

# research matters



Photo: Sylwia Kowalczyk 'Our Voices'

## Magic happened: co-producing a research-inspired exhibition

By Anna Gawlewicz, lecturer in public policy and research methods, University of Glasgow

'A picture is worth a thousand words' may be a worn-out cliché but it does summarise the added value of disseminating research visually. Working with artists can be hugely rewarding and facilitate new ways of producing knowledge.

In deep Covid-19 lockdown, my colleagues and I found ourselves researching [Polish migrant essential workers in the UK](#). This involved surveying 1,105 and interviewing 40 Polish workers and speaking to migrant support organisations. The richness of the qualitative material that we collected exceeded our expectations.



These powerful stories of solidarity and struggle deserved to be shared but we felt that using traditional dissemination methods such as a report would not do them justice.

### Trusted partner

We had a pre-existing relationship with [Centrala](#), a hub for Central and Eastern European art and artists in Birmingham, and pitched an exhibition idea to them. They loved it, and connected us with three critically acclaimed visual artists: Małgorzata Dawidek, Sylwia Kowalczyk and Paulina Korobkiewicz. Centrala also organised public launches in Birmingham, London and Edinburgh in autumn 2022.

## Working with artists

We prepared a mood board – a visual presentation of our research including images, text, and media stories – and shared anonymised interview transcripts with the artists. We gave them a lot of freedom to choose the most appropriate medium to express themselves. They considered various ideas, but in the end opted for photography. Working with artists was a new experience and introduced us to different ways of producing and disseminating knowledge. As researchers, we are used to having some control over the research process. We had to let that go and be open to different ways of knowing or not knowing, to almost unlearn how to produce a research output.

## Spaces of (dis)connection

The exhibition explores how public and private spaces changed because of the pandemic. For instance, lively public spaces became deserted while private spaces, our homes, became spaces of increased human presence – often an isolated one too. The exhibition presents both as having the capacity to connect and disconnect, to be simultaneously safe and dangerous. In doing so, it speaks to a more universal experience of the pandemic, the one that we all share to some degree. This is well-captured in Paulina Korobkiewicz's work, which features images of empty restaurants. Before the pandemic, these places were buzzing with noisy crowds.

The lockdown put a dramatic halt to this. But there is more to the theme of disconnection that the exhibition explores. It is also reflective of migrant experience during Covid-19: of being unable to travel internationally to see loved ones or experiencing ovations for doing essential work one minute and facing precarity the next. This is what made lockdown particular for migrant communities.

## Reception

This capacity to capture the universal and the particular of the pandemic experience is what resonated with the audience. Our launches were incredibly chatty with people engaging with artwork on a personal level. An English nurse, for example, found Magorzata Dawidek's white-toned artwork deeply evocative. Where the artist used white to express safety, the nurse saw danger because it transported her to the clinical setting of the hospital.

Art can create a stronger personal connection with the topic and generate emotionality. It opens up a new powerful space where perspectives of research participants, researchers, artists and the audience mix on equal terms. The researcher is no longer the one who determines the conclusions. Rather, they are collectively produced allowing individual viewers to connect with them from their unique positions.

[The exhibition is available online.](#)

# What do you think of Research Matters?

**Research Matters is for anyone interested in social research, whether working as a social researcher, using social research or just wanting to learn more about it.**

**The editorial team is keen to hear from readers what you think about the magazine. Are there any industry sectors, methods, or disciplines you would like to see included more often? Or other features or series you would like to suggest? Or would you like to write a regular column on an industry hot topic? Please email [admin@the-sra.org.uk](mailto:admin@the-sra.org.uk) with any ideas. You do not necessarily need to contribute to any future features but are more than welcome to do so if you would like!**



# The icing on the cake

SRA co-chair, Diarmid Campbell-Jack, on when a cliché is the only alternative left

Welcome to this quarter's Research Matters. Hackneyed phrases are the curse of all part-time editors. You've finished that last-minute data analysis, opened up a blank document entitled 'Research Matters Editorial', and suddenly the boilerplate phrases start flowing. At the end of the day, it goes without saying that it isn't always easy when writing to think outside the box.



It's simple to say that any issue contains the usual mix of hard-hitting pieces and thought-provoking articles. As someone who never avoids the opportunity to look a gift cliché in the mouth, I can confidently state that this Research Matters does indeed contain the usual mix of hard-hitting pieces and thought-provoking articles.

However, this quarter's issue includes something slightly different, with an in-depth discussion with four social researchers and a separate article on diversity and inclusion (D&I). We are rightly proud in the SRA of our recent work, having researched D&I within the sector, developed areas for the SRA to focus on in the future through an internal audit, and started developing an inclusive social research practice course. The in-depth discussion helps us continue thinking about this issue, providing a wide-ranging look at current work, key questions for the next few years, and even book recommendations.

This issue also contains a piece by Nadya Ali examining the work of Citizens Advice to integrate equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) into its advocacy projects, ensure policy changes benefit those experiencing intense disadvantage, and understand the link between issues facing their

clients and protected characteristics. Nadya's article is particularly worth reading to understand the challenge of advocating for the opinions of the majority while being attuned to the needs of marginalised clients.

We have two articles examining social research and environmental issues. Jo d'Ardenne reflects on the steps taken by the survey industry to reduce carbon emissions, the need for published data on the issue, and how emissions can be reduced. Pamela Kultscher of Statistics Austria talks us through a survey incentives experiment, where respondents could turn down an incentive, get a shopping voucher, or donate to support the renaturation of a bog. Read more to find out people's responses, and ponder if we'd see the same results from the average UK survey respondents.

This issue leads with an article by Anna Gawlewicz, who continues the theme of prosaic language by asking if the 'worn-out cliché' that a picture is worth a thousand words can be applied to research, using as an example, work with artists to illustrate her research into Polish migrant essential workers in the UK. Laura Tuhou from Ipsos also examines social research and creativity, examining how crafting has helped her decompress from heavy-going work, and inspire her subconscious.

We're delighted to include Kathryn Potter's article on Senedd Research, the team of experts supporting research across the Welsh Parliament. Many SRA members will be particularly interested in the work to develop a network of 350 members from over 100 universities and research institutions.

Finally, I'd heartily recommend that any jaded social researcher reads about Shannon Boston's experiences as a peer researcher at a youth organisation

in Shetland. Shannon writes wonderfully on her experiences working on three projects over two years:

**'Peer research has really changed my life, who I was two years ago would not believe what "today me" has achieved... I think this job really has changed me in such a positive way, my outlook, my confidence, my motivation and my skill set just keep growing. I am so excited for the future.'**

It is easy to think about how our social research analysis and reports can help change society. It is more difficult to remember how our work can help us as researchers, particularly those of us starting out on a career. Risking one last cliché, Shannon's piece is the icing on the cake of this issue.

## Can you help us develop these SRA activities?

- ▶ **Research Matters editorial team:** we meet quarterly to plan the next issue of the magazine
- ▶ **Events group:** we put together the annual conference and other gatherings

If you'd like to expand your horizons by getting involved, please email [admin@the-sra.org.uk](mailto:admin@the-sra.org.uk) with 'volunteering' in the title, and let us know which one you'd like to help with.

# My youth-led research journey

By Shannon Boston, researcher, OPEN project

I am a paid peer researcher at [OPEN project](#), a youth organisation in Shetland. Between 2021 and 2023, with funding from the [Ideas Fund](#), young people from the OPEN project in Shetland were matched with professional researchers to support them to conduct research on issues affecting their community. I have been in my role for over two years and have completed three research projects. I feel confident at my job now, but I didn't start that way.



the data and then tell the story of the findings. Most importantly for me, my confidence grew throughout this project. I started as a seed and, with the help of our mentors and my team, I was able to grow and develop into my role. We presented our findings to our local community and a space for young people came out of this work. It was not everything that young people wanted but there was still some palpable change due to our research.

For our second project, Shetland's Children's Partnership commissioned us to review its vision statement so that young people could have their input. We ran focus groups and interviews with young people to gather their views and presented the findings to the Children's Partnership. With each project, I have felt my passion for the role grow. My confidence was also growing to champion the voices and opinions of the young people who participated in the work.

For our third project I felt prepared. I knew how peer research worked. This time we focused on the impact of alcohol and other drugs on young people. For this project, we focused on ethics, including how we would ask young people our questions on such a sensitive topic. This was personally the hardest part of our research work so far. I had to put aside my own preconceptions and work from a neutral stance to give participants the most open and comfortable spaces to answer our questions.

For this project we wanted to understand why young people use alcohol and other drugs and we hoped that with that understanding people would be able to access the right help. We are coming to the end of the project now and it has been such an amazing journey. The young people in our community have really supported this project as well as the wider community. With each project we do we get more and more supporters.

Peer research has really changed my life. Who I was two years ago would not believe what 'today me' has achieved. The support and encouragement I have been given has helped me to blossom into the young woman I am today and the importance of that can't be forgotten. Everything in life is about people and when you find the people willing to help you develop you can either let the opportunity pass you by – which believe me I did that plenty – or grab it by the horns. Reflecting back, I think this job really has changed me in such a positive way, my outlook, my confidence, my motivation and my skill set just keep growing. I am so excited for the future and so thankful for how lucky I have been to get this chance. I am so glad that 'past me' did grab this opportunity by the horns. As the old Scottish grannies say: 'whit's fur ye'll no go by ye' (what's for you, won't go by you).

If you're interested in learning more about Scots Language please visit <https://www.scotslanguage.com/>



# Understanding and reducing the survey industry's carbon emissions

By Jo d'Ardenne, senior research director, National Centre for Social Research

The UK has set legally binding targets to become net zero by 2050. Every industry has a part to play in decarbonisation, and the survey industry is no exception. The research industry has already started to mobilise to reduce emissions. For example, the Market Research Society (MRS) has launched its [Net Zero Pledge](#), a voluntary scheme whereby research agencies commit to reach net zero by 2026. UK research and Innovation (UKRI) is due to launch its [Environmental Concordat](#) in 2024. This concordat will be a voluntary programme by which research providers can pledge to publish details on their emissions, make public commitments for reductions and share best practice.



Both programmes are to be commended. Hopefully, the number of research agencies subscribing to these or similar schemes, will continue to increase. That said, I believe practitioners who work in the survey industry should be doing something more specific. Current programmes tend to follow a similar format: estimate an organisation's total emissions, publish the results, and commit to common ameliorating steps such as improving building efficiency, reducing office-waste or investing in carbon offsetting. These are all positive actions. However, they are the type of action that could be taken by any industry.

To date there is a dearth of published data showing how different survey designs generate different levels of emissions. As a survey methodologist I strongly believe we need to generate this data so that commissioners can make fully informed decisions about the environmental trade-offs involved in different survey methods. I also believe that environmental impact should become another factor methodologists refer to when discussing total survey quality.

An obvious example of how different survey designs lead to different emissions is mode choice. Face-to-face interviewing methods have high response rates, but they also involve interviewers clocking up many hundreds (if not thousands) of car miles. In contrast, telephone interviewing and web modes have lower emissions. But the trade-off is a lower response rate and potential decreases in data quality.

Even within face-to-face designs there are many factors that influence mileage. These factors include how addresses are clustered during sampling, the maximum number of visits interviewers are expected to make to an address, the efficiency of contact patterns (that is, how often trips results in contact) and whether alternative modes of interviewing are permitted once initial contact is made (for example offering video interviews if a respondent agrees to be interviewed at a later date). Leaving the mileage issue aside, there are plenty of other design choices that affect the overall

level of emissions a survey produces. The volume of printed materials and the type of incentive offered will affect emissions. Even the number of email reminders sent will have some impact because of the energy required to store these emails on servers and data centres. As an industry we need to get better at understanding how our design choices affect emissions and sharing this information to inform practice.

I had the pleasure of hosting a [session at ESRA 2023](#) on opportunities to reduce emissions at each stage of the survey cycle. The aim was to encourage an exchange of ideas on what different stakeholders could do to address emissions through survey design and research governance. Various suggestions were made, including embedding environmental considerations into existing ethical review procedures, attempting to calculate survey level emissions, and sharing data on this area more widely. One proposal was that more process data could be shared within the survey industry (for example on number of trips, mileage, number of mailings). This would make it possible for future methodologists and commissioners to assess these factors alongside existing quality markers such as response rates. Ultimately it will improve our understanding of the trade-offs involved in different designs.

I hope that this inspires you to think about how you can reduce emissions on the surveys you work on in 2024 and beyond.

# How to save the climate one survey at a time

By Pamela Kultscher, survey methodologist and questionnaire expert, Statistics Austria

As enthusiastic adopters of a respondent-centred survey approach at Statistics Austria, we paused for a moment when we received more and more requests from respondents who wanted us to donate their incentive for taking part (a classic shopping voucher) to a good cause. Were people really ready to give up the money they ‘earned’ participating in our surveys? Might there maybe be a chance that a more ‘meaningful’ incentive, that could make a difference, could increase their willingness to participate in surveys? Could we even motivate people to stay in our panel surveys longer with this easily actionable suggestion?



de-watered (to gain peat and farm land), masses of carbon are released into the atmosphere where they react with oxygen and produce CO<sub>2</sub> and nitrous oxide: both gases are toxic for our climate. Although bogs only cover about 3% of the earth’s surface, they bind about one third of all terrestrial carbon. That is double what all forests combined can bind, including the Amazon and other rainforests. Renaturation restores the bogs’ water content and prevents the release of large quantities of CO<sub>2</sub> into the air.

## ... we decided to try sponsoring the renaturation of one specific raised bog at Nassköhr, the largest raised bog complex in the Eastern Limestone Alps

When we first offered this donation incentive to our respondents, we decided to try sponsoring the renaturation of one specific raised bog at Nassköhr, the largest raised bog complex in the Eastern Limestone Alps. The possibility to choose between the shopping voucher, the donation or no incentive at all found widespread approval, and the level of generosity shown by our respondents left us surprised. With an average 30% of respondents donating their incentive to the project, we achieved our funding goal for the bog within one year.

While we are still working on deeper analysis, we can already see that the willingness to donate is mode-dependent. We assume that the interviewers have quite a big influence

on the respondents’ decision to donate. While an average of 34% of respondents chose the donation option when taking part online, only around 20% in face-to-face and around 40% in telephone interviews did the same. Evidence also suggests that the willingness to donate depends on a person’s level of education (40% of people with university level education against 17% of people who completed compulsory education), as well as the amount of the incentive (the lower the incentive, the more people donate).

We have decided to continue our partnership with the Austrian Federal Forests and to support renaturation projects in both Salzburg and Tyrol, which will renew and protect around 100 hectares of raised bog landscapes. This equals 15,000 tons of carbon that will not be released into the atmosphere, and thus not be converted into CO<sub>2</sub> and nitrous oxide. We also aim to inspire more respondents to contribute to this important cause. One strategy will be to include progress in the bog projects into panel maintenance materials, and to dedicate a page on our website to bog renaturation that allows our respondent community to follow the renaturation work in progress. We also firmly believe that we can reduce our carbon footprint with other additional measures. One idea is to develop a calculator to measure our surveys’ environmental impact with the goal of reducing our carbon footprint in data-collection processes.

Together, the survey community can make a real impact on saving our climate. Let’s put our best brains to work and get going!

We decided to give the idea a chance, keeping in mind two important conditions:

- ▶ the donation had to be voluntary
- ▶ the cause we supported should be acceptable and beneficial to all respondents

As our core philosophy at Statistics Austria is rooted in the intention to render our data-collection process as eco-friendly as possible, we partnered with the Austrian Federal Forests. They are a public entity that not only manages around 850,000 hectares of forests and other natural landscapes – about 10% of the Austrian surface area – but also engages in the renaturation of raised bogs. Bogs are wetlands that contain large quantities of carbon. When they are drained and

# Insight into parliamentary research services in Wales

By Kathryn Potter, head of research, Welsh Parliament

Access to impartial, independent research analysis by parliamentarians is more important than ever, especially in a world where information is so readily available but also contested. TS Eliot asked, 'Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?', and in some small way, I view parliamentary research services as trying to answer that question.



Parliamentarians from all parties need research and analysis which they can trust to be factual, independent and non-partisan. In-house research services exist in most parliaments around the world. Varying in size, structure and services, what binds and sets them apart from other 'information providers' is impartiality and being a dedicated resource of institutional knowledge and expertise for the parliament.

The Welsh Parliament/Senedd Cymru is home to Senedd Research, a team of research and policy experts and information specialists supporting members of the Senedd.

## 'Get your facts first' – what we do

We answer members' confidential questions and requests for research (around 1,600 a year). We also support Senedd committees in scrutinising the Welsh Government and in their policy inquiry and legislative work in devolved policy areas such as health, education and the environment and non-devolved areas such as broadcasting and international trade.

Devolution has created policy divergence across the UK which is not always well understood. We publish topical, evidence-based articles and publications (in both our official languages of Welsh and English) on our website for everyone to read because we recognised a wider

need for trusted sources of information about the Senedd's work and what's happening across the Welsh policy and legislative landscape.

Published content ranges from explainers on legislation before the Senedd, to articles on contested policies like the 20mph speed limit introduction, to a series exploring progress against the Welsh Government's own Programme for Government.

## 'Timeliness is best in all matters' – how we work

Working in a fast-paced political environment with busy politicians means our work has to be succinct, accurate and timely. There's no point in answering a research request with carefully crafted analysis if it comes too late for the plenary or committee session or to help a constituent.

Parliamentary research does some of the heavy lifting on members' behalf, finding reputable sources; analysing data; fact checking; engaging with academics, experts and stakeholders; and scanning the policy and media landscape to synthesise different views. We then draft a briefing so that a member can pick it up, read and trust the information, and get everything they need from it. Information becomes knowledge.

Being a trusted source of information takes time to cultivate and is quickly undone. All work is checked and edited, and content is carefully planned.

## We can't do it alone – engaging the research community and new voices

Connections with the research community have grown stronger through our knowledge exchange (KE) work.

Academics help us support the Senedd's work in different ways: academic fellowships, research commissions, 'expert registers',

guest articles and rapid evidence reviews. We now have a KE network of 350 members from over 100 universities and research institutions, and we have trained over 300 researchers in how to effectively engage with the Senedd.

Developing 'areas of research interest' (ARIs) – lists of policy issues or questions that can be used by Senedd committees to inform their work – has been effective in engaging new audiences with parliamentary work, drawing in research evidence from more diverse sources and encouraging new perspectives to inform scrutiny and law-making.

The first four ARIs run by Senedd committees resulted in 94 responses from researchers in 27 universities, with over half coming from academics who hadn't engaged with the Senedd before.

## What's next?

The Senedd could be on the verge of its biggest shake-up since 1999 if legislation proposing an increase in the number of Senedd members (from 60 to 96) and changes to the way they are elected becomes law. We are currently preparing for this 'known unknown', anticipating redesigning our services to meet the needs of more members and more parliamentary business.

Further change will come as we consider how generative AI can help by automating mundane tasks, freeing us to concentrate on making sense of information and applying knowledge and expertise. We hope the ongoing AI revolution is complementary to our work, and not an existential threat.

## MORE INFORMATION

Senedd Research website:

<https://research.senedd.wales/>

In Welsh: <https://ymchwil.senedd.cymru/>

X/Twitter: [@seneddresearch](https://twitter.com/seneddresearch)

In Welsh: [@seneddymchwil](https://twitter.com/seneddymchwil)

Welsh Parliament: <https://senedd.wales/>

Senedd Cymru: <https://senedd.cymru/>

# Embedding EDI at Citizens Advice



By Nadya Ali, senior policy and EDI officer, Citizens Advice

Our policy and advocacy presses for policy change to improve outcomes for our advice clients. This includes having a statutory consumer advocacy role in the post and energy sectors, and involvement in policy areas such as consumer issues, welfare and housing.



We use our frontline knowledge, data and insights, and policy expertise as evidence, engaging with the government to advocate change that will improve people's lives.

A main focus is on improving outcomes for marginalised clients. This is part of our broad equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) commitment that includes making our workforce more diverse and reflective of society generally, and increasing the extent to which our service includes marginalised clients.

## Our EDI goals

We have three goals to advance EDI in policy and advocacy:

- ▶ integrating equality by design into our advocacy projects to ensure we know how to identify and consider the needs of those who experience intensive disadvantage, detriment or harm
- ▶ committing to at least one policy change each year to benefit those who experience intense disadvantage, detriment or harm
- ▶ monitoring our data to understand how issues affecting our clients relate to protected characteristics in order to determine gaps in our advocacy work

To meet these goals, we have focused on building directorate capability, making strategic decisions about the policy areas to focus on, and considering our model of advocacy. We deliver this through three workstreams.

## How we do our research and analyse our data

We've developed our research practices to ensure that they are as inclusive as possible and respect clients' lived experiences. We've achieved this by:

- ▶ developing guidance for staff on conducting inclusive policy research and engaging with people's lived experience
- ▶ adopting measures such as minimum sample sizes in our quantitative research to ensure our evidence reflects the experiences of marginalised groups
- ▶ developing tools to analyse intersectional demographic data and to break down client experience of particular advice areas by protected characteristics
- ▶ setting up monthly equity drop-ins to develop an EDI community of practice for policy and advocacy to inform the work of the wider directorate

## Decision-making on advocacy

We're identifying potential data and policy disparities or blind spots to guide decision-making on advocacy. We've adopted the principle of 'explain or change' to be more visible and accountable in our EDI approach, and to make sure that priorities reflect our data on marginalised clients.

This entails:

- ▶ identifying disparities or blind spots related to marginalised clients
- ▶ understanding what's driving disparities or issues
- ▶ deciding whether we make the disparity/blind spot an advocacy priority or the basis for a policy project and, if not, to have a rationale for why not

## How we advocate

We are reflecting on our approach to advocacy and questioning whether this best serves marginalised clients. Our policy arguments and recommendations have tended to be 'majoritarian'. This means we lobby for change that would theoretically benefit the most people, regardless of who they are. This is often the best strategy for appealing to and engaging with a wide range of policymakers and external stakeholders and for achieving maximum impact. This approach allows Citizens Advice to advocate on behalf of large numbers of people facing detriment in a 'neutral' way. It also enables us to achieve our statutory consumer advocate role, in which we advocate on behalf of all consumers.

However, majoritarian arguments don't differentiate between differently positioned low-income groups, some of whom might be at risk of deeper detriment. This means that not all our policy recommendations benefit everyone equally – some groups of people experience policy problems more than others.

Therefore, much of our work on improving the accessibility of demographic data and testing if our policy priorities serve marginalised clients, is about ensuring that majoritarian framings are more attuned to those clients' needs. Some recent projects have focused on specific aspects, such as discriminatory pricing in insurance and the impact on people of colour, or our work on benefits sanctions for which we analysed our data broken down by key demographics to show who is worst affected and would benefit most from change.

# The SRA interview: diversity and inclusion

By Diarmid Campbell-Jack, co-chair of the SRA

The SRA has directed considerable effort to improve diversity and inclusion (D&I) in social research in recent years and it is a continuing focus. We were keen to find out more from various social researchers with experience of developing diversity and inclusion in the profession. Their details follow. I emailed each a set of questions. Their thoughtful responses show how various organisations are improving D&I and some of the lessons learned. There's information on [SRA D&I activities on our website](#) along with our report 'Far to Go' based on research with social researchers.



**Reuben Balfour:** Reuben is an associate director at Ipsos. He started out working in public health and health inequalities over 12 years ago with Sir Michael Marmot at the UCL Institute of Health Equity. He's spent the last six years at Ipsos working in the public affairs team. He's also spent the last four years working on diversity and inclusion within Ipsos, including leading the REACH (race, ethnicity and cultural heritage) network over the last 12 months.



**Izzy Dawson:** Izzy has a BA in Politics from Newcastle University and an MSc in Development Studies from the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). Izzy works as a research assistant in international evaluation at Ecorys. Previously, Izzy has worked in



fundraising for War Child – a specialist charity for children affected by conflict – and prior to that, she worked at the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) as an economic affairs intern. Izzy has a keen interest in gender equality and social inclusion, as well as in education and climate change mitigation and adaptation.

**Georgie Day:** Georgie studied BA Politics and International Relations at Royal Holloway University of London before completing an MSc in Gender and International Relations at the University of Bristol. She works as a research assistant at Ecorys in both the international and UK markets, and is interested in international development policy, with a particular focus on gender and sexuality, equality, and inclusion.



**Charles McAlindin:** Charles is a senior research associate at the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), providing analytical support to colleagues through a range of different research/evaluation projects, with a specific focus on work/employment. Most of his work at the EHRC relates to diversity and inclusion, as almost all research projects relate to the nine protected characteristic groups in the Equality Act. Prior to working at the EHRC, he worked at Defra in a monitoring and evaluation role within trade. He started his career in the private sector working for market research company Kantar, with several clients who were key players in the FMCG (fast moving consumer goods) market.



**Diarmid:** Thanks all for getting in touch and being willing to answer some questions on D&I for us at the SRA. As you know, it's an area we're really interested in, and it's great to get the perspectives of social researchers with a real interest and experience in the area. Thanks again!

## Social research and positive change

**Diarmid:** In true social research spirit, we'll kick off with a not-at-all difficult question. What's the bit of D&I work that you or your organisation has been involved in that you're most proud of?

**Charles:** Good question! Back in 2015, we, that's the EHRC, undertook a joint research project with the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) (now the Department for Business and Trade (DBT)) exploring the views and experiences of mothers and employers on a range of issues related to pregnancy, maternity and the workplace. We're all particularly proud of this work as it had a real, direct impact on policy change, which is what we all hoped for.

Our survey results showed that around one in nine mothers had left their role due to dismissal, compulsory redundancy or discriminatory treatment. This finding, and some others, led to us recommending that the government should extend redundancy protections for mothers by a further six months.

One of the great things about this work was that in the following years after our report, policy interest continued to grow. In 2022, Dan Jarvis MP put forward the Protection from Redundancy Private Members' Bill, which sought to give mothers

six months' additional redundancy protection, in line with our recommendation. Statistics from our initial research were directly mentioned by Dan as the reason why he brought the Bill forward, and he referred to our research in all hearings for the Bill. The EHRC continued to advise Dan on the Bill which received Royal Assent in May 2023. All in all, a memorable piece of work, showing how research can really make a positive change.

**Diarmid:** Really interesting. A great example of how you can make positive change, and how continued hard work can pay off.

### Intersectional approaches

**Diarmid:** Anyone else?

**Izzy:** I'm really proud of an issue paper that some of my colleagues at Ecorys did that focuses on [tackling all forms of discrimination in and through education and training](#). This paper was produced within the framework of the European Commission's Working Group on Equality and Values in Education and Training (2021-2025) and was published by the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG EAC). It covers six main topics all related to tackling discrimination and disadvantage in and through education such as discrimination based on ethnic or racial origin, disability, sexual orientation and gender identity. It provides information for each area on the EU legal and policy response, relevant international initiatives, key challenges and points for attention, and a series of inspiring practices.

**Diarmid:** Why are you so proud of it?

**Izzy:** Oh, loads of reasons! It covers a wide range of discrimination types and is open about the unique challenges in addressing them. The strength of this paper is its recognition of the importance of intersectionality, which is vital when it comes to looking at discrimination.

Intersectionality is really important, and I've been encouraged to apply an intersectional lens to my work at Ecorys. There's a meta-evaluation of education

continuity that Georgie and I are working on for which intersectionality has been vital to understanding the power dynamics and structures that create inequality and discrimination. I think taking an intersectional approach really helps shape future interventions and projects so that they effectively cater for the most vulnerable and marginalised individuals.

### Social research as a career

**Reuben:** The thing I'm most passionate about in my D&I work is encouraging young people from all backgrounds to think about a career in social research. To do this, I think it's important to share stories that let young people see what social research involves and how people enter the sector. Looking back, I knew none of this when I was making those key decisions about A-level and university. At Ipsos, as co-chair of its REACH network, I produced a podcast exploring early careers of young Black male researchers. This gave the opportunity for three colleagues, two of whom were on their placement year, to talk about their experience of research, the company and how and why they chose a career in research. The podcast was published through Ipsos' social media. Anyone interested can find it on Spotify, so do give it a listen.

**Diarmid:** I like that – letting people hear people's first-hand experiences is vital, particularly when it comes to supporting all early career social researchers. That's an important area for us in the SRA, so it is excellent to hear about your work on this.

### Collaboration and support

**Diarmid:** Out of interest, Georgie, is there any support you've found valuable in your own D&I work?

**Georgie:** I've found that being in a collaborative environment has been useful for me in our D&I work. At Ecorys, I have found that the culture of teamwork and discussion enables ideas to be discussed openly – this has definitely been helpful for me, as someone at the start of my career. Having this collaborative environment helps ideas and perspectives get shared easily, with

this being key for producing diverse and inclusive work. I've also found it useful to get opinions from people with diverse experiences and viewpoints, as this has broadened my perspective and increased my knowledge. Having regular training sessions on different topics helps as well, and at Ecorys we have regular training sessions, such as UK LGBT+ awareness training, provided by the Proud Trust. So, quite a range of things really.

**Reuben:** For me, the support and encouragement from colleagues have been invaluable. Whether it's bouncing ideas off each other in a small group on MS Teams, working together to put on an event, sharing a link to an interesting article or being a familiar smiling face in an audience, it's really helped to have people who are engaged and support your ideas and the work you do.

### Looking ahead

**Diarmid:** Reuben, I'm interested in hearing what you think about where we are heading in the future. What do you see as the main challenges facing social researchers working in this area in the next, say, five years?

**Reuben:** I think the next five years present some opportunities but also challenges for D&I. The opportunities come through continuing to build a community of social researchers – engaging, educating and inspiring each other, and celebrating where things have worked well. Through working together, we can influence colleagues, organisations and the sector as a whole, to bring about change. Those are important opportunities, and we should keep those in mind.

The challenges lie in maintaining momentum and demonstrating impact on D&I issues, with this being particularly important from a business and organisation perspective. At the same time, we need to have more honest exchanges about where things haven't worked. There is also the challenge of responding to an ever-changing world, ensuring we strive to conduct research that captures the diversity of the society we live in, in an inclusive way. Lots to think about!

**Charles:** There are a few opportunities we're planning for at EHRC, thinking about new data that's becoming available, that will really add to our knowledge of D&I. The Census 2021 has, for the first time, asked respondents a question related to gender identity and sexual orientation. This has produced a data source which measures gender identity demographics in the UK. As gender identity becomes an increasingly pressing policy area, it is useful to have representative data sources. The census is a strong step towards developing representative data, helping us inform further research and policy decisions in this area. We're already analysing some of the Census 2021 data on gender identity and sexual orientation for part of our state of the nation report 'The Equality and Human Rights Monitor', due to be published in late autumn. This type of data will help all social researchers have a solid foundation for understanding D&I in the future.

Another big opportunity is understanding how the Covid-19 pandemic impacted D&I in the mid- or long-term. For example, evidence from the EHRC's Equality and Human Rights Monitor 2023 shows that ethnic minorities, disabled people and older people were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. In the next five years we will need to understand the extent to which short-term pandemic trends have manifested in longer term changes, and how we can best address these trends in order to progress an equality agenda.

### Looking back

**Diarmid:** You've noted some challenges or opportunities for the next five years. I'd be interested to hear what you wish you'd known about work in this area five years ago.

**Charles:** I guess it would have to be about data science, and how it can address evidence and analytical gaps. Much equality analysis is limited by either data on protected characteristics not being collected, such as ethnicity or disability. Or, where it is collected, it isn't representative, or doesn't use the Government Statistical Service (GSS) harmonised standards. This means

that the groups we are interested in can have quite small samples, which really limits the multivariate analysis you can do or the consistency with which we can categorise groups. Having better data-science tools and more coherent standards enables processes like data linkage, meaning we can take existing datasets and attach protected characteristics, creating richer datasets for analysis.

An example of this was during the pandemic, when the lack of ethnicity data in mortality statistics really hampered answering the initial question of whether there was increased mortality within minority ethnic groups. The ONS did a great job at pace to link Census 2011 ethnicity data to health records to create estimates of both Covid-19 mortality and (eventually) overall life expectancy by ethnicity. This filled a fairly significant evidence gap and has already proved really valuable. A similar example was the value of crowdsourcing analysis. During the pandemic, as datasets were made public, a broad range of analysts spent their own time understanding what they could about this once-in-a-lifetime global event, sharing their results/code and collaborating to improve their findings. The power in harnessing a small amount of that collaboration and diversity of thought would add value to many of the research and analysis challenges public policymakers face.

**Diarmid:** I'm glad you've raised that. How we link up and collaborate on these issues is important, as is achieving diversity of thought. How do we challenge ourselves as social researchers so we're genuinely open to different views – just because we're social researchers doesn't mean we always get this right!

**Reuben:** Interesting. The social research sector can often seem like it lacks diversity and could be more inclusive. When I started my career in social research over a decade ago, I knew very little about D&I. It was commonplace to consider issues relating to D&I in how we designed and reported research, but there appeared to be a gap when it came to ourselves

as an industry, with few opportunities to reflect, connect and think more specifically about D&I and the sector we work in. I assumed there weren't other people like me who had an interest in this sort of thing.

### Recommended reading!

**Diarmid:** Before we go, I'd like to pick on someone and get them to give some practical advice to all the Research Matters readers. Georgie, if you had to recommend a book or article for our readers, what would you tell them to check out?

**Georgie:** The non-fiction book on the topic of D&I that I would recommend everyone reads is ['The transgender issue: an argument for justice' by Shon Faye](#). It gives an honest, unapologetic look at how difficult it is to be transgender in the UK and examines how moral panic about the transgender community has evolved in the UK press and society more broadly. If we're fully committing to being as inclusive as possible, we must engage with experiences beyond our own and listen directly to marginalised minorities on how to be as inclusive as possible, both in day-to-day life, and in policy more broadly.

For an article, I'd recommend one by Harvard Business Review, titled ['Diversity doesn't stick without inclusion'](#). The article shows that aiming to have a 'diverse' workforce is not enough to encourage inclusion. Without inclusion, the crucial connections that attract diverse talent, encourage participation and foster innovation will not happen. I have found the stress on the fundamental importance of companies starting by understanding and valuing different perspectives to be incredibly helpful in starting to consider how D&I is framed in organisations and development.

**Diarmid:** That's a great place to end. Thanks all – it's so valuable to hear your perspectives on your own experience, and what we need to think about in social research both in terms of the challenges facing our sector, and the ways our evidence can be used. Thanks again.

Do 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.

# Craft and storytelling

By Laura Tuhou, research manager, Social Research Institute, Ipsos

Looking back, I think my becoming a crafter was probably inevitable. I come from a line of makers – sewists, knitters, bakers, authors, woodturners – a fact that's been instilled in me since birth, when my Oma (gran) gifted me the handknitted Mickey Mouse toy that became my most prized possession.



In my case, the hereditary penchant for creative expression has manifested in a habit of trying my hand at pretty much any craft I encounter. I learned to use a sewing machine in textiles class at primary school in the 90s. I picked up knitting at uni as a stress-management technique, and I added cross stitch to my arsenal in my late twenties because I wanted to make a very silly, very niche in-joke gift for a friend. Some of the skills gel with me more than others – I can make a pretty good stained-glass window, but I've never quite got the hang of crochet. I've learned and practised a lot of different crafts over the years, but I think sewing is my favourite.

Even though it was the first craft I learned, sewing didn't become a major part of my life until 2020. I'd sewn a few garments before, but all by eye and with, shall we say, mixed success. The lockdowns meant I was at home much more than usual, in close proximity to my sewing machine. As a result, I ended up making lots of facemasks for friends, and finally taught myself to read and use sewing patterns.

Once I understood the previously unintelligible language of sewing patterns, it opened up a whole new world of possibilities: when you know how to sew, and you can follow a pattern, you can make just about anything – the only limits are your imagination and the physical constraints of the fabric you're using – so I've made all sorts of things. My current project is a backpack, the pattern for which, ironically, I self-drafted.

This newfound freedom has meant that my sewing has become a form of storytelling. It's a way for me to share something about myself, and to invite others to do the same. One of my most recent makes was a dress with a pattern of smiling apples and pears. I bought the fabric because the print reminded me of a pinafore I had as a little kid, with an embroidered apple and pear on the chest. There's a photo of little me wearing that pinafore and a massive grin, so this grown-up-sized dress is a way for me to channel some of that childlike joy and exuberance in my grown-up life. Another recent project was a collaboration with my two young nieces, who are both into fashion design: they each drew a dress, we went shopping together to choose the fabric, and I made their dresses a reality. It was so adorable to see their reactions to these real-life, wearable objects that had previously existed only in their heads and on paper.

Craft is also a meditative practice for me. While I'm concentrating on cutting fabric accurately, figuring out a new technique, or sewing a fiddly seam, my brain doesn't have space to actively ruminate on anything else.

This is especially helpful when I need to decompress after a day's work – in my role at Ipsos I specialise in qualitative research with vulnerable populations, mostly on health and social care topics, which can be heavy-going. Using my brain in a different way outside work also helps me come up with creative solutions to problems. Even though I'm concentrating on something else, my 'work brain' is ticking over in my subconscious, figuring out the best way to reword that paragraph I couldn't quite get right in a draft report earlier in the day. Crafting is my favourite way to tie together these seemingly disparate parts of my life. I'm hopeful it'll help me cope with my next adventure, too, as I begin a part-time MA in medical humanities!



In 2013 I knitted a Mickey Mouse for my Oma, using the same pattern she did when I was a baby. If you want to have a go too [you can find the pattern online](#).

## Experimental designs

Barak Ariel, Matthew Bland and Alex Sutherland

SAGE PUBLICATIONS LTD (THE SAGE QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH KIT SERIES), 2022

Reviewed by David Parsons, Leeds Beckett University



Randomised control trials (RCTs) remain a dilemma for most social researchers. We recognise why they are a 'gold standard' for causal analysis but just how can they be fitted to the apparently RCT-unfriendly environment that social researchers commonly face? This valuable book helps unpick that dilemma.

RCTs have been around for over a hundred years, and arguably longer, so experimental methodologies have been widely explored including the works of Shadish, Campbell and their collaborators. This book draws on those contributions to frame the authors' own extensive practical experience particularly in criminology and the evaluation of judicial, custodial and policing policies and programmes, among others.

This places the book firmly in the social domain. It is not a starter guide for those new to evaluation but is for those with some evaluation experience. Its themed chapters allow readers to learn about the practical challenges of 'randomisation' (chapter 2), 'control' (chapter 3) and trials ('T is for trials or tests'; chapter 4).

To this is added a guide preparing for these methods with extensive conclusions on reliable positioning and use. The book is liberally strewn with practical tips (insert boxes), mini case studies and valuable examples of past design challenges from social and public policy contexts. If it has a weakness, it has disappointingly little on quasi-experimental designs, often a closer fit to social and community-based evaluation challenges.

Also, and while beyond the scope of *Experimental Designs*, for this reviewer the book is too dismissive of alternatives to fully or quasi-experimental approaches for addressing the complex challenges facing many social researchers and evaluators, although this is hardly surprising for a book well-placed in Sage's *Quantitative Research Kit* series. Nonetheless, this is an important and recommended contribution to demystifying RCTs and to cross-conceptual design choices for evaluators.

## Titles for review



We are always looking for reviewers (SRA members only) to write a short review for us. All books up for review are listed below. If you are interested, please email [admin@the-sra.org.uk](mailto:admin@the-sra.org.uk) and we'll send you guidelines. Please note that publications are available as eBooks 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 craft of qualitative longitudinal research

Bren Neale

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021

### Doing qualitative research online – second edition

Janet E Salmons

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

### Doing visual ethnography – fourth edition

Sarah Pink

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2021

### Essential skills for early career researchers

Joseph Roche

SAGE Publications Ltd, 2022

### Ethics, integrity, and policymaking: the value of the case study, Research Ethics Forum Series: Volume 9

(ed. with Dónal O'Mathúna, Ron Iphofen)

Springer, 2022

### Ethical evidence and policymaking: interdisciplinary and international research

(ed. with Dónal O'Mathúna and Ron Iphofen)

Policy Press, 2022

# SRA training

Unless otherwise stated, all courses are run online using Zoom. In-person courses are held in London or Edinburgh. Online courses run over one day or two half days, and extended courses over two full days or three part-days.

New dates and courses are being added all the time (and only courses with space are shown below), so for latest info please visit [www.the-sra.org.uk/training](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/training)

**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.

If you have any queries, please contact Lindsay: [lindsay.adams@the-sra.org.uk](mailto:lindsay.adams@the-sra.org.uk)

Full details of all courses are at [www.the-sra.org.uk/training](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/training)

## Evaluation

**12 January:** Building and using a theory of change, with Professor David Parsons

**20 February:** Foundations of evaluation, with Sally Cupitt

**7 March:** Research and evaluation project management, with Sally Cupitt

**12 March:** Impact evaluation (advanced), with Professor David Parsons

**14 and 15 March:** Theory-based evaluation – options and choices, with Professor David Parsons

## Qualitative

**19 January:** Introduction to qualitative interviewing, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**25 January:** Foundations of qualitative research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**31 January & 1 February (2 afternoons):** Creative methods in qualitative data collection, with Dr Nicole Brown

**1 February:** Narratives and storytelling in qualitative research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**2 February:** Narrative analysis, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**8 and 9 February:** Positionality and reflexivity in qualitative research, with Dr Nicole Brown

**14 February:** Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

**15 February:** Introduction to focus groups, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**16 February:** Writing up qualitative data, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

**22 February:** Digital qualitative interviews, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**27 and 28 February:** Creative data analysis, with Dr Nicole Brown

**8 March:** Conducting online focus groups, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**20 March (in person, in London):** Qualitative interviewing, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

**21 March (in person, in London):** Conducting focus groups, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

**22 March (in person, in London):** Qualitative data analysis, with Professor Karen O'Reilly

## Quantitative

**17 and 18 January (2 afternoons):** Questionnaire design, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

**24 and 25 January (2 afternoons):** Web survey design, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

**5 to 7 February (3 afternoons):** Advanced questionnaire design, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

**9 February:** Data management and visualisation with R, with Dr Alexandru Cernat

**1 March:** Understanding statistical concepts and essential tests, with Dr Valeria Kolbas

**7 and 8 May (2 afternoons):** 21 ways to test your survey questions, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

**9 July (1 afternoon):** Imputation for item missing data, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

**10 and 11 July (2 afternoons):** The three stages of weighting probability surveys, with Dr Pamela Campanelli

## Other research skills

**26 January:** Introduction to participatory action research, with Dr Karen Lumsden

**6 February (in person, in London):** Graphic design know-how for social researchers, with Lulu Pinney

**14 and 15 February (2 mornings):** Research with children and young people, with Berni Graham

**5 March:** Data visualisation and infographic design, with Nigel Hawtin

**14 March:** Writing effective research reports, with Dr Simon Haslam

**18 March:** Introduction to mixed methods research, with Dr Sarah Jasim and Dr Ruth Plackett

# Spotlight on SRA activity

## Training

[www.the-sra.org.uk/training](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/training)

Many qual, quant and evaluation courses are online.

## Events

[www.the-sra.org.uk/events](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/events)

## Blog

[www.the-sra.org.uk/blog](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/blog)

Topical posts on researching.

## Journal

[www.the-sra.org.uk/journal](http://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](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/resources)

Good practice guides and more.

## Ethics

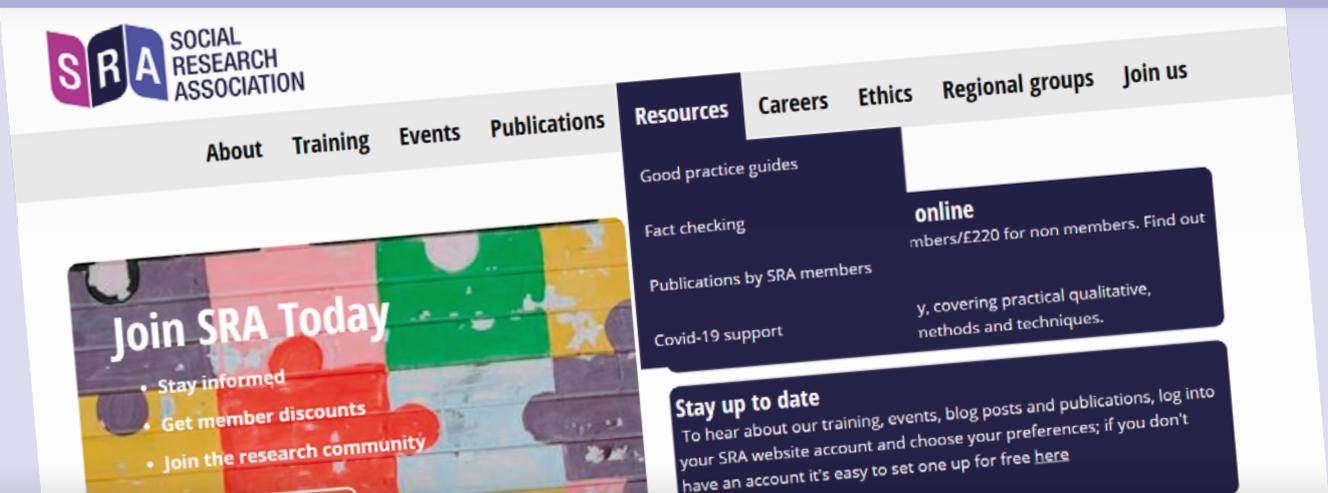
[www.the-sra.org.uk/ethics](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/ethics)

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

## Member resources

Log in, go to [www.the-sra.org.uk](http://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 2023

Copy deadlines: **2 February** (March issue); **26 April** (June issue); **12 July** (September); **18 October** (December).

### Editorial team

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