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sra : RESEARCH MATTERS

Social Research Association

The Polls Inquiry preliminary findings

*By **Patten Smith**, SRA chair and member of the Polls Inquiry team*

The failure of the pre-election polls to correctly predict the outcome of the 2015 general election caused considerable embarrassment to the polling industry. Consequently, the British Polling Council (BPC) and Market Research Society (MRS) set up an inquiry, led by Professor Patrick Sturgis, to investigate the causes of these errors. The inquiry presented preliminary findings at a public meeting on 19 January.

Its analyses indicated that six mooted causes of the errors could be eliminated with reasonable certainty: postal voting, voter registration procedures, overseas voters, question wording/framing, differential turnout misreporting and mode of interview. This left three: late swing, deliberate misreporting and sample composition. Deliberate misreporting would be largely undetectable from available evidence, but was also implausible as a significant source of error. The impact of late swing – voters changing their minds between final polls and actually voting – *could* be assessed using data from re-contact exercises whereby pre-election poll respondents were interviewed after the election and asked who they voted for. Although the evidence from re-contact polls was inconsistent across polling companies, there was some indication of a pro-Conservative swing but this was too small to explain the magnitude of the polls' prediction error.

Through elimination, the inquiry was left with sample composition error as the most likely cause of the polling error. This conclusion was further supported by a critical examination of the assumptions underlying polling sampling methods. Polls use a three-step procedure to obtain unbiased estimates of the population of people who will vote:

1. They collect quota samples of voting-eligible people and weight these to general population characteristics such as age, region and past vote
2. They assign turnout weights – estimated probabilities of voting – to respondents
3. They apply these weights to tabulate voting intention

For this methodology to provide good predictions, three assumptions need to be met:

- Step 1 has to deliver an unbiased sample (for voting intention and turnout propensity) of voting-eligible people
- Step 2 has to deliver reasonably accurate turnout probability estimates
- The voting intentions tabulated in step 3 have to agree with actual voting behaviour

Given no convincing evidence of a significant late swing or misreporting, step 3 assumptions seemed to hold, and the panel's analyses largely ruled out problems with the step 2 turnout-weighting assumption as a major cause of error.

However, there *was* evidence of potential bias in the sample of voting-eligible people when comparing the post-election re-contact polls with estimates of reported vote taken from two high-quality probability sample surveys conducted shortly after the election (British Election Study (BES) and British

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Social Attitudes Survey (BSAS)). Both BES and BSAS estimates of the Conservative lead over Labour proved to be reasonably accurate, whereas the re-contact poll estimates continued to substantially underestimate the Conservative lead. The panel demonstrated that the polling samples were biased across variables other than voting intention, sometimes in ways that could translate into biased estimates of voting intention. For example, polls substantially over-represented the politically engaged; under-represented those aged over 75; and also under-represented older postal voters.

There also appeared to be evidence of 'herding' whereby pollsters use existing poll results to help adjust the presentation of their own poll results. The variability across pollsters in the Conservative-Labour difference declined considerably over the last two weeks of the campaign (after controlling for sample size) and to an extent which is hard to square with basic tenets of sampling statistics. Despite evidence of possible herding, the panel considered it unlikely that this was a major cause of the polling error. It also emphasised that the existence of herding did not imply malpractice by pollsters; indeed it was likely that herding was motivated by pollsters' desire to maximise the accuracy of their estimates.

The panel produces its final report at the end of March 2016. This will present the findings in detail, and make recommendations about polling methodologies; BPC regulations on transparency; and on reporting and interpreting polling results.

Patten comments further in his editorial on page 3

New 'job board' for social research vacancies

The SRA's advertising service has gone up a gear – we have set up a new website with research vacancies: **http://jobs.the-sra.org.uk**

Research jobseekers can find jobs by research area and location; upload their (anonymised) CV for employers to browse; and set alerts tailored to their requirements. There are hundreds of job opportunities on the site.

Employers with a research vacancy can advertise for 30 days, with price options to suit their budget. Employers can reach a specialist social research audience. The premium listing includes an email to 2,700 people who have signed up for monthly job alerts. Find out more: **http://the-sra.org.uk/jobs/advertise-with-us**

Social Research Practice: contributions welcome

We have had a very positive response to the first issue of **Social Research Practice**, the new SRA methods journal. The second issue comes out in June and will include articles on researching the views of very young children and on methodological innovations in social media research.

We are already planning for issues 3 (December 2016) and 4 (June 2017) and welcome offers of articles. Our deadline for receiving articles for Issue 3 is 9 September. If you would like to offer an article please go to: **www.the-sra.org.uk/journal-social-research-practice**. Read the guidelines for authors, and download the article template. If you have an idea for an article but are not sure if it's suitable, just email the editor at **rabartholomew@btinternet.com**

SRA events: dates for your diary

The SRA events team has planned various events and activities – here are two for your diary:

THURSDAY 30 JUNE – Summer Event

A half day conference on a current issue in housing policy – details soon. Local Government Association, 2-5pm

TUESDAY 6 DECEMBER – SRA Annual Conference

Full-day event at the British Library in London, 10am-5pm

Details of these and other events to follow.

Contribute to SRA Research Matters

We are always pleased to discuss contributions to Research Matters. We consider articles on any topic as long as they are about research findings or research practice, and we particularly welcome contributions that show how research can make a difference. Whether you are interested in writing a short piece (330 words) or a full page article (670 words), do email us at **admin@the-sra.org.uk**

On polling and pixie dust

*SRA chair, **Patten Smith**, who is a member of the Polls Inquiry team led by Patrick Sturgis, comments on the preliminary findings.*

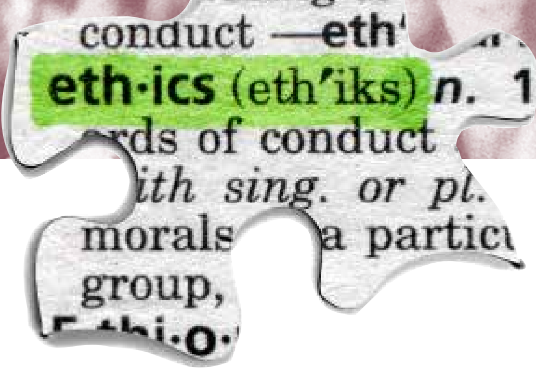
Should we be surprised at the preliminary findings of the British Polling Council (BPC) and Market Research Society (MRS) Polling Inquiry into the 2015 pre-election polling errors? I think not. If you asked experienced sampling statisticians (at least in the 30 years during which I have been a survey researcher) how confident they were that opinion poll samples were unbiased you would have received an answer which ranged from the politely non-committal to the downright sceptical. There are, after all, good reasons why ONS and government departments use high-quality random-probability sampling methods, coupled with protracted data-collection procedures designed to maximise response rates, when they want statistical estimates they can trust. They spend a lot of money on doing the job well because this minimises their risk of getting badly biased estimates. Given that polls are inevitably conducted quickly and on shoestring budgets, some might argue that it is as much a surprise when polls get things right as when they get them wrong!

But is it not the case that 2015 was the exception and that the polls have provided good estimates over past elections using quick, non-random surveys? The answer to this question largely depends on what you mean by good estimates. The polls have predicted the winner since 1992 (when we last had an inquest into their performance), but a little scrutiny shows that their ability to predict party vote shares has been pretty unspectacular over the years. It's just that the commentariat is a lot less fussy about the accuracy of poll estimates when they manage to get the winner right.

So the finding that cheaper and faster methods are more likely to result in biased samples should not surprise anybody – although we needed the inquiry to confirm our suspicion that this was indeed the case in 2015. The next question is, of course, what can be done to improve poll samples and this is something the inquiry will address in its recommendations when it reports. While I am sure we shall succeed in identifying methodological improvements that can be made, I am also confident that we shall have to point out that all proposed improvements must be judged against the back-drop of an ineluctable tension between speed and cheapness on the one hand, and accuracy and robustness on the other (something that should cause little surprise given that there is a price-quality trade-off in so much of life).

> **I am also confident that we shall have to point out that all proposed improvements must be judged against the back-drop of an ineluctable tension between speed and cheapness on the one hand, and accuracy and robustness on the other**

What this means, of course, is that when the inquiry reports, we will not succeed in identifying a magic solution to the problems of the polls, a kind of pixie dust, which when sprinkled in a suitable quantity on a cheap fast turnaround quota survey, will, by magic, enable it to deliver ONS quality estimates. Instead, we will be recommending how best to reduce the risk of error whilst acknowledging the impossibility of eliminating it completely. Perhaps this will disappoint those who have read recent commentaries on the polling inquiry implying that their authors are now tantalisingly close to cracking the formula for pixie dust. Sadly, such simple 'solutions' are doomed to ultimate failure, and it is perhaps salutary to remember that pixie dust has only ever been found to work its magic in fairy tales.



Thoughts on the ethics of publishing

*By **Helen Kara**, SRA trustee*

Publishing is, on the whole, a money-making enterprise. Most publishers of research, or their parent companies, are very wealthy organisations – albeit with honourable exceptions such as the not-for-profit Policy Press. Writers see very little of that wealth, and less now than in the recent past. The median income of writers dropped by over 50% between 2000 and 2013, and was reported in that year as £4,000[1]. For every JK Rowling, there are tens of thousands of writers earning little or nothing from their writing.

As a writer myself, I feel uncomfortable about looking online or in charity shops for cheap second-hand books. However, as a frequently rather skint person, I know how useful these options can be. I do buy new books when I can afford to, though I always check a book price comparison site such as bookbutler or bookfinder first (and before you tell me I should buy from bookshops, I do when I can, but the nearest one is 15 miles away). Some bookselling sites are independent, such as Wordery or Alibris, so I try to use those rather than the mammoth monopolies. And if I buy a book second-hand, I aim to do something else for the author, such as write a review online, promote their work on social media, or download an affordable e-book they wrote.

I am very worried about the move to open access. Yes, it's great from the reader's point of view. But what about the writers, who are now being charged fees?

I don't feel so worried about ethics when it comes to acquiring paywalled journal articles, because academic publishers generally make a load of money out of eye-wateringly expensive university library journal subscriptions. I know that the academic publishing business is getting more competitive, like everything else, with the economic climate requiring all expenditure to be thoroughly justified. But I also know that academic journal publishers don't pay their editorial board members, reviewers, or writers, and as I'm in all three categories, I figure I'm entitled to a pdf here and there.

But I am very worried about the move to open access. Yes, it's great from the reader's point of view. But what about the writers, who are now being charged fees? There are many journals in which independent researchers like me, or practitioners, or the temporarily unemployed, can't afford to publish. This doesn't only affect people outside the academy; university publishing budgets are limited, so junior academics may struggle to get funding to publish their work. And it applies to books as well as journals. Recently De Gruyter Open, a reputable academic publisher, emailed to ask whether I'd like to publish a book with them at a cost of 'only' 10,000 euros. I don't have that kind of money lying around – and if I did, I could think of lots of things I'd rather do with it than pay to publish a book which the publisher can then charge people to buy.

Do we really want to live in a world where publication is only available to the rich, rather than to people whose work is worth reading?

Charging writers for publishing their work is effectively a form of covert censorship. Research from Scandinavia in 2012 showed that around a third of the authors of articles in academic journals were retired, unemployed, students, practitioner-researchers or independent researchers[2]. How many of them would have been able to get their articles published if they had had to pay? Do we really want to live in a world where publication is only available to the rich, rather than to people whose work is worth reading?

I have a lot of time for the Committee on Publication Ethics (CoPE) which raises awareness of, and works to support, the ethical publication of academic journals. The committee works on internal ethics: ethical peer review, challenging suppression of results, handling fraud, and so on. This is important, and I'm glad it is doing it. On the micro level, I'm very glad the SRA is helping to level this playing field by using its charitable funds to publish our own journal, *Social Research Practice*, which is openly accessible for readers with no costs to writers either. But there is a real need for more awareness of, and some challenges to, the unethical aspects of research publishing on the macro level.

1 Authors' Licensing and Collecting Society (2014) *What Are Words Worth Now?* London: ALCS. p6

2 Kirkup, G. (2012) 'Will the Finch Report kill off non-commercial open access journals?' Gynoid Times. [Online] Available at: **http://www.open.ac.uk/blogs/Kirkup/?p=559** [Accessed 29/2/16]

Higher education and research: consultation and debate

*By **Ceridwen Roberts**, senior research fellow, University of Oxford*

Three key reviews about different aspects of higher education and research have recently been undertaken or are out for consultation: The Nurse *Review of the UK Research Councils*; the BIS *Consultation on higher education: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice*; and the announcement that Lord Stern would lead a review of the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Chancellor, George Osborne, also announced the comprehensive spending review (CSR). So, these are important times for the social science community. The Academy of Social Science (AcSS) and the Campaign for Social Science (CfSS) have responded on behalf of members, including the SRA. Full details of the reports are on the BIS website[1], and the AcSS[2] and CfSS[3] responses are on their respective websites. This article sets out some main points, but note that some major decisions are still to be taken, or consultations still open.

The CSR effectively commits to level funding for the science budget but details of the breakdown between the different research councils and, therefore, social science's share are not yet clear. However a £4.7 billion science resource funding in real terms, given virtually zero inflation, is not enough to reverse declining public investment in generating new knowledge in the UK. CfSS states: 'By 2020 the proportion of GDP for publicly-supported research and development will fall even further below its level in 2010 and may put greater distance between the UK and comparable countries.' As the science base is crucial to a vibrant knowledge economy, this is worrying.

Nurse examines the UK research funding system. While he describes the research base as world-leading, he warns against setting the level of public funding for science and technology at a 'sub-optimal level'. However, continued high quality means commensurate funding, and so comparing UK-spend with that of its main competitors is important. Nurse considers the effectiveness of the Research Councils and how they relate to other major research funders – government and associated agencies, the private and the charitable sectors. His comprehensive review of funding sources for research leads him to recommend a more strategic approach so that UK research meets UK needs. It also underlies his suggestion that the seven Research Councils evolve into one overarching body, Research UK. He argues that this would be a stronger advocate to government; and be better placed to link with other main players and formulate a UK research strategy.

these are important times for the social science community

The report emphasises the importance of government in developing new cross-government arrangements to discuss research priorities and funding; to bring policymakers and funders together; and to put science at the heart of government, possibly through a ministerial committee. To what extent the proposed arrangements would increase the influence of the government on research endeavour is unclear, although, in places, the report emphasises the importance of peer review.

Nurse also suggests that the REF should come under the remit of Research UK, though he does not discuss the REF in any detail. This is the subject of Lord Stern's report which is due in summer 2016. Its purpose is to examine different approaches to evaluating UK higher education research performance to decrease the administrative burden, and so the review will consider introducing metrics. The social science community is anxious about moving to a metric-based system as social science, unlike the natural sciences, does not suit this approach.

The whole arena of research funding and quality assessment, and the proposal to examine and assess university teaching quality mean that, as never before, the government is reviewing the social science community. It is important that those of us interested in the future of social science respond to these reviews, and consider their implications for the quality, effectiveness and social and policy impact of social science, and its ability to remain a critical friend of the status quo.

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1 https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-business-innovation-skills

2 AcSS (2016) Response to Department for Business, Innovation & Skills consultation on higher education: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice [pdf] AcSS. Available at: https://www.acss.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/AcSS-CfSS-response-to-BIS-HE-green-paper-Jan-2016-1.pdf [Accessed 29/2/16]

3 https://campaignforsocialscience.org.uk/

Why research quality matters: a case study

*By **Ivana La Valle**, SRA trustee and editor of SRA Research Matters*

Promoting good quality social research is at the heart of what the SRA does. Whenever SRA trustees need to decide whether to embark on a new activity or continue with an existing programme of work, the key question we ask is: will this promote good social research practice? Other questions are also important, but if what we are considering does not have the potential to support high research standards, it is unlikely to generate much enthusiasm. The reason we are committed to high quality research is because it can make a difference to people's lives, while poor quality research is at best useless, and at worst harmful. I'd like to illustrate the importance of good quality research, as well as the possible negative consequences of poor quality research with the findings of a recent review study to which I contributed.

A CASE STUDY: CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL CARE

The study was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE). It involved reviewing the research evidence on the place of residential care in the English child welfare system[1]. The proportion of looked after children in residential care has been steadily declining in England, and currently only one child in ten is placed in a children's home. Residential care is often seen as the 'last resort placement', when foster care and other alternatives have failed. However, it is not clear to what extent this trend has been informed by research evidence as the impact of residential care on children is not well understood, and there is little consideration of when to use it and what alternatives there might be. Therefore, two questions the study addressed were: what are outcomes for looked after children in residential care and how do they compare with outcomes for those placed in foster care and other family placements?

LACK OF HIGH QUALITY RESEARCH IN ENGLAND

What we found when we reviewed the English research base was rather worrying: policy and practice to support one of the most vulnerable groups in our society, children who require complex and expensive interventions, have been based on very limited research, some of which is of rather poor quality. The quality of studies providing quantitative data was particularly weak, not conforming to some basic sampling standards and failing to provide important information needed to judge the reliability of the statistical estimates. We did not find any of the kind of high quality evidence that has been so important in shaping other children's policy areas. There have been no longitudinal quantitative studies to follow up children who enter residential care to understand their experiences and explore their short and longer-term outcomes. There have been no robust evaluations to understand what could be done to improve the lives and chances of these children. No research instruments have been developed to assess the quality of residential care and what impact it has on children's experiences and outcomes. In short, none of this kind of robust evidence, which is essential to understand how national policy and local practice can make a difference to children's lives, has been available to policymakers working with children in residential care in England.

IT CAN BE DONE BETTER

Establishing how residential care affects outcomes for children whose lives are very chaotic, and with very complex home backgrounds and care histories, is challenging but not impossible. We found some good quality international evidence from countries like the US with a strong tradition of rigorous testing of social interventions, and Sweden and Israel where comprehensive administrative data systems have been set up to collect longitudinal data on children who enter the care system. These data have made a difference to children's lives by showing that:

- The development of robust tools to assess individual needs can lead to more effective support in residential care
- The quality of relationships, education and recreational activities, and even the food available in residential homes, can make a difference to children's experiences and outcomes
- Family involvement while children are in residential care and providing 'after-placement' support can contribute to better outcomes in the medium and long-term

When I say that this evidence has made a difference, I mean that the research has contributed to developing, testing and refining interventions which have led to a reduction in 'broken placements', crime, drug use, and unemployment among those who have experienced residential care. This is why good quality research is vital, and why the SRA is committed to promoting high standards in social research.

We welcome contributions from readers highlighting examples of good research practice to promote and flagging examples of bad practice to avoid. If you would like to write an article please contact **admin@the-sra.org.uk**

[1] Hart, D., La Valle, I. with Holmes L. (2015) The place of residential care in the English child welfare system. London: Department for Education.

Standardised survey design: are we missing a trick?

By ***Peter Lynn****, professor of survey methodology, University of Essex*

We generally try to standardise survey procedures so that all sample members for a particular survey are treated in exactly the same way. Each person is sent the same letter, offered the same incentive, called using the same call-scheduling algorithm, and so on. Insofar as there is scientific justification for this approach, it is that giving respondents a standardised stimulus should result in standardised data. So, even though some of the things we do or say to respondents may influence how they answer our survey questions, at least we try to hold those biases constant across all sample members. A less charitable view of why we design surveys like this is that it is quicker and easier.

This orthodoxy has been challenged from time to time. Two or three decades ago, researchers suggested that a more flexible, conversational, approach to interviewing might produce better data. A couple of research projects demonstrated the wisdom of this. But the idea never grew wings. Almost all surveys still have standardised wording (except some dependent interviewing in longitudinal surveys), and interviewers are still trained to read questions exactly as they are written.

Around the same time, other researchers suggested that giving interviewers a standard introductory wording to read out when asking people to participate in a survey may not be ideal. Instead, they suggested, interviewers should tailor their approach, using words and arguments to suit each person's characteristics and address their concerns. Even small talk about the person's dog or garden was allowed, as this was found to engage people and increase the chances that they would agree to be interviewed. This time the idea flew. Most survey organisations now train interviewers to tailor their initial introduction, whether by telephone or face-to-face. But interviewer introductions are still the exception rather than the rule. Most survey design features remain standardised.

Meanwhile, numerous studies have shown that survey design features have heterogeneous effects. Increasing the value of an incentive has a positive effect on response rate for one sample subgroup, but not for another. Stressing the importance of an accurate answer improves data quality for one type of person, but not for another. It is clear that standardised design features do not provide standardised responses. Furthermore, we can often predict quite well the nature of the variation in the desired effect. There is much evidence about which subgroups respond better to an increased incentive, or to an appeal to altruism rather than egoism, for example.

Insofar as there is scientific justification for this approach, it is that giving respondents a standardised stimulus should result in standardised data

So why do we ignore all this evidence each time we design a survey? Perhaps we are unclear about how best to target design features. How can we be sure that it is better to reword our advance letter in a particular way for a particular subgroup? But standardisation does not get round this problem. The question remains: how can we be sure that our standardised letter is the best option? We must be bolder in interpreting the ample research evidence.

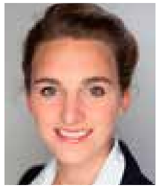
And it need not cost more to design and implement multiple variants of a survey procedure. Targeting can be used as a method to better allocate scarce survey resources. It may be more effective to send two reminders to the 20% of the sample likely to be influenced by reminders rather than to send one reminder to the whole sample.

Implementation of a targeted design feature may disrupt a survey organisation's usual procedures. To overcome this, modest investment may be needed to modify organisation-wide systems to allow the possibility of multiple targeted variants. Then, the option can be toggled on or off for any particular survey, and the parameters of the variants can be set.

Of course, targeting requires information to identify the subgroups to target. Sometimes, such information is limited to geographical location. But many surveys have rich sampling frames, and longitudinal surveys have considerable data from previous waves. Many opportunities exist for targeting. In failing to do so, we may be missing a trick in our quest to optimise participation and response quality within budget constraints.

Equality review identifies data gaps as key challenge

*By **Dr Verena Brähler**, head of 'Is Britain Fairer?' review and **Dr Hazel Wardrop**, research manager, Equality and Human Rights Commission*



'Is Britain Fairer?'[1], published in October 2015, is the biggest ever review on equality and human rights in Britain. It covers 43 indicators across ten major areas of everyday life, including education, employment, standard of living, health, justice, security, identity and participation, and supports parliament and policymakers to focus on some of the biggest challenges facing our society. The review was written by around 15 social researchers and statisticians at the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) who consulted with 240 organisations, examined thousands of quantitative and qualitative sources, and produced 1,800 pages of evidence.

USING A MEASUREMENT FRAMEWORK APPROACH

Social researchers from the UK and abroad have been interested in how our methodology contributes to the structure and meaning of the findings. The review is based on the commission's four measurement frameworks developed between 2007 and 2010. They include indicators to measure equality for adults and children, good relations and human rights[2].

Following an approach recommended by the United Nations Office for the High Commissioner for Human Rights[3], the review used three types of evidence – structure, process and outcomes – and adapted it to the UK context:

- Structure: the formal commitments to human rights in principle, for example, domestic human rights law, ratification of regional and international treaties
- Process: the efforts taken by states to meet obligations; can be seen in the legislative, regulatory and public policy frameworks
- Outcome: the position/experiences of individuals and groups, evidenced by social survey or administrative data, concerns highlighted by regulators, inspectorates, human rights monitoring bodies or NGOs

To assess outcomes, we chose around 75 quantitative measures (for example, on violent crime, educational attainment, access to mental health services) and carried out a robust analysis of change over time.

DATA GAPS

Despite this apparent wealth of evidence, the review concluded that data gaps are a major issue because they limit our ability to assess how fair Britain truly is, and renders some people in the most vulnerable situations invisible (including transgender people, Gypsies and Travellers, and those aged over 80). In doing so, it compounds the disadvantages such groups already face by hiding them and their issues from the decision-makers who set priorities and shape services.

The data landscape is undergoing some dramatic changes. In some areas, data availability has improved (for example, administrative data on outcomes of vulnerable children and survey data disaggregated by sexual identity), but in other areas, sources have either been reduced or disappeared altogether, such as the TellUs Survey[4]. Sample size has been reduced in major national surveys, such as the Family Resources Survey and the Crime Survey for England and Wales, limiting our ability to obtain statistically robust findings for all groups of people protected by law.

A corresponding challenge is that some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups, such as people outside the household population (homeless people, people living in bed and breakfast accommodation, and those in prison), are not always included in quantitative national surveys, while other groups, for example Gypsies and Travellers and transgender people, may be included but aggregated into broader categories or be too small a sample to allow for sufficiently robust analysis.

The commission's purpose is to challenge discrimination, protect and promote human rights, and be a catalyst for change. The availability of data has a central role in this. Ahead of the next review of equality and human rights in 2020, we will revisit our measurement frameworks to make sure that the commission continues to make best use the available evidence. We are also keen to work with other organisations to address some issues with data gaps, data collection and data analysis.

Find out more about 'Is Britain Fairer?' at **www.equalityhumanrights.com/about-us/our-work/key-projects/britain-fairer-0**

1 EHRC (2015) Is Britain Fairer? [download] Available at: **www.equalityhumanrights.com/about-us/our-work/key-projects/britain-fairer/great-britain-report** [Accessed 29/2/16]

2 EHRC (2015) Is Britain Fairer? Supporting Evidence. [Online] Available at: **www.equalityhumanrights.com/about-us/our-work/key-projects/britain-fairer/britain-fairer-supporting-evidence** [Accessed 29/2/16]

3 OHCHR (2012) Human Rights Indicators: a guide to measurement and implementation. [pdf] Available at: **www.ohchr.org/Documents/Publications/Human_rights_indicators_en.pdf** [Accessed 29/2/16]

4 TellUs is a national survey which gathers children and young people's views on their lives, schools and local areas. The survey was discontinued and the last available data are from 2009.

Nurses or interviewers: collecting biomeasures

*By **Jo Taylor**, national nurse field manager, NatCen Social Research*

Getting hold of complex medical measurements is an important element of health research because of the need to supplement self-reported results with objective biomedical data. These can range from the relatively simple, such as height and weight, through to more complex assessments such as exercise testing (step-tests with heart-rate monitors), electrocardiograms and other biomedical sampling such as blood sampling, 24-hour urine collections, and hair and saliva collection.

As a result, the research industry has tended to use nurses rather than interviewers, particularly for more complex measures. Our experience at NatCen Social Research, from running many large-scale surveys through our specialist nurse centre, provides some insights.

USING INTERVIEWERS OR NURSES

The first step in deciding whether to use interviewers or nurses is to assess whether measurements can be collected by interviewers or whether this needs the specific skills of nurses. On the Scottish Health Survey, interviewers took over from nurses in collecting certain biomeasures (height/weight, blood pressure) but only after a validation study examined the necessary processes. Often, even the simplest-looking measurements are more awkward than they seem – for example, for this study, technical advice on where to measure waists had to be simplified for the interviewers.

Training interviewers rather than nurses to take biomeasures may not be as cost effective as it might seem. Interviewers need training in aspects which nurses are likely to know, such as health and safety for measuring procedures; dealing with respondent reactions such as fainting; consenting to personal contact; and risks of working with biomedical samples (nurses usually have the relevant inoculations). This all adds to the cost of using interviewers, and so too do regular briefings to ensure that standards are maintained.

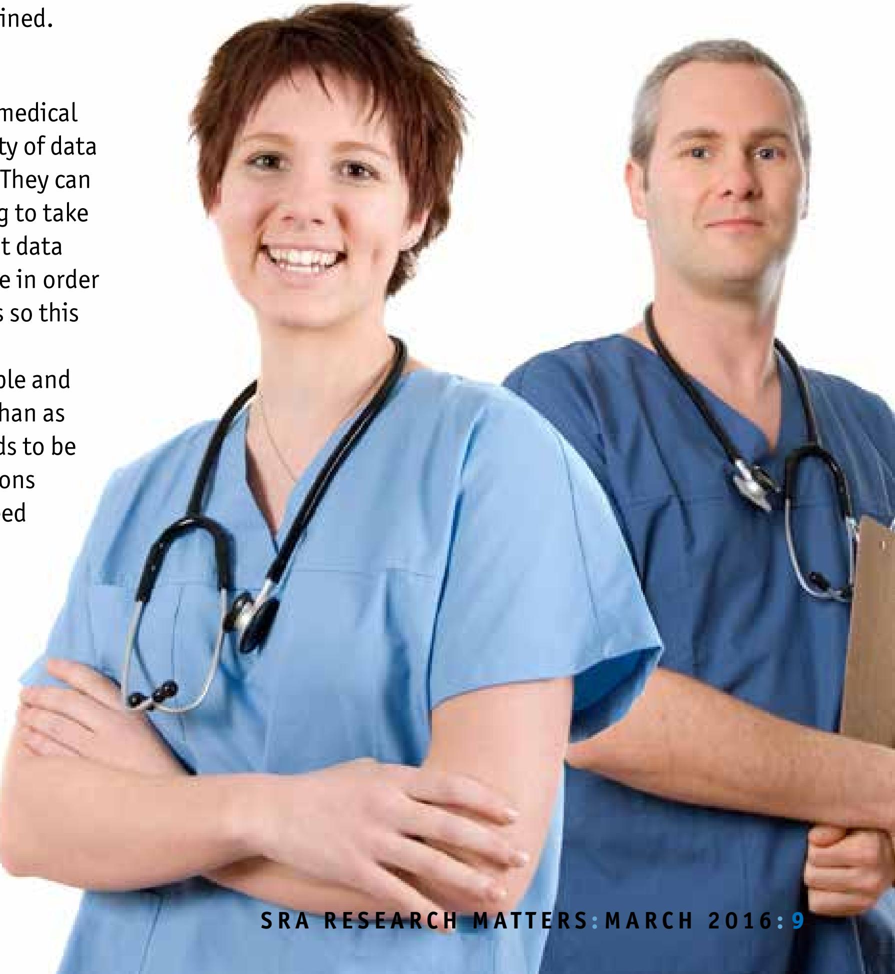
WHEN AND HOW TO USE NURSES

There are advantages to using nurses. They bring biomedical and professional skills which help to ensure the quality of data collected, and also minimise the risk to participants. They can take complicated measurements; do not need training to take blood pressure or blood samples; and understand that data needs to be gathered according to protocol every time in order to reduce variability. Nurses are seen as professionals so this may improve response rates.

This does not mean that using nurses is always simple and straightforward. Their role as data collectors rather than as nurse practitioners (which they are in 'real-life') needs to be clearly established: they should not diagnose conditions or give specific health advice to respondents. They need to pay particular attention to certain protocols such as disposing needles used for blood sampling when in respondents' homes.

A VIABLE OPTION

Maintaining a nurse field force is not straightforward, but it helps to maximise data quality and is likely to be the only viable option if complicated biomeasures are required. Future developments in health data recording, such as accelerometers and wearable technologies, may or may not reduce or increase the need for nurse involvement in social research. But trained nurses are likely to be needed for collecting biomeasures for some time yet.



How to approach shared evaluation

*By **Sarah Handley**, senior consultant, New Philanthropy Capital (NPC)*

As the voluntary sector comes under more and more pressure, not least in the press, it is increasingly important that charities show the difference they are making.

The sector needs to put greater effort into evaluating how they make this difference – not just to show funders, but to improve services and increase the influence of the sector's work. This will be achieved most powerfully when charities are collaborating, and are using their shared measurement and evaluation techniques.

Shared measurement is a broad term for when more than one organisation has a common approach to measuring impact. This can be done with various levels of sophistication, from agreeing on the same aims and outcomes to sharing technical solutions where data can be pooled and results compared. Shared approaches are not just for the charity sector – they can extend to the statutory and private sectors too, provided they are working towards similar outcomes. The NPC wellbeing measure[1] for example, has been used by charities, schools and the tri-borough[2] London authorities to support monitoring of children's wellbeing.

Inspiring Impact's[3] 2013 'Blueprint for shared measurement'[4] identifies key stages and success factors in developing a shared measurement approach. Drawing on case studies from charities, it explores the pre-conditions necessary for shared measurement, as well as important factors in developing, designing, scaling and sustaining this approach.

There are several projects underway at NPC which show how this might work. Our Journey to Employment (JET) toolkit[5] for example, is a shared approach to measuring employment outcomes for young people. It identifies outcomes such as emotional capabilities, skills and attitudes to work, with a series of indicators and measures covering each of these aspects. We knew it could not be a solo effort, so we invested time in establishing a committed group of individuals to work together. We met with employment advisers, government officials, programme managers and other experts to gain insights, while an advisory group of 19 experts guided the design of the framework.

For it to be used at scale, it needed to be accessible, meaningful and relevant – so our framework is flexible. We drew on existing resources and talked to peers to make sure our measures are valid and reliable. The next step is to create an online platform to allow organisations working on youth employment to gather and share data using these measures. We are not quite there yet, but it will really help to embed and sustain JET.

One way to build enthusiasm for shared measurement is through the Inspiring Impact programme, run by NPC alongside others in the charity sector. It shares examples of good shared measurement, and aims to inspire more of this. We published a report[6] last month, which identifies important benefits from shared approaches.

One charity already spearheading this sort of work is SafeLives, a national domestic abuse organisation which sets a great example of the benefits of using data from sustained shared measurement approaches. It runs 'Insights', which records safety outcomes of over 40,000 adults experiencing domestic abuse. Over 40 organisations use the programme, including refuges and independent advocates for victims. Data is pooled so that SafeLives has national intelligence, which was most recently used to advise the UK Government on its violence against women and girls strategy. At local level, Insights users benefit from using an approach which is more sophisticated than one they could have set up on their own, while the data has helped them to understand their users better and to tailor services accordingly.

There are benefits beyond this. The collaboration involved in shared measurement is critical to establishing a decent approach in the first place, but is also a valuable consequence. SafeLives visits Insights users regularly, to discuss what the data says and the lessons they can learn from it. It brings along benchmarking data and insights from other domestic violence services which are also using the shared system, helping users to reflect and improve.

Pooling data through a shared measurement approach can help build a larger evidence base to identify what works best for our beneficiaries. Shared measurement does seem to be greater than the sum of its parts, and we hope that all sectors embrace it more.

1 www.well-beingmeasure.com

2 Westminster City Council, Hammersmith and Fulham London Borough Council, and Kensington and Chelsea London Borough Council

3 UK-wide collaborative programme, working with the charity sector to help organisations know what and how to measure http://inspiringimpact.org

4 Ní Ógáin, E., Svistak, M. and de Las Casas, L. (2013) Blueprint for Shared Measurement [download] Available at: http://inspiringimpact.org/resources/blueprint-for-shared-measurement [Accessed 29/2/16]

5 Kail, A., Plimmer, D., Ní Ógáin, E., Harries, E. and John Copps (2014) The Journey to Employment (JET) Framework [download] Available at: www.thinknpc.org/publications/the-journey-to-employment [Accessed 29/2/16]

6 Handley, S., Sabri, F. and Kazimirski, A. (2016) Shared measurement: greater than the sum of its parts. Available at: http://inspiringimpact.org/resources/blueprint-for-shared-measurement/#x [Accessed 20/2/16]

When research findings are not what was expected

Dr Louise Morpeth, co-director, Dartington Social Research Unit, and member of the consortium responsible for Family Nurse Partnership in England

Often research confirms what we already know (or think we know) or, worse still, provides conclusions with strong caveats. The recent randomised controlled trial of the well-regarded Family Nurse Partnership (FNP) programme does neither, and raises serious questions about how public services support vulnerable women and their babies.

FNP – an intensive, home-visiting, preventive approach offered for up to two and half years to first-time pregnant young women – has all the hallmarks of an effective intervention. It is a carefully-crafted programme with a strong theoretical foundation and a 30-year history of continuous rigorous testing in the US. Although few observers expected the impact to be as strong in the UK, given our welfare and healthcare systems, the results published recently in The Lancet came as a surprise[1].

The study is an exemplar of a well-designed and well-executed experimental evaluation. The complexity and sophistication of the study sit in stark contrast to the researchers' blunt conclusions that 'there was little advantage to adding FNP to existing health service provision in England and [that FNP] was not cost-effective from the perspective of maternal outcomes.'(Robling et al, 2015: 30)[2]

For mothers' primary outcomes, namely smoking in pregnancy and a second pregnancy within two years, no differences were detected between the intervention and comparison group. Similarly, on the child outcomes of birth weight and emergency attendance at hospital, no differences were detected. A sub-group analysis was conducted to explore these effects on particular groups, for example, younger women or those living in more disadvantaged circumstances. Again, no differences were found. The study also examined a wide range of secondary outcomes (for example, service use and employment) and, for most, the picture was the same.

Since FNP costs around £2,000 per child more than usual services, it is understandable that the researchers concluded that it is not cost-effective from the perspective of maternal outcomes. However, they acknowledged that it was too early to say categorically that it was not cost-effective for child outcomes since the study only followed the children to age two.

FNP is preventive, aiming to affect longer-term outcomes, such as child development and contact with criminal justice and social care services. The trial in England did suggest small improvements in children's cognitive and language development, mothers' social support and self-efficacy, and the quality of the mother-partner relationship. These are tempered, however, by evidence of no detectable effects on maternal-child interaction and the use of maternal self-reporting rather than more objective indicators to measure child development.

These results have been difficult to digest for people with a commitment to FNP and evidence-based programmes more generally. Since 2007, hundreds of dedicated and highly-motivated family nurses have been trained. Evidence from the trial of their ability to effectively engage a group that is often labelled 'hard-to-reach' is unequivocal. Government has given unstinting support to this vulnerable group by ensuring that the programme increased capacity year-on-year. Local authorities, the bodies which commission FNP and have responsibility for public health, are being forced to make severe cuts to budgets. How should these different stakeholders respond to these findings?

Clearly, it would be neither ethical nor prudent to disregard this research. The results need to be fully understood and absorbed. Professor David Olds, FNP's developer, has provided a considered response to the findings, which include some concerns about the selection of some of the primary outcomes, for example, the programme has no track record of affecting birthweight, and suggestions about how we might learn from the results, for example, by narrowing the focus of the programme to those most in need[3]. The Cardiff team that evaluated the programme is now leading a follow-up study using administrative data, which may shed light on longer-term effects.

Furthermore, the implications for services as usual cannot be ignored. The study showed that these young women were making good use of regular services, such as primary care and children's centres, but neither FNP nor those services were making the difference we might expect in, for example, reducing smoking or increasing breastfeeding.

If a carefully-delivered, intensive and relational programme provided by motivated, well-trained nurses cannot make the difference we want, then it is time to take stock. There is a population of young women raising children who are living with considerable adversity. We need to learn from this research, and apply our hearts and minds to serve them better.

[1] Robling, M. et al (2015) Effectiveness of a nurse-led intensive home-visitation programme for first-time teenage mothers (Building Blocks): a pragmatic randomised controlled trial. The Lancet 387(10014), 146-155 doi: **http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(15)00392-X**

[2] Full report at: Robling, M. et al (2015) The Building Blocks Trial. Cardiff: Cardiff University School of Medicine [pdf] Available at: **http://medicine.cardiff.ac.uk/primary-care-public-health/research/early-years/completed-projects/building-blocks/** [Accessed 29/2/16]

[3] Olds, D. (2015) Building evidence to improve maternal and child health. The Lancet 387(10014), 105–107 doi: **http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/issue/vol387no10014/PIIS0140-6736(16)X0002-5**

How to get your findings across

Data visualisation and infographics

Done well, infographics and data visualisation make your work more memorable and more understandable. This is best explained by the Chinese proverb: 'Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand'. Words are good at telling, but visuals are better at showing. Throw in some interactivity and you can involve your reader too. **Lulu Pinney, independent designer and trainer**, gives some hints and tips for getting started.

The main factor in developing a successful infographic or data visualisation is clearly defining why it is wanted. This applies from the simplest chart to complex interactive explainers. Work based on 'we need an infographic' rarely fulfils its potential.

While charts and maps are the most common forms, other types of information lend themselves to visualisation such as connections, processes, actions and features. Collecting examples is a good way to see what works.

Frequently overlooked, graphic design is vital, not least because it has two jobs to do. As well as intelligent use of colour, image and layout to convey meaning, it also has to capture the right look and feel. These elements are subtle, even invisible, when done well. When lacking, the effort you put into developing your infographic is wasted because no-one will look at it, learn anything from it, or share it. But a successful in-house infographic is a great way of generating interest, and opportunities to create more.

To get started, I advise newcomers to:

- Identify a suitable project and get the blessing of their superiors to have a go so they get support with time and resources
- Be realistic about what is achievable
- Test it on other people when developing it
- Review the completed work and the process to refine it for the next time

There are tools which claim to create 'infographics' but they are best for charts and maps. If you are designing any other type of infographic, beware! Don't become a victim of style over substance. Be clear about why you want your infographic, otherwise you end up doing what the tool is capable of, not what you want.

With a clear story, suitable content and an understanding of the value of graphic design, successful data visualisation and infographics are well within reach.

Lulu (www.lulupinney.co.uk) runs training courses in data visualisation and infographics for the SRA.

Your story on YouTube

Bringing data to life is not always easy, especially when trying to explain complex information on a sensitive topic. **Matt Jonas, campaigns manager at NatCen Social Research**, explains how his team set about explaining a complex dataset on smoking, drinking and drug use to young people in schools.

Reporting the findings of the 'Survey of smoking, drinking and drug use among young people in England' was a tough assignment because the finished product had to appeal to young people aged 12 to 15 and their teachers; it had to be pitched just right. Having weighed up several options, we decided that animation was the best method as it is concise and engaging and the format softened a serious subject.

The process of creating a communication is pure, simple, painful editing; the final script had fewer than 700 words. The art is omitting things without confusing the message.

First, we selected the statistics which we thought were important, and would appeal to young people. Then we drafted a script. Let's face it, a string of isolated statistics is not that interesting to many people, so the next job was to link these up to form a strong narrative to support and enhance the numbers. Language was also important: the data needed to be explained using words and concepts which an average 13-year-old would understand.

We then worked with an agency to develop a storyboard (a sequence of images) which represented the results but also entertained. It is not easy to keep the attention of young people, so the entertainment factor was a prime consideration for each scene. Lastly, we picked a narrator and the background music.

The animation has been shown in schools up and down the country, with many young people and teachers interested. But, once we put it on the NatCen YouTube channel, it took on a life of its own. The animation has had over 15,000 views. It is our most successful video ever, and more than 2% of those who watch the video go on to download the full report. So, the results of the study are now reaching a whole new audience.

See the animation at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wuiqd0SdMno

The software and strategies of sanity

By Tabetha Newman, Timmus Limited

I've spent the past 12 years running my own social research company – working as a freelancer and subcontracting other like-minded folk as and when I need them. I've been lucky enough to work for clients ranging from the Office of National Statistics to SpilGames in The Netherlands. I spend most of my time designing ways to collect robust data using online digital methodologies (including online surveys, remote user interviews, and process workflow architecture). I've come to rely on various useful apps and digital tools. Here's a summary of some of the software and strategies which keep me sane!

TIME MANAGEMENT

To make money – and survive as a vaguely normal human being – a freelancer has to be effective at time management. I'm 'online' most waking hours and have clients who contact me 24/7, so I've learned to separate work and home life. I have separate email addresses to field different clients as well as a personal email account. I also removed some work email accounts from my iPhone so I am not distracted by work emails unless I'm on my laptop or desktop. I share a calendar with my other half (we like **https://calendar.sunrise.am**) so we can schedule everything from school runs and after school clubs to our shared desk space and client meetings.

PROJECT MANAGEMENT

I often work as an informal project manager within a wider team. Online management software such as **https://basecamp.com** or **https://www.teamwork.com** really helps. These software tools allow me to share 'to do' lists, keep a record of important email threads, and access key documents with the team and client. This has saved a project on more than one occasion, and handy features such as a 'display/hide from client' option also help within team communications. There is another reason why using these tools helps me personally: I often have three or four projects on the go at any one time, each of which has its own detail and subject context. By using Basecamp or Teamwork, I can create discrete digital spaces for me to contemplate each live contract as a separate entity. It helps me get in the zone for each job.

MANAGING MONEY

Being a successful freelancer means being effective in several roles from research director to head of marketing, admin assistant to web designer. But in my experience, nothing depresses a freelancer more than managing money. Running the accounts – offsetting tax, managing cash flow, setting up indemnity insurance, checking bank statements and invoicing clients – takes time and is unpaid. I've found solace in a fantastic accountant (also a freelancer), plus **www.freeagent.com** which connects to my bank account, monitors my tax, logs expenses and fields invoices all in one place (others I know use **www.xero.com/uk**).

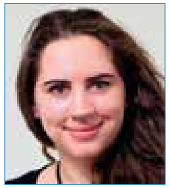
ANALYSING DATA

I'm a 'quant' by training, so I often carry out statistical analyses of data (usually non-parametric survey-based) during projects. However, the annual SPSS or Minitab software licencing fees for freelancers are extortionate (why do they do that?!) so I've found free alternatives. There are some fantastic online engines: I correct for multiple tests using **www.quantitativeskills.com/sisa/calculations/bonfer.htm**, and calculate sample sizes and confidence intervals at **www.mccallum-layton.co.uk/tools**. Chi Square, or Kruskal-Wallis tests can be calculated at **http://vassarstats.net**. It pays to double check with two sources – and check with SPSS when you get the chance – for reliability. My paranoia has led me to triple check on several occasions, but I've never yet been caught out by these online versions. It also helps to know enough R (**www.r-project.org**) to get by – some of the multivariate visualisations are worth the learning curve.

AND FINALLY ... PROCUREMENT WEBSITES

Maybe it's just me, but despite spending a significant amount of time registering with numerous national and local-level tendering portals, I have never – not once in 12 years – won a 'cold' tender. Indeed, I can count on two hands the number of tenders in all that time that even looked suitable to apply for. The whole experience is soul sapping. Digital is great for managing contracts and catch-up meetings (for example Skype or GoToMeeting) but, for winning work, I use the old fashioned method: get out there, network, attend conferences and meet people.

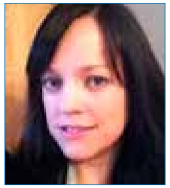
SRA Scotland update



Report by Sophie Ellison

We are planning our events programme which is likely to involve seminars on SALSUS (Scottish Schools Adolescent Lifestyle and Substance Use Survey) and using citizen juries for participative action research. Introduction to data visualisation and infographic design, a new course, is back by popular demand in May. Check out the SRA training pages for details and to book. To receive updates and stay in touch with us, visit the SRA website, or engage with us on Linkedin (**http://tinyurl.com/oh9aoh4**) or Twitter (**@SRA_Scotland**).

SRA Cymru update



Report by Faye Gracey

We have planned a varied programme for 2016 including four evening seminars, training courses, an afternoon tea social (12 April) and our annual festive event (1 December). Do keep an eye on the SRA website, Twitter (**@sracymru**), and LinkedIn Group (SRA Cymru) for details. Our committee has one vacancy. Please email me if you are interested in getting involved: **Faye.Gracey@wales.gsi.gov.uk**

SRA Ireland update

Report by Noelle Cotter

We are hoping to host events on research ethics, evidence-based policy making, evaluation and methods for researching with children. We will advertise all events on the SRA website, on Twitter and through our mailing list. To join our mailing list, email **sra.ireland@gmail.com**. Or follow us on Twitter: **@SRAIreland** for events, conferences and job listings.

Third Health Programme 2014-2020: call for proposals

The Third EU Health Programme is the main European Commission funding scheme to implement the EU health strategy with a budget of €449.4 million over seven years. The programme's main objectives are to:

- Promote health, prevent diseases and foster supportive environments for healthy lifestyles taking into account the 'health in all policies' principle
- Protect EU citizens from serious cross-border health threats
- Contribute to innovative, efficient and sustainable health systems
- Facilitate access to better and safer healthcare for EU citizens

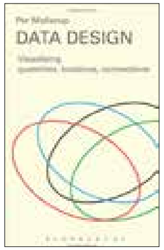
Call for proposals

The 2016 call for proposals is due to open in early March with a closing date likely to be the end June 2016. Further information is on the Consumers, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency (Chafea) website at: **http://ec.europa.eu/chafea/health/index.html**.

Contacts

Applicants can contact the national focal points for further information and advice on applying for the calls: for Ireland contact Kay Duggan-Walls at the Health Research Board, Dublin, tel: 353 1 2345187 **kdugganwalls@hrb.ie** and for the UK: Sarah Godman, NHS European Office, Brussels, tel +32 2 227 6448, +44 20 7799 6666 **Sarah.Godman@nhsconfed.org**

Data design: visualising quantities, locations, connections



Per Mollerup
Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2015
Reviewed by Helen Kara, SRA trustee

I read this book because I wanted to learn how to visualise research data. The blurb says it is for 'anyone concerned with presenting factual information in a clear and effective way'. The introduction states that the book 'describes problems, principles, and solutions for the visual display of information'. I was expecting a how-to book, but this book is much more about *what* you can do than how you can do it: as it says on the very next page, it 'concentrates on the principles', and says much less about the problems and solutions.

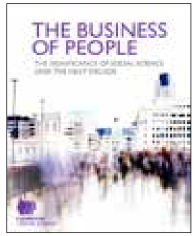
The book is divided into four sections: introductory, visualising quantities, visualising locations and visualising connections. It covers around 35 different types of visualisation, from the common (such as pie charts) to the unusual (such as isopleth maps). Some of the visualisations are plainly described, some come with snippets of history or humour, and some are accompanied by useful 'how to' tips or 'dos and don'ts'. The text could be described as oddly inconsistent or pleasingly idiosyncratic, depending on the reader's preferences.

Every visualisation is illustrated, often in colour, though some of the illustrations are too small to read clearly. The text is in a widely-spaced, left-justified column, leaving room for figure captions in smaller print on the right-hand side of each page – and also a lot of white space. This book is nowhere near as long as it seems, and has the air of a coffee table book trapped inside a paperback.

The index is too basic for the book's content. It mostly consists of section headings and people's names. I remembered seeing an interesting climate map of Australia, but 'climate map' wasn't in the index, nor was 'Australia', and I had to spend some time flicking through the book before I found the map I remembered in the 'choropleth maps' section.

The content itself is interesting and well-written. I came away knowing more about data visualisation, but not a huge amount more than I'd already learned from a one-day introductory workshop. The book may be trying to be 'all things to all people'. As a researcher, I would have preferred more information about how to make and use visualisations, and some guidance about which kinds of visualisation I should consider for different types of data. This book will be most useful for the complete beginner.

The business of people: the significance of social science over the next decade



Campaign for Social Science
SAGE Publications Ltd, 2015
Reviewed by Giles Lindon, Government Social Research

The Business of People argues that social science and social scientists are important to the success of the economy, political discourse and society. It proposes that UK social science is world-leading in quality, relative quantity and influence, and that government spending for science and innovation should increase. It also makes recommendations for the best use of government data, university funding and research priorities. It aims to reach a high-level audience: it explicitly targets MPs and their advisers, but implicitly gives examples for those who might be making budgetary decisions within national and local government departments – and, for that matter, within universities or businesses.

> **It proposes that UK social science is world-leading in quality, relative quantity and influence, and that government spending for science and innovation should increase**

Those already engaged in social science should not need convincing of the urgency of these arguments. Others will, however. Given this, I was slightly disappointed by the presentation and content of this booklet: while it mentions many examples of the value of social science, most are not discussed at any length. Graphs and graphics could have been much better used, and I found it oddly paced – at 30 pages, it is neither a short summary nor a detailed argument. For senior figures deciding budgets, a shorter, punchier argument would be better.

The pamphlet works best when it uses detailed case studies to illustrate a recommendation. The sense of the breadth of the social sciences might help practitioners to make their case more strongly.

Mental health service users in research: critical sociological perspectives

Staddon, P. (Ed)
Policy Press, 2013
Reviewed by Claire Fraser, EQUIP programme manager, University of Manchester

This book aims to present the benefits and difficulties of involving mental health service users in research. These are set out alongside a clear sociological account of how knowledge is traditionally constructed and the challenge to the traditional 'expert' power relationship which service-user involvement can bring. It should appeal to academic researchers who are involving service users in research and who wish to understand more of the sociological context and to develop and improve their practice. It might be useful for sociology students wanting to understand the user involvement movement. It also provides an accessible guide/introduction to those in the research community yet to involve service users in their research.

Written from a service-user perspective, it provides a useful overview of the historical context of silencing their voices and challenges the power relationship inherent in the traditional approach. It gives examples of the breadth and depth of service-user research in the UK and provides food for thought in the closing discussions about how service-user involvement may encourage, for example, experiential knowledge development.

As a researcher already working on a programme in which service-user involvement is central, I found the accounts of different research areas (for example racial tension, alcoholism, LGB service users) insightful and informative. I liked the focus on carers as well as an account of the researcher experience and the practical implications of patient and public involvement, areas often neglected in texts on this topic. The practical guidance on co-produced research and data analysis, and the challenges of navigating the territory between funder/academic institution expectations and those of service users will be useful to all. This makes the book more practical, as does the detail on responding to ethics committee queries and bias in sampling. Whilst it acknowledges the need for training for service users involved in research, more guidance would be useful.

The book may lead some readers to (rightly) challenge and improve their approach to user involvement. Chapter nine explores the term 'hard-to-reach' and how we might better understand why this is a 'problematic generalisation' based on assumed homogeneity. The chapter offers the well-meaning researcher an understanding of why it may be harder to engage some people since their unequal treatment in services may have left them reluctant to re-engage with those experiences. Importantly, it also highlights the steps we can all take to overcome the challenges.

Overall, I found this a thought-provoking and insightful text which will certainly guide and improve my own practice.

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 online at **http://the-sra.org.uk/sra_resources/publications/bookreviews**

Here are some of the titles on offer:

Digital ethnography principles and practice
Sarah Pink, Heather Horst, John Postill, Larissa Hjorth, Tania Lewis and Jo Tacchi, SAGE 2016

Participatory qualitative research methodologies in health
Edited by Gina Higginbottom and Pranee Liamputtong, SAGE 2015

Ethnography for the internet: embedded, embodied & everyday
Christine Hine, Bloomsbury, 2015

Social media in social research: blogs on blurring the boundaries
Kandy Woodfield, NatCen, 2014

Focus groups: a practical guide for applied research
Richard A. Krueger and Mary Anne Casey, SAGE, 2015

Grounded theory: a practical guide – second edition
Melanie Birks and Jane Mills, SAGE 2015

Interpreting qualitative data – fifth edition
David Silverman, SAGE, 2015

Mixed methods for policy research and program evaluation
Patricia E. Burch, SAGE, 2015

Qualitative online interviews: strategies design & skills – second edition
Janet E. Salmons, SAGE 2015

Understanding narrative inquiry: the crafting and analysis of stories as research
Jeong-Hee Kim, SAGE 2015

If you are interested, please email the office (**admin@the-sra.org.uk**) and we'll send you guidelines.

SRA training

QUALITATIVE COURSES

6 April	Analysis of qualitative data **(FULL – contact SRA for next date)**	London	
7 April	Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings **(FULL)**	London	
19 April	Designing a qualitative study	Edinburgh	
20 April	Focus groups	Edinburgh	
21 April	Qualitative interviewing	Edinburgh	
26 April	Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings	Edinburgh	
29 April	Grounded theory: a practical guide to qualitative analysis	London	
12 and 13 May	Designing and moderating focus groups (provided by NatCen Learning)	London	**NEW!**
19 and 20 May	Depth interviewing skills (provided by NatCen Learning)	London	
6 June	Qualitative interviewing	Cardiff	
6 June	Reporting qualitative data (provided by NatCen Learning)	London	**NEW!**
7 June	Focus groups	Cardiff	
9 June	Introduction to qualitative research (provided by NatCen Learning)	London	**NEW!**
17 June	Ethnographic methods: a practical guide	London	
30 June	Managing challenging interviews (provided by NatCen Learning)	London	

QUANTITATIVE COURSES

5 May	Web surveys: visual design and delivery	London	**NEW!**
10 May	Questionnaire design and testing **(FULL)**	London	
11 May	Understanding statistical concepts and basis tests	London	
12 May	Sampling and introduction to weighting	London	
1 June	Cognitive interviewing for testing survey questions	London	

EVALUATION

20 April	Advanced evaluation **(FULL)**	London	
10 May	Introduction to evaluation	Edinburgh	
16 May	Advanced evaluation **(FULL)**	London	
20 May	Introduction to evaluation	London	

OTHER RESEARCH SKILLS

12 April	Participative action research methods: an introduction **(FULL)**	London	
14 April	Introduction to data visualisation and infographic design	Cardiff	**NEW!**
20 April	Introduction to systematic reviews	London	
28 April	Introduction to data visualisation and infographic design	London	
9 May	Writing effective research reports	London	
18 May	Consultancy skills for social researchers	Cardiff	
19 May	Introduction to data visualisation and infographic design	Edinburgh	
15 June	Participative action research methods: an introduction	Edinburgh	

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

Tailored social research training for your staff

The SRA's expert trainers will provide a valuable learning experience for up to 15 of your staff, with course content which we can be tailor to suit.

The training takes place at your premises, making it a cost-effective option. Here are some recent courses we've run in-house with organisations around the UK:

- Advanced evaluation
- Questionnaire design
- Focus groups
- Project management for researchers
- Qualitative data analysis

For an informal chat contact the SRA office: admin@the-sra.org.uk or 0207 998 0304

SRA RESEARCH MATTERS

EDITORIAL POLICY

We welcome submissions for articles on any subject of interest to the social research community. Please email **admin@the-sra.org.uk** and ask for the Research Matters guidelines. Views expressed by individual contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the SRA.

PUBLICATION DATES 2016

SRA Research Matters will be published in June, September and December.

Next copy deadlines: **6 May**, **25 July** and **14 October**

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