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research matters



Polycymaking in Scotland: creating room for participatory research?

By Hayley Bennett, lecturer in social policy, School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh

As part of its commitment to participatory governance and a human rights-based approach, the Scottish Government seeks to increase participation in policymaking. This has led to a rise in the instances of participatory instruments, such as client panels and 'experts by experience' groups. An increase in participation by people with direct experience of social issues, or direct experience of using public services can bring new knowledge and expertise into



policy systems. Bringing in lived experience has the potential to challenge existing power relations. However, this 'participatory turn' raises important questions about how these knowledge channels interplay with research and evidence. On one hand, is this development creating more space for qualitative and participatory research methods – approaches that involve an inquiry-based approach to knowledge generation? On the other hand, is this development still feeding into positivist approaches to evidence-based policymaking (EBPM)?

INSIDE: Random online panels in the UK • Delivering a cross-national survey during Covid-19 • Data-linking research and policy • Everyday life in the UK • Creative social research with scientists • Viewing the census through the lens • Photovoice and lived experiences of probation supervision • Research hinterlands • Plus news, reviews and listings

How do policymakers in Scotland use participatory research findings?

In 2021 to 2022, I and the Poverty Alliance (an anti-poverty umbrella organisation focused on research, evidence and policy and practice change) collaborated using an ESRC impact placement. This project drew on previous research from What Works Scotland to design and undertake a series of 'conversations' with policymakers, stakeholders and researchers. We explored the connections between participatory instruments and participatory research, especially in the context of EBPM.

We found that participatory research, and qualitative research more generally, continues to face a number of established barriers, alongside new barriers to evidence-use. There are encouraging practices, particularly in local government and research shaped by community development professionals. However, the move towards participatory policymaking needs greater engagement and critical examination from various professional perspectives, particularly social researchers.

Three issues are summarised below, and more is available at participatoryknowledge.com

Parallel processes

The rise of participatory instruments was not driven by social researchers: government-led participatory instruments developed as separate initiatives driven by ideas of participatory democracy in policymaking, rather than shifting ideas that underpin EBPM. Government researchers noted that there is more interest in participatory research methods. However, on the whole, research teams are more familiar with quantitative research evidence and skills. There has been limited specialist training and targeted recruitment in these research teams in participatory research methods.

Crowding out?

There is a lack of shared understanding across various research, organisational and policy communities on the differences between participatory instruments, consultation approaches and participatory research. Some discussants thought that the use of participatory instruments negates the need to commission or use qualitative and participatory research evidence – for example, an experience panel where policymakers can ask service-design questions or quickly gather views. For some, there were concerns about quality and limited contextual analysis of experiential insights gained from participatory instruments.

Skills, training and practice

While most discussants understood that participatory research involves trained social researchers, there was less clarity about the skills and training provided to people: facilitating participatory instruments, analysing insights, and incorporating findings into decision-making processes alongside research generated knowledge. Some discussants thought that the civil service code was enough

to ensure that participatory instruments were adequate, while others thought much more specialist training was required akin to advanced qualitative data analysis and participatory research competencies, including the role of theory, analysis and ethics.

Next steps

It is hoped that by participating in these conversations, this project can contribute to nurturing critical reflection. This can focus upon individual and organisational practices of participatory research, their interaction (or not) with participatory instruments, and the plurality of research evidence. Increasing numbers of professions and policymakers are engaged in this dynamic space: asking critical questions, seeking to develop new skills and knowledge, and demonstrating more openness and awareness of participatory approaches, principles and values. Universities, the third sector, research consultants, local authorities and various Scottish Government units could better support participatory research approaches through the development of a community of practice combining experienced participatory and qualitative researchers, with policy specialists who are developing participatory instruments, or who are trying to draw on various forms of research and knowledge.

There's more information about [the participatory knowledge project on its website](https://participatoryknowledge.com).

SRA annual conference: moving to June 2023



The SRA annual conference has long been a fixture at the end of the calendar year. But because December is now associated with the spreading of coughs and sneezes, and worse, the SRA trustees have decided to move the conference to June, when we hope it will become associated with warmth and sunshine – and indeed gardens, because at the next conference, on **Thursday 15 June, 2023**, at the **Royal College of Physicians** near Regents Park in London, we can access its garden spaces.

This means our call for workshop papers will be in October this year – please look out for it!

Questions and answers: making things interesting

Ailbhe McNabola, SRA co-chair, highlights some of the topics covered in this issue of Research Matters.

Welcome to this quarter's Research Matters.

One of the things I've always thought is fantastic about social research, and which for me marks it out as a great career path, is the variety of methods researchers are using and the broad range of questions to which their work is aiming to provide answers. Our working lives are long, but in social research things should always stay interesting.



In this edition of Research Matters we have everything from data-linking and mass observation projects to art exhibitions inspired by the census. To give you a flavour of the methods and resources covered in this edition: Patten Smith of Ipsos writes about the rise of random online panels, recently growing in number in the UK but longer established elsewhere. Patten asks why the UK has been comparatively slow, but reassures us that they're here to stay, and hugely useful.

Hayley Bennett from the University of Edinburgh reflects on how participatory research practice is viewed and used by policymakers in Scotland. The team behind the use of 'photovoice' (a community-based participatory research technique) to research lived experience of probation supervision,

explain how the method empowers participants and helps to build confidence and skills. Jennifer Leigh from the University of Kent writes about what happens when the physical sciences meet creative research methods. The team from the European Social Survey at City University talk about how Covid-19 has prompted a full switch from face-to-face to self-completion fieldwork, which has started but will take some time to realise.

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Of course, you don't always need to conduct new fieldwork (shh... don't tell the commissioners). Faye Gracey writes about the insights for policymaking that can be gained from data-linking, with some great examples from her work in the Welsh Government in policy areas such as climate change, education, mental health, housing and Covid-19. And we learn about another valuable resource – the Mass Observation Archive – as Kirsty Patrick shares information on what it contains and how researchers can access it.

There are some SRA updates too, as we continue our work behind the scenes to ensure the organisation is relevant and useful to social researchers at all stages of their careers and in all sectors. We have now launched the SRA's ethics appraisal service, thanks to the hard work of some expert volunteers. It aims to provide an ethics appraisal to researchers who can't easily access ethics panels – such as independents or those based in small charities. And we're putting a call out for new volunteers, as our longstanding trustee and treasurer, Nigel Meager, retires from the SRA board.

Going back to my theme of variety, one of my favourite parts of Research Matters is the 'research hinterlands' where we hear from people in different social research roles about their career to date and how they made their way to where they currently are. No two stories are ever the same. This time it's Eileen Irvin who combines her role working on large, random probability, patient experience surveys at Ipsos with an interest in coaching.

I hope you enjoy this edition of Research Matters. Keep an eye out for latest news on events and activities on our website.

Is my social research project ethical? Who can I ask? The SRA ethics appraisal service

In the September 2021 issue of Research Matters, Jane Evans explained why the SRA is setting up this new service:

'What do you do when you're an independent social researcher, or working for a small charity, and a funder or journal asks you about the ethical credentials of your planned research? How often do you go ahead with planned research in-house without getting an objective review of the ethics?'

From time to time the SRA is approached by researchers in this situation. They don't work in academia, in government, or in a large research agency or charity, where an ethical review is likely to be available. So, we're now pleased to announce the launch of the SRA ethics appraisal service.

What the service aims to do

It aims to:

- ▶ enhance the ethical awareness and conduct of the applicants about the research and its consequences, rather than promote mere rule-following
- ▶ protect all stakeholders (e.g. individuals participating in and associated with the research and researchers themselves) from undue risk of harm or violation of their rights
- ▶ increase awareness of the potential harms, benefits and risks of research

What you get from the service and how it works

- ▶ it is run by the SRA, drawing on a panel of reviewers with experience and expertise in research ethics, many of them advisers on the SRA's Ethics Forum
- ▶ it will offer an independent, objective and systematic appraisal of your planned project
- ▶ it will help to increase understanding and awareness of potential benefits and risks in research practice, for everyone involved
- ▶ if considered to be ethically appropriate, your project will receive a favourable opinion from the service; if not, you'll be advised of the reasons

The service can't give 'ethical approval' for a project, since the SRA won't have ongoing organisational oversight. But we hope it offers a useful service to members and the wider research community.

What it costs

Use of the service needs to be paid for, as the complex decisions and appraisal needed would not be reasonable for volunteers to undertake. Based on an initial assessment, the fee will be based on the complexity of the project's ethical aspects: £800 is the standard rate, £1,100 for a complex appraisal.

Find out more

Please go to the [SRA website](#) to see:

- ▶ SRA ethics appraisal service: how it works
- ▶ application form

We are grateful to Ron Iphofen, independent research consultant; John Oates, professor of developmental psychology at the Open University; and SRA trustees present and past, Martina Vojtkova and Jane Evans, for their voluntary work in developing the service.

RESEARCH

ETHICS

Random online panels in the UK

By Patten Smith, senior consultant, Ipsos

In the last few years each of the three main UK social survey providers has set up a random online panel to provide general population estimates (Ipsos UK's *KnowledgePanel*, Kantar Public's *Public Voice* and NatCen's *NatCen Panel*). UK agencies have offered general population online panels to prospective clients for years, so what's the big deal about three more appearing? The critical difference is that these are *random* panels: recruited from random samples, not convenience samples (primarily, those answering adverts), of adults. In contrast to convenience sampling, there is total control over who joins the panel. Even if most of those invited decline, thereby degrading the randomness of those recruited, the risk of egregious bias is far less than for a largely uncontrolled convenience sample. It ensures both that it is impossible for population members with very rare characteristics or views to be on the panel in over-large numbers, and that other rare groups missed by conventional recruitment methods are included.

Given that random online panels have existed in other countries for over two decades, why has it taken the UK so long to set them up? Perhaps because the UK has a tradition of conducting its high-quality random sample surveys through face-to-face interviewing, thereby giving clients exacting expectations concerning response rates and questionnaire length. If they could afford long interviews with high response rates,



why accept less? But the situation has changed. Client budgets have continued to tighten just as face-to-face fieldwork costs have increased to address declining response rates; we (and the UK Government) now expect to use digital methods; the pandemic has affected face-to-face data collection; clients expect to get their data much more quickly; and survey methodologists believe that previously we overestimated the negative impacts on data quality of low response rates. There is a new openness to using digital methods in high-quality surveys, manifested in the flourishing of push-to-web surveys and random panels.

So how does the random online panel work? The three UK examples differ in detail, but the overall approach is common:

1. Panels are recruited using random samples from the postcode address file (PAF)
2. Initial recruitment is offline (by post for Ipsos, by a prior face-to-face survey for NatCen, and through a mixture of the two (mainly post) for Kantar Public)
3. Once recruited, panellists are regularly invited to participate in surveys for a range of clients
4. Panellists are financially incentivised for participating
5. Panels include those who were non-internet users at the time of recruitment (to ensure full panel representativity); during data collection these are contacted by phone (Kantar Public and NatCen) or online on supplied limited-functionality tablets (Ipsos)

As in any survey, some kinds of people are less likely to respond than others. Lower recruitment and retention rates are found for younger adults especially men), adults aged 75+, members of some ethnic groups, those with lower levels of education, and those in social grades C2DE. To help counter underrepresentation in these groups, panel providers have implemented various measures, which include disproportionate stratification during recruitment and when sampling for individual surveys, and sophisticated weighting strategies. Although none of these is perfect on its own, together they give clients confidence that any residual non-response biases are minimised. And in this, random online panels are considerably less bias-prone than non-random panels which, while controlling for some demographics through quotas and weighting, fail to address biases arising from other, unknown, sources.

So, when should a researcher use a random online panel? They are primarily designed for researchers who care about the quality of their survey estimates but have limited budgets or time. Nothing has changed since 2010 when the [American Association for Public Opinion Research \(AAPOR\)](#) concluded:

Researchers should avoid nonprobability online panels when one of the research objectives is to accurately estimate population values.

If you want to, or have to, use an online panel, and if you *genuinely* care about estimating population values accurately, you have no choice but to use a random probability panel. And now you have three to choose from!

Delivering a cross-national survey during Covid-19: reflections and future implications

By Tim Hanson and Siobhan O'Muircheartaigh, European Social Survey ERIC, City, University of London



In common with other surveys that rely on face-to-face fieldwork, the European Social Survey (ESS) has faced numerous challenges over the past two years. Lessons from the resulting adaptations have helped to shape strategies for ESS's short- and long-term future.

Every two years since 2002, ESS has measured the attitudes, beliefs and behaviour patterns of diverse populations across Europe by conducting face-to-face interviews with cross-sectional, nationally-representative samples. Before the pandemic, over 30 countries were expected to participate in ESS's 10th round with the usual face-to-face approach, from September 2020. Where possible, we retained this approach but extended timescales for completing the round. National teams had to follow strict Covid-19 safety measures to minimise risk to respondents and interviewers. In total, 23 countries have completed or will shortly complete round 10 fieldwork using a face-to-face approach. This is a positive outcome given the considerable obstacles posed by the pandemic.

One key change from previous rounds was to allow video interviewing. Interviewers could offer this to respondents reluctant to take part in person due to the pandemic or other reasons. The share of video interviews has varied widely but, in several countries, they have been a productive complement to in-person interviewing. Based on preliminary results – to be further analysed – we retained this option in our round 11 specification (when we hope all countries can conduct fieldwork face-to-face).

A challenging outcome of the pandemic has been reduced interviewer capacity in most countries, compared with previous rounds. Many interviewers did not return to work, or wanted to work more flexibly, which usually led to lengthy fieldwork periods. There were also challenges for national teams in managing resource for ESS fieldwork alongside other surveys returning to the field at similar times. In some countries, response rates were lower compared with previous rounds. However, this has not been universal, and some national teams reported no greater reluctance from respondents to participate.

To ensure cross-national comparability and to preserve trend data amidst an already disrupted round, we wanted to retain a face-to-face approach where possible. In some cases, this proved unfeasible – typically due to national Covid-19 restrictions or delays with survey organisations returning to face-to-face interviewing. As a result, nine countries implemented a new self-completion approach for round 10 (Austria, Cyprus, Germany, Israel, Latvia, Poland, Serbia, Spain and Sweden).

ESS's self-completion approach includes both web and paper, with most countries following a sequential process that offers paper questionnaires with the penultimate reminder. In all but one country, recruitment is managed entirely through postal invitations and reminders. In Israel, due to postal system limitations, fieldworkers make contact at addresses, and distribute letters and questionnaires. The centrally designed protocol requires countries to send unconditional monetary incentives, with conditional incentives

for those who respond to the survey also strongly recommended. Some national teams used fieldworker visits to non-responding addresses to further maximise response. Full analysis of the self-completion approach will follow, but early indications suggest promising response rates in most countries, ranging between around 20% and 40%.

The UK was able to retain a face-to-face approach for round 10. However, as part of a recent ESRC-funded project, we also carried out a parallel-run self-completion experiment. This will provide valuable evidence not only on response rates, sample composition and data quality between modes, but also on measurement differences between the self-completion and face-to-face approaches. Data collection on this experiment recently closed with a 36% response rate (with around three quarters of responses online and a quarter on paper), which will likely be similar to the level achieved for the UK's round 10 face-to-face fieldwork.

The ESS has recently decided to prepare to move from face-to-face fieldwork to a self-completion approach. This is partly influenced by the encouraging evidence of self-completion at round 10, alongside concerns over the long-term sustainability of face-to-face field forces in many countries. However, this shift will not be quick or straightforward, and the challenges will not fall evenly across countries. We are now planning developmental and experimental work to prepare for the switch. This will be central to ESS's activities over the next few years.

Data-linking research and policy

By Faye Gracey, senior principal research officer, Welsh Government

In February I started a new role in Welsh Government leading on data-linking research. I feel privileged to have joined a team which is informing Welsh Government policy, delivery and legislative decision making. Here are some examples.



Supporting policy

Our analysis has helped inform the Programme for Government¹ decision to continue support for Flying Start² programmes and to deliver a phased expansion of early years provision to include all two-year-olds. We linked de-identified Flying Start childcare attendance with on-entry school assessment³ for children who received Flying Start childcare, and found those with higher attendance tended to meet their expected outcomes in all areas of learning more often than those with lower attendance. This difference in outcomes between those with high and low attendance was even greater for children with higher take-up.

Informing action

Our study found that children and young people with neurodevelopmental disorder, mental disorder, or self-harm diagnosed and recorded⁴ before the age of 24 were much more likely to miss school than their peers. This has informed target assessment and early intervention based on school absence and exclusions data



in some schools, and is informing our 'whole school' approach to emotional and mental wellbeing.⁵

Evaluating decisions

In response to Covid-19 the Welsh Government made a £50 million investment⁶ and mandated a move away from communal accommodation solutions for people experiencing homelessness, instead favouring self-contained accommodation. We linked Covid-19 testing data to homelessness data from health records⁷ and found lower Covid-19 rates amongst people experiencing homelessness compared to the general population. This suggests changes to homelessness policy during the pandemic may have had a positive impact on people who were experiencing homelessness at the time in reducing infection.

Investments in Wales

My team and I are part of Administrative Data Research (ADR) Wales⁸ – a partnership between Swansea University Medical School, Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data (WISERD), staff at SAIL (Secure Anonymised Information Linkage) databank, and civil servants at the Welsh Government – a great example of successful collaboration.

We came together in our current form with ambition in July 2018 and haven't stopped aspiring to do more since. We're so pleased to have been awarded £17 million⁹ [Economic and Social Research Council \(ESRC\)](#) funding to further enhance our capacity.

Our 2022 to 2026 research programme aims to be even more influential.

There are potentially more opportunities to bring further funding into Wales for data-linking research such as the new UK Evaluation Accelerator Fund,¹⁰ run jointly by the Cabinet Office, HM Treasury's evaluation taskforce and other UKRI research councils. We've set up a new data-linking research team within the Welsh Government to focus on project development and capitalise on opportunities for research investment in Wales.

Next steps

Our 2022 to 2026 research programme work is being carefully aligned with the Welsh Government's Programme for Government 2021-2026. We plan to link data to add to evidence informing government decisions on policy areas such as climate change, education, mental health, housing and Covid-19.

Our ADR Wales partnership is working to ensure plans for our new research thematic areas provide the evidence needed for decisions.

It is an exciting period ahead, especially with new data sources, like the Census 2021, set to become available for linked-data research projects. Our SAIL data¹¹ catalogue is growing, increasing the opportunities available for researchers to undertake data-linking projects.

We look forward to sharing more examples of how ADR Wales data-linking research is having a positive impact on people's lives. Do follow us [@ADR_Wales](#).

¹ www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2022-01/programme-for-government-update-december-2021.pdf

² www.gov.wales/get-help-flying-start

³ www.gov.wales/analysis-flying-start-outcomes-using-linked-data-childcare-and-foundation-phase-baseline-assessments-html#section-63727

⁴ www.adruk.org/fileadmin/uploads/adruk/Documents/Data_Insights/Data_Insights_Diagnosis_and_absence_November_2021.pdf

⁵ www.gov.wales/framework-embedding-whole-school-approach-emotional-and-mental-wellbeing

⁶ www.gov.wales/welsh-government-unveils-package-support-keep-people-their-homes-and-end-homelessness

⁷ www.adruk.org/news-publications/news-blogs/welsh-research-finds-covid-19-infection-rates-lower-amongst-people-who-had-experienced-homelessness-than-the-general-population/

⁸ www.adruk.org/about-us/our-partnership/adw-wales/

⁹ www.gov.wales/17m-funding-collaborative-data-research-wales

¹⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-accelerator-fund>

¹¹ <https://data.ukserp.ac.uk/Organisation/Index/0>

Everyday life in the UK

By Kirsty Pattrick, mass observation projects officer, Mass Observation Archive

'Really, I just want to be by myself and cry. Breathe! People are talking about this situation going on for months. We're on week two and it's already mental...' (M5645, Covid-19 collection, 2020)



If you're looking for contemporary narrative data on everyday life in the UK, the national Mass Observation Archive (MOA) may be your answer.

Based in Sussex, it holds a rich repository of documents capturing life in the UK. Its founders sought to capture people's thoughts, opinions and experiences through diaries and surveys, and observations (1937 to mid-1950s), to counter what they saw as mis-representations in the press. All aspects of life were explored: topics included general elections, birth control, shopping and dancing. It was active through World War 2, and today, there exists a vast collection, with a unique lens into this period.

Since 1981, a reincarnation of its national panel of volunteer writers (observers) continues with over 450 contributors. Throughout the pandemic, interest increased from volunteers and researchers alike, looking to document and to understand the unfolding crisis.

'Decisions are being made seemingly 'on the hoof' and lots of people feel confused by this [...] It feels as though they have to pull out a surprise at every briefing.' (K7595, Covid-19 collection, 2020)

Over 40 years of narrative data includes contributions from observers and initiatives such as the 12 May diary day, (an open call). In 2020, this resulted in over 5,000 day diaries from those aged four to 94.

Directives (open questionnaires)

Three times a year, the self-selecting observers receive a directive (term used by MO founders), containing a series of open-ended questions on two or three themes. Wide-ranging topics capture innermost thoughts and experiences on social, political and personal subjects. MOA provides opportunities to collaborate on directives, generating new data through paid commissions.

The panel

'It is calming, makes you use your brain and gives a sense of purpose.' (H1776, Why I Write, 2020)

Observers contribute for various reasons: as a writing hobby, to be part of a research project and to write for history. It was a compelling reason for those who recently joined and for others they want to leave something of themselves behind (Sheridan, 1996) as a legacy.

Rich resource

Researchers across disciplines use MO as the sole data source for projects and as a mixed-methods approach. Some use it comparatively with early MO (Clarke et al, 2017, Brewis et al, 2021) and it's been used alongside other sources of data on large-scale research projects (Lindsey and Mohan, 2019).

Many volunteers have contributed for years if not decades: 37 since the 1980s. It's a valuable source of qualitative longitudinal data. They write anonymously, and are candid with their contributions, confiding in MO knowing their writing will be safeguarded.

Unlike other data-collection methods, the narratives are generated from within the observers' own space and time. Responses vary in format, tone and length with a mix of handwritten, typed and creative submissions. The lack of restrictions and anonymity provides a valuable dataset (Olsen et al, 2019).

It also gives access to voices that may not usually be forthcoming on a subject. For example, for those researching the [Directive on Protest \(2018\)](#), you will see narratives from those who wouldn't see themselves as activists or could be seen as anti-protest.

Getting involved

- ▶ access our archives, including narratives of the pandemic: at www.thekeep.info. We are working with the Wellcome Trust to catalogue and make available over 8,000 narratives documenting the pandemic via a digital tool
- ▶ collaborate on commissions: we collaborate with researchers across disciplines on topics asked of observers
- ▶ join our 85th anniversary festival: includes workshops and a seminar series
- ▶ join the panel: become a regular contributor or consider our annual 12 May day diary
- ▶ contact moa@sussex.ac.uk or visit www.massobs.org.uk if you would like to find out more

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Creative social research with scientists



Success: a collaborative collage made by members of a UK research group

By Jennifer Leigh, senior lecturer in higher education and academic practice, Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Kent and vice chair (research) WISC, and the board of the International Women in Supramolecular Chemistry (WISC) network (www.womeninsuprachem.com)

In recent years I have been bringing creative research approaches into a sphere where they are not known – the physical sciences. I started off as a chemist. I have a degree in chemistry and completed 2½ years of a chemistry PhD before leaving while pregnant with my second child. I trained as a yoga teacher, then went on to qualify as a somatic movement therapist and then complete a PhD in education. I now work in higher education, and find myself almost full circle, and even back at the laboratory bench at times.



There is a lack of diversity in science. In chemistry, outreach teams have done an amazing job, with around 50% of undergraduates being women. Yet attrition rates are high, with the biggest dropout post-PhD, and only around 9% of full professors. According to the Royal Society of Chemistry there will never be gender parity at the current rate of change. Gender disparity is only one aspect of equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and it has to be looked at intersectionally to be meaningful. There is only one Black professor of chemistry in the UK (Royal Society of Chemistry, 2022), and proportions of disabled scientists are small (CRAC, 2020). We need to understand why and effect change.

Change

I was approached by the international Women in Supramolecular Chemistry (WISC) network to be part of that change as the only social scientist on the board. I am one of the statistics of women leaving the chemical sciences, and have the skills needed to lead

WISC's research with an ethos that embeds EDI expertise, social research methods, and [an area-specific approach to support the retention and progression of women in this sector](#).

WISC is doing something different – building networks and communities, and encouraging scientists to reflect. I use qualitative and creative research methods *with* scientists to process experiences that are hard to put into words (such as the concept of success – see picture). This work is not about studying scientists. Instead, I actively engage them as collaborators and partners, which can be seen in the author lists of our publications.

I lead an ongoing collaborative autoethnography across UK, Europe, and the US, and work directly with research groups in the UK and US. This data was triangulated with a member survey to illustrate experiences of [managing research through Covid-19](#). Our book, which expands on this work, uses fiction and art as part of an embodied inquiry (Leigh and Brown, 2021) into [the work and lives of women in STEM](#).

I have also been back in the lab, using video as part of rhythm analysis, leading a public engagement project, and shedding light on the [reality of working in a lab as a woman](#).

Challenges

When I first started working with WISC, they were apprehensive about getting involved with qualitative work. However, they saw me as an insider, and trusted me enough to give it a try. It did not take long for them to see its transformative value, and to start to apply the tools they were learning about reflection in other aspects of their

work and lives. Reflection is not part of the scientific curriculum. Connecting groups and individuals with reflective tasks allowed them to process their experiences and to see that they were not alone. For example, the group discussing success in the picture above were open about their shared experiences of disability, chronic illness, and the overwork culture endemic in academia.

There have been challenges with dissemination. By definition, interdisciplinary work does not fit within disciplinary boundaries. However, we were adamant about wanting to reach a scientific audience, and now have articles in leading chemistry journals that had never published primary qualitative data before, demonstrating that qualitative social research has as much value as hard numbers. There has been considerable research on measuring the 'problem' of women in science. WISC's work contributes to understanding and presents solutions.

There are also challenges in how this work is seen and valued. Interdisciplinary social research does not always fit easily into research assessment categories or funders' calls. Novel work can be hard to review, and while its value for impact or change is real and acknowledged, it can be hard to resource.

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Viewing the census through the lens

Insights from the 'Counted' photography exhibition

Counted is a free entry exhibition running until 25 September 2022 at the National Portrait Gallery, Edinburgh.

Our editorial team member Fiona Hutchison spoke with Louise Pearson, curator (photography), National Galleries of Scotland.

How did the Counted exhibition come about?

Scotland's Census was the jumping off point to explore themes of identity, complexity and change in society. We had a couple of years of lead-in time to tap into this high point of public awareness about our population. We opened Counted a week before Census Day in March 2022. The running of the physical displays, all the accompanying online material and learning resources, could be timely and topical.

How does the exhibition relate to findings on Scottish society?

In thinking about Scotland's Census, we broke the exhibition into sections as visitors move through the gallery. The first section is on the make-up of households. We included series of photographs, for example on single parent families. The second and largest part is prompted by census questions relating to identity, including protected characteristics. And the last part of the exhibition is based on how the census is used, for example in planning services within remote communities. All sections show photography depicting people living in Scotland.

How did this project help National Galleries of Scotland reflect and expand on its contemporary photography collections?

This was an integral part enabled by an Art Fund award for new acquisitions. We included the work of eight new

photographers, many of whom have lived experience of the aspects of identity they capture through their lenses. Half of the photography images on display are new work, and the other half are drawn from existing collections.

How did you establish what population data to use?

Figuring out which data to use was initially challenging. Obviously the 2022 census was not available at the time of exhibition design. We were looking back to the last results and the population estimates released by National Records of Scotland. We drew upon their case studies on use of data by local authorities. Everything was in the public realm, and for our purposes very digestible.

How does the exhibition highlight new variables in Scotland's Census?

We were aware that 2022 was the first year Scotland's Census included questions on trans history and status. We worked with the photographer Craig Waddell. His approach to his photography corresponds well to the ethos of voluntary participation, enabling people to express their identities.

Labels blend statistics with information about the photographs' subjects and the photographers. How did you go about preparing those?

Our team talked through this a lot. We didn't want to bombard people who were maybe coming to the exhibition for the art with statistics. Having said that, a stat in the label made the connection between Scotland's Census and the displays. Some statistics could highlight changes over time in the population. Also, these labels were written in a



Image © Neil Hanna

way to prompt visitors to think and reflect. We've had excellent feedback from visitors on the exhibition, not just the photographs we include, but the interpretation and our tone of voice.

What are your hopes for the impact of the exhibition?

We wanted to be open about the gaps in the collections and how we are addressing those through contemporary photography acquisition. One example, apparent through data, was the gap in representation of our Polish population. All new photographs become part of our permanent collection and will serve as a record into the future. The main thing is to show people that they are represented within their national collection: it's not all kings, queens and celebrities.

How do you think population statistics can inspire art?

It really surprised me how many photographers are using statistics to inform their own practice, even quoting them in their artistic statements. Contemporary photographers are really interested in representing marginalised people. So, the idea of the exhibition relating to population findings really struck a chord.

How do you think art can increase knowledge and interest in population statistics?

Everyone will fill out their census form with different combinations. Portraiture highlights the individuality of experience. The photographer is giving faces to the statistics, and can evoke a personal and emotional response. Interplay between statistics and creative practice works well, and I'm sure there's more to come.

Photovoice and lived experiences of probation supervision

By Dr Wendy Fitzgibbon, University of Westminster, Dr Jayne Henry, Hertfordshire Forensic Services and Maria Strapkova



Introduction

Despite the expansion of probation supervision, the lived experiences of service-users have been under-researched. This article presents research which sought to understand the experiences of people supervised by probation. The projects offered service-users, who often feel invisible and ignored, a chance to share their feelings, through a technique called photovoice. Photovoice is a new approach to studying probation supervision (Fitzgibbon and Healy, 2017) that shifts the control from the researcher to the co-producing participants, and provides an opportunity to give voice to their experiences.

Photovoice was developed by Wang and Burris (1994), who studied health conditions of women in rural China. Since then, it has become a vital community-based participatory research technique, providing a platform for people to express their views/experiences using visual images. Mizock et al (2014:1485) suggested that photovoice enables participants to express their experiences through an alternative, non-verbal approach that can 'enhance feelings of empowerment, acceptance, self-efficacy, agency and civic-mindedness'.

The photographs presented here are the result of two projects, funded by the Ministry of Justice and HM Prison and Probation Services, which explored the challenges people experienced on release from prison and while on probation.

Findings

The research findings emerged from the thematic analysis of the photos and the group discussions where photographs were discussed, compared and interpreted by the research participants. Four overlapping themes were identified:

- ▶ support – the importance of providing support and assistance while on supervision
- ▶ pains of probation supervision – the everyday struggle with stigma and labelling while under supervision
- ▶ journey – the challenges associated with uncertainty about the future, mental health issues and feelings of isolation
- ▶ back on track – the challenges of focusing on the right things in dark times

This article examines the first three of these themes. All participants' names have been changed and their consent was given at the start of the project to use their photographs.

Support

Participants were mainly positive in their photos about the support provided to them while on probation supervision. However, many participants emphasised that being properly heard and being able to explain their story are sometimes difficult during supervision. Sandra stated that support and honesty were very important for her to build a positive relationship with her probation officer after a previous negative experience.

Nicola produced pictures of her glasses and her own ear and explained how important it was for her to 'see clearly' and to be heard and listened to by the probation officer:



'Seeing clearly'

'These glasses are me being able to see clearly now that the support is in place.' (Nicola)



'Being heard'

'I did feel like I was heard and speaking to ... she really made it much easier, as I found it really hard to communicate... she was really listening... I just felt like this massive weight has been lifted off my shoulders.' (Nicola)

happily ever after starts here

Pains of probation supervision

Participants on probation supervision often shared common experiences such as feelings of embarrassment, shame, stigma, being trapped, pain from being in the criminal justice system (Fitzgibbon and Stengel, 2017). Participant Tom took a photo of a spider in the net to represent how he felt at the beginning of his journey. Tom explained how hard it was for him to lose his job over his offence, and how his role of breadwinner was suddenly insecure.



'Caught in the net'

'He described himself as being a spider in the net ... like police, probation, counselling, lawyers, court, having to sign the register, children services... he was really disappointed that his name was now out there... everyone knew who he was.'
(Probation officer on behalf of Tom)

There has been little attempt within research to understand the 'pains of probation'. This subject remains under-researched although the concept of 'pains of imprisonment' have been analysed widely since Sykes' work in 1958.

Journey

The resettlement process back into the community after custody was a common theme among participants. The journeys from prison and community sentence to 'normal life' were a challenge. Photographs were taken by Richard who often walks his dog around the canal. He took these pictures as they reminded him of his journey to freedom. The first picture represented his incarceration, and the second is where he is now, on the way to freedom.



'Closed gates like prison'



'Looked like freedom'

Another common theme was a desire for new beginnings – a fresh start without stigma.



'New start': Sandra

Conclusion

Photovoice has been used within social research as an empowering method encouraging social action. It is a powerful tool, which gives a voice to people who feel unheard and neglected by society. We found that photovoice helps participants to build self-confidence and develop new skills through creating images and sharing their feelings in group discussions.

References and further reading on photovoice

- Fitzgibbon, W. (2022). Applied photovoice in criminal justice. London: Routledge.
- Fitzgibbon, W. and Healy, D. (2019). 'Lives and spaces: photovoice and offender supervision in Ireland and England'. *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 2019, 19(1): 3-25.
- Fitzgibbon, W. and Stengel, C. (2017). 'Women's voices made visible: photovoice in visual criminology'. *Punishment and Society*, 20(4): 411-31.
- Mizock, L., Russinova, Z. and Shani, R. (2014). 'New roads paved on losses: photovoice perspectives about recovery from mental illness'. *Qualitative Health Research*, 24: 1481-1491.
- Wang, C. and Burris, M. (1994). 'Empowerment through photovoice: portraits of participation'. *Health Education Quarterly*, 21(2): 171-186.

Do social researchers emerge fully formed? Do they have any other life for that matter? In this series, we check out the back stories of some of our social research colleagues. What's your hinterland? Do you have an interesting story to tell? Let us know!

Research hinterlands

Eileen Irvin, associate director, Ipsos

Current research role

In my day job, I am an associate director, working at Ipsos. I sit between the survey research methods centre and the health team, developing our methods work and mainly focusing on large, random probability, patient experience surveys, for the NHS, CQC and Department of Health and Social Care.



courses. As I was just starting out, one of my colleagues also offered me some free coaching, to support my thinking about what I wanted for my career. Those sessions were incredibly helpful to me in my development.

So, a few years later, when I had started my career in social research, it was something I decided to come back to. I went back to the training company I had worked at, and did an International Coaching Federation accredited course over six months, and since then have done bits of coaching in my spare time.

However, the skills are transferable. Most obviously, I have found that the training has helped with my line management and delegation skills, particularly when supporting development. I also sit on Ipsos' internal coaching panel, so am occasionally asked to provide coaching support to colleagues from elsewhere in the business.

But it has also helped where I was not expecting it. Going through people's problems with them, and learning lots of techniques, have helped with my own problem solving. It also developed my qualitative research skills. The listening and partnering skills, and techniques of reflecting the coachee's language, really helped me in depth interviews.

Overall, coaching has helped me think about conversations and challenges differently, which permeates every aspect of my work. It is also nice to expand your network in a different way – and it is amazing the way that the worlds intersect. In fact, I met my first Ipsos employee, before I worked here, at a coaching training session.

Hinterland outside work

My research hinterland is coaching, by which I mean life and business coaching. It involves a conversation, or series of conversations, on a specific topic that looks to take you forward by partnering with you, asking the right questions and challenging assumptions. It's not mentoring (which focuses more on providing advice from experience), or therapy (which looks more at the past and the 'why' of things), but sits in a similar space.

Before deciding social research was where I wanted to be, and while studying for my Masters, I took a part-time admin job. It ended up being at a company that trained people in coaching, and as part of the role, I was allowed to sit in on some of the

I really enjoy the opportunity to listen to people, to help them think differently about the challenges and goals, and to work with them to plan their next steps

I really enjoy the opportunity to listen to people, to help them think differently about the challenges and goals, and to work with them to plan their next steps. Compared to a research project, there is also something very satisfying about knowing that the process is very contained. In that hour, we have come up with a plan to move them forward, and that is all I am responsible for.

Can you help the SRA make sound decisions?

Next year, Nigel Meager, the SRA's longstanding trustee and treasurer retires. So, we are looking for a new trustee to continue Nigel's good work in advising the trustee board.

This is a chance to join a supportive and active group of researchers who are ensuring the SRA makes a positive impact on our sector.

The role of treasurer does not require accounting knowledge, or a high degree of numeracy. Instead, it calls for logical thinking, an analytical mind, and a willingness to ask questions: in other words, the skills of a researcher! Nigel will be available through 2022 to help the new treasurer become familiar with the role. Here's what he says:

'The SRA is a well-managed and successful charity whose finances are sound. The job of the treasurer is help make sure this situation continues, and to be the voice of the trustees on financial matters. In practice, this means acting as a sounding board and critical friend to the chief executive, asking questions to check that the association adheres to its financial obligations as a charity and a company, and that it's managing its finances prudently in

the interests of its members and the wider social research community. It hasn't been onerous in its demands on my time, as all the routine financial work is done by the chief executive, with professional accounting support. It's an important role, but I've found it enjoyable, and it has been extremely satisfying to see the SRA go from strength to strength in recent years.'

[Find out about the SRA's trustees on our website.](#)

SRA membership is open to all, and our 1,400+ members represent many sectors, research methods and approaches. We welcome applications from across the membership. In addition, so that the trustee body is broadly representative, we would particularly like to hear from members working in central government. If you're interested in applying but are not yet a member, [you can join online.](#)

The board of trustees meets six times a year, with video-conferencing, and you'll be expected to attend these meetings. Board meetings focus largely on strategic rather than operational issues. Trustees are volunteers, whose positions are re-nominated every two years, to a maximum of six years.

We estimate that this role calls for a commitment of around six or seven days a year. Expenses for meetings and so on are reimbursed.

Each trustee uses their knowledge and experience to help the board reach sound decisions. This involves scrutinising board papers, leading discussions, focusing on key issues, and providing views and advice. You'll need to be aware of your legal responsibilities, and the need to act in accordance with Charity Commission guidance, as explained in [the essential trustee.](#)

More information and application

To apply for the role of trustee and treasurer, please complete the online form on the [SRA website](#) by **Friday 15 July.**

A subgroup of existing trustees will select candidates with reference to the criteria in the online application form.

QUERIES? For an informal chat, please contact the chief executive, Graham Farrant: graham.farrant@the-sra.org.uk

And if you know someone suitable who may like to apply, please encourage them!

SRA vacancy: operations manager

We are looking for an operations manager to work with our CEO and staff team, in our small but thriving charity. You'll support us in delivering a wide variety of high-quality services and activities, review what we do, develop a growth strategy, and lots more! This is a new role for the SRA and reflects how we've grown in recent years. So, if you have project management experience, and are organised, practical, supportive and analytical (and know the research landscape), please do consider applying. [Information for applicants.](#)

DEADLINE: Friday 17 June.



The low value purchase system: your route to more work?

What it is

The low value purchase system (LVPS) offers research commissioners in the public sector a simple, efficient route to find contractors. So, if you're a commissioner or a research contractor, it's certainly worth a look.

How it works

This is a potential opportunity for smaller research providers, who find it impractical to compete with larger suppliers on the UK Government's Research & Insights DPS agreement, to be considered for smaller government contracts. The price threshold for research contracts is those with a value of less than £122,976.

Potential advantages

- ▶ easier route to market – direct award is available
- ▶ dynamic filtering system, can search by service, SME/VCSE status, location

- ▶ supports government SME policy
- ▶ quality, price and cultural fit can be assessed based on individual customer requirements, not a blanket approach

Why it might benefit research contractors:

- ▶ flexible, you can join the agreement at any time
- ▶ dynamic filtering system, you can choose what service you wish to offer
- ▶ access to UK Government business and public sector buyers
- ▶ less of a barrier to access for SME/VCSE suppliers

Find out more

Full information on how to apply and where to register can be found in the ['documents' section of the crown commercial website](#): download 'RM6237 LVPS supplier access information'.

[This is the link for suppliers to register](#): follow the 'access as a supplier' button in the LVPS blue box.

There are three filters to complete: the service heading for goods/service (you should choose 'research'), the postcode radius in which you can supply the goods/services, and your SME/VCSE status. For your chosen service heading of 'research' you need to provide a brief description of your offering in 400 characters or fewer. There is no space to give detail about pricing, but you can refer to it (that is, price on application, or time/rates and so on).

Applicants must agree with the terms and conditions of the agreement (CCS supplier contract and also buyer supplier contract). There is a 1% levy on all invoiced work obtained under the agreement.

SRA journal 'Social Research Practice': spring 2022 issue

Issue 12, Spring 2022, is free to download at:

<https://the-sra.org.uk/SRA/Publications/SRA-Journal/SRA/Publications/SRA-Journal.aspx>

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. 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 for an article or research note but are not sure if it's suitable, please email Richard Bartholomew, the editor: rabartholomew@btinternet.com



CENSUS REPORT

Census 2021 results are on the way

The first population and household estimates from Census 2021 in England and Wales will be released on June 28. Publication will be at 11am to enable the laying of the first census results in Parliament.

Read more about what to expect from the first results in the [ONS national statistical blog](#).

[Further information about the Census 2021 results](#). This link will be updated with confirmed dates as soon as they are available.

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Titles for review



We are always looking for reviewers (SRA members only). 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. Please note that publications are available as e-books only. Book reviews need to be submitted within 10 weeks of you receiving the book. Here are a few of the titles on offer:

The coding manual for qualitative researchers – fourth edition

Johnny Saldana

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021

The craft of qualitative longitudinal research

Bren Neale

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021

Doing data science in R: an introduction for social scientists

Mark Andrews

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021

Doing qualitative research – sixth edition

David Silverman

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

Doing qualitative research online – second edition

Janet E Salmons

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

Doing visual ethnography – fourth edition

Sarah Pink

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021

Respondent centred surveys: stop, listen and then design

Laura Wilson and Emma Dickinson

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021

Training courses in research methods

Unless otherwise stated, all courses are run online using Zoom in live sessions, with small groups of attendees (between nine and 16).

Only courses with availability (at time of going to press) are shown. New dates and courses are being added all the time so please visit the website for updated information – www.the-sra.org.uk/training

Our courses are designed to help you learn the practical application of research methods, and are led by experts in their field.

Costs: **online**: SRA members: half day: £82.50; one day or two part-days: £165; two days or three part-days: £330. Non-members: half day: £110; one day or two part-days: £220; two days or three part-days: £440; **in person**: SRA members: £202.50; non-members: £270.

Online courses run over one day or two half days, and extended courses over two full days or three part-days.

If you have any queries, please contact Lindsay: lindsay.adams@the-sra.org.uk

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

Evaluation

(all with Professor David Parsons)

5 July: Research and evaluation project management

7 & 8 July (2 mornings): Theory-based evaluation: options and choices

15 September – in person in London: Foundations of evaluation

16 September – in person in London: Impact evaluation (advanced)

22 September – Impact evaluation (advanced)

24 October – Foundations of evaluation

Qualitative

24 June: Introduction to qualitative interviewing, with Dr Karen Lumsden

1 July: Designing qualitative research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

7 July: Narratives and storytelling in qualitative research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

8 July: Introduction to qualitative data analysis, with Dr Karen Lumsden

14 July: Narrative analysis, with Dr Karen Lumsden

15 July: Writing up qualitative data, with Dr Karen Lumsden

22 July: Digital qualitative interviews, with Dr Karen Lumsden

23 August: Conducting online focus groups, with Dr Karen Lumsden

25 August: Reporting qualitative data, with NatCen

15 & 16 September: Creative research methods in qualitative data collection, with Dr Nicole Brown

27 & 28 September (2 mornings): Positionality and reflexivity in qualitative research, with Dr Nicole Brown

29 & 30 September (2 full days): Depth interviewing skills, with NatCen

5 October – in person in London: Designing a qualitative study, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

6 October – in person in London: Conducting focus groups, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

7 October – in person in London: Qualitative interviews, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

10 October: Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

11 October: Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

27 & 28 October (2 mornings): Introduction to qualitative research, with NatCen

8 to 10 November (3 part-days): Designing and moderating focus groups, with NatCen

10 & 11 November (2 mornings): Creative data analysis, with Dr Nicole Brown

16 November – in person in London: Introduction to ethnographic methods, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

17 November – in person in London: Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

18 November – in person in London: Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

Quantitative

15 & 16 June (2 afternoons): Web survey design, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

21 to 23 June (3 afternoons): Advanced questionnaire design, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

1 July: Understanding statistical concepts and essential tests, with Dr Valerija Kolbas

8 July: Introduction to R, with Dr Alex Cernat

26 to 28 July (3 afternoons): Correlation, linear and logistical regression with R, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

29 July: Data management and visualisation with R, with Dr Alexandru Cernat

8 & 9 September (2 mornings): Questionnaire design, with NatCen

1 to 3 November (3 afternoons): Advanced questionnaire design, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

Other research skills

21 June: Consultancy skills for social researchers, with Dr Simon Haslam

28 June: Introduction to data visualisation, with Nigel Hawtin

11 & 12 July (2 afternoons): Undertaking evidence reviews with MAXQDA, with Dr Christina Silver

13 & 14 July (2 mornings): Introduction to evidence reviews, with NatCen

24 August: Introduction to participatory action research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

20 September – in person in London: Introduction to data visualisation, with Nigel Hawtin

13 October: Making the most of your research journal, with Dr Nicole Brown

8 November: Writing effective research reports, with Professor Simon Haslam

16 & 17 November (2 mornings): Research with children and young people, with Berni Graham

24 November (1 afternoon): Introduction to embodied inquiry, with Dr Nicole Brown

Spotlight on SRA activity

Training

www.the-sra.org.uk/training

Many qual, quant and evaluation courses are online.

Events

www.the-sra.org.uk/events

Blog

www.the-sra.org.uk/blog

Topical posts on researching.

Journal

www.the-sra.org.uk/journal

Read back issues and find out how to write an article for our free journal.

Resources

www.the-sra.org.uk/resources

Good practice guides and more.

Ethics

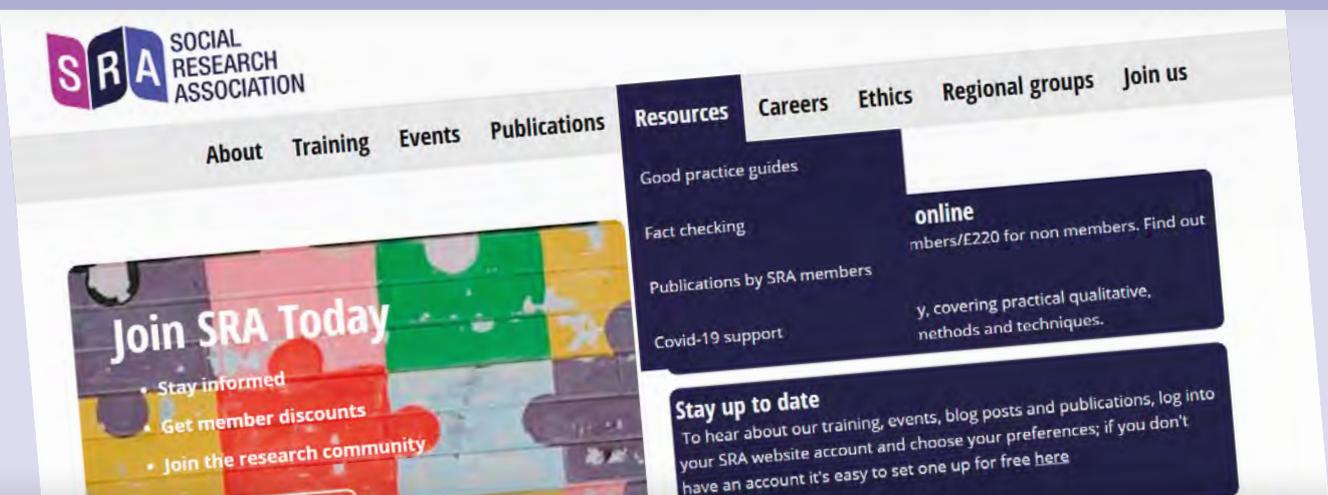
www.the-sra.org.uk/ethics

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

Member resources

Log in, go to www.the-sra.org.uk then see 'members' section.

Free access to 5,500+ social science journals, data science training at a third off, and more.



research matters

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

Publication dates 2022

We publish four times a year. Next issue: **September 2022**.

Copy deadlines for 2022: **15 July** (September issue); **7 October** (December issue).

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