

research matters



Magenta 2020: new pathways for policy evaluation?

By David Parsons, visiting professor, Leeds Beckett University

It's here, but it's been a long time coming. The new 'Magenta Book', released in March, follows the previous version as the UK Government guidance on effective policy and programme evaluation. Publication was held up for nearly two years as it fell foul of other, more pressing, government priorities. Was it worth the prolonged wait?



Among evaluators, Magenta has become a watchword for guiding practice in government and outside: 'all policies and programmes should be subject to comprehensive but proportionate evaluation, where practicable to do so'. The reach of the previous version, now nine years old, was always intended to go well beyond government policy and programmes, and it has successfully raised aspiration in and outside government for what evaluation could and should do. Yet nine years on, its nearly 140 pages were looking a little dated with its heavy emphasis on empirical evaluation, and some emerging gaps.

Improving an icon

The challenge of updating Magenta was daunting. In 2011 it steered a course between the needs of different users, balancing the 'why and what' issues faced by policy people with the 'how to' challenges facing evaluation designers, deliverers and managers. It was practical, harnessing numerous case studies, and pretty comprehensive in its coverage of many methodological possibilities. Yet with hindsight, it was probably behind the curve in balancing some of those possibilities with others. It was quite tough on the utility of 'constrained designs' especially when deferred evaluation decisions and rising cost pressures meant evaluators often had little else to fall back on.

Perhaps the biggest gap in 2011 was that Magenta had too little to say about the use of theory-based approaches. Subsequently, theory-based evaluation (TBE) has had a challenge establishing itself as a practical alternative to empirical evaluation (in complex intervention circumstances) in many (but not all) government departments. This was always going to be an uphill task but the balance of Magenta 2011 may not have helped. The 2020 version appears to make up for lost ground, and goes a long way to establishing a stronger balance of (different) evaluation pathways. It is a better fusion of the, often different, evaluation perspectives of social researchers and economists, and challenges a generation of evaluation practitioners and analysts, in government and outside, to widen their aspirations.

The new offer

Magenta 2020's sections include:

- ▶ Why, how and when to evaluate
- ▶ Evaluation scoping
- ▶ Evaluation methods
- ▶ Data collection, data access and data linkage
- ▶ Managing an evaluation
- ▶ The use and dissemination of evaluation findings

Some of this remixes and updates earlier content, but much is tackled afresh including a wholly new section on 'evaluation capabilities'.

The 2020 version is a better fusion of the, often different, evaluation perspectives of social researchers and economists, and challenges a generation of evaluation practitioners and analysts, in government and outside, to widen their aspirations

At 89 pages it is notably shorter, but any brevity in the main guide is counterbalanced by approaching 300 pages of supplementary guidance including on analytical methods (45pp), post-implementation reviews (45pp), handling complexity (67pp) and other guidance on managing quality. Novice and experienced evaluators alike will find much of the value in the 2020 guide in these supplements, which like the main body guide, have open access (PDF) at:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book

A new model

The new Magenta drops the earlier division between part A (aimed at policymakers) and part B (analysts). This provides for a more integrated approach (and less detail in the main body) which may be better suited to raising aspirations all round. It is liberally strewn with easy-access summary charts with the 'selecting methods' flow chart a particular success (p.47). In addition to evaluation capabilities, which fronts a new government capabilities framework, it has important new content on data access and linkage (and constituent legal frameworks).

Underlying this all is an encouraging new emphasis on the potential of theory-based approaches in scoping and delivering complex evaluations. This feels like a step change in expectations, and promises opportunities for uplifting the role that TBE can play in evaluating novel interventions and

especially those taking place in complex, multi-influencing circumstances. The supporting (supplementary) guidance on 'handling complexity in policy evaluation' draws heavily on leading edge academic thinking from the Centre for Evaluating Complexity Across the Nexus (CECAN).

The verdict

It is most certainly worth the wait. It may take a bit more effort to juggle the dispersed content between the main body and those supplements, and its lack of case studies in the main body, but to my eyes, it's a well-placed successor to its predecessor.

HM Treasury. (March 2020). [Magenta Book: Central Government guidance on evaluation.](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-magenta-book)

Editorial

SRA chair, David Johnson, reflects on racism and racial inequality, and encourages the social research profession to do the same.

In the last issue I wrote about how Covid-19 has affected us all in so many ways, and how the SRA was responding to the financial challenges with which we were faced. This issue, while Covid is still with us and continuing to present many health, work and personal challenges, I'm turning to the subject of racial inequality. This has been brought into sharp focus by the shocking killing of George Floyd, the resulting Black Lives Matter campaign, the shooting of Jacob Blake and various recent accusations of continued racial profiling in the use of stop and search powers in the UK.



I have no direct experience or frame of reference with which to appreciate or even really comprehend the challenges people of colour face; or often to see or understand the ways in which racism is woven into the fabric of society alongside the more obvious discrimination faced day to day. What I can do though is to recommend 'Why I'm no Longer Talking to White People About Race' by Reni Eddo-Lodge, which provides a thought-provoking and sobering insight into the ongoing racism and prejudice faced by Black, Asian and other minority ethnic people in the past and right now.

This should be of vital importance in particular to the social research profession given the nature of our work. The SRA has been concerned about issues around the lack of diversity and inclusion in our profession for some years, identifying a lack of evidence in three key areas about which we needed to consult members:

- ▶ The ethnicity and social class background of social researchers, where anecdote suggests the greatest under-representation is found

- ▶ The experiences of social researchers from less-represented groups, and their views on the barriers and enablers for improved representation and inclusivity
- ▶ What organisations are doing to address diversity and inclusion – and the benefits of sharing good practice across the sector

This led the trustees to consider consulting members on these issues through our member survey, and to develop a separate research project to address these questions. These were approved during 2019, with the survey launching in October that year, and an invitation to tender for the research project issued in November. Following a competitive tender, the project was awarded in February 2020 to The Young Foundation, a UKRI-accredited independent research organisation, social investor and community development practitioner. The project had to be paused because of Covid-19 but I am pleased to say that it will now proceed, and we expect it to report in spring 2021.

The SRA also has been, and continues to be, actively involved in several other areas to better promote better diversity of representation in the social (and market) research professions. In particular, through the work of our committed trustees and our advocacy group, we were part of the panel for the NatCen/SPA event: Navigating the White Space. We have engaged and collaborated with emerging professional networks for BAME social researchers and had ongoing discussion and collaboration with other professional organisations on this issue, including the MRS and RSS. And we encourage readers to take part in the current [MRS survey of Diversity, Inclusion and Equality](#).

There are, of course, other organisations working in this area too. For example, [Colour of Research](#) (CORe) or more internationally [Women in Research](#), [WIRe in Color](#) or <https://www.womeninresearch.org/wire-in-color> and [Insights in Color](#).

You may also be interested to read recent SRA blog posts: [Unequal truths](#) by Ella Fryer-Smith; [Digital ethnography in a time of social unrest](#) by Dr Heidi Hasbrouk; and [Research methods books by women of colour](#) by Dr Helen Kara.

And don't forget the articles published in the [March 2020 Research Matters](#) by Jenny Douglas from the Open University about intersectionality-informed research methods; and by Shivonne Gates from NatCen about ethnic diversity in social research.

I would encourage everyone to take time to reflect on the seriousness of these issues and what we can do to learn more; develop a diverse profession; influence with evidence; and act as champions in this space to really make a positive difference in people's lives.

Lastly, I would of course commend all of the articles in this quarter's magazine, I would particularly draw your attention to the article on page 5 by Theo Joloza and Vicky Cummings about using social research to improve inclusion at ONS.

Until next time, happy researching!

Always assume trauma: some examples from real life research

By Jane Evans, SRA trustee

It is a fundamental ethical principle of research that participants should not be retraumatised. Researchers and Research Ethics Committees (RECs) are fastidious about avoiding or mitigating trauma in the research setting. This article argues that trauma is, in fact, an unavoidable, and possibly beneficial, part of the qualitative research process, and that all researchers and RECS, no matter what the topic, should be prepared to encounter and acknowledge it.



Most RECs would recommend techniques of research and lines of questioning which avoid reactivating trauma. For example, when conducting a service evaluation, ask only questions about the service and not the circumstances which led to the service being needed; keep returning the interviewee to the topic in hand; provide details of helping agencies; allow the interview to pause, or even end, if something upsetting comes up. Do all you can as a researcher to avoid retraumatisation.

But as many, perhaps most, experienced researchers know, this is not possible and is rarely the way things work out in the field. In my work with vulnerable children and young people, stories of trauma and past abuse are routine. They need to tell their stories; in many cases they are conditioned to telling and retelling their life stories in order to access the services they require. To stop them, or direct them back to the topic, feels cruel, more so than the fact that they are clearly reliving trauma when you only came to ask about their use of a service. Sometimes, you may think you're totally safe – no

trauma will come up; after all you're only speaking to adults and professionals. However, I've spoken to parents ostensibly about a child's college placement, who went on to speak at length about their child's abusive lack of care at previous settings or their stress when dealing with the supposedly supporting authorities. I've heard about previous stillbirths and traumatic labours from new parents using the registrar service. I've spoken to programme staff who have revealed in detail violent assaults in the course of their work or abusive employment conditions.

...trauma is, in fact, an unavoidable, and possibly beneficial, part of the qualitative research process, and that all researchers and RECS, no matter what the topic, should be prepared to encounter and acknowledge it

Is this Ok? The REC might not approve if they knew this was going on. But the literature tends to show that research participants can experience taking part in research as beneficial, even to the extent of reliving trauma (Legerski and Bunnell, 2010). They needed to talk about it, even if it was irrelevant to the research. The process of taking part in an interview was therapeutic to them, even when they felt upset and even cried during the interview and, importantly, even though the researcher can never be a therapist.

I would argue that other benefits accrue as well. Of course, if a researcher hears of ongoing abuse it must be reported, but past abuse may need investigation too – what about children in a household

in which there is long-term abuse? It's important when evaluating a service to learn that employment conditions are causing distress, and the topic cannot be avoided if it emerges during an interview. Perhaps the researcher is the only person who will listen; perhaps they are the only safe way to blow a whistle, given the undertaking for confidentiality and anonymity.

I would argue that trauma can never be avoided: to some extent we have all encountered it in our lives and in the right circumstances we may relive it and wish to recount it. When interviewing consenting, fully informed adults and young adults, the best we can do at times is to gracefully acknowledge that trauma with care. As researchers, we cannot provide therapy but should signpost to such sources of support. We should also be prepared to listen as an objective outsider, being transparent about what we will and won't intervene in; what is private and anonymous; and what is a cause for public concern. In either case, as researchers, we will have allowed a shift to take place which participants will benefit from.

These realities mean that ethics committees need to acknowledge that research participants will reveal and relive trauma, and make this a consideration of review. Researchers need to make sure that they are fully equipped, and some would suggest, trained, to signpost interviewees to support. They also need to make sure they have their own support as vicarious trauma is a risk in some interviews.

Reference

Legerski, J-P. and Bunnell, S. (2010). 'The risks, benefits, and ethics of trauma-focused research participation'. *Ethics & Behavior* 20: 429-442.

Using social research skills to improve inclusion at ONS

By Theo Joloza, principal social research officer, and Vicky Cummings, senior social research officer, ONS

Irrespective of recent events, 2020 is the Civil Service Year of Inclusion. Within the Office for National Statistics (ONS), there are several diversity networks for staff covering all the [protected characteristics](#). The ONS Black Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Network was relaunched in March 2020, and has 121 members and allies. The membership is made up of colleagues from different professional backgrounds including social research. In addition, colleagues from a white ethnic background have allied with the network to provide support and improve racial equality and inclusion within ONS as they share the values of the BAME network.

The ONS's new strategy 'Statistics for the public good' has, as one of its core principles, being inclusive in its approach to workforce, talent management and the design of data, statistics and analysis.

As social research members of the network, we think that there is an opportunity to use our expertise and to contribute to the aims of ONS leadership in making the ONS a truly inclusive place to work. This is a role that all social researchers ought to be playing and, in turn, will contribute to the civil service drive to improve inclusion and make the civil service diverse so that it reflects the society it serves. This is in line with an important objective of the BAME Network which is to support ONS in considering ethnic diversity in all its outputs, by providing a critical friend role.

As social researchers from a BAME background, we are working with colleagues in ONS to ensure that policies are not just data driven but follow good social research practice. Below are some of the ways in which we are doing this:

- ▶ Contributing to discussions about the data that is used in human resources (HR) to inform decisions on recruitment, retention, progression and reward systems, and to evaluate the experience of ethnic minority colleagues in our organisation
 - ▶ Making recommendations on data analysis to ensure meaningful interpretations which then inform effective and measurable interventions
 - ▶ Contributing to policies on the reopening of ONS offices: Covid-19 analyses show the disproportionate effect that the pandemic has had on people from an ethnic minority background
 - ▶ Encouraging network members to participate in internal focus groups and surveys that then inform senior leadership decisions
 - ▶ Encouraging network members to declare their diversity data on internal HR systems to ensure that decisions are informed by our organisational data. Alongside that, we have challenged the traditional viewpoint that has prevented certain analyses being conducted due to the belief that these will breach disclosure rules. In doing so we have been mindful of social research ethics
- Following recent events in America, and the rallies that have taken place in the UK supporting racial equality, race has become a topical issue. Due to the sensitivities, it is important that, as social researchers, we ensure that the language we use in our working lives takes this into consideration. That includes questionnaire design and the dissemination of results. As a network in ONS we have contributed to this by:
- ▶ Playing a role in ensuring that our outputs follow the [guidelines for reporting](#)
 - ▶ Offering support to existing working groups that aim to ensure that the outputs of the upcoming 2021 Census and our social surveys are representative and as inclusive as possible



- ▶ Engaging with the recruitment team leading the work on developing recruitment materials for community adviser roles for the upcoming 2021 Census

The network will offer its support to any future plans that the office has to increase representation in the surveys. For example, this could include projects to explore how to improve respondent recruitment materials in order to effectively reach groups that have previously been under-represented in surveys; and, similarly, encouraging the consideration of exploratory sampling methods to encourage better representation of such groups.

The ONS is not alone in making efforts to improve inclusion. This is UK Government-wide: the Prime Minister has announced a [Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities](#). We believe that there is a role for all social researchers to share in this vision both in how they design their research but also in how they recruit their staff and create inclusive and enabling working environments. This is particularly pertinent since the government commissions much of its social research from the private sector. While the civil service may be taking positive steps to ensure that social research conducted in government is inclusive, those efforts may be derailed if the private agencies that conduct research on its behalf are not themselves diverse and inclusive.

Social research and replication

By Diarmid Campbell-Jack, technical director, Ecorys

Proving psychic effects?

While social researchers consider themselves far too cerebral to waste time examining the paranormal, one of the most important challenges to our work is rooted in a recent study of extra-sensory perception (ESP).

Professor Daryl Bem's 2011 paper on ESP received more publicity than the average psychology paper. Not surprising given that it claimed people were better able to remember words if they rehearsed a list **after** being tested on them. If true, the keen student could get better results by cramming not only before an exam but after it as well. However, when other psychologists repeated the study, the positive results disappeared, and the paranormal was once again relegated to pseudo-science.

Replicating other studies

Questions began to be asked in social psychology, resulting in several large-scale studies to see whether this was a widespread phenomenon. The results were less than impressive, with at best, around half of all replications having similarly significant results to the originals. In addition, effect sizes tended to be substantially lower. Social priming and the marshmallow test of delayed gratification were high-profile victims. What was at first an amusing anecdote about the paranormal suddenly became 'the replication crisis'.

Social research

While there is little solid evidence on replication in social research, there are reasons for concern. Deliberate or accidental p-hacking (manipulating analysis to get significant results) is just as possible in social research as psychology. Under-powered studies are hardly unknown in our work. General social science journals are only slightly less likely than those in psychology to be biased towards papers with positive

findings, with this becoming increasingly likely (Fanelli, 2012). Furthermore, as is the case in other fields, data tends to be made publicly available only for the most high-profile social research studies, so there is perhaps less of an incentive to follow best practice if your data won't be available to others. Meanwhile, the nature of real-world research increases the chances of failed replications.

This is compounded by replication simply not yet having received the necessary attention in social research. There has been little external scrutiny to spur us on and, with this being absent, our internal culture has not led to serious examination outside select individuals and funders (including David Johnson's views in the September 2019 Research Matters, and the work funded by 3ie: <https://www.3ieimpact.org/evidence-hub/replication-studies-status>). Awareness of the issue appears low. Sociology's two flagship journals have only published 27 articles in their history with replication in the title, with only one in the past 25 years (Freese and Peterson, 2017). The lack of hard evidence to date makes the issue easy to ignore – it is one thing to replicate a lab-based psychology study with 30 participants and another to fund and replicate a social research evaluation across 100 schools.

Next steps

How can social research begin to deal with this situation? A start would be to raise awareness and encourage discussion. We need to critically examine the likely extent of replication issues and the possible causes, identifying and promoting best practice and considering the range of views on the issue.

We are relatively lucky in that there is much from which we can learn. Recent work by Clemens (2015) defining different types of replication provides

a basis for assessing replication issues. The ongoing discussions around significance testing and p-values should encourage all of us to re-examine our practice in these areas. We can think about how psychology and other fields provide relevant training. We could even look beyond reporting on data limitations to state why our work may be actually wrong. We also need to be aware of what is different about our field. Changes to journal practices will make little direct difference to the many social researchers not working in academia. Preregistering your analysis plan with an independent organisation so you are committed to your approach in advance isn't a relevant option when you're doing exploratory analysis on large-scale existing datasets.

While taking these steps is important, a more fundamental question is why replication has not received more attention. The lack of evidence and external scrutiny should not be used as an excuse. If we are to live up to our claim that our work can really help understand society, we need to take these issues seriously.

References

- Bem, D.J. (2011). 'Feeling the future: experimental evidence for anomalous retroactive influences on cognition and affect'. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 100(3): 407-425.
- Clemens, M. (2015). The meaning of failed replications: a review and proposal. Institute for the Study of Labor, IZA DP No. 9000. <http://ftp.iza.org/dp9000.pdf>
- Fanelli, D. (2012). 'Negative results are disappearing from most disciplines and countries'. *Scientometrics* 90: 891-904.
- Freese, J. & Peterson, D. (2017). 'Replication in social science'. *Annual Review of Sociology* 43(1): 147-165.



An interview with a researcher in the third sector

Fiona Hutchison, from the Research Matters editorial team, spoke with Ruth McKenna, senior research and communications manager for the charity Waverley Care.

Q. Can you tell us a bit about who you work for and what you do?

A. Waverley Care is Scotland's HIV, hepatitis C and sexual health charity. I manage a team responsible for research, evaluation and communications within the charity.

Key to our research approach is recruiting, training and coordinating peer researchers. We reimburse them for their time and expertise. I find working with diverse peers who don't have a background in research one of the most enjoyable aspects of my role.

Q. Which research topics do you tend to explore?

A. Researching how structural inequalities affect access to public services is a major thread running through my work. In Waverley Care we research stigma and the compounded stigma of belonging to more than one marginalised group.

We engage with many people often described as 'hard to reach'. However, I've found that if you adapt your research methods, and are prepared to go to where people are, it's not hard to engage participants.

Q. Why did you decide to work for a charity?

A. While conducting my PhD in social and political sciences I came to a fork in the road. I felt I had to decide whether or not to concentrate on writing journal articles, conference papers and building up an academic CV. However, through carrying out paid internships during my PhD, I realised how much I enjoyed using research in a practical context and working with people. I had first-hand experience of charities using research to develop and improve their services. As a result, I secured a research job for the British Red Cross while writing up my thesis. I took it from there!

Q. What have been some of the challenges working within the third sector?

A. Transitioning from an academic research environment to work in the third sector meant adapting in two main ways. Firstly, in a charity, your research is always applied and practical and brings results towards decision-making and delivery within relatively short timeframes. Initially I missed the theoretical side and conducting research to further knowledge.

Fortunately, joining networks means I interact and collaborate with academic researchers on a regular basis.

Secondly, it's normal to have a blended role within the third sector. For example, I now cover communications management, which wasn't my background. That's been an enjoyable learning curve to take with help from peers in Scotland's Third Sector Research Forum.

Q. What tips would you give to a researcher who is looking to work within the charity sector?

A. Be creative. You'll likely have more scope for trying creative methods and approaches than working within other sectors.

Be open minded. Lived experience is valuable within our research. By working with people who have lived experience you'll discover more about your own biases and about developing genuinely ethical research.

Be value driven. You'll be able to trace how your day-to-day research activities have influenced policy and practice, (hopefully!) improving access to services.

Going door-to-door in the Covid-19 era

By Helen Moore, head of social survey operations research and support (OPERAS), ONS

After watching Covid-19 storm clouds gather for several weeks, on the evening of Monday 16 March, the Prime Minister announced, 'Now is the time for everyone to stop non-essential contact with others and to stop all unnecessary travel. We need people to start working from home where they possibly can.' The Office for National Statistics (ONS) ceased face-to-face data collection immediately in favour of its interviewers working by telephone from home, so that they could continue collecting data to tell the story of the virus's impact on the UK. Sabina Kastberg wrote about this in June's edition of *Research Matters*. Some of our face-to-face interviewers were available to help on other projects because they were not spending time travelling, and telephone numbers were not available for all addresses.



or another vulnerability. About 100 interviewers took part in the training, which was delivered in partnership between ONS and its commercial partner IQVIA. The questionnaire is simple to administer, but the protocol about contacting the address, preparing the car boot, conducting the interview, and delivering and collecting swab test samples was all new. Gloves and hand sanitiser were provided to protect both respondent and interviewer. The protocol stipulated always keeping a distance of two metres – interviewers were given an allowance to buy a face covering to use if distancing was ever

We're not rushing to return to the old ways of interviewing even if official restrictions on contact allow it

not possible (for example, passing people in the corridor of an apartment block). Support was available pretty much round-the-clock in the early days, to iron out a few teething problems with interview field allocation systems and with finding drop-off points for delivering completed swab tests. The interviewers used Yammer, ONS's internal social media forum, to form a brilliant support network for each other.

This has been useful learning as we dip our toes into the next phase for face-to-face interviewers working on

our regular surveys. We're not rushing to return to the old ways of interviewing even if official restrictions on contact allow it. We need to assess both the public's and our interviewers' appetite to allow the closer physical contact that a face-to-face interview in the home would involve. Meanwhile, we're exploring the costs and benefits of a different short-term approach. We've done a great job of keeping going with telephone interviewing for our regular surveys while we've been unable to work normally, but we can't achieve our normal response rates unless we can access more telephone numbers. So, in July and August we tried out having two interviewers each from a couple of local groups visit sampled addresses to collect phone numbers. We've developed a field protocol consistent with that used for the Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Survey. There are some small differences: we provide face coverings and hand sanitiser to these interviewers, but because they do not handle swab tests, they don't need to use gloves. We will assess the success of this approach before we decide whether to adopt it more widely. We're talking to our interviewers about any concerns they have about returning to work in the field. Many of them can't wait to get out and about again persuading respondents of the importance of taking part – it's that personal interaction that they relish about the job.

From May, ONS interviewers were asked to help with the new Coronavirus (COVID-19) Infection Survey which provides estimates of the prevalence of, and immunity from, the virus. The UK Government and its scientific advisers are using this survey to make crucial decisions about restrictions to public activity. A call went out for volunteer interviewers, with the stipulation that they must not be 'shielding' or at increased risk because of age

Moving quickly on ELSA: putting methodology into practice

By Pete Dangerfield, research director, and Bruno Pacchiotti, senior researcher,
NatCen Social Research

The coronavirus outbreak has sped up several plans for the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA), not least its move towards alternative modes of data collection. The study, which aims to investigate the physical, psychological, social and economic aspects of ageing, was due to commence Wave 10 of face-to-face interviewer and nurse fieldwork this year. However, as the coronavirus outbreak hit the UK, and social distancing measures were imposed by the UK Government, plans for ELSA, as with all other face-to-face surveys, came to an abrupt halt. Eager to understand the impact of the outbreak, the ELSA team had to rethink our practices and adapt data collection methods to the new situation. And we had to do it swiftly.

At the time of writing, we are finishing fieldwork on a new sequential online and telephone sub-study with the ELSA panel, which explores the impact of coronavirus on the over-50 population. Foremost, of course, the study should provide critical insights into some of the populations most affected by the virus. From a research methods point of view, fielding this study has also allowed us to put into practice some of the methodological work we've been carrying out on ELSA in the last few years.

At NatCen, we had been thinking, even before coronavirus struck, about how online data collection could be used for some of the elements of the ELSA biennial face-to-face survey. Last year,

as part of the 'UK Population Lab' programme, we conducted a thorough evaluation of the potential benefits and pitfalls of a move to online data collection.¹ We engaged in a review of the Wave 9 CAPI² questionnaire to assess the risk of mode effects when introducing an online option and to understand what could be done to mitigate those risks. We also explored the possibility of introducing an alternative fieldwork design, whereby an online or sequential online-CATI³ approach to data collection could complement the biennial survey and capture some measures more frequently – either quarterly or annually – in between face-to-face waves.

Given the nature of the ELSA sample, whose members are aged 50 and over, another key consideration was how online modes of data collection would affect responses. We reviewed data from two probability-based online panels to assess potential patterns of response, as well as any bias that could be introduced to the actual achieved sample when moving some elements of the ELSA survey online.

Outside this evaluation, we've also developed some new ways to manage our telephone fieldwork. The richness of information we already have about our study members – such as internet usage, their participation history, along with their demographic characteristics – are very powerful in this regard. Combining this data with the first week of web completions, we used a model to predict which sample members



would be more or less likely to take part in the web survey, and then set an order for who should be contacted by our telephone interviewers. We are looking to review the technique in the coming months to understand if this could be used more widely on our panel studies.

To sum up, the pandemic has presented us with an opportunity to further develop and implement some of the methods we had been considering for ELSA and panel surveys in general. The impossibility of doing face-to-face fieldwork, coupled with the need to collect timely data to monitor the outbreak's impact on the ELSA sample (a sample which includes higher risk individuals), prompted us to design a sequential online-CATI approach. Response rates, which indicate how important telephone contact is for many of our older participants, seem to justify the approach we've taken. Our preliminary work on the impacts of changing our data collection approach proved highly beneficial, and the experience illustrates the importance of reflecting on how you can adapt and innovate in new situations.

¹ For a detailed description of this work, please see the [published report](#).

² Computer-assisted personal interviewing.

³ Computer-assisted telephone interviewing.

How Ipsos MORI has resumed face-to-face fieldwork during Covid-19

By Dr Lisa Hazelden, managing director face-to-face, operations, Ipsos MORI

On 3 July, following months of preparatory work and a successful proof of concept trial, Ipsos MORI led the market announcing a return to face-to-face fieldwork in the UK. We are now carrying out Covid-19 safe face-to-face interviews for both random probability and quota projects across the UK, dependent on local conditions.



Since March, we have worked to evolve our data collection modes, and can now administer a participant-centric solution, which includes socially distant doorstep interviews as well as telephone and video interviews. We have implemented an online portal enabling potential participants to specify their preferred data collection mode, and appointments are then arranged to suit the participant. The new portfolio of Covid-19 safe data collection modes is compliant with both the Market Research Society (MRS) and government guidelines.

How we trialled this

A series of proof of concept trials across a number of projects is now almost complete. All trials have been extremely encouraging, and have gone much better than we could have anticipated. The majority of participants interviewed were very responsive to fieldworkers knocking on their doors and the new safety measures implemented. Our response and placement rates have so far been equal to, or better than, our pre Covid-19 data, and reasons for refusal are also consistent with pre Covid-19 data.

By way of example, in early July we conducted a large-scale Capibus trial, targeting 1,000 interviews over ten days, using interviewers with a mix of ability straight out of our furlough programme. The interviewers received online training covering health and safety and the use of new protocols and methodologies, followed by assessments and an accreditation for video interviewing. The trial questionnaire covered a range of topics exploring how comfortable participants were in covering different types of information using the different modes.

There was a particularly positive reception from older householders who had experienced little human contact in recent months, and it was easier to find some of the harder-to-reach groups, such as full-time workers, than before

The trial achieved 1,036 interviews in the time frame – 917 doorstep, 112 telephone and seven video. The interviewers started with a screening questionnaire to identify any potential vulnerabilities. If a risk to the participant or interviewer was identified, the interview was pushed to either telephone or video. Strike rates were equivalent or better than pre Covid-19, with the only discernible difference in the data being a slightly higher percentage of ABC1 participants, because a higher proportion of this group were at home during lockdown.

Average interview length was 15.4 minutes. 53 sample points were worked by 34 interviewers with an average of 20 interviews per point.

Feedback from interviewers was overwhelmingly positive, with the vast majority stating that the doorstep survey worked well, and that they were able to use the telephone interviewing option to convert individuals who would otherwise have refused. Anecdotally, participants appeared to be more friendly than pre-lockdown. There was a particularly positive reception from older householders who had experienced little human contact in recent months, and it was easier to find some of the harder-to-reach groups, such as full-time workers, than before. There were no issues with answering more sensitive questions on the doorstep.

It is worth noting that some of our random probability work relies on longer interviews, traditionally conducted in the home, and these are more likely to require video interviewing.

Looking ahead

We expect face-to-face doorstep engagement will continue to play a vital role in gaining participation and maintaining response rates for these surveys. The success of this trial and others meant returning to delivering large-scale face-to-face tracker projects from August.

The Understanding Society Covid-19 study

By Professor Annette Jäckle, Professor Michaela Benzeval and Dr Jonathan Burton, Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex; and Professor Thomas Couper, Department of Economics, European University Institute



The Understanding Society panel study

Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study, is an annual survey that collects high quality data from a representative sample of people living in the UK. The study collects data on health, education, employment, income, housing, family relationships, civic engagement – domains that are highly relevant to understanding the experiences and consequences of the coronavirus pandemic in the UK. Fieldwork for the study has continued throughout the pandemic. Thanks to a previous programme of research and development on data collection modes, the study transitioned seamlessly to web and telephone interviewing in March 2020 (see Burton, Lynn and Benzeval, 2020). The study is, however, not set up to provide data on rapidly changing circumstances – or to provide data in real-time.

Starting in April 2020, we therefore set up a new Covid-19 study, which complements the annual Understanding Society interviews. We invite our sample members to complete additional regular web surveys to track how the pandemic is affecting them, and we make the data available to researchers within a month of completing fieldwork. In some months, individuals in non-internet households are interviewed by telephone. The 20-minute questionnaire includes core content repeated in each survey to track changes through the pandemic, as well as rotating content. The Covid-19 study includes all members of the main Understanding Society survey; 42,330 individuals were invited to the first web survey in April 2020 and 41% responded. The study is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and the Health Foundation, with fieldwork carried

out by Ipsos MORI and Kantar. The survey design and implementation of the Covid-19 study builds on prior work, developing and testing methods for event-triggered data collection, to collect data about life events between annual interviews (see Jäckle, Burton and Couper, 2019).

Why use an existing panel?

Embedding a study on Covid-19 in an existing household panel study offers several analytical advantages:

- ▶ The data from the Covid-19 surveys can be linked to prior information about respondents, collected in annual interviews since 2009. These provide background, or ‘baseline’ information, that is crucial for any analyses of differences in the experience and consequences of the pandemic across the population
- ▶ In future, it will be possible to link the Covid-19 data to annual interviews from 2021 and beyond, enabling analyses of the long-term consequences of people’s experiences during the pandemic
- ▶ Repeating questionnaire content from the annual interviews in the Covid-19 surveys, produces time series that cover the period before, during and after the pandemic
- ▶ The background information can be used to create survey weights that adjust for selective non-response more effectively than weights that are based on standard demographic characteristics (for example, age, gender, region of residence) alone
- ▶ The study interviews all household members aged 16+, enabling detailed analyses of within-household relationships and dynamics

- ▶ The sample is a representative sample of people in all age groups. That is, it includes representative samples of children, working age adults, and those in retirement

Data access and results

To date, the data from the April, May, and June surveys are available from the [UK Data Service \(UKDS\)](https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=6614).

The data from the annual Understanding Society interviews, which can be linked to the COVID-19 data, are at <https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/studies/study?id=6614>.

The Understanding Society team publishes [briefing notes](#) about different effects of Covid-19.

The Covid-19 data are being used by researchers in government, charities, commercial organisations and academia in the UK and abroad. Publications using these data are logged in the [Understanding Society publications database](#).

Where to find out more

[Updates on the Understanding Society Covid-19 study](#)

[Data documentation, including questionnaires, online variable search, and the user guide](#)

References

Burton, J., Lynn, P. and Benzeval, M. (2020). ‘How Understanding Society: The UK Household Longitudinal Study adapted to the Covid-19 pandemic’. *Survey Research Methods* 14(2): 235-239.

Jäckle, A., Burton, J. and Couper, M.P. (2019). Event-triggered data collection, Understanding Society Working Paper 2019-16, Colchester: University of Essex. <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/working-papers/2019-16.pdf>

SRA Scotland

By Karen Kerr

On 24 June SRA North and SRA Scotland ran the first joint online committee event 'Keeping connected, staying social, getting virtual'. Here's [the blog](#) if you'd like to find out more. Many thanks to all our speakers and participants who helped to make the event a huge success.

The pandemic continues to be a challenging time for all of us both professionally and personally, and SRA Scotland is keen to support social researchers in Scotland. If there is any way in which we can help you at this time, please feel free to get in touch with me, either by email, karen.kerr@sds.co.uk or telephone, 07584 470028.

To keep up to date with SRA Scotland news please follow us on [@SRA_Scotland](#).



SRA Cymru

By Faye Gracey

The pandemic has ignited a lot of change. It can be hard to keep up with new advice, guidance, law, policies, and social research/statistics. @SeneddResearch provides regular briefings which you may find useful context for your social research work. Visit www.senedd.wales (Welsh Parliament) and click on research to find out more. SRA Cymru is keen to support our network and is always pleased to hear from you: please don't hesitate to get in touch at any time.

For our latest news do continue to follow [@SRACymru](#). Cofion cynnes. faye.gracey@llyw.cymru. gracey@gov.wales



SRA North

By Jenni Brooks

SRA North was delighted to join forces with SRA Scotland for our first joint virtual event, 'Keeping connected, staying social, getting virtual'. You can see a [report of the event on the SRA blog](#). We would love to organise another virtual gathering, and are always open to collaborating with others, so if you have any ideas we would love to hear from you.

We are aware that some of our members will be finding things difficult at the minute – if there is anything we may be able to do to support you please let us know. As always, keep in touch with us by following [@SRANorth](#), or emailing srnorth@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](#).

REVIEWS

Documentary research in the social sciences

Malcolm Tight

SAGE Publishing, 2019

Reviewed by Ruthi Margulis, independent researcher

Documentary research (DR) is an integral part of social research, yet there is little literature that covers this subject. This book aims to fill that gap, and starts by explaining the need for DR, and its usefulness and relevance to a range of fields, including historical and policy research. The author provides a comprehensive overview covering the different areas in which DR is used, the nature and variety of documents, types of documentary research, techniques for collation and analysis, and next steps. He also provides diverse examples of research projects, ending each chapter with selected key readings. The book is aimed at all social

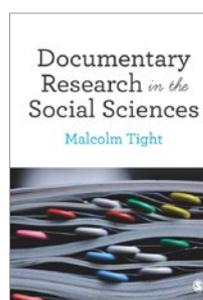
researchers, including beginners, and provides an excellent starting point.

The author's aim 'is to help make DR a more widely accepted and recognised, understood and applied part of the social research landscape'. He does this in part by clearly illustrating that DR is often included in a research project though we may not recognise it as such, for example literature reviews and secondary data analysis. The book synthesises current thinking on DR, and discusses and references a wide range of literature.

The author discusses differences in terminology that can cause confusion, and makes it clear that this field has

many approaches, perspectives and uses, including those he thinks best illustrate his points and objectives. This is especially helpful for those entering the field for the first time, as is the discussion about ethics, and why this is relevant to DR even when a document already exists.

I would highly recommend this book to researchers in all fields, and especially policy and qualitative researchers. The author's enthusiasm, expertise and understanding of DR really helps to draw the reader in, as does his clear, coherent writing style and pragmatic approach.



Qualitative secondary research: a step-by-step guide

Claire Largan and Theresa Morris

SAGE Publishing, 2019

Reviewed by Aimee Grant, independent scholar

In recent years, there has been increased interest in using existing qualitative data to answer new questions.

The 14 chapters of this book each provide guidance on how to undertake a particular element of qualitative secondary analysis. For example, chapter 3 focuses on theory, chapter 5 on ethics, chapter 8 on quality, and chapter 10 on data management. The range and depth of the book mean that it is ideally suited to masters and doctoral students, perhaps being too lengthy for the majority of undergraduates who have limited time in which to complete their dissertation. However, the authors note that it is 'perfect for those doing dissertations', and it is written in a way that is

accessible to them. For this reason, selective use of chapters would be beneficial for undergraduates; the chapter on constructing a literature review may be particularly useful.

If you are considering using secondary data in your own research, on page 32 there is a handy checklist under the heading 'How do I know if qualitative secondary research is for me?' These sorts of checklists and decision tables, boxes labelled with 'pause for thought' and diagrams exploring concepts can be found throughout. This makes it ideally suited to the novice qualitative researcher, as well as those new to using secondary data. It also makes for a very readable book.

Overall, the authors have written a well thought out, accessible and comprehensive book, which is a welcome addition to a relatively small literature on secondary data and documentary analysis. I will definitely be using this in my own research, to ensure that I have not forgotten important elements in my research design and analysis, and will be recommending chapter 5 (ethics in qualitative secondary research) as additional reading in the ethics chapter of my forthcoming book aimed at undergraduate students undertaking documentary analysis (to be published by Policy Press in 2021).



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:

Doing action research in your own organization

David Coghlan
SAGE, 2019
(5th edition)



Get your data from social media – Little Quick Fix

Nicola Thomas
SAGE, 2020



Visual research methods in educational research

Julianne Moss and
Barbara Pini
Palgrave MacMillan,
2016



SRA training

Our trainers have adapted several training courses to run live online. These courses are now available to [book on the SRA website](#).

Trainers are experts in their fields, and the training aims to provide practical hands-on knowledge and understanding to small groups of participants. There's a focus on interactivity including practice sessions in online breakout groups. One-day courses run either in one session or over two half days.

SEPTEMBER

22 & 23	Reporting qualitative data	NatCen
23	Impact evaluation: options, choices and practice – FULL	Professor David Parsons
23 & 24	Conducting online qualitative research – FULL	Dr Karen Lumsden and Professor Karen O'Reilly
25	Qualitative data analysis – FULL	Professor Karen O'Reilly
28, 29 & 30	Analysis of qualitative data – FULL	NatCen
28	Theory-based evaluation: options and choices – FULL	Professor David Parsons
28	Narratives and storytelling in qualitative research	Dr Karen Lumsden
30	Narrative analysis	Dr Karen Lumsden

OCTOBER

1 & 2	Web survey design	NatCen
2	Research and evaluation project management – FULL	Professor David Parsons
7	Foundations of qualitative research	Professor Karen Lumsden
8 & 9	Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings	Professor Karen Lumsden
8 & 9	Smartphone video production for social researchers	Mark Saunders and Michele de Laurentiis
12	Qualitative interviewing	Professor Karen O'Reilly
13	Conducting online focus groups	Dr Karen Lumsden
14, 15 & 16	Designing and moderating focus groups	NatCen
14 & 15	Introduction to applied behavioural science	Chris Perry
15 & 16	Creative methods in qualitative research	Dr Nicole Brown
15 & 16	Questionnaire design	NatCen
21	Qualitative data analysis	Professor Karen O'Reilly
21 & 22	Cognitive interviewing	NatCen
22 & 23	Converting to online qualitative research	Dr Karen Lumsden and Professor Karen O'Reilly
22 & 23	Depth interviewing skills – FULL	NatCen
23	Introduction to sampling and weighting	Dr Alex Cernat
27 & 28	Weighting and imputation for survey non-response	Dr Tarek Al Baghal
28 & 29	Introduction to evidence reviews	NatCen
30	Introduction to R	Dr Alex Cernat

NOVEMBER		
2	Data visualisation and infographic design	Nigel Hawtin
3 & 4	21 ways to test your survey questions	Dr Pamela Campanelli
5	Research and evaluation project management	Professor David Parsons
9	Foundations of evaluation	Professor David Parsons
10 & 11	Managing challenging interviews – FULL	NatCen
19 & 20	Emotions and reflexive qualitative research	Dr Nicole Brown
DECEMBER		
1	Impact evaluation: options, choices and practice	Professor David Parsons
1 & 2	Research with children and young people	Dr Louca-Mai Brady & Berni Graham
7	Theory-based evaluation: options and choices	Professor David Parsons
9 & 10	Public involvement in social research	Dr Louca-Mai Brady & Berni Graham
10 & 11	Introduction to qualitative research	NatCen
17 & 18	Depth interviewing skills	NatCen

Courses are priced as either one day (£165 for members, £220 for non-members) or two-day (£330 for members, £440 for non-members). Either type may run over several sessions such as two consecutive mornings or afternoons, or over full days. Please check the website for details.

New courses and new dates are regularly added so please keep an eye on the website:

www.the-sra.org.uk/training

If you have any queries contact lindsay.adams@the-sra.org.uk

Coming this autumn: GDPR guidance for social research

The MRS and SRA have been working on a joint guide to GDPR and the Data Protection Act, that is specifically designed for social research.

With such complex and multi-faceted legislation this guide has taken a good deal of time to draft, check and review (reviewers have included ONS and the Information Commissioner's Office). It is now being copy-edited and should be available soon.

Spotlight on SRA activity

Training

www.the-sra.org.uk/training

Many qual, quant and evaluation courses have been converted to online delivery, at reduced prices.

Events

www.the-sra.org.uk/events

No face-to-face conference this year, but we're looking at a virtual event.

Blog

www.the-sra.org.uk/blog

Plenty of topical posts on researching under lockdown – why not consider a contribution?

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, support during lockdown, and more.

Ethics

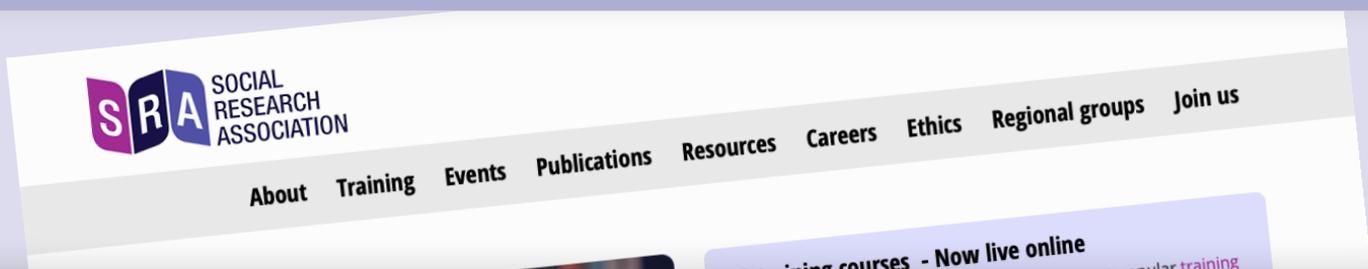
<https://the-sra.org.uk/SRA/Ethics>

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

Member resources

Login at 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 2020

SRA Research Matters will be published in **December**.

Copy deadline: **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 • **Fiona Hutchison**, Historic Environment Scotland
 • **Genna Kik**, IFF Research • **Patten Smith**, Ipsos MORI • **Tim Vizard**, ONS
 • **Martina Vojtkova**, 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