

research matters



A diverse profession?

Isabella Pereira, SRA trustee and a research director at the Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute, asks whether social research walks the talk when it comes to representation and inclusion.



As social researchers, concepts such as representativeness and inclusivity are central to our work. We examine differences across groups and communities by gender, ethnicity, class, disability. We may earn a living through uncovering and describing the inequalities in society. But what do we know about how representative and inclusive our own profession is? Who are its winners and losers – and why?

There is an obvious moral imperative for ensuring that our profession is diverse. Put simply, ‘we all should have equal opportunity to develop, progress, and be rewarded and recognised at work’.¹

There is also the business case. Here, evidence is building, although understanding the effect of contextual factors and the measurement of both ‘diversity’ and its outcomes is challenging.² Researchers are confident, however, that an association between cultural diversity in organisations and increased creativity exists.³ This suggests that diversity can be a powerful engine for innovation, also identified by Lenny Henry recently when speaking of the effect of diversity in the television industry. He said, ‘I do not believe we have to choose between great television or great diversity. Diversity is not the thing you do as an afterthought. It is how you make great TV.’⁴ This is equally relevant in social research where creative responses are vital.

¹ CIPD. (October 2018, full report). Diversity and inclusion at work: facing up to the business case.

Available at: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/diversity-inclusion-report> [Accessed 22 October 2019].

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ <https://rts.org.uk/article/sir-lenny-henry-delivers-his-speech-rts-cambridge-convention-2019>

In making his argument, Henry was able to draw on evidence of how representation of minority groups had changed in his industry and the relevant impact. In the research sector this monitoring information does not exist, but key players are responding to the challenge. This year the MRS published the second wave of its survey on diversity in the market research sector,⁵ and the SRA began collecting relevant data from members in 2019 in our survey of members.

Generating evidence to *describe* the state of representation in the profession is clearly essential in taking steps to address inequalities. But we must also understand what factors are perpetuating inequalities, because ‘biases and discrimination are a key issue that impede progress towards diversity and inclusion’.⁶

We need, therefore, to explore *if and how groups are disadvantaged* at all levels of the profession (entry level, mid-career and senior level), and also within organisational cultures and our professional culture as a whole.

We also need to consider *who might be affected by biases*, and, critically, how different types of disadvantage might overlap (or intersect) in individual experiences. Social class provides a strong example of where ‘intersectionality’ will be important to understand. We do not yet know how the advantages of financial, social and cultural capital play out in our profession and what barriers exist for those who lack these assets.⁷ And naturally, there are similar concerns to be explored where ethnicity, gender, disability and sexuality are concerned.

⁵ Lightspeed Research. (May 2019). Where we stand: inclusion, diversity and equality (IDE) industry report. Available at: <https://www.mrs.org.uk/pdf/inclusionreport.pdf> [Accessed 22 October 2019].

⁶ CIPD, *ibid*.

⁷ ‘How social class can affect your pay’. 22 February 2017. Financial Times. <https://www.ft.com/content/8001d074-dcc9-11e6-86ac-f253db7791c6>

⁸ CIPD. (October 2019). Diversity management that works: an evidence-based review. Available at: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/diversity/management-recommendations> [Accessed 22 October 2019].

⁹ www.the-sra.org.uk/diversity

We will need to ask ourselves many questions in order to frame our thinking and focus our activities in addressing these issues. These may include:

- ▶ How should representation and belonging be part of our values? What do we mean and what are we aiming for?
- ▶ Which issues matter most? Are we more concerned about some groups than others? And which ‘sites of disadvantage’ concern us most?
- ▶ How should we account for the wide range of employment situations of social researchers? Researchers working as independent researchers will face different challenges to those in government or large agencies
- ▶ How do we make change happen? Advice on good practice is out there,⁸ but initiatives must suit our needs

On the SRA board, we are committed to taking further steps on these issues. Primarily, we know we need more evidence. To this end, alongside working with the MRS on its survey work, we are commissioning our own qualitative research with organisations and individuals to explore these issues. We are looking for *researchers to conduct the work*⁹ and also participate in it. We’d also like to start a conversation about these issues and hear about what initiatives members would like to see. To get involved please email advocacy@the-sra.org.uk and let us know your thoughts.

We’d like to be able to proud of our profession for its representativeness and inclusivity – but there’s a lot of work to do. Please help us take some first steps by getting involved.

Social Research Practice: next issue

Issue 9 is due in early 2020

The overall aim of the journal is to encourage and promote high standards of social research for public benefit. It promotes openness and discussion of problems. It is free to download at: www.the-sra.org.uk/journal-social-research-practice.

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



About time and cakes

SRA chair, David Johnson, muses on what's new and what's coming up for the SRA

Welcome to this quarter's Research Matters. I'm writing this editorial just as the clocks have gone back and with only 8½ weeks left until Christmas, leaving me with a rather Proustian sense of time lost and half-remembered.



Anyway, dispelling that somewhat melancholic feeling and a sudden desire for a madeleine, we have, as ever, a packed edition for you. We have articles on diversity in social research, a subject to which the board has been turning in recent months; insights on research and innovation policy in Wales; top tips on working as an independent researcher; going back to basics on questionnaires in the web age; the success of Welsh Government's analysts in winning the annual Government Social Research Award; an article on microdata; and our usual branch round-ups and book reviews.

In the centre spread we recognise Pam Campanelli and Liz Spencer's huge contribution to training social researchers in quantitative and qualitative methods respectively. On behalf of the trustees I'd like to add my thanks for their fantastic input to the SRA's training programme over many years, and I wish them all the best for their future ventures, coincidentally both involving jewellery!

The SRA has relaunched its website which is cleaner and fresher than before, and includes new features such as a blog page which Cath Dillon introduces on page 4. We'll be adding other features over time. I must say a huge thank you on behalf of the trustees to Graham Farrant and the whole SRA team who have stuck with what has proved to be very challenging task (when are IT launches ever easy?!).

This year's SRA conference on 10 December on the theme, 'Blurring boundaries and crossing frontiers in social research', looks at what there is to learn from research taking place across boundaries, and at new frontiers – methods, roles, disciplines and more. We're all set with our main speakers: Professor Sir Adrian Smith, Professor Pamela Cox and Professor Lorraine Whitmarsh and, as I've said about previous conferences, as well as being a chance to hear great speakers and attend interesting presentations,

it's a good place to catch up with current and former colleagues in the social research community. For those of you who are able to make it (and to date we have 240 bookings), don't forget the SRA AGM directly before the conference at 9.45am when you can hear a bit more about the SRA's achievements over the last year and meet some of the trustees.

We'd love to see you there and, until then, happy researching!

SRA SOCIAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

[About](#) [Training](#) [Events](#) [Publications](#) [Resources](#) [Careers](#) [Ethics](#) [Regional groups](#) [Join us](#)

Join SRA Today

- Stay informed.
- Get member discounts.
- Join the research community.

[Register Today >](#)

SRA Annual Conference 2019
10 December, London

- Sir Adrian Smith (keynote), Director, Alan Turing Institute
- Pamela Cox (plenary), social historian, BBC2 author and presenter
- Lorraine Whitmarsh (plenary), Director, Centre for Climate Change and Social Transformations

Plus Workshops, Masterclasses, Research Gallery, networking...
[More details and to book](#)

Training >

Introduction to Evidence Reviews
Nov 14 - Nov 14 2019
London

Designing a qualitative study (Qualitative data collection)
Nov 13 - Nov 13 2019
London

[Sign up for the SRA Mailing List](#)

The SRA Blog >

The latest edition of the *SRA Journal* is out now

Articles:
Towards closer disciplinary integration of international social research beyond Brexit
Linda Hantrais, LSE and Loughborough University

Doing research in care homes: the experiences of researchers and participants
Jenni Brooks, Sheffield Hallam University; Kate Gridley and Gillian Parker, University of York

Consulting the oracle: using the Delphi method in research with undocumented migrant children
Andy Jolly, University of Wolverhampton

Publications > **Resources >** **Jobs >** **Ethics >**

Introducing the SRA blog

By Cath Dillon, commissioning editor of the SRA blog, and research and evaluation consultant, Briest Dillon Ltd

If you follow the SRA on Twitter, you will have seen our latest publication. We recently launched the SRA blog to offer a place for informal, inspiring and (occasionally) provocative writing from social researchers.



An energetic team of SRA members has been posting articles every week. These reflect the SRA's role as a professional membership organisation: promoting high standards in social research through education, guidance and connecting the research community. We've published 20 original posts in our first three months.

Catch-up on the blog

The first guest blogger was Helen Barnard of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation on communicating research about poverty. Helen Kara then shared lessons learned from her first 20 years as an independent researcher, and is seeking posts from other independents (see contributions from Camilla Gordon on creative facilitation and Adam Pearson on his freelance journey). A post from an 'undercover researcher' called for professional vigilance over the use and reporting of non-random surveys.

There are several useful 'how to' posts, with tips for running inclusive focus groups (Lucy Ellis, Youth Sport Trust); managing large online communities (Anna Cordes, Which?); and creative research communication (Jenni Brooks on the first SRA North knowledge cafe).

There are also ideas about how to transfer research skills to new contexts and develop professionally (see Sophie Payne-Gifford on the Parenting Science Gang and Jessica Smith on her Winston Churchill fellowship).

The team

Preparations began in May, with a call for volunteers willing to write, commission and review blog posts on a regular basis. We are now 14-strong. The team includes representation from agency, independent, third sector and public sector researchers. There are early career researchers, and each SRA region is represented (except Ireland). We have gaps for quantitative, Government Social Research (GSR) and academic researchers in particular, but do get in touch if you would like to join the team, whatever your research background or career stage.

Themes

We started by asking every volunteer to propose one blog post that they would like to write and two commissions they would like to pursue. From these we prioritised the first set of articles.

The proposals revealed what might be at the forefront of SRA members' minds right now: participation and participatory methods (Hannah Ormston on co-production and Rowena Hays on peer research); evaluation frameworks and alternative approaches (Leanne Teichner on complexity theory); routes into social research (Rhianna Mallia on volunteering); and researcher wellbeing (Emilie Smeaton on trauma-informed research).

Health, young people, maternity services and managing sensitive topics more generally while working with hard-to-reach participants were topics that appeared more than once in proposals. At the time of writing, the team is compiling questions for social research in a post-Brexit (or otherwise) future.

The common feature of blog posts so far is the personal accounts of being a researcher alongside descriptions of methodology and illustrations of how research findings are used to influence policy, improve public services and evidence change.

Guidelines

There is a light-touch review process with a turnaround of less than a month. The SRA's digital communications manager, Jessica Nelligan, makes sure that posts are web-ready and fit with style guidelines. A set of quality guidelines asks reviewers (members of the blog team) to assess each post against SRA research standards (interesting, useful, fit for purpose, transparent, independently validated, useable and ethical).

If you would like to write 800 to 1,000 words about your experience of working in a particular policy area, or using a particular research approach, do get in touch with a 200-word (max) proposal.

Who to contact:

Jessica Nelligan:

jessica.nelligan@the-sra.org.uk

Where to find blog posts:

SRA website: <https://the-sra.org.uk/SRA/Blog/Blog-Home.aspx>

Twitter: [@TheSRAOrg](#)

The editorial team:

Cath Dillon (commissioning editor, independent researcher)

Helen Kara (independent research editor, independent researcher)

Sophie Payne-Gifford (qualitative editor; University of Hertfordshire)

Patten Smith

(quantitative editor; Ipsos MORI)

Petra Boynton (UCL, independent researcher and journalist)

Anna Cordes (Which?)

Lucy Ellis (Youth Sport Trust)

Rowena Hay

(Shortworks, independent researcher)

Emma Hollywood

(Skills Development Scotland)

Andrew McKeown (Ipsos MORI)

Hannah Ormston (Carnegie UK)

Bessie Pike (Walnut Unlimited)

Emilie Smeaton

(National Lottery Community Fund)

Leanne Teichner (Data Cymru)

Making our questionnaires fit for web: back to basics



Gerry Nicolaas, head of the methodology & innovation hub, National Centre for Social Research

The problem

Within the last five years, social survey data collection in the UK has changed significantly. Gone are the days when face-to-face interviewing was the obvious data-collection mode for academic and government-funded social surveys. Instead we see the growing use of online data collection, sometimes on its own but predominantly in combination with more traditional data-collection modes such as postal, telephone and face-to-face. This development has revealed questionnaire design practices that are not suitable for online data collection, and particularly not for smartphones which are increasingly the device of choice for online survey participants.

Our decades-long use of face-to-face interviewers to collect survey data has allowed us to develop questionnaires that rely on interviewers to motivate and help respondents to produce full and accurate answers. This has allowed us to slip into some bad habits to meet the complex data needs of many stakeholders, resulting in long and dull questionnaires, and questions that are complicated and burdensome to answer. The issue facing survey customers and designers is whether to adapt these questionnaires so that they can be completed online or to develop new measures that collect comparable data across modes and devices.

Getting the basics right

The temptation is to stick with what we know and to adapt existing questions rather than starting from scratch. That applies to new surveys as well as existing surveys. Existing surveys,



however, have the added complication that there is an entrenched desire to maintain valuable time series which can thwart changes to question design – even when it can be demonstrated that this will improve data quality. However, if we switch to online data collection without fixing our bad questionnaire design, we get the worst of two worlds: uninterpretable trends with unimproved questions. To successfully use online data collection in social surveys, it is vital to get the basics right.

1. Good questionnaire design

It is often claimed that this new era of online data collection requires new questionnaire design principles. However, adhering to the recommendations made in classic text books that were written before the internet became publicly available would go a long way towards making questionnaires suitable for online completion, including on smartphones. This includes keeping questionnaires short, minimising text length, reducing response lists, using simple language, minimising cognitive burden by keeping tasks manageable and so on (see for example Payne, 1951; Kahn et al, 1957; Sudman et al, 1982; Converse et al, 1986). We need to acknowledge that there is a problem with how we currently design questionnaires, and that we have neglected to enforce the basics of our craft.

2. A user-centred approach

Given the absence of an interviewer to motivate and assist online survey participants, it is vital that we adopt a user-centred approach to questionnaire design. To meet the data needs of survey customers, we need to understand what motivates people to take part in online surveys; how they access online questionnaires; and how

they process questions and provide answers online. Like the Government Digital Service, we need to adopt a ‘user-first’ mantra.

3. A multi-disciplinary approach

Designing good questionnaires for online use requires a multi-disciplinary approach. In addition to subject experts and survey methodologists, it requires technical knowledge and expertise in visual design, usability testing and data processing.

4. Closer collaboration between survey customers and designers

Finally, ensuring that questionnaires are fit for online and smartphone completion will benefit from closer collaboration between survey customers and those responsible for survey design and delivery. Decisions about questionnaire design are often made by customers after consulting internal and external stakeholders, and this can result in lengthy questionnaires and cognitively burdensome questions. Involving survey designers from the outset can help to manage expectations of what can be collected online.

References:

- Payne, S.L. (1951). *The art of asking questions*. Oxford, England: Princeton U. Press.
- Kahn, R.L. and Cannell, C.F. (1957). *The dynamics of interviewing: theory, technique and cases*. New York: Wiley.
- Sudman, S. and Bradburn, N.M. (1982). *Asking questions: a practical guide to questionnaire design*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Converse, J.M. and Presser, S. (1986). *Survey questions: handcrafting the standardized questionnaire*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.



Research and innovation policy in the UK: an insight from Wales

Former chair of SRA Wales, Jennifer Evans, currently senior research manager at the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), reflects on research policy for universities and how HEFCW helps researchers to navigate this context in Wales.

Research in universities

There are many researchers working in universities across the UK who are shaping collaborations and engaging even more researchers beyond the university setting. The range of funding schemes delivered through research councils and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) alone is mindboggling. The effort that goes into making this system work is substantial and, when you can see it making a difference, incredibly satisfying. This system of research activity that takes place in and with universities constitutes the policy area I work in.



How HEFCW fits into this context

The role of HEFCW (and UK counterparts) is to be part of the UK research and innovation policy environment for universities, delivering core funding to universities in Wales and supporting our institutions to be part of the UK system. We work closely with UKRI delivering UK-wide funding programmes and making sure that Wales' capacity to contribute is maximised.

Our new [Vision for Research and Innovation in Wales](#)¹⁰ highlights:

- ▶ Opportunities for our universities in Wales where government priorities reflect our universities' research strengths
- ▶ Challenges that Wales faces in its own context. For example, Wales has a disproportionately high share of small- and medium-sized businesses which often find it more difficult to collaborate, compared to those areas of the UK where research- and development-focused firms are much easier to access
- ▶ Potential for changing the funding and governance landscape

Fundamentally, we want to reassure universities in Wales that we understand this, and are committed to doing everything we can to ensure that Wales can engage and perform locally, nationally and internationally in the future. We draw on the full system which includes collaborations and innovation, whether driven or supported

by universities in Wales. It's through these collaborations – that exist across the UK too – that many SRA members in Wales are likely to be part of this system of research policy.

How to ensure future success

To date, HEFCW has remained in the background because, as a small policy organisation, there hasn't been capacity to be otherwise. In contrast, our counterpart in England is visible and active. Future success in Wales requires us to be open and available to those trying to navigate the system, as well as reaching the people who oversee it.

While recognising that working relationships with university structures can be challenging, I encourage those of you who are not already part of them to engage with universities in your area, if only to find out about the variety of work underway.

Many universities have public networks or host public lectures or seminars. Through social media, academics are increasingly accessible and keen to celebrate and share their work. Each year, the ESRC runs its [Festival of Social Science](#)¹¹ which is a perfect opportunity to find out more about the social science research happening in a university near you.

Research develops in many different ways. Establishing a relationship that leads to being partners on research funding can take time, but it's an exciting and collaborative time. Do take advantage of this and be part of it!

Research policy becomes more complex when you realise that research per se isn't devolved. Anyone, anywhere, can conduct research, and no single central function oversees this. However, economic development activities, which rely so heavily on research activity, **are** devolved, as is education. Therefore, the oversight of *university* research is devolved too. HEFCW does this in Wales; the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland; and, correspondingly, Research England and the Scottish Funding Council.

¹⁰ https://www.hefcw.ac.uk/documents/publications/hefcw_reports_and_statistics/Research%20and%20Innovation%20the%20vision%20for%20Wales%20English.pdf

¹¹ <https://esrc.ukri.org/public-engagement/festival-of-social-science/festival-events/>

What's new in microdata?

By Andrew Engeli, head of Secure Research Service policy, Office for National Statistics

This is an exciting time for those wishing to conduct research using confidential (official sensitive) data.¹² At a recent high-level meeting of stakeholders hosted by the UK Statistics Authority, participants elaborated a shared vision of how these kinds of data can be provisioned to the research community to conduct research for the public benefit, all the while maintaining the security and confidentiality of those data.

These kinds of data are becoming increasingly powerful for the social research community, especially in their ability to provide statistical counterfactual samples for policy evaluation and impact measurement. Within the Secure Research Service (SRS) of the ONS, we are implementing a series of measures that will match the aspirations articulated at the workshop, and which will take the provision of microdata and administrative data into the next decade with the aim of generating policy-relevant research.



research using confidential data in any kind of policy evaluation work. The UK Statistics Authority has rolled out its new ethics self-assessment tool which will assist independent researchers and those from the commercial sector who do not have in-house ethics boards in gaining ethics assent from the National Statisticians Data Ethics Committee.¹³

Data acquisition/linking

The Act has opened up the pathway to the SRS being able to offer more confidential data for research. In partnership with ADR UK, we are making good progress in acquiring new administrative data for research.

For example, the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy has made its National Energy Efficiency Data available in the SRS using the provisions of the Act. We are working closely with the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office in the acquisition of new datasets on crime and justice, which are eagerly anticipated by researchers in those fields. The ONS and the SRS continue to work closely with the Department for Education on creating linked datasets and bespoke national pupil database data extracts for research, and the ADR UK has funded a programme of work under the theme of 'data for children'. The SRS is also supporting the ADR UK-funded project on wage and employment dynamics that is using the annual survey of hours and earnings dataset linked to census and DWP/HMRC records to provide innovative ways of understanding wage pricing in the UK.

All of these datasets are available to approved projects from the academic, government, third and commercial sectors if there is a clear public benefit (such as a formal evaluation of a policy).

Data access and infrastructure

These developments have increased the demand for the provision of and access to microdata. We are meeting increasing demand on the service by increasing storage and processing capacity in the current platform, and users will notice improvements in performance. We are enabling assured organisations to connect to the SRS from safe locations in their organisation under the new Assured Organisational Connectivity certification scheme.

We are also developing an online researcher accreditation service (RAS) to ensure we meet our obligations under the Act and the ADR UK partnership, and that we provide a one-stop service for researchers to submit applications and make service requests. The RAS is currently in private beta and will be available for all researchers to use by March 2020.

Conclusion

These developments mean that more data and more access are being provided to all segments of the research community to conduct research that has a clear public benefit. At the same time, the new regulatory framework provides reassurance to research subjects and the general public that the data that they have provided is being handled and used in accordance with the highest ethical and security standards.

Recent research by NatCen has shown that ONS remains among the most trusted public institutions in the UK, and the evolution of the SRS is being carefully managed in order that we nourish that trust and reciprocate with transparency and openness about the value of microdata and administrative data to the improvement of public policy.



The Digital Economy Act

The Digital Economy Act 2017 has created a new regulatory framework governing access to administrative data for research purposes, including the accreditation of researchers, projects and data processors.

The first meeting of the new Research Accreditation Panel took place in October, and the first projects using these kinds of data have been approved under the new legal gateway. This will become the default process for anyone in the social research community wishing to undertake

¹² By this, we mean data that can, without appropriate controls being put in place, identify research subjects (individuals, businesses and so on).

¹³ An article about this toolkit appeared in the September 2019 edition of Research Matters.

New ventures in applied creativity

In this article we honour the contributions to the social research profession of Pam Campanelli and Liz Spencer. They have been the backbone of the SRA training programme for 25 years, running quantitative (Pam) and qualitative (Liz) courses across the full range of skills: design, data collection, analysis and reporting. Their knowledge and expertise have benefited many hundreds of course participants. Together they have guided generations of research practitioners to acquire practical wisdom in research.

Pam and Liz are not only two of the UK's foremost research trainers and consultants: both have 'hinterlands' with talents in art, craft and music, and they are now moving on from research to focus on these creative areas. We thank them, wish them all the best, and look forward to seeing more of their new work!

PAM CAMPANELLI

Dr Pamela Campanelli is a survey methods consultant, chartered statistician, chartered scientist and fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, with a PhD in statistics, an MA in survey methods and a BA in psychology. Prior to her consultancy role, Pam worked at the University of Michigan, the US Bureau of the Census, ISER and NatCen.

Her main interests and publications are in the study of survey error and data quality issues, especially questionnaire design, question testing strategies, survey sampling/weighting and analysis. Pam is a renowned trainer on these topics, working with the SRA, RSS, NRCM and others in the UK, and for governments, universities and companies around the world.

Q: What should people bring to a training course to get the most out of it?

An open and inquisitive mind.

Q: What makes for a successful training session?

When the trainer is well-prepared, knowledgeable about the subject and is an engaging speaker thus encouraging the audience to engage and to ask questions.

Q: Any memorable training days?

I love teaching. I aim for participants to leave the day feeling inspired, having learned a lot and thoroughly enjoyed the day. But there are the days, when you know that you have taught it 'just right' and it is as if something magical has happened.

Q. What are the main changes you've seen in your area of research during your career?

I've always been a quantitative specialist. Here are some of the changes I've seen:

- ▶ Introduction and vast growth of web surveys
- ▶ Reduction of quantitative interview surveys due to cost
- ▶ Last UK census ever will be 2021 due to cost
- ▶ Rise of big data and data science (I see these as a complement rather than an alternative to surveys)
- ▶ Lower response rates, but ideally a focus on nonresponse bias
- ▶ Changes in sampling frames (such as address-based sampling introduced in the US)
- ▶ Fewer probability designs, due to cost (sadly)
- ▶ Proliferation of ways to test a questionnaire (21 ways!)
- ▶ Changes in cognitive interviewing analysis and reporting

Q. What advice do you have for new researchers entering the profession?

Be flexible as there is a lot of change in the industry, but don't forget to look at the past at the lessons learned and the recommendations made.

Q. Tell us about your career change

Ever since I was a child I've loved art and music. I will be exploring the things I've always wanted to make while looking out for what people most want to purchase. I used to make sterling silver jewellery, but I have now been playing with metal clay, resin, Perspex and glass for jewellery making. I will also be expanding to welding sculptures, mosaic/stained/fused glass and painting coats/chairs/handbags.

I became a published music composer in the spring of 2019: (<https://www.sempremusic.co.uk/full-catalogue-list/saxophone/saxophone-quartets/>) scroll down to Contrasting Moods Quartet (SM-S165FF). And I'm looking forward to getting back up to speed in performing on saxophone and clarinet.



LIZ SPENCER

Liz Spencer is a sociologist and a fellow of both the Academy of Social Sciences and the Royal Society of Arts who has specialised in qualitative methods since 1973. She has worked for several UK universities (including the LSE and the University of Essex), at NatCen, and as an independent consultant. As well as for the SRA, she has taught short courses for the universities of Hong Kong, Fribourg, Zurich, Aberdeen, Exeter and Essex, and has been a visiting professor at the Institute for Higher Studies in Vienna. Together with Jane Ritchie, she pioneered 'Framework', a matrix-based approach to data management and display.

Q: What should people bring to a training course to get the most out of it?

Curiosity, attentive listening and an open mind so they can gain transferable skills as well as benefit from meeting fellow researchers from a range of different settings. A desire to carry out good quality research.

Q: What makes for a successful training session?

Creating a safe learning environment, a lively, enthusiastic and knowledgeable teacher, well-structured workshop sessions to put principles into practice, lots of discussion and interaction. A comfortable and welcoming venue.

Q: Any memorable training days?

Too many to mention. I feel very privileged to have been able to share my experience with so many researchers over the years.

Q: What are the main changes you've seen in your area of research during your career?

There is no simple answer to this question. One development I have noticed is the popularity of mixed method projects which means a



wider range of researchers engaging in qualitative research. While welcoming this, I sometimes wonder if the researchers themselves have a clear understanding of the respective contribution of the qualitative and quantitative components. Other developments I think are deeply regrettable: for example, pseudo-qualitative methods which essentially try to quantify qualitative findings through ranking and scoring in the mistaken belief that this makes them more robust. All smoke and mirrors if you ask me.

Q. What advice do you have for new researchers entering the profession?

Qualitative research is a very broad church, involving many different approaches and a lot of judgement rather than strict rule following. Consequently, it is important to try to develop your own understanding of qualitative challenges. Don't be frightened to question people who try to tell you there is only one way of doing something: ask them for their rationale and decide whether or not you find it convincing – from a *qualitative* perspective.

Q. Tell us about your career change.

I have always loved creating things, and originally wanted to go to art college before pursuing a more academic career. Over the past ten years I have been designing jewellery, using semi-precious stones and, more recently, polymer clay. But I love teaching and have been missing it. So, my new venture is to run jewellery design workshops at my studio in Suffolk. Liz Spencer has morphed into Elizabeth Sadler (my married name): www.elizabethsadler.com and www.craftcourses.com/categories/jewellery/polymer-clay-jewellery.





Government Social Research Award 2019

By SRA Wales

Congratulations to Welsh Government analysts (below) for winning the Government Social Research (GSR) Award 2019 for 'the practical value GSR has added to inform the development and implementation of the Childcare Offer'. The award is a fantastic endorsement of all the work they have done, and of the role GSR can play to help develop, implement and improve policy, delivery and legislation.

'This is an excellent example of using social research to improve and underpin policy and legislation'

Dr Andrew Goodall, director general Health and Social Services, and chief executive NHS Wales

Their analysis has contributed to the development and implementation of the Welsh Childcare Offer, and in particular:

- ▶ Determined the preferred option to administer national eligibility checking for childcare funding, which placed the least burden on parents to apply, and the greatest value for public money¹⁴



Photo left to right: Sarah Crocker (head of policy analysis, Childcare Offer), Hannah Davies (senior research officer, Education and Skills), Faye Gracey (research and evidence lead, Childcare, Play and Early Years), Katrina Morrison (Fast Stream research officer, Childcare Offer)

- ▶ Justified the continuation of piloting, by providing indicative evidence of a positive contribution of the Childcare Offer to the Welsh Government Employability Plan¹⁵ and Economic Action Plan.¹⁶ Monitoring data and independent evaluation has found positive indications¹⁷ with parents reporting increased flexibility in the types of jobs they do, the hours they work, and their disposable income
- ▶ Developed an Additional Learning Needs (ALN) grant within the Childcare Offer programme. Case studies identified challenges that children with ALN have in accessing early childhood education and care. This evidence informed policy: an ALN grant has been awarded to LAs to help improve accessibility of settings¹⁸
- ▶ Informed the new Childcare Offer capital programme, based on recommendations to improve alignment of early education and childcare.¹⁹ The recommendations were informed by evidence from interviews with LAs, childcare practitioners and teachers
- ▶ Confirmed that the implications of Brexit are likely to be insignificant in comparison to substantive issues the sector already faces in recruitment and retention of skilled childcare practitioners,²⁰ based on a robust survey of setting managers. This has informed workforce development, business support activity, and the 'We Care' campaign²¹

What is the Welsh Childcare Offer?

This manifesto commitment provides working parents with a mixture of childcare and early education for children aged 3 or 4, up to 30 hours a week. The mixture varies geographically.

¹⁴ <http://www.senedd.assembly.wales/documents/s81485/Revised%20Explanatory%20Memorandum.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://gov.wales/employability-plan>

¹⁶ <https://businesswales.gov.wales/economic-action-plan>

¹⁷ <https://gov.wales/evaluation-childcare-offer-wales-0>

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ <https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-06/181122-alignment-childcare-offer-wales-foundation-phase-en.pdf>

²⁰ <https://gov.wales/implications-brexit-social-care-and-childcare-workforce>

²¹ <https://www.wecare.wales/>

The team's work has used a full range of research methods, offering significant value to the work of the GSR including:

- ▶ Developing theory of change and logic modelling which provided an analytical framework and helped engender a collective understanding of the different departmental and cross-party objectives of the Welsh Childcare Offer
- ▶ Using high-quality economic modelling to inform early implementation decisions by estimating take-up and determining affordability of the offer
- ▶ Developing regulatory impact assessments (RIAs), informing the Childcare Funding (Wales) Bill and transition from early implementation to 'business as usual'
- ▶ Establishing a robust monitoring system, providing regular management information for the government and local authorities
- ▶ Implementing bespoke pieces of high-quality research and analysis, including ground-breaking ethnography, analysis of Care Inspectorate Wales service registration/inspection data
- ▶ Submitting a successful business case for administrative data linking at the Secure Anonymised Information Linkage (SAIL) Databank, to

indisputably determine long-term outcomes of the Childcare Offer

- ▶ Undertaking independent evaluations, to help improve the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the offer

The team is keen to highlight the value of the wider research community's contribution to this work including confirming 'what we know' and evidence gaps, and sharing methodological lessons. SRA networks and events have also been key to making and maintaining these links in bringing together public, private, third sector and academic researchers.

SRA REPORTS

SRA Scotland

By Karen Kerr

Glasgow Evaluation Group and SRA Scotland recently hosted a well-attended lunchtime seminar: 'Internal versus external evaluation and research support services – the advantages and challenges of each'. To find out about SRA Scotland and future events go to <http://the-sra.org.uk/home/sra-scotland/> and follow us [@SRA_Scotland](#). If you would like to get involved with our organising committee, please do get in touch with me: karen.kerr@sds.co.uk or **07584 470028**. We are always keen to welcome new committee members and would love to hear from you.



SRA Cymru

By Faye Gracey

Great to see lots of familiar and new faces at our last evening seminar. Thanks to Luke Sibieta (Institute for Fiscal Studies, Education Policy Institute and Sibieta Economics of Education) for leading an insightful presentation on his analysis of the differences in education spending across UK nations (you can see the slides on the SRA website's events archive). We're refining our plans for 2020 and are always pleased to hear from researchers interested in getting more involved in the organisation of our activities, or simply sharing ideas and feedback. Do follow us [@SRACymru](#) to hear our news first. See <http://the-sra.org.uk/events/> for details of events. If you want to get more involved with our organising committee, do get in touch: faye.gracey@gov.wales or **03000 257459**.



SRA North

By Jenni Brooks

Our job shadowing pilot has been successful, and we will continue this as a rolling programme, so if you are in the north of England and would like to either offer a one-day placement, or shadow a researcher, please contact us (no deadline). We held an event about creative methods of research dissemination in September in conjunction with @engage at the University of Liverpool – you can find links to all the speakers in our SRA blog post. As ever, if you have any questions, ideas for events, or want to get involved, please get in touch [@SRANorth](#) and sranorth@gmail.com.



SRA Ireland

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

An interview with an independent researcher

Genna Kik from the Research Matters commissioning team asks Katie Spreadbury, independent researcher, about her experience and top tips.

Q. Can you tell us a bit about what you do: when did you start in research, and what sort of research do you do now?

A. I have worked in research since 2004, and became an independent researcher in 2016, after having my first child. I primarily work in social research helping research agencies when they need a bit of extra resource. Sometimes I support a whole project from start to finish, other times I come in for a specific part of the project such as the design or the reporting. Sometimes, I work across a research team, for example two days a week picking up whatever tasks need doing that week ... it really varies! I also have small-business clients who I support under my brand OrangeSheep Research. I help them run their own customer surveys – I think it is important for the industry that good quality research is available to everyone. So, I offer a flexible service to help them run their surveys to a high standard while keeping within their budget.

Q. What did you do before becoming an independent researcher?

A. I started off my career at BMRB (as it was then) and did my initial training there in their stakeholder team running customer and employee loyalty surveys. I then spent almost ten years at IFF Research, mainly working on the social research side of things but also continuing my experience in the commercial sector. My specialties were business research and learning and skills, but I worked across a whole range of sectors.

Q. Why did you decide to become an independent researcher?

A. After I had my children, I realised the 9 to 5 wasn't for me any longer – I wanted something I could fit in flexibly around looking after the kids. I am lucky enough to have family nearby who look after them while I work, and I can supplement this with evenings and weekends when I have a lot on or if one of them needs me on one of my usual working days. I started off on two days a week, but as my children get older and are starting school/preschool, I will be able to increase this.

Q. What have been some of the benefits?

A. The main benefit for me is the flexibility: I can pretty much choose when I work and how much I take on at any time, and I can fit my work around the school run and school holidays. Also, I mainly work from home so I avoid the daily commute, which makes things a lot less stressful in the mornings!



Q. What have been some of the challenges?

A. The main challenge is the regularity of the work. Inevitably, there are quiet periods when nothing comes along for a while, then suddenly three requests for help all arrive at the same time. It is hard to turn down work but at the same time, if you take too much on, there is no-one else to fall back on – it's you who has to do it – so you have to be quite organised with your time and workload.

Q. What top tips would you give to someone who is looking to become an independent researcher?

A. Keep in touch with people and make use of your contacts! A lot of my work has come from former colleagues and clients who heard I was doing this now, and who contacted me when things in their department got too busy and they needed a bit of short-term help. Also be prepared to manage your money carefully so you are covered in the quiet periods should they occur. The income isn't steady and isn't guaranteed, so you need to be prepared for this just in case.

Keep in touch with people and make use of your contacts...
Also be prepared to manage your money carefully

Stay connected, keep informed and up to date with your professional development

Make the most of the SRA's many membership benefits and services designed to support researchers across all sectors:

→ High quality training courses at 25% discount

Last year we ran 124 courses, covering different methods and techniques and taught by trainers with a practical focus on applied research. Whether you're new to social research and looking for an introductory course or an experienced researcher wanting to broaden your knowledge base, our training programme will support your learning at different levels.

→ Reduced delegate rates at our conferences and other events

Covering topical issues, often with a focus on research methods and the real-world experiences of researchers, our events are an excellent forum for researchers to meet and discuss research issues and share good practice.

→ Free access to over 5,500 social science journals

As a member you receive unrivalled access to the EBSCO collection of social science journals, almost all full text. A vital resource for researchers working outside academia.

→ Free access to our research ethics consultancy forum

Confidential guidance and advice for members on ethical questions and dilemmas, from our expert and knowledgeable ethics forum.

→ Quarterly magazine Research Matters

This popular magazine is available exclusively to SRA members for three months (and after that it's generally available on our website). A volunteer editorial committee drawn from members plans and commissions articles from practising researchers and others connected to social research.

→ Topical news stories in our bi-weekly newsletter for members

Fortnightly e-newsletter with latest news and comment.

→ Streamlined application for indemnity and public liability insurance

Coverage for professional indemnity and public liability insurance for SRA members through our arrangement with brokers WPS Insurance.

Find out more and make the most of all your membership benefits at www.the-sra.org.uk
If you're not a member yet check out our membership options at www.the-sra.org.uk/Benefits

What works now? Evidence-informed policy and practice

Annette Boaz, Huw Davies, Alec Fraser and Sandra Nutley (eds)

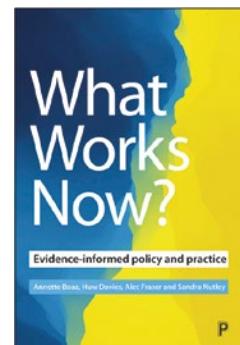
Policy Press, 2019

Reviewed by Dr Janet C. Bowstead, Royal Holloway, University of London

This is a timely and accessible book in the current 'post-truth' context of the UK and elsewhere. Some of the same authors and editors revisit the concerns of 'What works? Evidence-based policy and practice in public services' (Policy Press, 2000), and explore the changes and continuities in the 20 years since that publication. Across six fields of policy and practice, and five jurisdictions, they draw out shifts from evidence-based to a more nuanced concern with evidence-informed policy and practice. They identify a polarisation between the dominance of technocratic approaches and new public management (NPM) from the mid-1990s and the more recent popularist questioning of expertise,

highlighting that both extremes downplay the importance of pluralism, contestation and political debate.

Though not titled as a 'handbook', it is particularly well structured and cross-referenced between different sections and chapters, ensuring that readers can go straight to particular fields or contexts that interest them. Policymakers and practitioners will find useful overviews of past and current debates, as well as specific examples in text boxes, within each chapter in section two (healthcare, social care, criminal justice, education, environment, international development). Theories and concepts are clearly discussed in the more thematic chapters in sections one and three, including highlighting



works from the 1970s onwards which will be useful for readers less familiar with such earlier, and still-relevant, literature. Section four provides commentaries and pertinent comparisons, with chapters on the UK, Australia and New Zealand, Scandinavia, Canada and the USA. Despite changes in the political and economic context over the past 20 years, the authors identify a continuing appetite for a better-informed world, especially around the day-to-day work of making policy and delivering services. Overall, the book is thought-provoking and pragmatic, not least in its reasonable price, making it accessible for a wide-ranging audience.

Social research with children and young people

Louca-Mai Brady and Berni Graham

Policy Press: Social Research Association Shorts, 2018

Reviewed by Jon Eilenberg, National Children's Bureau

This book aims to provide practical guidance on research and evaluation with children and young people (CYP) for researchers, users and commissioners. After a short and to-the-point introduction laying out the content, the next four chapters explore context, involving CYP, ethics and methods. The chapters are well structured, using bullet points, figures and examples to present points clearly and coherently. There's a good mix of practical advice and theoretical reflection, although the emphasis is on the former. Each chapter

ends with a list of key points and literature for further reading.

The main strength of the book as an introduction for readers who are not too familiar with CYP research. It provides research tools with a good level of practical detail as well as advice on how to use them. Another strength is the special attention given to the inclusion of marginalised groups of CYP, just as the chapter on ethics has some good and balanced advice on the challenges of doing research with CYP.



One point of criticism is that the book tends to mention 'research and evaluation' in the same breath, although the latter is only discussed tangentially. This is linked to wider epistemological and methodological issues.

I would recommend this as an introduction for new researchers and research users in the field.

Transcribing for social research

Alexa Hepburn and Galina B. Bolden

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2017

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

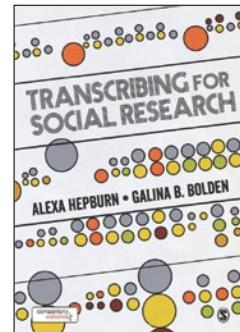
This book is a practical guide to transcription, together with an explanation of the social science which underpins it. Although one might assume that transcription involves making a verbatim account of words spoken during an interview or focus group, the authors argue that standard orthography is unable to represent the 'words, gestures and conduct of the people being studied'. Drawing on insights from conversation analysis which show how social phenomena are 'realised through talk in interaction', as well as discursive psychology and ethnomethodology, Hepburn and Bolden show the reader, in ten succinct and well written chapters, how to capture words and interactions and record them accurately on paper using a transcription system originally developed by Gail Jefferson.

What impresses about this book is that the authors convincingly argue that

standard orthography imposes written conventions on spoken language when written and spoken modes of communication are not identical. The authors therefore demonstrate how important it is to capture data on timing, overlap, intonation, emphasis and volume if the richness of talk is to be accurately represented as well as providing guidance on the transcription of non-speech sounds and visible conduct. The book is liberally sprinkled with useful information on transcription theory and practice, and is accompanied by a companion website with data and exercises which allow the reader to consolidate their transcription skills. Given the highly technical nature of the material, the book is easy to follow, although it is best to begin at the beginning and read it in its entirety. Transcription conventions are, for example, introduced gradually with helpful

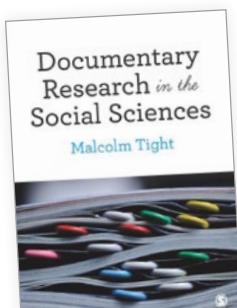
summaries at the end of each chapter. Some prior background knowledge of linguistic terminology might be useful although such knowledge is by no means essential for the determined reader. Admittedly, using such a fine-grained transcription system could be both time-consuming and expensive to implement. The onus may therefore be on the researcher to be aware of these techniques and to gauge whether they can be used in their projects.

Transcribing for Social Research is an invaluable contribution to the methodological literature which will appeal to researchers across a range of disciplines who wish to successfully capture speech in all its complexity.



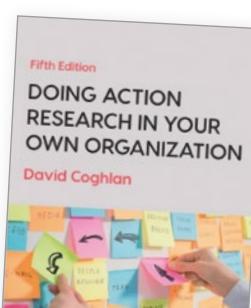
Titles for review

We are always looking for reviewers. Write a short review for us and you get to keep the book. All books up for review are listed below. If you are interested, please email admin@the-sra.org.uk and we'll send you guidelines. Here are a few of the titles on offer:



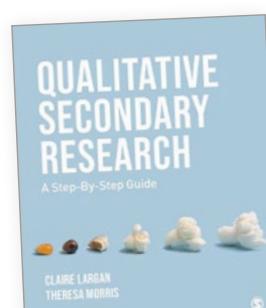
Documentary research in the social sciences

Malcolm Tight
SAGE, 2019



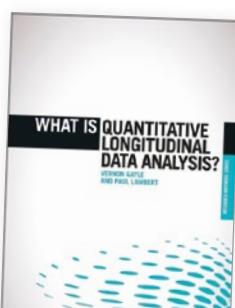
Doing action research in your own organization

David Coghlan
SAGE, 2019 (5th edition)



Qualitative secondary research: a step-by-step guide

Claire Langan & Theresa Morris
SAGE, 2019



What is qualitative longitudinal data analysis?

Vernon Gayle and Paul Lambert
Bloomsbury Academic, 2018

TRAINING 2020

EDINBURGH

27 January	Writing effective research reports	Dr Simon Haslam
19 February	Questionnaire design	NatCen Learning
Early March (tbc)	Introduction to data visualisation and infographic design	Nigel Hawtin
26 March	Qualitative interviewing	Professor Karen O'Reilly
27 March	Conducting focus groups	Professor Karen O'Reilly
30 March	Qualitative data analysis	Professor Karen O'Reilly
31 March	Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings	Professor Karen O'Reilly

LONDON

13 January	Introduction to participatory action research	Dr Karen Lumsden
16 January	Introduction to grounded theory	Professor Karen O'Reilly
21 January	Weighting and imputation for survey non-responses	Dr Tarek Al Baghal
28 January	Project management in research and evaluation	Professor David Parsons
29 January	Theory-based evaluation: options and choices for practitioners	Professor David Parsons
30 January	Qualitative data analysis	Professor Karen O'Reilly
31 January	Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings	Professor Karen O'Reilly
4 March	Research with children and young people	Dr Louca-Mai Brady and Berni Graham
9 March	Foundations of evaluation	Professor David Parsons
10 March	Impact evaluation: options, choices and practice	Professor David Parsons
10 March	Designing a qualitative study	Professor Karen O'Reilly
11 March	Qualitative interviewing	Professor Karen O'Reilly
12 March	Introduction to sampling and weighting	Dr Alexandru Cernat
2 and 3 April	Depth interviews	NatCen Learning
30 April	Questionnaire design	NatCen Learning

NOTTINGHAM

30 January	Qualitative interviewing	Dr Line Nyhagen
31 January	Conducting focus Groups	Dr Line Nyhagen

Members: £202.50 a day. Non-members: £270 a day.

To get your SRA member discount, make sure to log into the website before registering.

We regularly add courses and course locations to our programme. Keep up to date at: www.the-sra.org.uk/training You can also join our mailing list at www.the-sra.org.uk If you have any queries contact Lindsay Adams on 0207 998 0304 or lindsay.adams@the-sra.org.uk.

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



research matters

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

Publication dates 2020

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

Copy deadlines: **5 February** (March issue); **1 May** (June issue);
20 July (September issue); **5 October** (December issue).

Editorial team

Andrew Phelps, ONS (commissioning editor) • **Imogen Birch**, Citizens Advice • **Emma Carragher**, Home Office • **Andy Curtis**, Paul Hamlyn Foundation • **Jess Harris**, Kings College London • **Genna Kik**, IFF Research • **Patten Smith**, Ipsos MORI • **Tim Vizard**, ONS • **Martina Vojtкова**, NatCen Social Research • **Paul Webb**, Praxis Care

The Social Research Association (SRA)

Tel: 0207 225 0695

Email: admin@the-sra.org.uk
www.the-sra.org.uk