudinal research online. Also think about whether you set timescales for contributions to the VRE or leave it open.

- **Allow plenty of time for participants to do the survey or sign up to a VRE.** Sending an email with a link can be more effective than a letter with web address details.

- **Have a named research contact.** For an online survey or VRE this encourages participants to get in touch if they have any problems, rather than drop out.

- **Post specific questions on a VRE to encourage response and discussion.** You could also distil the key points from reports or focus group discussions to prompt responses.

- **Widen the pool of participants.** Activity and discussion might flow more readily if the number of participants is increased, so that there is not over-reliance on a potentially small active group.

- **Encourage users to add the survey web address or VRE site to their favourites** and click ‘remember me’ when they first sign in so they can come back to it whenever they need to.

For more examples of NFER’s work see: [www.nfer.ac.uk/publications](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/publications); or find out more about our research at: [www.nfer.ac.uk/research](http://www.nfer.ac.uk/research).

**REFERENCES**


Qualitative research today

By Carol McNaughton Nicholls and Caroline Turley, senior research directors, NatCen Social Research

One of the great strengths of qualitative research as a methodological approach is enabling an understanding of data in context. As such, a good qualitative researcher has to be acutely aware of the context in which their research occurs. Indeed, even the methods used, we would argue, should be influenced by social and political context.

This is the assertion that we made at a recent SRA evening seminar, where we discussed qualitative research today. Our involvement in developing the second edition of the textbook, Qualitative Research Practice, provided the starting point for the seminar. First published in 2003, it provided an important contribution to the qualitative research canon, not least because of its focus on how to conduct rigorous social policy research and assess the quality of qualitative approaches. Now, a decade later, a second and entirely updated edition is available. For the seminar, a key task was to consider the ways in which qualitative research practice has evolved since the first edition. So, what light did this shed on identifying emerging trends in qualitative research today?

First, the prevalence of internet communication and social media makes these a possible topic of research as well as a medium for communicating research findings. There are concerns about how to ensure that qualitative research carried out using the internet is rigorous and valid, and generates the depth and insight that traditional approaches offer. We think that such concern, whilst constructive, may be overstating the issue. Research participants may present themselves differently on different social media platforms, but we as qualitative researchers should be sensitive to the fact that the participants have many ‘selves’ and are likely to present themselves in different ways depending on the context, both online and offline. The internet provides another mechanism with which to communicate with participants and understand their lives, but this is just one mechanism alongside many others. The key lies in understanding the context in which the research is taking place, and how this might impact on the data collected.

Technology has also provided qualitative researchers with a proliferation of tools with which to access or generate data (some of which may be online). Video, photographs, images, text, talk, audio recordings – all can be more easily captured and shared. But again, we have always had to make choices about method – for example, between diaries, observations or interviews. So whilst technology has shaped the nature of the data collected and of our relationship with participants – often in exciting and creative ways – it has not fundamentally altered the process. The qualitative researcher’s commitment to ensuring that data is useful and relevant, as well as being collected/generated, stored and analysed consistently and appropriately remains the same.

And of course the research process, whatever method used and whether online or offline, has to be ethical. Embedded in our practice is the need to ensure that the proposed research approach has been approved by a suitable ethics committee before proceeding, and remains subject to review by that committee throughout. Whilst the mainstreaming of ethics into research practice over the previous decade is to be celebrated, we caution that the increased proceduralisation of ethical review should not lead to it becoming viewed as a ‘tick box’ exercise, where the true value is lost. Rather, ethical practice should be an integral part of a researcher’s conduct, founded on knowledge, skills, ethical conscience, empathy and consultation with participant groups regarding the most effective way to include them in research, all the while adhering to core professional standards.

In summary, qualitative research today, as before, sets the qualitative researcher at the heart of the process. We are faced with an increased range of choices throughout the research process, combined with smaller budgets and increased proceduralisation. Therefore, our responsibility lies in promoting and protecting good practice and ensuring participants are included, consulted and accurately interpreted.

Our responsibility lies in promoting and protecting good practice and ensuring participants are included, consulted and accurately interpreted.

In creating the qualitative research of the future, today, we need to ensure that we shoulder both the challenge and responsibility this brings in ensuring our practice is rigorous, relevant, creative, transparent and ethical.


The views in this article represent those of the authors, not necessarily all of the editors or contributors of Qualitative Research Practice.

See Helen Kara’s review of this publication on page 16.
Cost benefit analysis: putting it into practice

By Julian Cox, head of research, New Economy

The profile of cost benefit analysis (CBA) and its influence on policy is growing, with it featuring prominently in media reports on capital schemes such as HS2 and the UK’s flood defences. Can we also apply the methodology to the trickier problem of understanding how we maximise the value of people-based public services, not just big capital schemes? In Greater Manchester we have been working hard since 2010 to come up with such an approach.

New Economy is Greater Manchester’s economic think-tank and adviser on best policy practice. With the support of Whitehall economists and analysts, we have developed a methodology for applying CBA, and refined it through application to support initiatives such as the Government’s Whole Place Community Budget Pilots. Our approach has now matured to the point that it has gained backing from national government. The toolkit, ‘Supporting Public Service Transformation: Cost Benefit Analysis Guidance for Local Partnerships’, was published in April as a supplementary guide to the HM Treasury Green Book.

So how does it all work and what lessons have we learned through this process that can be applied to other areas across the country?

In simple terms, CBA works like this – at the outset of a new project or initiative, local partnerships consider options for changing public services, and compare them to the business as usual approach. The relative costs are identified and the changes in outcomes (eg employment, crime, health) are then quantified and monetised. The toolkit helps, not only to understand whether a project is good value for money but also identifies the impact on different agency budgets and helps to understand the benefits of commissioning jointly.

The guidance itself is designed for commissioners, performance officers, finance officers and practitioners. It is supported by:

- An Excel-based model which provides a structured and consistent approach for applying the methodology
- A unit cost database which includes more than 600 unit cost estimates, which can be used to calculate the costs of delivering proactive services and the potential savings in reactive costs that can be achieved
- Our experience has shown that there are wider benefits of applying CBA than just producing a benefit-cost ratio to take to the partnership board. The rigour of carrying out the analysis means that project teams have to think in a more structured way; consider in more detail the design of the project; understand the cohort they are working with; and clarify upfront the outcomes to be achieved. It also provides a focal point for different agencies to engage and work together to understand how they interact, and how costs and benefits transfer between them.

It is important that commissioners, finance staff and analysts do not think of CBA as a one-off process. Evaluation has often been done as an afterthought at the end of a programme. Key data is then not available, and it is difficult to carry out quantitative analysis of the project. Applying CBA to appraise value for money before a project starts may require some assumptions, but will give clarity on the main data which project teams need to collect during the project. We recommend that CBA is then updated regularly to iteratively improve the analysis. This not only gives funders confidence to continue to support or develop the project, but can also indicate which aspects of the programme are working and which need to be refined.

CBA does not tell us everything we need to know to decide which programmes should be funded. It does, however, provide some powerful insights into the value created by projects and how the impact spreads across the public sector and to society as a whole.

Supporting public service transformation: cost benefit analysis guidance for local partnerships is at: http://neweconomymanchester.com/stories/1966
Dealing with the ‘don’t knows’ in the Scottish referendum

By Christopher McLean, senior research executive, Ipsos MORI

With the referendum fast approaching, ever greater attention is being paid to the polls for signs of which way the result will go. The variety of methodologies employed by polling organisations, not to mention variations in how the question is asked and ways in which the headline figures are presented, create wildly differing results and make it difficult for anyone but the most engaged observer to get a handle on what the polls are saying. Furthermore, for those of us trying to measure voting intention, one of the biggest challenges lies in dealing with the ‘don’t knows’.

Voters who have yet to make up their minds can have a significant impact on headline voting intention measures. Removing don’t knows from the results assumes that either the don’t knows won’t vote (even if they have said they definitely will) or that their votes will be proportionately distributed between Yes and No. On the other hand, presenting all who are not completely certain how they will vote as don’t knows gives the impression that a large segment of voters have no idea how they will vote. In reality, attitudes are far more nuanced.

So how do we categorise and measure the don’t knows? Through our regular polling, we have been asking the referendum question followed by a series of questions to understand the attitudes of voters in greater detail.

Many voters are somewhere on a continuum from solid Yes voters, through those who may change their minds, or are completely undecided, to solid No voters. Our latest data suggests that around 55% of people in Scotland are both certain to vote in the referendum and have definitely decided how they are going to vote. The other 45% breaks down into three broad categories: those who may not vote; those who intend to vote and give a voting intention but tell us they may change their mind; and those who intend to vote but are undecided how they will vote.

Those who may not vote

Many indicators point towards a high turnout. Recent information published by the Electoral Commission suggests that 4.1 million Scots are registered to vote, including two thirds of newly enfranchised 16 and 17-year-olds. When we ask how likely respondents are to vote in the referendum, between 75% and 80% tell us they are absolutely certain. Now, an 80% turnout may be optimistic as some people will not actually turn out on the day, but it provides an indication of the level of interest in the referendum and suggests a high turnout is likely. By comparison, in our latest poll, only 68% say they are certain to vote in a Scottish Parliament election compared to 78% who say they are certain to vote in the referendum. Further, claimed certainty to vote can overestimate actual turnout by up to 10 percentage points.

The flip side is that at least one in five Scots are not certain to vote in the referendum. This is not to say they definitely will not, and many factors – an energised and convincing campaign, public momentum or a sunny day – may encourage some to vote.

Those who give a voting intention but may change their minds

If you follow the referendum debate in the media, you might assume that most people have strong convictions about which way they will vote. However, for many voters, the decision is not so cut and dried. In our latest poll, we found that 14% of the population are leaning to one side or the other, but may change their minds before the referendum.

Those who are certain to vote but are undecided

The final group is those who say they are certain to vote in the referendum but are undecided about how they will vote. This accounts for around 9% of the population and has been relatively stable over the two years in which we have been polling on the referendum question.

It remains to be seen how many uncommitted voters can be convinced by one side or the other and the impact they will have on the final result.
Reflections on the public consultation on the census

Three big benefits from the census consultation

By Ian Cope, director of population and demography, Office for National Statistics

After three years’ work by the Office for National Statistics, the national statistician has given the Government the recommendation for future population statistics in England and Wales (http://tinyurl.com/odx5ard). ONS assessed possible options (see www.ons.gov.uk/ons/index.html) and approaches against criteria such as statistical quality, risk, cost, technical and legal feasibility, public acceptability and burden. This involved methodological research, talking to users, learning from other countries – and, not least, consulting the public.

The three-month public consultation (http://tinyurl.com/mmf2lp) focused on two leading approaches for census taking. The 700-plus responses from organisations and individuals were comprehensive, well informed and broadly agreed with each other. This made our decision about what to recommend (http://tinyurl.com/odx5ard) easy – make the best use of all sources:

1. Increased use of administrative data and surveys to enhance the statistics for the 2021 census and improve annual population statistics

This approach will provide the population statistics needed for the next decade and offer a springboard to the greater use of administrative and survey data in future. Further research will be done to find the optimal blend of methods and data sources.

The big benefits

If the Government and Parliament approve this recommendation, what will the effect be?

1. The move towards predominately online data collection: bringing gains in speed and efficiency, and greater questionnaire flexibility

2. The potential for more frequent and timely statistics between censuses: administrative sources supplementing data from the census could be used to produce population statistics between census years

3. The potential to supplement the traditional census approach: linking administrative data to census data could allow information on a wider range of topics, for example income, to be published

The census is back, but it is not business as usual

By Ludi Simpson, University of Manchester, member of the Beyond 2011 Independent Working Group

The hard work has paid off. The SRA and others made a successful case for high-quality official statistics that currently are provided by a system including the census, a case that has been backed by ONS and the UK Statistics Authority. I trust that the Government’s own departments have made a similar case, and that a budget will allow both the next census and development of statistics from administrative sources.

But it is not business as usual. We have the chance of long-term improvement of the demographic data that underlie our appreciation of social trends. It is not about ‘saving the census’ though a successful plan might well include that.

The 2021 census will be largely online, with a major challenge to avoid exclusion. The definition of households will require a seriously better address register. However, the major opportunity is not just to bring a census into line with information technology, but to imagine how it can be updated more than once a decade, whether by transformation into a longitudinal online inquiry or by linking to survey and administrative information.

So it may not be business as usual until the next crash, but the start of a precarious climb to a new statistical system.
Evaluation design hierarchies – more than meets the eye?

By Matt Barnard, head of evaluation, NSPCC

At the NSPCC, we are coming to the end of the first ‘cycle’ within our current organisational strategy, which aims to generate learning alongside providing services. The idea is that by disseminating learning about our programmes, the NSPCC can indirectly help many more children than the number it helps through direct contact alone. The cycle involves a number of phases that each service will go through, from ‘focus’, through ‘test’, ‘analyse’, ‘respond’, ‘influence’ and finally ‘review’. For some of our more established services, we are into the influence and review phases, while others are at the beginning of the cycle, and we are determining what the focus of intervention should be.

Alongside the review of individual services, we are reflecting on the role of learning and evaluation within the process of service development and testing. One fact is clear: over the last four years we have become much more sophisticated in our understanding of research and evaluation methodology. For example, we are familiar with the standards of evidence recently published by the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF). Deliberately intended to dovetail with other evidence standards (such as the Maryland scale, Project Oracle, Nesta and Blueprints), the EIF standards set out a hierarchy of evidence, with multiple randomised control trials (RCTs) at the top and no evidence or logic model at the bottom.

Standards are very useful in providing a benchmark and language for discussing evidence that can be shared with researchers, practitioners, commissioners and policymakers. Underlying the evidence standards are the methodological concepts of ‘power’ (the ability to detect change) and ‘strength’ (the confidence in attributing change to an intervention). The interaction between these concepts is very usefully captured in a matrix in the HM Treasury’s Magenta Book (Part B, p109), which sets out how they combine to produce different kinds of evaluation outcomes. However, our experience at the NSPCC has taught us that this matrix (and scales of evidence such as the EIF one) do not indicate which kind of methodology is appropriate in what circumstances. While the hierarchical nature of the scale implies that you should always go for the highest power and strongest design that time and resources allow, this may not always be the best approach.

Generally, the higher the power and stronger the design of an evaluation, the more expensive it is. A crucial part of the decision-making process when judging what evaluation approach to adopt should be the value that will be generated from using that design. For example, an intervention that is just being developed may not be ready for an RCT, because the outcomes are not clear enough and the referral pathways are not developed. At the other end of the scale are interventions that already have a lot of high quality evidence supporting their effectiveness. What we may be exploring in these cases is how well they translate to a different context or with a different group of service users. An RCT may not offer the best value way of doing that, instead a ‘stepping stone’ study that monitors outcomes but looks in a detailed way at implementation issues may be a better use of resources.

To try and capture some of these complexities we have modified the matrix in the Magenta Book (below) to indicate the kind of evaluation that each of the combinations of power and strength are appropriate for services at different phases. As the NSPCC moves into the next round of development and testing, we hope this adapted matrix will help discussions between evaluators and programme developers and make sure we are applying the lessons we have learned over the last four years.

### Weak design
- **Low power**
  - Early exploration study
- **High power**
  - Stepping stone study

### Strong design
- **Low power**
  - Efficacy trial
- **High power**
  - Real world trial

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Blueprints programme criteria

Early Intervention Foundation Standards of Evidence

Magenta book

Maryland scale
[www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/171676.pdf](http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/171676.pdf)

Nesta

Project Oracle Standards of Evidence

Social Research Unit at Dartington What Works Evidence Standards
I was part of the LSE team that contributed to a National Audit Office report that assessed the quality of impact evaluations undertaken by the UK Government. Our part of the review considered a specific type of evidence – impact evaluation – which attempts to understand the causal effect of policy and to establish cost-effectiveness. To put it another way, we asked ‘did the policy work?’ and ‘did it represent good value for money?’

Governments around the world increasingly have strong systems to monitor policy inputs (eg spending on a business support programme) and outputs (eg number of firms helped by the programme). However, they are less good at identifying policy outcomes (eg the effect of the programme on the employment of the firms supported). In particular, many government-sponsored evaluations that look at outcomes do not use credible strategies to assess the causal impact of policy interventions. By causal impact, we mean an estimate of the difference that can be expected between the outcome for those ‘treated’ in a programme, and the average outcome they would have experienced without it. Pinning down causality is a crucially important part of impact evaluation. Estimates of the benefits of a programme are of limited use to policymakers unless those benefits can be attributed, with a reasonable degree of certainty, to that programme.

The credibility with which evaluations establish causality is the criterion we used to assess the literature. We were asked to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of government evaluations, to assess the robustness and the usefulness to policymakers, and to suggest improvements.

We looked at 35 UK evaluations covering active labour markets, business support, education and local economic growth. We picked these because policies in these areas are targeted differently (eg some at firms, some at individuals) which then helps illustrate how evaluation deals with crucial methodological issues. These are also areas where perceptions of quality vary markedly.

What did we find? First, the quality of evaluation varies widely both within and across these policy areas. For example, we found high-quality evaluations in the areas of active labour markets and education. In contrast, evaluations of business support and local economic growth were considerably weaker. Second, that quality range really matters for policymakers. On the basis of the reports we reviewed, we judged that none of the business support or local economic growth evaluations provided convincing evidence of policy impacts. In contrast, six out of nine education reports and seven out of ten labour market reports were good enough to have some confidence in policy impacts.

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How can policy evaluation get better? We think that using a control group (ie a counterfactual) should be considered a necessary (although not sufficient) requirement for robust impact assessment. Business support and local economic growth evaluations, in particular, could make better use of use administrative data and improved evaluation techniques to construct these counterfactuals.

We also make some more technical recommendations about how to handle policies where people can opt in; improving inference (ie how certain we are about the effects of policy) as well as the interpretation of impact estimates (do they apply to everyone ‘treated’, or just a subset?). More care should be taken to distinguish between the analysis of programme delivery (processes) and the assessment of impact and value for money (outcomes). Finally, every impact evaluation needs a technical appendix written for a specialist audience.

Overall, our verdict is mixed. We found a lot of very good evaluations; and many others that could be easily improved. For other areas, notably evaluations of business support and spatial policies, the picture is more worrying. Of course, these are also some of the hardest kinds of policies to evaluate robustly, but the gap between best and current practice should be narrower than currently. Narrowing that gap certainly makes for a challenging agenda.

Overall our verdict is mixed. We found a lot of very good evaluations: and many others that could be easily improved.

The new What Works Centre for Local Economic Growth, a partnership between LSE, Arup, and the Centre for Cities, is looking in more detail at evaluation and local economic development. We are always looking for new perspectives and demonstration projects to enhance our work. If you are interested please get in touch: www.whatworksgrowth.org
Measuring the impact of social science research

William Solesbury reviews a new report from LSE’s Public Policy Group

It was the 1993 White Paper on science Realising Our Potential1 that first declared a policy concern with the use of research. Around the same time Roger Jowell, then director of NatCen, addressing the ESRC about the work of his and other independent research centres outside academia, cheekily said that they knew all about ‘research users’ – they called them ‘clients’! Most members of the SRA outside universities will recognise his point. Scroll forward 20 years and academic researchers have finally caught on too. The current Research Excellence Framework requires them to demonstrate the impact of their research as well as the excellence of its outputs. In this context the new book from the LSE on The Impact of the Social Sciences: How academics and their research make a difference2 is timely.

It provides a rich, empirical account. It is based on analyses of staffing data, profiles of the outputs and impacts of a sample of 270 researchers drawn from online sources, reviews of universities’ websites, interviews with 100 researchers proactive in identifying the impact for their work, interviews with potential research users, published surveys and case studies of research/practice linkages, and revenue flows to researchers. The book is jargon-free, well-structured, with clear tables and revealing graphics, and some pertinent and witty quotations – all in all, a model of research communication. It is supplemented by a website3, and reviews a new report from LSE’s Public Policy Group2 is timely.

The book provides some interesting measures of social scientists’ capacities, outputs and impact. So we learn that:

- There are 32,500 social science researchers in UK universities; the biggest groups are in education, sociology, economics and business studies
- The top social science disciplines referenced on gov.uk websites are social policy, geography and economics
- Two fifths of social scientists have contact with businesses and a third with third sector organisations
- Social science departments add £4.8 billion to the UK economy
- 6.4% of the national workforce has a social science degree
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- Social science departments add £4.8 billion to the UK economy
- 6.4% of the national workforce has a social science degree
- There are five main forms of social scientists’ relationship with external interests: advisory role, episodic contracting, strategic commissioning, creating a joint research asset, policy marketing
- But all this is about social science research in universities. The authors recognise that there are such researchers elsewhere, in independent research centres, in research and consultancy businesses, in think tanks, in government, in NGOs. But they have nothing to say about their outputs and impact. They see them principally not as producers, like the academics, but as ‘intermediaries’ who ‘combine social science knowledge advances and ideas with their own proprietary procedures, ‘ordinary knowledge’, or applied modes of working so as to create amalgam products that cater more directly to the needs of companies or government agencies.’ (page 26). This is an important role to which they attach a value of £20 billion, that is four times the value of academic social science itself. Flattering, but I suspect that many SRA members and their organisations will bridle at this description.
- Even so, this work is a valuable contribution to understanding the often fraught research/practice relationship.

1 Cabinet Office, Realising our potential: a strategy for science, engineering and technology, HMSO 1993
2 Simon Bastow, Patrick Dunleavy and Jane Tinkler, The Impact of the Social Sciences: How academics and their research make a difference, Sage 2014
3 http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/book
4 http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences
Community research for participation: from theory to method

Edited by L. Goodson and J. Phillimore
Bristol, Policy Press, 2012

Reviewed by Carol Riddington, independent social researcher

The book focuses on involving in social research ‘difficult to engage’ communities, such as gypsies and travellers, refugees, mental health service users and carers. I found the collection of studies from 20 academics from around the world thoughtful and interesting. The book aims to: address the need for methodological rigour whilst conducting community research; and, assess the impact this methodology has on co-researchers/community consultants who are involved in various stages of the research process. It is organised into three parts: theoretical and methodological issues of conducting community research; ethics, power and emotional involvement of all those involved in the projects under discussion; and examples of managing the research process when involving people from diverse communities. It is aimed at social science students who are on the cusp of undertaking their own independent research or starting out on a research career.

Each contribution follows a similar format starting with the chapter’s aims, followed by a description of the research project and a discussion on the issue being addressed. At the end of each chapter there is a section on key learning points based on the author’s involvement in the project and a summary clearly listing in table format the advantages, disadvantages and limitations of conducting their particular community research study. The contributors have been honest in reporting the dilemmas they have had to address and offer constructive advice to the reader. Throughout the collection there is an emphasis on addressing thorny research concerns such as the internal and external validity of the data being collected as well as the reliability of the findings. Several contributors also usefully highlighted the fact that involving members of a community in the fieldwork is not a cheap alternative to hiring trained interviewers and that the process is both time consuming and resource intensive if it is to be done effectively.

I expected the book to draw exclusively on qualitative studies. However, it was refreshing to read examples of community research where co-researchers have been involved in quantitative surveys as well as evaluations. Weaving through the chapters was an underlying theme about the power relationship between academic researchers and lay members of the community and this provided continuity across the chapters. There were also several useful discussions around the difficulties co-researchers experienced on remaining independent and objective whilst interviewing or observing members of their own communities.

I would recommend this book to anyone undertaking this methodology or involving lay people or users in the design of their research. It would also be a useful read for policymakers who are intending to implement findings based on community research methods as each contributor has given theoretical consideration to their project to ensure the findings are robust and objective. The book offers good practical advice for researchers and examples on how other researchers resolved unforeseen issues when problems occurred during their studies.

Do you have a research ethics query?

The SRA has a free research ethics consultancy service to support members when you encounter ethical dilemmas in your research.

14 senior researchers from various sectors and disciplines are available to offer you the benefit of their very considerable experience. This is an informal, confidential forum to support researchers. The participants give their time voluntarily.

How it works: we circulate your question or request to the members of the consultancy forum. We collate their replies and send them to you, normally within seven working days.

Email Ron Iphofen ron.iphofen@gmail.com to ask your question or make your request. Let him know if you would prefer it to remain anonymous throughout the consultation process.

Please see our website for more details, and names of the forum members: http://the-sra.org.uk/sra_resources/research-ethics/ethics-consultancy-forum/
Qualitative research practice: a guide for social science students and researchers

Edited by Jane Ritchie, Jane Lewis, Carol McNaughton Nicholls and Rachel Ormston
SAGE Publications Ltd; second edition (19 Nov 2013)
Reviewed by Helen Kara, SRA trustee

I am a little suspicious of second editions, having been ripped off a couple of times by those which are almost indistinguishable from their first editions (a new cover design doesn’t count). So I’m glad to say that this second edition has been fully revised and brought up to date, involving several new authors and including two completely new chapters, one on research ethics and one on observational methods.

As with the first edition, the book begins with a context-setting chapter on the history and nature of qualitative research, followed by a chapter on how qualitative research can be applied. Then there is the first of three chapters on design, which cover project design, sampling, and fieldwork design. In between the first and second of these is the new chapter on research ethics. This takes the contemporary approach of recommending that researchers develop and hone their own ethical thinking skills, rather than relying on ethical regulatory systems or written guidelines.

Like the last edition, this book has useful chapters on interview and focus group methods. The new chapter on observational methods includes a helpful section on online observation. Following this are two chapters on data analysis, which is often the most challenging part of any research project. The first of these chapters covers the principles of data analysis, and the second explains how to put them into practice. A chapter on generalisation follows, including reliability and validity, which is naturally more theoretical but still highly relevant. It’s also good to see an excellent chapter on writing up qualitative research, an essential skill which is rarely explained how to put them into practice. A chapter on generalisation follows, including reliability and validity, which is naturally more theoretical but still highly relevant. It’s also good to see an excellent chapter on writing up qualitative research, an essential skill which is rarely included in ‘how to’ books. This chapter, like the others from the first edition, has been revised and expanded, and it covers data presentation as well as writing.

No book on qualitative research can be perfect, or cover everything; the field is too large and contested. But this book is very good indeed, and covers a great deal, including methods and approaches beyond those outlined above, such as visual methods and participatory research. The book is well written and readable, and easy to navigate, with helpful chapter and section headings and a comprehensive index. I think it would be an excellent primer for anyone who is new to qualitative research, and also a very useful reference book for people with more experience.

Social media, sociality and survey research

Reviewed by Paul Webb, research officer, Praxis Care, Belfast

This book has been written because of the writers’ awareness that declining response rates and inadequate sampling frames present a challenge to all social researchers who wish to collect survey data which is ‘accurate, timely and accessible’. Primarily written by researchers from RTI International, the book is a compendium of chapters which describe how the researchers have incorporated social media data into their research projects. The authors suggest that the book is intended for survey and market researchers, as well as students in survey methodology and market research and I agree that this book will be useful for this constituency.

The writers don’t argue for the replacement of the more familiar survey modes but suggest that postal, web-based and telephone surveys can be supplemented by the imaginative use of social media. Indeed, they recognise that social media data has its own limitations and does not fit easily into designs where precise estimates are needed.

The writers define social media as ‘a collection of websites and web-based systems that allow for mass interaction, conversation, and sharing among members of a network’ and refer to web 2.0 with its user generated content. The book covers a diverse range of topics which include how to predict sentiments and emotions using consistent methods, how to pre-test questionnaires use Skype and Second Life and how to develop innovative research by using social media to collect ideas from large groups of people. There is also a chapter on how to apply the principles of the games designer to market research so that participation in research is more enjoyable.

Although very wide ranging, the book retains its coherence because it is organised around the idea of a ‘sociality hierarchy’ which can be broken down into broadcast, conversational and community levels. The authors also consistently avoid the use of technical language and include a useful set of references – many of which are downloadable – at the end of each chapter.

This book is a must read for any researcher who wants to make use of social media data; it is incisive, instructive, easy to read and, above all, fascinating.
SRA training courses

**LONDON**
- **25 JUNE**  Introduction to evaluation – David Devins
- **1 JULY**  Research using social media – Farida Vis
- **7 JULY**  Data visualisation – Jon Minton
- **18 SEPTEMBER**  Cognitive Interviewing – Pamela Campanelli
- **9 OCTOBER**  Research and evaluation with children and young people – Louca-Mai Brady and Berni Graham
- **6 NOVEMBER**  Designing a qualitative study – Liz Spencer
- **26 NOVEMBER**  Qualitative interviewing – Liz Spencer
- **27 NOVEMBER**  Focus groups – Liz Spencer

**MANCHESTER**
- **9 JUNE**  Research project management – Simon Haslam

**EDINBURGH**
- **21 OCTOBER**  Designing a qualitative study – Liz Spencer
- **23 OCTOBER**  Qualitative interviewing – Liz Spencer
- **24 OCTOBER**  Focus groups – Liz Spencer
- **3 DECEMBER**  Analysis of qualitative data – Liz Spencer
- **4 DECEMBER**  Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings – Liz Spencer

One-day courses are £195 for SRA members (£260 for non-members) and include lunch and refreshments. Details and booking: [www.the-sra.org.uk/training](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/training) or contact Lindsay.adams@the-sra.org.uk

We are planning more training for the autumn such as workshops on MAXQDA and NVivo and courses on ethnography and virtual interviews. Keep checking our website or join our mailing list for updates on all events, training courses and job advertisements. Go to ‘join’ on our website.

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**SRA RESEARCH MATTERS**

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SRA Research Matters will include any copy that may be of interest to its readers in the social research community. We will notify you if we are unable to include an item. Copy submitted for publication is accepted on the basis that it may be edited to ensure coherence within the publication. The views expressed by individual contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the SRA.

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**PEOPLE**

Editorial team:
- Ivana La Valle (commissioning editor) ivanalavalle@outlook.com
- Graham Farrant (SRA general manager) graham.farrant@the-sra.org.uk
- Diarmid Campbell Jack, Save the Children
- Lan-Ho Man, Department for Communities and Local Government
- Colin Payne, NatCen Social Research

The Social Research Association (SRA)
24-32 Stephenson Way, London NW1 2HX
TEL: 0207 998 0304
Email: admin@the-sra.org.uk
www.the-sra.org.uk

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