Ethnic diversity and inequality: ethical and scientific rigour in social research

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March 2011

An investigation into the desirability and feasibility of developing guidance to help decide when and how ethnicity should be included in social policy-relevant research projects.

This research involved a series of review, consultation and piloting exercises to address the increasing need for research to inform policy and practice development that is sensitive to the diversity of the UK's multiethnic population. Emphasis was given to the importance of ensuring that any guidance developed and promoted should be seen as living documents to be regularly appraised in light of the evolving social world and ethical and scientific standards. The report:

- discusses the background and rationale of the study;

- describes the research, consultation and piloting processes;

- investigates the requirement for and desirability of guidance in relation to ethnicity and where responsibility should lie for ensuring ethical and scientific rigour;

- identifies the form and content appropriate to relevant guidance documents;

- assesses the feasibility of developing such documents and their likely impact on research practice; and

- draws conclusions about the prospects for enhancing the quantity of UK social research that appropriately and sensitively addresses ethnicity.

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Background

There is an increasing demand for social research that can inform policy and practice development that is sensitive to, and serves the needs of, the UK's multiethnic population. Currently, much social research does not include minority ethnic people and communities and does not engage meaningfully with issues of ethnic diversity and inequality. Where research does address ethnicity, there is a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches, as well as concerns regarding ethical standards. Increasing the quality and quantity of social research that addresses ethnicity will require particular knowledge, skills and competencies among researchers and research commissioners, as well as a commitment to ethical and scientific rigour in such work.

Project aim

The overall aim of the present project was to explore the feasibility and desirability of developing guidance at different points within the research cycle that could help commissioners of research, investigators, applicants and peer reviewers consider *when* and *how* ethnicity should be included in social policy-relevant research projects. In order to achieve this aim, the project involved a series of review, consultation and piloting exercises through which we were able to (i) synthesise key ethical and scientific issues relating to ethnicity in social research; (ii) explore current concerns and practices among social researchers; and (iii) identify factors that support or hinder the use and impact of guidance on research practice.

Findings

Our consultation work suggested that many social researchers are aware of the importance of incorporating attention to ethnicity within their work and acknowledge the challenges this brings and the need for greater guidance and support. Current practices of review and scrutiny of proposed research in relation to ethnicity appear to be largely informal and heavily reliant on the interest and expertise of particular individuals. Further, while there is a large volume of published literature on conceptual, ethical and methodological issues in researching ethnicity, this material is not always readily accessible to a multidisciplinary audience and some notable gaps exist. Learned Society guidance documents do not, by and large, deal with ethnicity in any detail. The study findings therefore confirmed both a need and a potential demand for guidance in the area of researching ethnicity. Nevertheless, some dissenting voices were heard, including those who are confident that the issues are already adequately addressed; those who are concerned that guidance would constrain creativity and hamper research; and those who question whether it is necessary to focus increased attention on ethnicity (in some cases seeing this as a specialist area or of marginal interest).

Review and consultation exercises identified a wide range of potential issues for inclusion in guidance ranging from broad concerns, such as the importance of scrutinising the motivations that lie behind research on ethnicity, to much more specific issues, such as the need to explain and justify how ethnic categories are operationalised. These issues are synthesised in a set of Principles for Social Research in

Multiethnic Settings (Chapter 4). We found evidence that researchers, reviewers and research commissioners would welcome short guidance documents at points within the research cycle that could alert them to key issues for consideration. However, a number of important issues were raised in relation to producing such concise accessible guidance documents, including the potential tension between a desire for brevity and the wide range of issues considered important; the appropriate balance between flexibility and prescription; the extent to which generic guidance can be relevant across disciplinary boundaries and diverse research settings; and the appropriateness of privileging ethnicity, as opposed to other axes of difference and inequality.

Notwithstanding these complexities, the project did result in guidance documents being developed and piloted in five social science journals and within the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) research commissioning process. These documents were received positively by the majority of researchers who chose to consult them. Most respondents reported the documents to be comprehensible and exhaustive and felt that they had the potential to improve the quality of research papers published or proposals submitted. Several researchers felt the guidance had had a significant impact on their own practice – raising awareness, prompting reflection and, in the case of reviewers, making their job easier. However, a large number of researchers reported no significant impact, largely because they felt their current practice was already consistent with the guidance being offered. Further, overall uptake was low in the pilot across all journals, suggesting that many researchers either regard attention to ethnicity as being of no concern or consider the use of a guidance document to be an unwelcome addition to their workload.

Conclusions and future directions

What then is the likely future role for guidance documents on researching ethnicity within the research cycle? Our project suggests that such documents do hold promise and that researchers are receptive to their introduction. Their use, however, will need to be actively promoted by key gatekeepers. Research commissioners, ethics and independent scientific review (ISR) boards and journal editors must demonstrate their commitment to such documents and to raising standards, so that researchers are challenged and supported to improve their practice. Even with such commitment, the shift towards higher ethical and scientific standards is likely to be a long, slow process. Our project findings suggest that there is a need both to convince a wider audience of social researchers of the need to address ethnicity within their work, and also to encourage those researchers who already work in the field of ethnicity to reflect on and improve their current practice. Many of the common pitfalls highlighted in research in this area are deeply embedded in broader structures, including the poor representation of minority ethnic people among social researchers and the limited involvement of minority ethnic communities in shaping research agendas. Nevertheless, it seems likely that principles of good research practice can be gradually agreed and established, and that this would in turn encourage progress towards meeting these standards. In this context checklists may well be helpful, and, notwithstanding some inevitable initial resistance among people who feel overworked, can serve to inculcate a common understanding of what constitutes sound ethical and scientific practice.

However, if the wider aim is to increase the volume of research that sensitively and appropriately addresses ethnicity, prompting guidance documents are unlikely to be sufficient. There needs to be a much broader approach and significant investment in increasing the confidence and competence of social researchers to research in this area. Finally, it is worth highlighting the importance of ensuring that any guidance documents developed and promoted should be seen as living documents to be regularly appraised in light of the evolving social world we seek to understand and the ethical and scientific standards to which we aspire.

Introduction

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Key points

- There is an increasing requirement for social research that can inform policy and practice development that is sensitive to, and serves the needs of, the UK's multiethnic population.
- Currently, much social research does not include minority ethnic people and communities and does not engage meaningfully with issues of ethnic diversity and inequality.
- Where research does address ethnicity, there is a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches, as well as concerns regarding ethical standards.
- Increasing the quality and quantity of social research that addresses ethnicity will require particular knowledge, skills and competencies among researchers and research commissioners, as well as a commitment to ethical and scientific rigour in such work.
- The overall aim of the present project was to explore the feasibility and desirability of developing guidance that could help commissioners of research, investigators, applicants and peer reviewers:
  – consider when and how ethnicity should be included in social policy-relevant research projects;
  – make suitable decisions and recommendations regarding research design to ensure that ethnicity is appropriately and sensitively addressed in such research.
- In order to achieve this aim, the project involved a series of review, consultation and piloting exercises with the following objectives: to identify:
  – and synthesise key ethical and scientific issues relating to ethnicity in social research;
  – current concerns and practices among social researchers and areas in need of support;
  – factors that support or hinder the use and impact of guidance on research practice.

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Background and rationale for the study

The need for social research to address ethnic diversity

The UK has long been recognised as a multiethnic society. Latest estimates from the Office for National Statistics indicate that around 16 per cent of the population of England and Wales self-identify as belonging to an ethnic group other than the majority 'white British'. The ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity of the UK population is increasing, in terms of both the proportion of the population who are from minority ethnic backgrounds and the range of ethnicities that are identified. Clearly, there is much to celebrate in the emerging 'super-diversity' of our population (Vertovec, 2007). However, ethnicity is also one of the major social divisions in modern Britain (Anthias, 2001) and ethnic identities have important implications for life chances and wellbeing. Across a range of social indicators, outcomes for minority ethnic groups continue to be far worse than for the majority white British population. Persistent disadvantage among long-established post-colonial migrant populations, as well as Gypsy and Traveller communities, is now coupled with new issues facing more recent arrivals.

Although the UK government has renewed its commitment to tackling such inequalities (DCLG, 2010), ensuring equitable opportunities, experiences and outcomes for all, regardless of ethnicity, presents significant challenges for policy-makers and practitioners. In particular, appropriate responses are often hampered by the lack of good-quality research that addresses ethnic diversity and inequality. There is a need for better understanding of the patterns and causes of ethnic inequalities across diverse arenas, including employment, education and health (Mason, 2003), as well as identification of potential solutions. Further, the legal duties placed upon public bodies by the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, combined with the growing expectation that social policy and practice be firmly grounded in evidence, clearly require a research base that reflects the ethnic diversity of the population. The requirement for such an evidence base has been formally acknowledged by the Department of Health in its *Research Governance Framework for Health and Social Care*, in which it sets out general principles that should apply to all research (Department of Health, 2005):

> *Research, and those pursuing it, should respect the diversity of human society and conditions and the multi-cultural nature of society. Whenever relevant, it should take account of age, disability, gender, sexual orientation, race, culture and religion in its design, undertaking and reporting. The body of research evidence available to policy makers should reflect the diversity of the population.*
> *Para 2.2.7*

Other government departments, while not having such explicit general principles, are showing increasing commitment to strengthening the evidence base relating to minority ethnic groups, for instance by specific programmes of research (e.g. the Department for Work and Pensions' work on ethnic minority employment disadvantage) and initiatives to ensure 'ethnic monitoring' (e.g. the Department for Education and Skills' work to support schools in this endeavour). Some professional bodies (such as the Royal College of Psychiatrists) and voluntary funders of research [including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF)] have also expressed their commitment to embed attention to ethnic diversity within the research they commission or support.

However, despite the apparent increased awareness of the need for (and right to) inclusion in research that influences knowledge, policy and practice, it is clear that much funded social research that is conducted in the UK focuses predominantly on the majority white British population and fails to consider ethnicity as a variable of analysis (Oakley, 2006). Unlike the US,[1] there is currently no explicit *legal* requirement in the UK to include minority ethnic participants in publicly funded research intended to inform social policy decisions affecting its ethnically diverse population.

Furthermore, where research does engage with ethnicity there is a vast array of approaches to conceptualisation, measurement, analysis and reporting of results, all of which raise practical, methodological and ethical issues. Indeed, the ethical and scientific arguments around whether and how to incorporate ethnicity into policy-relevant social research are complex and there are significant concerns that research that is poorly conceived and executed may do more harm than good (Patel, 1999; Ellison 2005; Gunaratnam, 2007; Salway and Ellison, 2010).

Thus, while there is an increasing need for research to inform policy and practice development that is sensitive to the diversity of the UK's multiethnic population, this will require particular knowledge, skills and competencies among researchers and research commissioners, as well as a commitment to critically reflect upon and promote the ethical and scientific rigour in such work.

Opportunities for enhancing the quality and quantity of social research that addresses ethnic diversity and inequality

The present project was based on the premise that there are at least three critical junctures in the research cycle at which there is the potential to increase both the quantity and quality of research that pays attention to ethnic diversity and inequality (see Figure 1). For researcher-led research, these will

usually be research proposal development and independent scientific review (ISR); ethical review; and peer review for publication. For more applied or directly commissioned research, the equivalent stages are development of the commissioning brief or tender document; contract agreement/project plan fine-tuning; and review and finalisation of project report/other outputs. Clearly, in some cases a research project may fall somewhere between these, perhaps being directly commissioned but also requiring ethical approval from a university or National Health Service (NHS) ethics committee. Nonetheless, the key point is that in most cases there are clear junctures at which research commissioners and researchers can be alerted to, and required to reflect upon, whether and how their research engages with ethnicity. Furthermore, there are clearly various people involved in this cycle (such as journal editors and ethics committee members) who could potentially play a role in, and take responsibility for, enhancing the quality and quantity of research in this area.

Background work for the present project suggested that the potential for these junctures to act in this way is currently underexploited. For instance, although a large number of guidelines exist on the use of race/ethnicity for health and biomedical journals, they are varied (Outram and Ellison, 2006; Smart, *et al*., 2008) and largely not enforced (Ellison and Rosato, 2002). Key journals that publish social policy-relevant research, including *Ethnicity and Health*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Journal of Social Policy* and *Journal of Marriage and Family*, do not currently employ any specific guidelines for reviewers or authors on whether and how attention to ethnicity should be considered in research. A preliminary search and consultation exercise also suggested that there is little in the way of guidelines for use by either researchers or reviewers of proposals at the levels of commissioning, ISR and ethics approval. Ethics guidance documents produced by professional bodies and associations also appear to give limited attention and no concrete guidance to researchers as to how their work should address the complex issues that arise in research in multiethnic settings. Further, while some funding agencies, including the JRF, give explicit indication to applicants that they expect research to be inclusive of and relevant to all, regardless of ethnicity, wherever appropriate, many more do not.

In short, though the need for social research to respond to the multiethnic nature of UK society is increasingly recognised, it appears that there are few mechanisms currently in place to encourage or support researchers in this direction and little in the way of quality assurance checks within the research cycle.

Figure 1: Stages of the research cycle with potential for introducing guidance
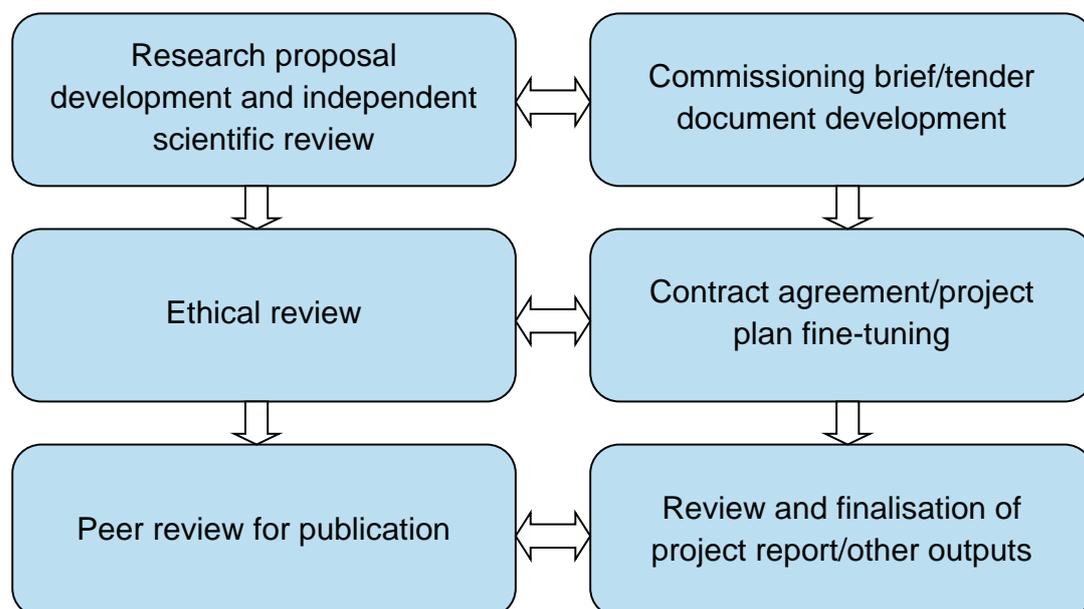
Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the present project was to explore the feasibility and desirability of developing guidance that could help commissioners of research, investigators, applicants and peer reviewers:

- consider when and how ethnicity should be included in social policy-relevant research projects; and

- make appropriate decisions and recommendations regarding research design to ensure that ethnicity is appropriately and sensitively addressed in such research.

    In order to achieve this aim, the project had the following objectives:

- to identify and synthesise key ethical and scientific issues relating to ethnicity in social research;

- to identify current concerns and practices among social researchers and areas in need of support;

- to identify factors that support or hinder the use and impact of guidance on research practice.

Overview of methods

In order to meet these objectives a series of review and consultation exercises were undertaken over an 18-month period. The findings were then fed into the development of guidance documents that were piloted at stages within the research cycle. Table 1 summarises the various activities undertaken. We provide some further detail of each of these steps in Chapter 2, though interested readers are referred to

Table 1: Project activities (2008–10)

Area of activity	Specific activities
Review and synthesis	Review of guidance documents of the Learned Societies of the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS)
	Review of conceptual and methodological social science papers focused on researching ethnicity
	Review of empirical papers published in the journals of the Learned Societies of the AcSS
Consultation	Semi-structured telephone/email interviews with social researchers
	E-consultation with members of ISR and ethics committees
Guidance development and piloting	Guidance developed and piloted within JRF's research commissioning cycle
	Guidance developed and piloted within social science journals
Preparation of reports and other outputs	Facilitated workshops with social researchers and research commissioners*
	Journal articles
	Oral presentations
	Website (http://research.shu.ac.uk/ethics-ethnicity/)

* These workshops included researchers working in universities, government departments, private agencies and charitable organisations. They provided an additional opportunity for consultation as well as dissemination of project findings.

the project website (http://research.shu.ac.uk/ethics-ethnicity/) for more information on our methodological approach. Ethical approval for the project was provided by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Health and Wellbeing, Sheffield Hallam University.

Terminology

So far our discussion has employed the term 'ethnicity' without further elaboration. However, it is important to note that frequent, everyday reference to 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic groups' belies the complex and contentious nature of these terms. Indeed, the diverse and contradictory ways in which the term 'ethnicity' is employed is one of the central issues facing social researchers concerned to enhance the rigour of research in this area.

Given the focus of this project – exploring the range of current concerns and practice in social science research – we employ the term 'ethnicity' loosely, recognising the varied meanings that researchers can attach to it, including cultural, socio-political and/or genealogical dimensions. For simplicity we choose not to use the term 'race' or the combined formulation 'race/ethnicity' in the general text of the report, though we recognise the close relationship these terms have with 'ethnicity'.[2] Nevertheless, at times during our review, consultation and piloting exercises we did employ these terms since they are in use by social researchers and it was important not to overlook relevant information by restricting ourselves narrowly to the term 'ethnicity'. Furthermore, our respondents also frequently employed these terms, as reflected in their responses.

Structure of the report

Chapter 2 provides some more detail on the methods used in the project. We then go on to describe the main findings of the project. Data generated through the diverse project activities have been integrated to present findings and draw conclusions relating to the need for and desirability of guidance (Chapter 3); the possible form and content of such guidance (Chapter 4); and the feasibility and impact of introducing such guidance within the research cycle (Chapter 5). Chapter 6 provides an overview of the project's findings and discusses their implications for researchers, research commissioners and the users of research in the future.

1 Methods

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Key points

- The project involved a series of review and consultation exercises over an 18-month period.
- Review work included:
  - review of guidance documents of the Learned Societies of the Academy of Social Sciences (AcSS);
  - review of conceptual and methodological social science papers focused on researching ethnicity;
  - review of empirical papers published in the journals of the Learned Societies of the AcSS.
- Consultation work included:
  - semi-structured telephone/email interviews with social researchers;
  - e-consultation with members of ISR and ethics committees.
- Following these activities, guidance documents were developed and piloted within (i) social policy-relevant journals and (ii) the JRF research commissioning process.
- A series of development and dissemination workshops was held with social researchers working in a range of settings to share findings and gain further insights.
- Findings from these diverse activities were integrated to draw conclusions about (i) the need for and desirability of guidance; (ii) the possible form and content of such guidance; and (iii) the feasibility and impact of introducing such guidance within the research cycle.
- In addition to the present report, a number of papers and presentations have been prepared that can be accessed via the project website http://research.shu.ac.uk/ethics-ethnicity/

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Review and synthesis

The three elements of review and synthesis work were underpinned by the following broad questions:

- To what extent do social scientists have access to advice and direction on when and how they should incorporate attention to ethnicity within their research work?

- What issues of ethical and scientific rigour have been identified in relation to researching ethnicity? To what extent is there consensus around such issues and how they should be addressed?

Review of guidance documents of the Learned Societies of the Academy of Social Sciences

The first stage of review work involved a review of the guidance documents of the 32 UK social science Learned Societies of the AcSS[1] (listed in Appendix 1). While researchers draw on many sources to guide

their work, guidance documents represent public statements on the part of Learned Societies and as such provide a useful window into the current state of articulated principles and good practice in relation to conducting social research. The specific aim was to examine the extent to which ethnic diversity is explicitly or implicitly considered within the research ethics and scientific standard guidance provided by Learned Societies to their members. A supplementary aim was to identify factors that might influence Learned Societies' and their members' more active consideration of when and how to incorporate attention to ethnic diversity within their research.

Our approach involved examining each Society's website to collect background information on the Society's age, size and key foci, and to identify any documents or activities of relevance to research ethics, scientific standards and/or ethnic diversity. Requests for relevant information were also emailed to each Society's Chair and/or key administrator where these were not readily available on the website. In all cases we were able to either access relevant documents (some of which were in development at the time of the study), or else confirm the absence of any such relevant documentation for the Society in question. Documents identified were subjected to interpretive documentary analysis, as described by Abbott, *et al*. (2004). Following initial careful reading of the material to generate preliminary themes, a draft coding template was developed. This was subsequently piloted, revised, finalised and then used to guide the systematic extraction and analysis of data from each of the documents. Detailed findings from this part of the project are reported elsewhere (Salway, *et al*., 2009).

Review of conceptual and methodological social science papers focused on researching ethnicity

The second element of our review work consisted of a review of published research literature with the aim of identifying and synthesising the key issues that social science researchers have highlighted in relation to ethical practice and scientific standards in researching ethnicity. Our aim was to gain an understanding of the breadth of issues that have been identified across the disparate disciplines within the social sciences, as well as to identify areas of consensus and potential conflict. This approach allowed us to identify issues for possible inclusion within the guidance documents to be developed for piloting. The review was also intended to be replicable.

In order to identify a sufficient volume and range of material, two approaches were adopted. First, a systematic computerised search of Sheffield Hallam University's library catalogue and online databases was undertaken using carefully constructed search terms (ethnic*/rac*/cultur*/minority/religion/language and method*/concept*/measur*/research*/theor*). Second, recommendations of key papers were sought from experts in the field. Box 1 describes the criteria for paper inclusion. The review was also supplemented with a number of guidance documents and additional relevant papers that were already known to the research team, but had not been identified by either of the search approaches. In total therefore we drew on well over 100 papers and documents. An analysis framework was created through an iterative process to guide the systematic extraction and synthesis of key themes from the papers.

Box 1: Selecting methodological and conceptual papers for review

Papers were eligible for the review if they dealt with any or all of the following issues:

- whether and when social policy-relevant research should pay attention to ethnicity (and/or race);
- whether and when social policy-relevant research should adopt data generation approaches that are inclusive of minority ethnic groups and/or enable exploration of ethnicity (and/or race);
- how the concepts of ethnicity (and/or race) should be theorised within social policy-relevant research;
- the scientific principles and standards that should be employed in research that includes attention to ethnicity (and/or race);
- the ethical issues that need to be addressed in relation to social policy-relevant research that pays attention to ethnicity (and/or race).

Review of empirical social science research papers published in journals of the Academy of Social Sciences

The third element of our review work involved an exploration of current practices in empirical social research. We undertook a review of recent papers published in social policy-relevant journals associated with Learned Societies of the AcSS (21 journals in total – see Appendix 2) in order to explore whether and how they had incorporated attention to ethnicity and/or race. The review took March 2008 as its starting point and looked backwards to include six papers from each journal that were empirical, UK-focused or a comparative study including the UK, and also social policy-relevant. These papers were then assessed to determine the proportion of papers that included some attention to ethnicity and/or race. Next, those papers that were found to have paid attention to ethnicity and/or race, were examined in more detail to determine what this had involved. Specifically, we examined:

- whether the authors gave any rationale for including attention to ethnicity and/or race and if so what this rationale was;

- whether the paper gave attention to ethnicity and/or race in the way that the body of empirical data was generated (for instance in the sampling procedures employed);

- whether the paper explored outcomes in relation to ethnicity and/or race (and therefore had a focus on potential inequality).

Consultation

Semi-structured interviews with social researchers

In our first consultation exercise we interviewed social researchers in government and private research agencies as well as research commissioners based within government departments. This focus was important given the large amount of social policy-relevant research that is commissioned and delivered outside universities, and the familiarity with academic research already gained through the review

exercises and the research team's own prior experience. We approached the twelve government departments (including some in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as in England) that are most active in producing social policy-relevant research (both in-house and commissioned) and 15 research agencies. Six representatives of government departments and eight representatives of the private research agencies agreed to participate. A semi-structured interview tool was completed for each respondent by either telephone or email, depending on respondent preference, between September and November 2008. The interviews sought information on:

- the extent to which attention to ethnicity was evident within the research being commissioned and conducted;

- the organisational procedures and policies in place to ensure ethical scrutiny and scientific rigour and the extent to which ethnicity is explicitly or implicitly given attention within such guidance;

- the degree of confidence and expertise expressed by researchers and research commissioners in relation to researching ethnicity;

- the types of issues arising in researching ethnicity, whether guidance or support on these issues is needed and, if so, what form and content this should have.

Respondents were asked to respond in terms of what they knew about their organisation and the research commissioned/conducted within it, rather than to relay answers that related merely to their own personal experience, and to refer a more experienced colleague if they were unable to answer the questions in this way.

Email consultation with members of independent scientific review and ethics committees

Consultation with members of ISR and ethics committees was undertaken with the aims of:

- identifying possible content that might be incorporated into guidance; and

- assessing the receptiveness of such committees to potential guidance.

Our sampling strategy focused on cities having a relatively high minority ethnic population as it was felt that research ethics and ISR committees in these areas would be more likely to have experience from which the project could learn. The following cities were selected: Birmingham, Bradford, Manchester, Leicester, London – Tooting and London – Tower Hamlets. Sheffield was also included, given our local connections and relative ease of inclusion. The intention was to gather information from all the ethics and ISR committees within a region to which a social policy-relevant research might be submitted for review. A total of 40 such committees were contacted by email, with 13 participating by completing a short online questionnaire: five from Sheffield, three from Manchester, four from London and one from Bradford. No completed questionnaires were received from committee representatives in Birmingham or Leicester, though we were directed to some relevant documentation. Twelve of the responses came from representatives of university ethics and ISR committees and just one from a local council committee.

Piloting

Piloting in academic journals

Based on the review and consultation work, a draft guidance checklist was prepared that was intended to be used by both authors and reviewers to support the preparation and review of academic papers. The aims of the pilot across all journals were to:

- assess the feasibility and desirability of introducing a guidance checklist focused on ethnicity within social policy-relevant journals;

- gain insight into whether such an intervention could help to enhance the quality of published research that pays attention to ethnicity.

We recruited five journals to the pilot: *Diversity in Health and Care* (*DHC*); *Ethnicity & Health* (*E&H*); *Anthropology in Action* (*AA*); *Journal of Social Policy* (*JSP*) and *Social Policy and Society* (*SPS*). The timing of piloting in each journal varied slightly, though all took place between January 2009 and July 2010. The guidance checklists were finalised through a series of iterations with input from one or more members of the editorial teams and, although the checklists covered largely the same content, each was slightly different. The guidance checklist piloted in *E&H* is given in Appendix 3 as illustration. Participation in the pilot was entirely optional, authors and reviewers being invited to participate through a brief paragraph inserted into standard emails from the editors. Completed guidance checklists were not reviewed as part of the pilot; rather, authors and reviewers were asked to give feedback on the usefulness and appropriateness of the guidance using an online questionnaire. Forty-four people followed the link to the online questionnaire – 26 as reviewers and 18 as authors. However, only 25 of these people answered any of the detailed questions and 21 completed the questionnaire fully. The vast majority of these 21 respondents were authors or reviewers of *E&H* (18), with very low participation from the other journals: *AA* (1), *DHC* (2), *JSP* (0), *SPS* (0). We discuss the possible reasons for these differential response rates in Chapter 5.

Piloting in the JRF research-commissioning process

Drawing on the review work, and with input from the JRF's programme managers, a guidance document was drafted in a format similar to that used in the JRF's standard guidance for research applicants. The document was intended to prompt researchers to carefully consider whether their proposed research should or should not pay attention to ethnicity, and to alert researchers to the main scientific and ethical issues that have been highlighted in relation to researching ethnicity sensitively and appropriately (see Appendix 4). Four calls were identified for inclusion in the pilot between July and December 2009: Forced Labour; Alcohol and Locality; Young People and Housing; and Young People who Drink Little. Researchers submitting proposals to the first two of these calls were provided with the additional 'Researching ethnicity' guidance document prior to submission, along with other standard documentation from the Foundation, while researchers submitting proposals to the other two calls were not provided with the additional guidance at the time of submission. The pilot's aims were to:

- assess the feasibility and desirability of introducing a guidance document focused on ethnicity within the JRF research commissioning process;

- explore whether such an intervention could enhance the quality of research proposals submitted in relation to their treatment of ethnicity.

Once all proposals had been received, applicants to all four calls were invited to participate. Consenting applicants were requested to provide feedback on the usefulness and appropriateness of the guidance document using an online questionnaire. Applicants who had not had sight of the document at the time of preparing their proposal were able to read and consider the document before completing the feedback questionnaire. In addition, where applicants gave permission for their proposal to be reviewed by our research team, a standard template was used to examine whether and how the researchers had incorporated attention to ethnicity within their proposal documents. Forty-nine applicants followed the link to the online questionnaire, 36 submitted answers to only a sub-set of the questions, and 26 submitted fully completed questionnaires. A total of 77 proposals were submitted in response to the four calls that were included in the pilot (56 to the active calls and 21 to the control calls). Of these, applicants gave consent and we were able to review 33 proposals from the active calls and 13 proposals from the control calls (close to 60 per cent in both cases).

Integration of findings

Clearly the project was complex in terms of the number of different activities undertaken and the range of people engaged. Rather than reporting on the findings from these activities separately, we present in the following chapters an integrated analysis that draws on insights across the project life. This is appropriate since most activities yielded information pertinent to more than one of our objectives listed in Chapter 1. Analysis of findings was performed independently for each component initially, and then, through a series of iterations, informed by further consultation with researchers and research commissioners working in the field, the key themes were extracted and synthesised.

2 Need for and desirability of guidance

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Key points

- Documents produced by the AcSS Learned Societies that offer guidance to researchers on ethical, scientific and professional conduct issues do not, by and large, deal with ethnicity in any detail.
- While there is a large and growing volume of published literature focused on conceptual, ethical and methodological issues in researching ethnicity, this material is not always readily accessible to a multidisciplinary audience and some noticeable gaps exist.
- Our review of published papers suggests that much social policy-relevant research continues to ignore ethnicity or employs approaches that are conceptually and/or methodologically weak.
- Consultations with social researchers in government and private agencies, and with members of ISR and ethics review boards, suggested that current practices of review and scrutiny of proposed research in relation to ethnicity are largely informal and heavily reliant on the interest and expertise of particular individuals.
- Social researchers are aware of the importance of being able to appropriately incorporate attention to ethnicity within their work and many acknowledge the challenges this brings and the need for greater guidance and support.
- There is evidence that members of ISR and ethics boards who review social science research proposals would also receive guidance positively.
- Overall, there appears to be a significant need and demand for guidance in this area.
- Nevertheless, some dissenting voices can be heard, including those who are confident that the issues are already adequately addressed; those who are concerned that guidance serves to constrain creativity and hamper research; and those who question whether it is necessary to focus increased attention on ethnicity (in some cases seeing this as a specialist area or of marginal interest).

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In this chapter we draw primarily on findings from our review and consultation exercises, though the results of the piloting exercises provide additional evidence in support of some of the issues raised below.

Is existing guidance adequate?

Our review work suggested some significant inadequacies in both the guidance documents produced by the AcSS Learned Societies and the body of published literature that might serve to guide researchers in relation to researching ethnicity.

Our review of the AcSS Learned Societies revealed that fewer than half of the 32 Societies (*n* = 13) had produced documents for their members that explicitly addressed research ethics and/or scientific standards, while four others had documents relating to professional conduct that included some mention of research standards. The remaining Societies (*n* = 15) did not have any documentation providing

guidance to their members on these issues. A range of explanations were offered for the absence of Society-specific guidance by Society chairs/secretaries in response to our email enquiries, including that the small size of the Society meant there was no capacity to develop such guidance; the multidisciplinary nature of the Society made it difficult to produce guidance suitable for all; the Society saw no need to produce such guidance because it did not award research funding; the Society was configured as a forum for debate rather than a regulatory body; and it was felt that producing such guidance might be viewed as calling into question the integrity of individual Society members. Five of these Societies said that they expected their members to follow the ethical guidelines and professional standards of their host institutions; other Societies referred their members to guidance produced by other bodies, such as the Social Research Association (SRA) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Where documents were available, our review found little explicit reference to ethnicity (or related concepts such as race, culture or religion) from either a research ethics or a scientific standards point of view. This limited attention appears intentional in some cases, with a number of Societies – notably the SRA – intentionally adopting more generic language in an effort to be inclusive of all potential categories or axes of difference (an issue to which we return in 'Privileging ethnicity' below). However, more commonly, the lack of explicit attention seems likely to have resulted from oversight.

Regardless of the rationale, the absence of explicit reference to ethnic diversity or minority ethnic groups begs the question of whether the existing guidance statements will effectively alert researchers to the need to consider ethnicity. In particular, our review found little in current documentation that guides researchers as to when social research should include attention to ethnicity. We did, however, identify relevant statements in several documents relating to three linked themes: (i) research should benefit wider society; (ii) research should not overlook sub-groups within society; and (iii) researchers should consider the potential (differential) consequences of their work and their findings for different 'groups'. However, such generic statements seem unlikely to prompt researchers to consider carefully whether their work should include attention to ethnicity, or indeed to reflect on the existing body of knowledge and whether it adequately represents, and effectively serves the needs of, our multiethnic population. In addition, Society documents offer little in the way of guidance to researchers on how they should address the complex scientific issues that arise when researching ethnic diversity. It may be considered beyond the scope of Society guidance on ethics and professional conduct to provide detailed instruction on how to carry out research studies. Nevertheless, issues of scientific and ethical standards closely inter-relate. At the least, it would seem important for ethical guidance to explicitly alert researchers to some of the potential complexities and to point them in the direction of additional appropriate support.

Turning now to our review of published literature on the conceptual and methodological issues arising in researching ethnicity, our searches produced a large number of relevant contributions and we were able to extract many useful principles, which we present in Chapter 4. Nevertheless, finding relevant material was not straightforward, with esoteric titles making some useful contributions hard to track down and disciplinary specificity meaning that some contributions were inaccessible to a more general social science audience. Furthermore, there were some noticeable limitations and gaps, including some that related to issues identified as needing greater support during our consultation exercises (see Chapter 4). While our review was not intended to be exhaustive, it seems unlikely that we overlooked much material that would be readily accessible to other researchers seeking guidance in this area. We can therefore ask whether the current body of knowledge adequately guides and supports social researchers, particularly those who are new to incorporating attention to ethnicity. We identified the following limitations.

First, there is more material that is concerned with *how* to conduct research on ethnicity than *when* or *why* attention should be given to ethnic diversity. There is little to help researchers decide whether a study should include attention to ethnicity or how central the focus on ethnicity should be. There is also little to convince those who are not already aware of the need to consider ethnic diversity.

Consultations with researchers and with members of ISR and ethics boards also suggested that this is an area where further clarity is needed, with respondents in both groups expressing uncertainty

about how to decide, and how to justify, when attention to ethnicity is warranted, or indeed should be prioritised, and when it can justifiably be ignored. Our review of published papers suggested that, where ethnicity is a research focus, researchers are often not explicit about their rationale and may draw on varied arguments in support of their approach. Fourteen papers (out of 35 that had some reference to ethnicity and/or race) were found to include some kind of rationale for why attention to ethnicity and/or race was warranted. In nine papers, the authors made reference to ethnic or racial inequalities, thereby invoking the notion that research can (and perhaps should) contribute towards efforts to bring about social justice. In two papers, the authors justified their approach by reference to the multiethnic nature of their field location, thereby implying (though not discussing in any detail) that research should yield findings that are representative of the population to which they might be applied. In three papers, authors referred to conceptual and/or empirical inadequacies in the existing research base. These authors identified the aim of their paper as contributing to filling such gaps, thereby situating their own work within the broader body of research evidence and the extent to which it serves the needs of the multiethnic population. Among the papers that had not given any attention to ethnicity it was rare to find any justification for the omission or any discussion of the potential limitations of the research findings for a multiethnic context.

Having stated that the literature focuses predominantly on *how* and not *whether* or *when* to incorporate attention to ethnicity, it is important to note a second limitation – namely, that there is more discussion of pitfalls and shortcomings than clear examples of how to achieve good practice. While many of the papers reviewed raised important issues for reflection, our consultation exercises suggested that social researchers want more explicit illustrations of how to go about designing and conducting research in the real world. One particular area where this disjuncture is keenly felt relates to the requirement for enhanced conceptual sophistication on the one hand and a lack of clarity on how to put the investigation of ethnicity into practice on the other. In particular, the predominant focus in many of the sociological contributions on the fluid and context-specific nature of ethnic identities may not sit easily with stark and persistent inequalities that social researchers are frequently tasked with understanding or the demands from policy-makers for findings that relate to fixed, statutory ethnic categories.

A further limitation relates to the inadequate material that is available to guide researchers in designing sampling and recruitment approaches and how these should link to conceptualisations of ethnicity on the one hand and to analysis strategies on the other. Whether a study adopts a quantitative or qualitative methodology, and regardless of the unit of analysis, researchers can adopt a variety of approaches to defining and selecting their sample or the body of data to be generated. For instance, in quantitative studies that take individual people as the unit of analysis, studies can adopt one of essentially three different sampling approaches: exclusive (focusing on people identified as belonging to just one delineated ethnic category); representative (aiming to ensure that the distribution of ethnicity found within the study's sample is the same as that found in the wider 'target' population to which the study's results are intended to apply); or comparative (aiming to recruit equal numbers of participants from two or more ethnic 'groups' to assess the relationship between ethnicity and the outcome of interest). While we have begun to identify some of the issues that researchers need to take into consideration when identifying sampling approaches (Salway and Ellison, 2010), this area has received far less attention than other aspects of research design, such as designing data collection tools for use in ethnically and linguistically diverse samples.

Does current research practice suggest a need for greater guidance?

Both our review of published empirical papers and our consultation exercises with social researchers in a variety of settings and ISR/ethics board members strongly suggest a need and potential demand for greater guidance and support in researching ethnicity.

Drawing first on our consultation exercises, the overall impression was that current practices of review and scrutiny of proposed research in relation to ethnicity are largely informal and heavily reliant

on the interest and expertise of particular individuals. Several respondents across all the consultation exercises expressed the feeling that these issues could be dealt with more systematically and comprehensively.

Four out of six government respondents reported that their department has processes in place for deciding whether a piece of research should or should not include attention to ethnic diversity, and one that their work always includes attention to ethnic diversity. However, just one department had an explicit document – the Audit Commission's Diversity Guide (National Audit Commission, n.d.) – and on review we found this to include very little concrete guidance on when or how to incorporate attention to ethnic diversity in research studies, though it did serve to prompt consideration of these issues. By and large, the departments appeared to rely on researcher experience and informal decision-making. One respondent also mentioned seeking guidance from stakeholders on particular projects, something that was felt to be important but currently not done systematically.

Nothing explicit. But as an example we had an advisory group with stakeholders from minority communities for a recent study and they could guide on the design and the dissemination. This was very important. There is no guidance or rule about this. It is just accepted good practice to involve stakeholders in this way. I'm sure there is a lot more we could do to make this more systematic.

None of the independent research organisations were reported to have any explicit procedures in place for deciding when or how to include attention to ethnicity within particular studies, relying predominantly on researcher experience or taking the lead from commissioners or partner organisations. None of the respondents offered any specific criteria that would be taken into consideration, though some indicated that existing evidence of ethnic inequality would encourage attention to ethnicity in a proposal.

I think we will go by the commissioner's recommendations but there are certain areas where kind of we know that ethnicity is an issue. So, any time we are looking at sort of low income or worklessness or homelessness we know we need to include reference to ethnicity. That comes from knowledge though rather than any particular ethical or structural procedure.

Similarly, there was a mixed picture in relation to established systems and codes of practice for ethical and scientific review. Three of the government respondents reported that their department follows the Government Social Research (GSR) code of research ethics complemented by guidance taken from the SRA and the Market Research Society (MRS), and one that such a code is planned in future. The remaining two reported relying on the commissioned researchers to follow their own organisational code of ethics. Processes of ethical and scientific scrutiny appeared to be informal or absent in most of the research agencies we made contact with, only one organisation having a formalised process involving a research board. Only two of the private research organisations were reported to have their own code of research ethics. Again, the SRA and the MRS were cited as sources of guidance, the latter of which has produced some specific guidance relating to conducting research amongst different ethnic groups (http://www.mrs.org.uk/networking/ern/downloads/guidance_ethnic_research.pdf), though its main code of conduct includes no reference to ethnicity. Importantly, two respondents stated that they would adhere to ethical codes in use by the commissioner of the study in question. This may be problematic since our government department interviews suggested that commissioners do not always have such a code in place. In general, scientific review in these organisations consisted of informal review by colleagues or a senior manager.

Considering next our findings from interviews with members of ISR and ethics boards that review social policy-relevant research, Table 2 summarises the responses to the closed-ended questions. Five respondents reported that their committee 'always' pays attention to whether a research proposal

Table 2: Summary of responses from members of ISR and ethics committees

	n = 13
Does your committee pay attention to *whether* ethnic diversity has been taken into consideration in the research proposals submitted for review?	Yes, always: 5 Yes, in some cases: 7 No: 1
Does your committee pay attention to *how* ethnic diversity has been taken into consideration in the research proposals submitted for review?	Yes: 11 No: 2
Do you have a person on your committee who is a race/ethnicity specialist?	Yes: 4 No: 9
How common is it for a proposal to be referred for further work because it has not included attention to ethnic diversity though your committee feels that it should?	Never, to my knowledge: 3 Not very common: 9 Common: 1
How common is it for a proposal to be referred for further work because your committee feels the proposed methods/approach to dealing with ethnic diversity need improvement?	Never, to my knowledge: 3 Not very common: 10 Common: 0
Do you think your committee should do more to prompt researchers to consider *whether* and *how* to incorporate attention to ethnic diversity in research?	Yes: 6 No: 7
Do you think your committee faces difficulty in deciding whether particular research proposals should pay attention to ethnic diversity?	Yes: 3 No: 10
Do you think your committee faces difficulty in making recommendations as to *how* researchers should address ethnic diversity in their methods/ approaches to research?	Yes: 2 No: 11
Would your committee find guidance on when and how research should take ethnic diversity into consideration helpful?	Yes: 10 No: 3

has taken ethnic diversity into account. The seven respondents who indicated that ethnic diversity is sometimes, but not always, taken into consideration were asked to give further details, but none offered very specific criteria that would prompt such attention, instead referring to the 'particular relevance' to the research topic and/or the judgement of the panel members.

Eleven of the thirteen respondents indicated that their committee pays attention to how ethnic diversity has been taken into consideration in the proposals reviewed. Respondents were asked to describe the types of issues that they would examine in research proposals. Four respondents mentioned checking sampling approaches, the objective being to ensure that the study generates representative data. Four mentioned issues of language and translation requirements. Again respondents indicated that these issues are more relevant for some research proposals than others, but did not give a clear indication of what factors would imply that ethnic diversity warrants consideration in any particular research study. Despite this reported scrutiny of whether and how research proposals pay attention to ethnicity, the majority of respondents reported that in practice it is uncommon for proposals to actually be referred for further work, calling into question whether these committees do indeed play a quality control function

in this regard. When asked whether they thought their committee should do more to prompt researchers to consider whether and how to incorporate attention to ethnic diversity in their research, answers were roughly evenly split. Among those that stated they should do more, typical responses centred on the need to make the issues more explicit and routinely considered by all:

> *I think it is too easy for researchers to say this aspect is not applicable to their study and we do not really question this in any way.*

> *The quality of the advice given can be dependent on attendance [at the meetings] rather than an adopted systematic approach to consider issues in detail.*

Turning now to consider our review of published papers, the findings corroborated concerns about the generally low proportion and poor quality of research that incorporates attention to ethnicity. Of the 124 relevant papers, 35 (28 per cent) included some reference to ethnicity and/or race, with the remaining 89 making no such reference at any point in the paper. We examined the 35 papers in more detail to see where references to ethnicity and/or race were made and the degree to which there was a consistent focus on this area. Only nine papers made reference to ethnicity and/or race in their abstract and just ten (around 8 per cent) included mention of ethnicity and/or race across all or most sections of the paper. There was wide variation in the degree to which the papers embedded attention to ethnicity and/or race. In some papers, the authors acknowledged the multiethnic context of UK society but did not take it into account in their own research design. For instance, Neal and Walters (2007) discussed prior related research that had engaged with ethnicity but deliberately focused their study on 'mainstream', 'rurally included' people to explore community-making in rural England. Perrett (2007) identified the relevance of attention to ethnicity in his field of inquiry – industrial relations – but did not directly address this in his study and offered no rationale for the lack of attention. A number of papers showed inconsistency across sections, for instance highlighting the ethnic make-up of their sample in the methodology section but not exploring ethnicity as a factor in the analysis or discussion. In contrast, a minority of the papers reviewed reported on studies in which ethnicity and/or race was given a much more consistent and central focus. In most cases, these were papers where the guiding research questions were framed in terms of ethnic and/or racial inequality, such as Netto's (2008) exploration of minority ethnic identity and engagement in the arts. However, a few papers were not centrally focused on issues relating to ethnicity and/or race but nevertheless incorporated systematic attention to these as relevant factors throughout the paper (see for instance Berthoud, 2008; Holland, *et al*., 2008).

Fifteen papers were found to have given some attention to ethnicity and/or race within their approach to generating the body of empirical data. How this attention was recorded differed from paper to paper with some papers purely stating that information on ethnicity and/or race had been collected as part of the general background information of participants (e.g. Statham, *et al*., 2008) while others focused more directly on this axis of difference (e.g. Williams, *et al*., 2007). None of the papers offered a detailed description or rationale for how the sampling approach had been determined or how it related to either (i) the author's conceptualisation of ethnicity or (ii) the planned analysis. Only ten papers explored ethnicity and/or race in relation to outcomes, with seven of these papers making comparisons across ethnic and/or 'racial' 'groups'. Two additional papers drew comparisons between 'minority' and 'majority' ethnic 'groups' in respect to housing inequality (Manzi, 2007; Varady, 2008) while the final paper briefly highlighted ethnicity in relation to inequalities in power relations in a political context (Coole, 2007). Therefore, just ten out of 124 papers reviewed, less than 10 per cent, could be said to contribute any understanding regarding the form or causes of ethnic inequalities.

Do social researchers and research reviewers express a need for greater guidance?

The findings from our consultation exercises with social researchers based in both government departments and independent research organisations confirmed that they are increasingly required to design, commission and conduct research that incorporates attention to ethnicity. There were, however, somewhat differing views as to the challenges this presented. Among the government respondents, three saw no or few challenges for their organisation regarding when and how to take ethnic diversity into account and reported that researchers in their department considered themselves to be experts in the field. The other three respondents – one of whom also highlighted significant experience within the department – felt there were many challenges, citing as examples the need for additional resources; lack of researcher experience; small sample sizes in many datasets; a need for mainstreaming attention; and low levels of awareness of ethical and scientific issues. Respondents emphasised that these challenges are ongoing since the issues surrounding researching ethnic diversity are complex and fluid. Responses from all the independent research agencies bar one showed that researching ethnicity was not regarded as straightforward or unproblematic. Indeed, several respondents appeared reflective and cautious about the ease with which attention to ethnicity can be incorporated into research.

When asked explicitly about the potential usefulness of guidance, positive responses were given by all respondents. Four of five government respondents and seven out of eight agency respondents said that their organisation would find guidance on *when* and *how* research should pay attention to ethnic diversity helpful. The other respondents felt that such guidance would be helpful to other, less experienced researchers.

Interestingly, while very few of our ISR/ethics committee respondents explicitly reported that their committee faced difficulties in making decisions about whether and how researchers should address ethnicity, most nevertheless felt that guidance on these issues would be helpful to their committee (see Table 2).

Summary

Our consultations with researchers, commissioners and ISR/ethics committee members all indicated a positive response to the proposal of guidance to support better research practice in the area of ethnicity. Indeed, a large proportion of respondents in each category felt that such guidance would be helpful to themselves and others, and were able to identify specific issues that presented challenges and complexity. Furthermore, the consultations suggested that current processes of review and scrutiny of proposed research undertaken by researchers, commissioners and ISR/ethics committees in relation to ethnicity are largely informal and heavily reliant on the expertise and interest of particular individuals. Given this, there does appear to be a need for accessible guidance that could make such review more systematic and thorough.

Further support for the proposal of guidance documents that could alert researchers (and other stakeholders within the research cycle) to issues of scientific and ethical rigour comes from our findings that (i) existing Learned Society documents do not currently provide such guidance or support; (ii) published literature illustrates the significant concerns that exist around research standards in this area, but is not always easy to access and its coverage of the issues involved and potential solutions remains patchy and in some areas contested and unresolved (see Chapter 4); and (iii) much published social science research continues to ignore ethnicity or to tackle this in ways that are conceptually and/or methodologically weak.

However, while much in our review and consultation works suggests that the proposal of guidance to support better research practice is welcomed by researchers, commissioners and reviewers, it is

important to acknowledge some issues that came to light that may compromise the desirability, utility and impact of guidance.

First, not all respondents recognised a need for support and improvement in their own or their organisation's practice. Indeed, some of the government social researchers' reports of their expertise and ability to tackle the complex issues related to researching ethnicity raised the possibility of their being over-confident, if not complacent. The theme of researchers feeling that they already follow good practice but that other people might benefit from further guidance was reiterated in our piloting work, reported in Chapter 5. Second, there appear to be many stakeholders within the UK social research arena who see ethnicity as a specialist issue and not something that should be part-and-parcel of the bulk of social research. It is important to highlight the large proportion of published research that makes no reference at all to ethnicity, and yet apparently seeks to inform practice and policy development for our multiethnic population. Similarly, in our review of Learned Society documentation we found that the degree of focus on inequality and social justice in general, and ethnicity in particular, varied greatly across the Societies. It will be difficult to engage researchers in the use of guidance if they perceive the focus as largely irrelevant to their work (a theme reiterated in our piloting experience, discussed in Chapter 5). As one of our government-based consultation respondents noted, guidance needs to somehow reach those researchers who are not aware that they need to consider issues surrounding ethnic diversity:

Those who need to learn, more often than not, are not aware that they need to learn.

Further, while many social researchers based in government and independent research agencies (who frequently respond to government agendas) do acknowledge the importance of addressing ethnicity in their work, they also express the need to consider all aspects of diversity and inequality and not to privilege ethnicity, a theme we return to in the next chapter. Finally, there was evidence in some cases of a lack of clarity in terms of where responsibility should lie for ensuring ethical and scientific rigour, with both researchers and commissioners looking to the other party to ensure these issues are adequately considered and addressed. In such cases, we might find that guidance, though approved of in principle, would not be incorporated into routine practice since there might be an expectation that someone else should be the one to use it.

3 Form and content of guidance

Key points

- A wide range of potential issues for inclusion in guidance were forthcoming from our review and consultation exercises.
- Issues identified spanned ethical, conceptual, methodological and logistical aspects of designing and conducting research. They ranged from broad concerns, such as the need for researchers to scrutinise the motivations that lie behind research on ethnicity, to much more specific issues, such as the importance of employing rigorous methods for working across languages or the need to explain and justify how ethnic categories are operationalised.
- There was evidence that researchers, reviewers and research commissioners would welcome short guidance documents at points within the research cycle that could alert them to key issues for consideration.
- However, our consultation exercises and workshops suggested a need for signposting to more detailed support on how to tackle some of the issues raised in practice.
- Producing concise, accessible guidance documents for inclusion within the research cycle raises a number of questions and challenges relating to the appropriate balance between flexibility and prescription in guidance; the extent to which generic guidance can be produced that is relevant and useful across disciplinary boundaries and diverse research settings; and the appropriateness of privileging ethnicity, as opposed to other axes of difference and inequality or other aspects of research practice.

What issues are important to include in guidance?

Both our review and consultation exercises produced a wealth of potential material that could inform the development of guidance documents. Issues identified were wide-ranging, from broad issues relating to researchers' responsibilities and the contribution of research to society, to much more specific issues such as the importance of ensuring rigorous cross-language working.

The Learned Societies review, while producing little by way of material specifically focused on ethnicity, nevertheless highlighted some important themes that were echoed and further developed in the published literature we reviewed, including those relating to researchers' responsibilities towards wider society and – by extension – to minority ethnic individuals and communities within a multiethnic society. Several of the papers reviewed engaged with the central issues of what motivates research into ethnicity and what the impact of such work might be on the lives and wellbeing of minority ethnic individuals and groups. For instance, Bulmer and Solomos (2004) remind us of 'the inherently politicised and often controversial nature of research on race and racism' (p. 3) and urge researchers to reflect carefully on what research in this area is intended to achieve. They suggest that greater research attention is needed to addressing the 'real-life' issues that affect minority ethnic people and how social action can tackle racialised structures and processes. Many other authors too argue that research into ethnicity should be

primarily (or exclusively) concerned with understanding inequality and discrimination (Ellison, *et al*., 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1998).

The Learned Societies' documents and the published literature also raised fundamental issues relating to researchers' responsibilities towards their research colleagues, the profession and the commissioners and funders of research. A further theme was recognition that research often involves conflict between competing ethical and scientific principles and the need for researchers to recognise and carefully negotiate their obligations to the different stakeholders (sponsors and commissioners of research, academic and professional colleagues, research participants, and wider society) in the process.

In addition, the review of published papers produced much material relating to how researchers should design and undertake specific research studies to ensure scientific and ethical rigour. Many of the papers reviewed identified pitfalls and inadequacies in the ways that social research on ethnicity is commonly conducted, as well as advocating particular approaches to research design and execution. Issues identified spanned the whole research cycle from the framing of research and identification of research questions right through to the dissemination and translation of research findings.

A further source of potential content for the guidance document came from our consultations with researchers, commissioners and ISR/ethics reviewers. Again, broad issues on which clarification and guidance would be useful were identified, including when and why to include attention to ethnic diversity; how to judge whether it might be reasonable and valid not to include attention to ethnicity; and how to build and assess cross-cultural researcher competence. Some more specific issues were also highlighted, relating to particular aspects of research methodology:

- working with categories and groups (appropriateness of umbrella terms, diversity within 'groups');

- sampling, and particularly how to achieve inclusive samples with small budgets;

- questionnaire design across languages and cultural groups;

- working across languages (methods of translation, conceptual equivalence);

- exploring the interplay of multiple axes of difference and inequality (e.g. ethnicity and gender, ethnicity and age);

- how to ensure sensitivity and cultural appropriateness;

- working with community researchers and interpreters.

Respondents also identified particular communities or groups of people that they perceived to present additional challenges for researchers and existing research approaches – new immigrants, Gypsies and Travellers and 'invisible' (i.e. not enumerated within statutory categorisations) minorities – and that might therefore warrant particular attention within guidance documents.

What format should guidance take?

Clearly, the list of issues for possible inclusion is lengthy and the appropriate form and content will depend on the audience and context within which any particular guidance document is intended to be used. As discussed more in Chapter 5, our piloting experience highlighted three characteristics of guidance documents that potential users and promoters of guidance felt to be important: they should be concise; they should be written in a language that is accessible and meaningful to the audience; and they should be easily integrated alongside any other existing documents already directed at that audience.

The consultation exercises suggested that such brief checklists or prompting documents would be considered useful by (at least some) researchers, commissioners and ISR/ethics committee members. Spontaneous suggestions from our respondents included bulleted lists to remind researchers of issues not to be overlooked in planning research; guidance documents attached to research tenders from research commissioners; and checklists with signposting to additional materials. However, our findings also suggested that more comprehensive support is needed to increase confidence and competence in this area. The consultation with researchers yielded some useful suggestions as to how such materials might be structured and presented, so that they might be easily accessible and applicable to a wide range of researchers with different levels of expertise and in varied disciplinary and working contexts. Several respondents identified the need for graded material that would be accessible to researchers with different levels of experience. Introductory material was felt to be needed for those who have no previous experience and need to be encouraged to engage with issues of ethnic diversity. At the same time, more experienced researchers must not feel patronised by guidance, or feel that it has nothing to offer them, especially if they do a lot of work in the field. Some respondents felt that a self-assessment tool for use by individuals and departments would be a useful starting point, so that people can see how they are currently doing and identify areas they need to improve on. This might then be supplemented by a graded set of learning modules within which minimum and higher levels of attainment could be identified. The aim would be to encourage incremental improvements in research practice rather than putting people off with goals that seem unachievable. The potential for guidance on researching ethnicity to dissuade researchers from tackling this area is an important consideration, and one that echoes our observation that much published material focuses on the pitfalls and shortcomings of prior research.

In terms of the format, some respondents felt that face-to-face delivery of guidance through training was important, but more identified online materials as appropriate, being flexible and accessible as and when needed. There were a number of more specific suggestions as to how content might be presented, with the emphasis being on real-life illustrations of research practice, such as examples of common problems and issues to be aware of; examples of bad practice to inform good practice; case studies of research studies – highlighting issues and providing detailed, practical suggestions; and examples of good research papers or reports.

While developing such comprehensive materials was clearly beyond the scope of the present project, the apparent need for further support to those conducting research in this area does call into question whether brief, prompting guidance documents are likely to have much of an impact on research practice – an issue to which we return in Chapter 5.

Challenges to developing appropriate and acceptable guidance documents

Having highlighted the apparent demand for more comprehensive support to researching ethnicity among many social researchers, we return now to our primary objective of developing guidance documents for use within the research cycle, and highlight some challenges that became apparent during our review and consultation exercises.

Flexibility versus prescription

A common theme in our Learned Society review, reiterated by a minority of participants in our piloting exercises, was the desirability of ethical and scientific guidance offering flexible prompts for discussion and debate rather than prescriptive codes to be followed without reflection. As such, there was a common desire in Learned Society documents to avoid an 'audit culture' and 'compliance mentality' whilst encouraging professional integrity, responsibility and dialogue. Related to the perceived desirability of ensuring flexibility in any guidance document was a concern expressed that overly prescriptive guidance might stifle

research, particularly innovative methodological approaches. On the other hand, it could be suggested that if guidance documents are too flexible, allowing for multiple interpretations, their potential to shift practice will be minimal.

Specificity versus generality

Closely related to the issue of flexibility versus prescription is the question of whether guidance can be developed that is relevant and useful to social researchers across a range of disciplines and working contexts. While some journals may cater to a narrow constituency, more often research commissioners, journal editors, ISR/ethics boards and other stakeholders who might wish to introduce guidance will want to accommodate a diverse range of approaches to social research.

In our review of Learned Society documentation, we identified a commonly felt tension between generic and discipline-specific ethical (and scientific) standards. Some argued that ethics should be firmly grounded within the values and methods base of a single discipline (Butler, 2002), and expressed concern that generic ethical codes can become 'legalistic, adjudicative and restrictive' (Harper and Corsin Jimenez, 2005). The perceived inapplicability of research standards across disciplinary arenas was particularly evident in comments about the inappropriate application of biomedical research standards to social science research.

Furthermore, our review of both Learned Society documents and published literature highlighted the way in which different social science disciplines tend to have different concerns and emphases. So, for instance, while the sociological literature we reviewed devoted considerable space to the importance of conceptual clarity in how ethnicity and related concepts such as race are theorised (see for instance Bradby, 2003; Banton, 2005; Karlsen and Nazroo, 2006) many of the psychology papers we reviewed were more concerned with the importance of establishing the validity of measurement techniques across groups (Rogler, 1999; Sue, 1999; Giosan, *et al*., 2001), ostensibly finding the concept of ethnicity and the construction of ethnic 'groups' less problematic. Where such divergence reflects differential emphasis it may not compromise the development of effective and supportive guidance. [For instance, more recent contributions from psychologists are calling for increased attention to the unhelpful reification of ethnic categories in psychological research (Helms, *et al*., 2005; Phinney and Ong, 2007).] However, there appear to be a number of areas where conflicting opinions are more difficult to resolve. Three such conflicts are highlighted here.

First, there is diversity of opinion regarding the place of values within research on ethnicity and the extent to which such research can and should aspire to objectivity and independence. Some authors argue that research in this area is inherently value laden, that researchers should be politically committed and that their work should be a tool for activism and social change (Williams, 1987; Lewis, 1996; Stovall, 2005; Kalra, 2006). Others appear to endorse a focus on inequality and social justice but urge researchers to be as objective as possible by engaging in critical reflexivity and transcending their current value- and theory-laden position (Ellison, 2006; Scambler and Nazroo, 2006). Other researchers see no place for values in research, believe it is possible to engage in social research in an independent and detached manner and advocate approaches that strive for such objective knowledge generation [see for example Crozier's (2003) discussion of the contrasting positions of Ladner (1987) and Hammersley (1995)].

Second, and closely related, there are divergent opinions and practices in relation to the involvement of research subjects – for instance respondents, members of the public or community representatives – in the research process. Some researchers advocate, on both ethical and practical grounds, for the active and meaningful involvement of minority ethnic people in the conception, design and execution of research studies (Crozier, 2003; Elam and Fenton, 2003). For some researchers, partici-patory approaches are a fundamental element of good practice in research on ethnicity, being a means to challenge ethnocentric biases and the myth of the 'neutral truth-seeker' (Patel, 1999, p. 12). Others endorse the approach in principle but are more cautious, identifying ethical, logistical and theoretical

complexities that can arise in practice (Salway, 2005; SSRG, 2005). Some highlight concerns that the use of such inclusive or participatory methods can compromise scientific independence (BAAL, 2006) and would not therefore support such approaches as a general principle of sound research practice. Clearly, these opinions relate fundamentally to researchers' beliefs regarding how evidence/knowledge can and should be generated.

Third, there are differing opinions regarding the desirability of increasing the *quantity* of research findings that relate to minority ethnic populations even where the quality of the data and analysis is in question. Some researchers argue along the lines that 'any data are good data' in that all evidence serves to raise the profile of ethnic diversity and inequality issues. Others invoke a 'right to inclusion' argument, suggesting that researchers should always take steps to ensure inclusive samples, as in the case of one of the experts we consulted by email:

> *While I can not identify particular papers that you should include in your review, I consider that all such research should be inclusive of minority ethnic individuals and communities.*

In contrast, others argue in favour of selectivity and quality control in the generation and dissemination of evidence in this area, expressing concerns that poorly conducted research can do more harm than good (Ellison, 2005; Gunaratnam, 2007). An example of potential conflict here would be whether or not analyses of secondary datasets that allow the use of only very broad ethnic categories because of small samples should be undertaken. Another important source of potential disagreement relates to whether efforts should be taken to ensure ethnically representative samples even if the resulting body of data will not be large enough to sustain comparative analyses by ethnicity. Of course, some people take the middle ground, seeking to identify ways of working with imperfect data and ensuring sensibly cautious conclusions (Aspinall and Jacobsen, 2007).

As well as the potential for conflicting disciplinary perspectives on what constitutes ethically or scientifically sound research, variations across geographical contexts in the language and concepts employed in relation to ethnicity may compromise the development of guidance documents that are widely applicable and acceptable. At the very least, such differences will demand careful wording and may suggest the need for flexible prompts rather than prescriptive rules.

Privileging ethnicity

An issue that arose in both our consultation and piloting exercises was whether it is appropriate and useful to develop and promote guidance that focuses exclusively on ethnicity, as opposed to all/other axes of difference and inequality. In particular, some government respondents referred to their organisation's need to work within a single equality framework and therefore the need to consider all axes of diversity and potential inequality simultaneously within their approach to research. Several respondents suggested that any guidance developed should address not ethnicity alone, but rather diversity and equality issues more generally. Given the simultaneous need for guidance documents to be succinct and yet detailed enough to prompt reflection and changed practices, extension beyond a focus on ethnicity might be a significant challenge.

Areas of uncertainty and innovation need

A final challenge worth emphasising is that researching ethnicity raises complex issues many of which are not easily resolved and for which no 'cook book' solution exists. It is possible therefore that guidance documents, while encouraging greater clarity and more careful practice in some areas, will introduce additional uncertainty for researchers and research users in others. Conceptual and methodological innovation will help to establish standards of good practice over time in areas that presently are perceived to

be highly taxing and controversial – for instance, new methods are being developed and tested for constructing robust samples of 'invisible' and undocumented minority groups (Mühlau, 2010). Nevertheless, it seems likely that elements of research practice will persist where guidance documents can do no more than encourage researchers to reflect carefully on, and explicitly document, their decisions and actions.

Some suggested principles

By aggregating across the various documents and papers reviewed and the findings from the consultation exercises undertaken, we have aimed to summarise the range of issues raised in a draft set of principles (Box 2). The principles are, by and large, expressed in fairly general terms, aiming to alert researchers (or those who are commissioning or reviewing research) to issues that they should take into consideration, but not prescribing in any detail how they might actually address these in their own research practice. This approach is taken because we recognise that there can be multiple appropriate ways of addressing the issues depending on the context and focus of research. Nevertheless, we have included some statements that some may consider overly prescriptive or contentious. It is also possible that, at times, some principles may be in conflict with others, requiring researchers to make careful decisions and be aware of the trade-offs involved. Despite these complexities, we hope the set of principles nonetheless provides a useful starting point to prompt social scientists to think about *whether* and *how* their research should include attention to ethnicity.

Box 2: Principles for social research for multiethnic settings

Part 1: Broad ethical and scientific considerations

A. Responsibilities towards commissioners and sponsors

Researchers should:

A1   Attempt to ensure that sponsors, funders and employers appreciate their obligations towards the multiethnic society at large and to minority ethnic participants within any particular study and the implications this may have for how they discharge their duties.

A2   Avoid agreeing to sponsors' conditions that jeopardise any of the principles set out here in relation to researching ethnic diversity.

A3   Ensure that sponsors appreciate the additional costs that may be involved in carrying out a study in a way that is sensitive and appropriate to the needs of minority ethnic participants.

A4   Be aware that certain funding sources may be contentious in relation to the needs and interests of minority ethnic groups.

B. Responsibilities towards the discipline and colleagues

Researchers should:

B1   Be aware of and promote equal opportunities in all aspects of their work.

B2   Be alert to the vulnerable position that colleagues of minority ethnic backgrounds may face, particularly those who are employed as contract researchers, and should seek ways to support their career development.

B3   Be aware of the disparities in resources that may exist when partnering with community-based organisations representing minority ethnic communities and seek ways to ensure their effective participation and long-term benefits of collaboration.

C. Responsibilities towards research participants

Researchers should:

C1   Take particular care to ensure that their research methods do not unintentionally discriminate on the basis of ethnicity (and related factors, e.g. cultural preferences, social disadvantage, language, religion).

C2   Recognise their responsibility, and put in place appropriate procedures, to ensure inclusion in research projects of minority ethnic individuals or groups who might otherwise be excluded for reasons of language, culture, expense and so on.

C3   Be aware of power differentials between themselves and the participants in their research projects and should be alert to the *possible* vulnerability that minority ethnic people may face (for instance by virtue of social disadvantage, limited English language competency, past racist abuse, mistrust of institutions and so on).

C4   Be aware of possible differences between ethnic groups in the impact of their research on participants and not override social and cultural values in the pursuit of knowledge.

C5   Seek guidance on the social, cultural, religious and other practices that *might* affect relationships and the impact of the research on participants where participants differ from the researcher in terms of their ethnic background.

C6   Take steps to adequately assess the potential for harm and offence that their research approach and methods may have for diverse ethnic groups and individuals, and make necessary modifications to minimise risk.

C7   Adopt non-oppressive strategies that are free of any form of prejudice or discrimination in all their dealings with minority ethnic research participants.

C8   Be alert to the potential for communication across languages and cultures to introduce misunderstanding and ensure that appropriate procedures and resources are in place to allow effective and free communication with all minority ethnic participants.

C9   Take particular care in gaining informed consent from minority ethnic participants in order to ensure that the information considered relevant by the participant has been made available in a form that is meaningful.

C10 Adopt the necessary procedures to ensure all participants receive adequate protection of anonymity and confidentiality. Particular issues may arise when working with small communities and vulnerable minorities.

C11 Ensure that the research methods and approaches employed are sensitive to the preferences and circumstances of all participants irrespective of ethnicity.

C12 Be alert to possible cultural variation in notions of public and private space and take steps to ensure that they do not infringe uninvited upon the private space of individuals or groups.

C13 Find ways to involve minority ethnic people who are the subject of research in the planning and execution of the research project.

D. Responsibilities towards wider society

D1   Research should benefit the widest possible community, including minority ethnic groups within it.

D2   Research agendas should be informed by diverse sections of the population, including the interests and concerns of people of minority ethnicities.

D3   Researchers should reflect critically on how their values and beliefs shape their research approach and seek to minimise ethnocentric bias in identifying research topics and questions.

D4   Researchers should consider prioritising research that addresses issues of concern to minority ethnic 'groups', particularly where the topic is recognised as a neglected area.

D5   Researchers should be aware of how the broader evidence base in their area reflects the experiences and needs of different ethnic groups and work to ensure that no group is disadvantaged by routinely being excluded from consideration or by being over-researched.

D6   In planning all phases of an inquiry, from design to dissemination of findings, researchers should be aware of the likely consequences of their research for society at large and minority ethnic groups within it, including those that are not directly involved.

D7   Researchers should prioritise research that aims to understand and address discrimination and disadvantage and seek to achieve research agendas that respect fundamental human rights and aim towards social justice.

D8   Researchers should seek to promote emancipatory forms of inquiry that engage with minority ethnic communities in the articulation and implementation of research agendas.

Part 2: Research design and conduct

E. Resources and staffing

Researchers should:

E1   Recognise the potential for harm when social inquiry involving minority ethnic participants, or seeking to address issues relating to ethnic diversity, is conducted by inadequately trained/ inexperienced researchers and ensure that research team members are adequately trained and prepared for their role.

E2   Be open and honest about their competency in relation to researching ethnic diversity and seek to upgrade their skills appropriately.

E3   Recognise that researching ethnicity sensitively and appropriately requires additional resources and ensure that budgets are adequate to support the planned work.

F. Framing research and identifying research questions

Researchers should:

F1   Carefully consider the framing of their research and the research questions identified in order to avoid stereotyping, essentialising and pathologising of, and to maximise relevance and utility of findings to, minority ethnic people.

F2   Make explicit and reflect on any underlying assumptions, biases or prejudices that might shape their research.

F3   Seek ways of facilitating the involvement of diverse sections of the population in shaping research agendas, research questions and approaches to research design and conduct.

G. Conceptualising 'ethnicity' and related concepts

Researchers should:

G1   Be explicit about how they conceptualise ethnicity and related concepts.

G2   Be clear and consistent in their use of terminology and justify their choice of terms.

G3   Recognise and counter essentialist tendencies be they genetic, cultural or both.

G4   Recognise historical and contextual specificities in their research on ethnicity.

G5   Give adequate attention to revealing and understanding racism and racial exclusion.

G6   Challenge pathologising and stigmatising constructions of particular ethnic identities.

G7   Give adequate attention to white ethnicities, 'mixed/hybrid' identities, the interplay of religious and ethnic identities, and the interplay of migrant and ethnic identities, as well as other social identities.

H. Categorisation and labelling

Researchers should:

H1   Recognise that ethnic categories and labels are neither natural nor value neutral.

H2   Recognise the inherent dangers of working with fixed categories and counter the tendency to treat such categories as if they were static, homogeneous and mutually exclusive.

H3   Carefully consider the appropriateness and limitations of particular categories and labels in relation to the focus of any particular research study. In particular, researchers should recognise the pros and cons of employing standard administrative/statutory categories (such as the UK Census codes) as opposed to bespoke categories.

I. Data generation, sampling and recruitment

Researchers should:

I1   Carefully consider the pros and cons of different approaches to sampling their body of empirical data in relation to their research objectives.

I2   Ensure adequate resources and appropriate approaches to facilitate the recruitment of a sufficient number of participants/collection of sufficient data necessary to address the research questions relating to ethnicity.

I3   Adopt sampling approaches that will generate an adequate volume and comparability of data to sustain any proposed comparative analyses by ethnicity.

I4   Carefully consider the adequacy of secondary data samples in relation to any proposed analyses by ethnicity.

J. Data generation tools and measurement

Researchers should:

J1   Be aware that data generation methods and tools may operate differentially across ethnic 'groups' and take appropriate steps to ensure equivalence both conceptually and empirically.

J2   Be aware of the complex 'insider–outsider' issues that may arise during data collection and take appropriate steps to ensure the quality of data and the safety, comfort and respect of researchers and participants.

J3   Be alert to, and counter, the ways in which their methodological approach may privilege particular voices or understandings of the world and may disempower some research participants. They should also seek ways to counter dominant discourses and 'give voice' to those who are seldom heard.

J4   Recognise that the structures and processes that perpetuate ethnic disadvantage may be elusive and may demand innovative and sustained methods of inquiry.

J5   Ensure that potential participants are not excluded for lack of English language competency.

J6   Employ rigorous methods for working across languages and recognise that some concepts do not easily translate across linguistic boundaries.

J7   Seek to include bi-/multilingual researchers within the research team.

K. Analyses and interpretation

Researchers should:

K1   Recognise the multiple factors that may account for any observed differences between ethnic 'groups' and the importance of identifying, rather than assuming, underlying explanations.

K2   Be aware of interlinked hierarchies of disadvantage and explore the ways in which different aspects of identity are inter-related.

K3   Avoid the tendency to present the majority 'white British' group as the standard or norm against which other groups are to be compared.

K4   Examine diversity within and similarity across ethnic 'groups'.

K5   Be alert to inherent biases in methods of data collection and analysis that may compromise comparisons across ethnic 'groups'.

K6   Seek to understand processes of ethnic identification, categorisation, and inclusion and exclusion, not merely draw comparisons between pre-identified 'groups'.

K7   Be aware of factors beyond the scope of their study – particularly historical factors and wider social structures – that could compromise conclusions.

K8 Adopt a highly critical and reflexive approach to analysis and interpretation at both a personal and a methodological level.

K9 Give adequate attention to the wider socio-political and historical context within which the research focus is situated.

L. Representation and dissemination of findings

Researchers should:

L1 Be explicit about the limitations of any study and the degree of likely transferability/applicability to the wider UK multiethnic context.

L2 Be alert to, and take actions to pre-empt, the possible misuse or misinterpretation of their research findings in ways that result in derogatory or damaging representations of minority ethnic people.

L3 Consider whether the dissemination of certain findings may serve to further marginalise already marginalised minority ethnic groups, and be aware that in some circumstances it may be necessary to withhold data where their publication would do more harm than good.

L4 Take responsibility for ensuring that their work is widely disseminated in appropriate forms and languages to ensure access and impact across minority ethnic groups, as well as other stakeholders.

L5 Carefully consider the form and content of research outputs to ensure that they are accessible and appropriate to all potential stakeholders and adequately 'give voice' to the subjects of the research.

L6 Reflect critically on their use of language and terminology in the dissemination of findings to ensure that their work is accurately communicated and does not reinforce prejudice or racial-ised stereotypes.

Summary

Our review and consultation exercises yielded a wealth of material upon which to base issues for inclusion in guidance documents for use within the research cycle. From these, we have synthesised a set of principles for debate, as well as for adaptation for use in particular contexts. While there was evidence from our consultation exercises that brief guidance documents were perceived as potentially valuable by researchers and other stakeholders within the research cycle, we also identified a need for providing more comprehensive support to researchers.

Some significant challenges to constructing concise and accessible guidance documents were also identified, including the extent to which ethical and scientific guidance can be relevant and useful across divergent disciplines and contexts. That said, some Learned Societies, such as the SRA, have attempted to produce guidance documents that are widely relevant and applicable, and many of the principles we have included in Box 2 were found to be expressed across a wide range of substantive and disciplinary contexts.

Furthermore, a number of general themes emerged from our review work that appear to be positive in terms of moving towards clearer and more comprehensive guidance in relation to researching ethnicity. First, several of the Learned Society documents and published papers reviewed pay explicit attention to the ethical implications of research for wider society and the 'groups' within rather than exclusively focusing on research participants. Notwithstanding the importance of protecting participants, this wider perspective is likely to be important if the implications of research for minority ethnic populations are to be fully appreciated and benefits distributed more fairly. A further positive theme is that of researchers having a responsibility to defend their own ethical and scientific standards in research practice, particularly in the face of pressure from funders or employers. Given this, there is evidence that researchers are encouraged to seek to influence research sponsors in a way that opens up the possibility of researchers pushing for greater attention to ethnicity and more realistic funding of such research endeavours (Bulmer and Solomos, 2004; Scambler and Nazroo, 2006). Related to this is the helpful notion that individual researchers must be aware of, and bear responsibility for, the cumulative behaviour of their profession and the consequences of their actions for society at large (SRA, 2003, p. 15), and specifically that certain disciplines must redress their neglect of ethnicity and racialisation [see for instance Williams (1987) on social policy; Sue (1999) on psychology; Ali, *et al*. (2001) on disability studies; and Karney, *et al*. (2004) on marital and family research].

4 Feasibility and impact

> **Key points**
>
> - Guidance documents were successfully developed and piloted in social science journals and within the JRF research commissioning process.
> - The guidance documents were received positively by the majority of researchers who chose to consult them. By and large, respondents reported the documents to be comprehensible and exhaustive and felt that they had the potential to improve the quality of research papers published or proposals submitted.
> - The pilots highlighted the importance of guidance documents being concise; carefully worded to ensure wide comprehension and applicability to different types of activities (such as journal articles or research proposals); and consistent with other documentation already in use.
> - The question of whether it is desirable for guidance to focus exclusively on ethnicity was raised by JRF staff, editors and researchers and clearly deserves consideration.
> - Several researchers reported that the guidance documents had had a significant impact on their own practice: raising awareness, prompting reflection and, in the case of reviewers, making their job easier.
> - However, a large number of researchers reported no significant impact, though this was primarily because the guidance documents were felt to be consistent with their current practice rather than being unhelpful, inapplicable or inappropriate.
> - Despite the positive reception among those who had used the guidance, overall uptake was low. Furthermore, our review of JRF research proposals found no evidence that applicants who had read the guidance addressed the key issues of concern any more adequately than those who had not.
> - Therefore, although it does appear to be feasible to introduce guidance documents that are accessible and meaningful to a wide range of social researchers, our piloting experience raises doubts as to the extent of their likely impact on practice. Stronger promotion by journal editors and commissioners might result in greater uptake and impact, though it appears that some researchers regard attention to ethnicity within research as either (i) of no concern to them or (ii) something that they felt they already do well.

In this chapter we draw on our experiences of developing and piloting guidance documents within five social science journals and also within the JRF's own research commissioning process to draw some conclusions about the feasibility and likely impact of this type of intervention.

Is it feasible to develop guidance documents and introduce them within the research cycle?

Overall, the experience of our piloting exercises suggests that, despite the challenges identified in Chapter 4, it is feasible to develop and introduce guidance documents within the research cycle that are perceived

by a wide range of social scientists to be appropriate, comprehensible and exhaustive. Drawing on the review and consultation exercises we developed, through a series of iterations, relatively concise documents for use by authors and reviewers within social policy-relevant journals (in the form of checklists) and by applicants to the JRF's research calls (in the form of a series of paragraphs included within guidance to applicants).

Of those researchers who provided feedback on the journal checklists (the majority of whom responded to the *Ethnicity & Health* piloting), most identified no questions that they felt were difficult to understand, unnecessary or irrelevant (Table 3).

A few important issues were raised regarding the application of some questions to some types of paper, as well as the potential for misinterpretation of some of the questions. These issues might warrant attention in a revised version of the checklist. Nine respondents identified some questions that they felt were irrelevant and/or difficult to apply to the paper in question. However, on examination of their detailed responses most of the issues they raised did not compromise the overall usefulness of the checklist or its broader aims. For instance, one respondent said that since all respondents spoke the native language the checklist question on working across languages was irrelevant; but the 'not applicable' option could have been used in this case.

Similarly, in the JRF pilot, out of the 36 respondents who answered the questions relating to the content of the guidance, 28 reported that the issues covered were 'very straightforward' to understand and eight that there was 'some difficulty'. Of these eight, just two mentioned specific difficulties, though these related less to understanding the guidance document and more to operationalising ethnic diversity within their particular research project. Just one respondent reported that the issues covered in the guidance were 'largely irrelevant' to their proposed research. However, while three-quarters of those responding to the 'Forced Labour' call felt the issues were 'very relevant', none of those responding to the 'Young People and Housing' call gave this response, with most saying 'somewhat relevant'. Respondents were also asked whether they felt that any important issues were omitted from the guidance document. Thirty respondents answered this question and seven said 'yes', identifying a range of issues that they felt deserved greater attention. Most of these responses related to the need for more detail on how to address the issues raised through concrete examples and more detailed instruction.

We didn't feel any issues were missing, but that it might be helpful to bring them to life a little, by giving examples?

So, across both the journal and the JRF pilots, it was feasible to develop and introduce a guidance document. Respondents' own assessments revealed a range of ethnicity expertise among the sample, giving confidence that (i) important inadequacies in the guidance document would have been highlighted had they existed and (ii) the document can be used with ease by researchers with varied prior exposure to the issues covered.

Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting some issues that arose during the process of constructing and introducing the guidance documents since they illustrate some of the concerns of key stakeholders

Table 3: Summary of responses to questions on journal checklist content

	'No'	%	*n*
Are any questions in the guidance checklist:			
difficult to understand?	19	76	25
unnecessary?	21	84	25
difficult to apply (or irrelevant)?	16	64	25
Were any important issues omitted from the checklist?	24	96	25

and suggest potential barriers to raising ethical and scientific standards. These points reiterate some of those raised in Chapter 4.

The first area of concern related to the clarity and meaningfulness of the guidance documents to particular audiences. Thus, while the content of the guidance documents was largely the same across both the pilots, editors and JRF managers felt that there was a need to tailor the wording and layout for their own context. In the main this was not a significant issue. However, two areas of potential complexity arose. The first related to the relevance and appropriateness of the guidance documents to an international, non-UK audience. Our project was focused on the UK, but the journals we approached had an international body of authors and reviewers. While our literature review suggested that many of the issues raised in the guidance documents are recognised cross-nationally (particularly in the US), concepts and terms relating to ethnicity, race and related concepts vary greatly across settings, reflecting particular histories of 'ethnogenesis' (Aspinall, 2007), and demanding careful consideration to ensure comprehension and utility. The second related to the applicability of the guidance documents to different types of study. Although the phrasing employed in the guidance appeared to be successfully applicable to both quantitative and qualitative empirical studies, there appeared to be a need for modification of the guidance for it to be easily applied to secondary research studies based on review and synthesis of earlier work (an increasingly important contribution to knowledge generation for policy-makers and practitioners).

The second area of concern related to potential disruption to the normal processes of review operating within the journals and the JRF commissioning process. Details of the pilots were carefully negotiated with editors and JRF staff. Even so, within the JRF several managers preferred not to allow their research calls to be included in the pilot for fear of disruption to their normal processes. For the journal editors there was a major worry that the introduction of the guidance might pose an additional burden to themselves, and importantly, to their reviewers who perform their task without payment. The solution adopted to allay these concerns was that participation by authors and reviewers was entirely voluntary.

The third area of concern related to the appropriateness of a guidance document that focused exclusively on ethnicity. This concern echoed comments by researchers during our consultation exercises, and clearly deserves careful consideration. In the case of the JRF pilot, managers were concerned not to appear to be privileging ethnicity over and above other axes of difference and inequality. An explicit preamble to this effect was therefore inserted before the detailed guidance.

How is such guidance likely to be received by researchers?

Twenty-one participants (reviewers and authors) in the pilot across all journals provided responses to the questionnaire sections relating to their experience of using the checklist. Again, responses indicated a generally positive attitude towards the checklist. In answer to the question, 'Did using the checklist take too much time?' just four of the 21 respondents said 'yes'. Eight respondents felt that the checklist made their task of preparing or reviewing the paper 'easier', eleven that it was 'pretty much the same' and just two that it made the job 'more difficult'. In the JRF pilot, just two out of 26 respondents who gave responses to this part of the questionnaire reported that they felt the document took too much time, and one that the document made the job of preparing the proposal 'more difficult'. Fourteen respondents felt that the document made their job of preparing the proposal 'easier' and a further eleven that it was 'pretty much the same'. The reception, was therefore, generally positive.

However, some dissenting voices and words of caution were evident. In the pilot across all journals, two respondents, both reviewers, one from *Anthropology in Action* and one from *Ethnicity & Health* expressed strongly negative opinions regarding the guidance checklist. One of these respondents saw no value in the checklist for other researchers or the journal as a whole, describing the checklist as overly long and repetitive, tedious and unnecessary, making the job of a reviewer more difficult. The other respondent who perceived the checklist negatively had somewhat different concerns, arguing that such an intervention might constrain and direct researchers detrimentally, limiting the creativity of researchers.

A couple of other respondents, while being broadly supportive, nevertheless felt that it was important to ensure that the guidance checklists were concise and clear to all, again reflecting the concern that such interventions can become a hindrance rather than a help.

Among the JRF pilot respondents, none expressed very negative views towards the guidance, but two highlighted difficulties they had faced in addressing the issues raised by the document:

Perhaps it was my topic. Race and ethnicity was not the main issue of the research topic ... my difficulty was more of a worry than a difficulty – because I felt as though I had not specifically chosen people from a range of ethnic/race backgrounds.

I found the guidelines made it tempting to just concentrate on White groups in the research given the diversity of ethnic groups in the UK and that there was no clear way we could 'represent' all of or to some extent even any of them … I felt the guidelines didn't offer sufficient suggestion on how best to do that and felt more like a warning.

While it could be argued that the guidance had prompted these researchers to think about aspects of their research they might otherwise have ignored, their experience of the guidance was not positive. It might be a concern if the guidance discouraged researchers from incorporating attention to ethnicity because it appears to demand unattainable standards.

What impact might such guidance documents have on research practice?

In terms of the potential impact that guidance documents might have on research practice it is clearly important to consider both the extent to which researchers are likely to read and consider such guidance and whether they then act upon it, and how this impacts on their work.

In both pilots included in the present study, it was entirely up to researchers whether or not they read and used the guidance. In the case of the journals, the editors presented their journals as 'hosting' the pilot and, though links to the pilot materials were included at the foot of emails to authors and reviewers, they did not provide explicit support or encouragement to increase participation. In contrast, the JRF pilot was presented to applicants as a JRF initiative and applicants received emailed invitations to participate and reminders directly from JRF staff.

The pilot across all journals had a disappointing response from authors and reviewers, particularly from journals other than *Ethnicity & Health*. The response from authors might have been better had there been a mechanism to ensure that they had access to the checklist prior to submission, but this was not possible. Instead, a large proportion of authors would have been aware of the checklist only when they were at the point of submission and may well have preferred to continue to submission without taking the additional time to consider the guidance and make adjustments to their paper. The low response among reviewers is more disappointing and may corroborate concerns expressed by the editors during the design phase of the pilot that reviewers already feel over-burdened and are reluctant to engage in something that may be seen to add to their workload. It is worth reiterating, however, that the majority of those reviewers who reported back to us on their experiences of using the checklist did not find the checklist to be too time-consuming or difficult to use. Furthermore, it is possible that some reviewers read and used the checklist but chose not to invest the extra time in providing us with feedback via the e-questionnaire. Likewise, it is possible that those least inclined to find such a checklist helpful and/or easy to use would have also been least willing to complete the questionnaire (even if only to make this one point). While we had anticipated the greater number of responses from the ethnicity-focused journal, the very low response rate from the more generalist journals reported in Chapter 2 – with just one reviewer from *Journal of Social Policy* and none from *Social Policy and Society* following the link to the online survey – is cause for concern. The extremely low response would seem to imply little interest in ethnicity and/or attempts to enhance the quality of published research.

In contrast, the response rate to the JRF pilot was reasonably good, with the 36 partially completed online questionnaires representing 47 per cent, and 46 reviewed proposals representing 60 per cent, of all applicants who responded to the four calls. Just five applicants actively refused to participate. This may reflect the more active role that the JRF took in promoting the pilot, and perhaps a belief in the value of cooperating with research funders.

Looking first at the self-reported impact of the guidance documents on authors, reviewers and applicants, there was a range of responses. Among the journal pilot respondents, when asked whether using the checklist had had a significant impact on the way they had reviewed or prepared the paper, 14 respondents said 'no', while seven said 'yes'. Detailed responses were examined to understand more about why they felt the checklist had or had not affected the paper review/preparation process. Among the authors, three felt that the checklist had had a significant impact on how they prepared their paper.

It makes it easier to put into practice issues (i.e. ethical) that one deals with when conducting research on ethnicity.

Helps in identifying important issues in writing a paper on race/ethnicity.

Only two authors had read the checklist before they wrote their paper but did not consider it to have had a significant effect. One respondent reported that it did not have an effect because 'I already used the same principles in my scientific research', thus providing a positive endorsement of the content of the checklist. Another author implied that the checklist was not particularly relevant to the study in question but did not provide further explanation.

Among the reviewers, four out of 14 felt that the checklist had had a significant impact on the way they reviewed the paper.

The checklist made it clearer for me to comment on the article.

By using the checklist it is easier to review the concept ethnicity in the study in a systematic way.

Among the reviewers who felt that the checklist had not had a significant impact on how they reviewed the article, this was primarily because the checklist was felt to cover issues that they would normally take into consideration during a review anyway; again, providing endorsement for the checklist content.

The JRF pilot also produced mixed responses in terms of self-reported impact on own practice. When asked whether the guidance document had had any significant effect on how they prepared (or would have prepared) their proposal, responses were split evenly between 'yes' and 'no'. Among those who said 'no', their explanation was primarily that the document covered issues that they were already familiar with (echoing the responses of authors and reviewers reported above).

Most of these issues are well known and I would have been aware of them in any case.

For those who thought the guidance did affect (or would have affected) their preparation of the proposal, few specific examples were given, but there was a general feeling that it highlighted issues that were overlooked or at least not made explicit in the proposal.

Helped me to ensure I covered all relevant (to JRF) points. Helped strengthen our application by reminding us to engage with certain issues (that otherwise we may have overlooked) – so very useful as a research checklist.

The guidance would have affected some of our thinking and perhaps some of the detail of the proposed study. There are things I wished we had said now in the proposal having read this guidance.

Interestingly, in both pilots far more people felt that the guidance would contribute to improved quality in general than identified an impact on their own research practice.

In the pilot across all journals, when asked 'Do you think the checklist can enhance the quality of the papers published in the journal?' 20 out of 21 respondents said 'yes'. Respondents clarified their response by identifying a variety of benefits relating to raising awareness among researchers; contributing to the rigour of research and the systematic reporting of studies; assisting reviewers in their task; and making reviews more useful.

If researchers use the checklist when preparing manuscripts, then a more consistent and focused treatment of racial and ethnic issues should be the result

I think it is a good move towards research quality.

The checklist encourages the reviewer to really think carefully before reading the paper about these issues – so when you are reading the paper you are looking for these criteria in the paper.

It gives a nice framework for issues to consider when reviewing, in one easy-to-access place.

In the JRF pilot, though only half of the respondents felt that the guidance document had had (or would have had) an impact on the preparation of their own proposal, 24 out of 26 said that they thought the guidance could enhance the quality of proposals submitted to the JRF, particularly for less experienced researchers.

It does provide a series of key issues that could serve to prompt people who have not worked in this area before.

I would hope it would: there is still a distinct lack of awareness of race equality issues amongst many public agencies and some researchers and they need as much 'encouragement' as possible to ensure this dimension is incorporated properly into all proposals.

In addition to feedback from researchers on their own perceptions of the impact of the guidance, in the JRF pilot we were able to review the research proposals that were submitted to both active and control pilots. A review template was developed iteratively, based on the key issues covered in the additional guidance document on researching ethnicity and piloted on four proposals to ensure that it was comprehensive and could be employed consistently. The research proposals were then divided between two members of the research team who carefully read the proposals, took notes and applied the review template. One of the researchers was blind to which proposals were active and which were control.

Overall, our review found little evidence that proposals prepared in response to active calls (with access to the guidance document) differed in any systematic way from those submitted to the control calls. Looking first very broadly at whether the proposals included any attention to ethnicity and/or race, however limited, we found that 11 out of 13 control proposals (85 per cent) and 30 out of 33 (91 per cent) active proposals included some mention of these issues. However, on the whole, proposals paid very limited attention to these issues and very few showed consistent attention across background, rationale, research questions, methodology and outputs. Very few proposals included any detailed justification for why the proposed research should pay attention to ethnicity and/or race – just three active proposals

and two control proposals. Among the five proposals that paid no attention to ethnicity and/or race at all, none included any justification for why these were not addressed or any discussion of the potential limitations of adopting a research design that overlooked ethnicity and/or race. Nevertheless, all these proposals clearly intended to inform policy and practice development for the UK's population as a whole.

Across both sets of calls, proposals were, on the whole, characterised by an absence of any critical engagement with the concept of ethnicity and/or race; lack of clarity and justification for how ethnicity and/or race would be operationalised within the studies; and very limited detail regarding methods of data generation, analysis and presentation. Indeed, all of the key issues raised in the guidance document were dealt with poorly in the majority of proposals; we discuss some of these areas in more detail below. It is worth noting, however, that the JRF's general guidance document highlights similar shortcomings as the main reasons why proposals are rejected by the Foundation, namely 'insufficient information about key aspects', 'lack of clarity about what is planned' and 'insufficient detail about methods to be used'.

The JRF's standard guidance, as well as the additional ethnicity guidance, includes explicit reference to the potential value of including 'people with direct experience' (such as service users and members of the public) in the planning and conduct of research. It was therefore surprising to find that fewer than half of the proposals – 20 out of 46 – showed some evidence that the focus and framing of the proposed research had been (or would be) informed by those individuals and groups that were the focus of the research. Likewise, very few proposals showed any consideration of ethnic diversity in relation to user/public engagement in the research, even where it was clear from the research methods that an ethnically diverse sample of participants was to be recruited. Exceptions included a proposal that planned to involve a group of community researchers with diverse ethnic backgrounds and language skills, and three proposals that aimed for people from minority ethnic groups to be represented on user consultation/steering groups. However, no detail was provided regarding how meaningful participation would be achieved or any obstacles that might need to be overcome.

The ethnicity guidance document included sections that explicitly discussed the complexities involved in defining and operationalising ethnicity and ethnic categories. There was little evidence in the proposals that any of these issues had been considered by researchers. Although almost all proposals referred to ethnicity, race or related concepts such as 'cultural groups' or 'socially diverse groups', it was rare to find that applicants had made any attempt to explain or define such terms. Furthermore, in those proposals where ethnicity and/or race was regarded as a factor to be considered in the analyses, there was commonly no detail regarding how this would be achieved in practice. Only six proposals included clear identification of the ethnic categories to be employed, and none of these included a detailed justification for, or discussion of the pros and cons of, the identified categories. This is particularly notable given that few of the proposals were working with secondary data where the ethnic categories had already been chosen and deployed, thereby leaving researchers little flexibility in their analyses. Many proposals indicated or implied that ethnic group categories would be used, but were not explicit about what these categories would be.

In a number of proposals it appeared that the researchers intended to explore ethnicity and/or race in a more flexible, process-oriented way – for instance by undertaking ethnographic work in ethically diverse neighbourhoods rather than collecting individual-level data from groups of people categorised into particular ethnic 'groups'. While such an approach may well be appropriate, here again we found a disappointing lack of detail on how the central concepts were understood and how relevant data would be generated.

A further area of concern that was highlighted in the ethnicity guidance document related to the care of participants and alerted researchers to additional issues that may be relevant when conducting research that includes minority ethnic participants. We found evidence of such considerations in just eight proposals in total, four of these being proposals submitted in response to the 'Forced Labour' call, which may reflect the fact that the participants in this research programme were perceived by researchers to be particularly vulnerable. Proposals included mention of using intermediaries to establish trust with

communities; taking particular care to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, for instance by using pseudonyms; and ensuring that data collection activities take into consideration differing needs and preferences of participants, such as language, working hours and childcare.

The guidance document alerted researchers to several issues relating to the generation and analysis of data that deserve careful consideration when researching ethnicity, and particularly when exploring ethnic differences or inequalities. Again, it was rare to find that any of these issues had been explicitly considered in the proposals. In relation to ensuring or exploring the validity and appropriateness of data generation tools across different participant groups, just two proposals included anything of pertinence. One proposal mentioned that interviewers and interviewees would be matched by gender and language and another that an online survey would be used since the researchers believed this would be accessible to 'hard-to-reach' groups. Interestingly, just six proposals mentioned including data collection in more than one language, four of these being proposals to the 'Forced Labour' call. None of these proposals included any mention of how they would ensure rigorous methods of translation and conceptual equivalence across languages.

Even though a large number of proposals lacked detail on how they would sample across ethnic categories, many nevertheless implied that comparisons by ethnicity would be made during analyses. In general, either proposals provided insufficient information to assess whether or not adequate samples would be achieved to allow such comparative analyses or the detail provided suggested that samples would not be adequate. Most proposals included very little detail on their approach to analysing ethnicity in relation to their topic of focus. While a handful of proposals made some reference to the importance of exploring diversity within ethnic groups, for instance along the lines of gender, many more did not. Only one proposal included any mention of the need for caution in inferring causal links from associations with ethnicity.

The final area we examined in the proposals related to the reporting and interpretation of findings. Few applicants explicitly stated an intention to report findings for different ethnic groups, but this was implied in other parts of the proposals since data would be generated and analysed by ethnicity. Given this, it was disappointing to find little reference to how the research would avoid stereotyping, essentialising or pathologising minority groups; ensure reflexivity; and assess the transferability of findings and limits thereof.

Notwithstanding the possibility of some positive movement between what researchers *propose* and what they actually *do* if funded, we can conclude that the introduction of a guidance document that was offered to applicants as an additional, optional source of information did not have any noticeable impact on the written proposals that were submitted.

Summary

Findings from both pilots suggested that it is feasible to develop guidance documents that are perceived by a range of social researchers to be comprehensive, relevant and comprehensible. Most respondents to both pilots felt the guidance to be desirable and raised few criticisms or concerns, and none that would be difficult to address. However, the very poor engagement with the pilot in the generalist social policy journals, and comments from a number of JRF applicants, emphasise the fact that considered attention to ethnicity is not embedded across social research in the UK – for many researchers this appears to be a marginal concern at best. Furthermore, the positive attitudes towards guidance in principle expressed by journal editors and JRF commissioners were tempered by significant concerns regarding the additional burden such an intervention might represent, particularly for reviewers.

In terms of the content and form of the guidance, consistent messages across both pilots were: the need for guidance documents to be short; the importance of ensuring that terminology is widely comprehensible and relevant; and concerns about the appropriateness of privileging ethnicity to the exclusion of other axes of difference and disadvantage. Aside from these concerns, however, the content

of the guidance documents was widely felt to be appropriate. However, it is important to remember that our respondents were a self-selected group, and we might expect that researchers who did not consider the guidance or provide feedback would have less favourable opinions. We can only speculate, however, since we were not in a position to gather information on reasons for non-participation.

Turning to impact, the picture was less promising, because of both low levels of uptake and limited effect among those who did use the guidance. The low level of response in the general social policy journals was not completely unexpected but is, nevertheless, cause for concern since it suggests little interest in approaches to researching ethnicity and/or to raising standards of research more generally. The low response to the pilot in *Diversity in Health and Care* is puzzling since we might expect ethnicity to be central among the concerns of their authors and reviewers, and may perhaps relate to the piloting process.

Even in the case of *Ethnicity & Health*, where a reasonable level of participation was achieved, if the guidance checklist were to be adopted by the journal it would be important to find ways of presenting it as an aid to reviewers (and authors) that makes their job easier, rather than as an additional task to be completed. Moreover, if the editors want the checklist to be widely used it seems unlikely that presenting it as optional will have the desired result; rather the majority of authors and reviewers seem likely to choose not to use it unless it is promoted more actively.

In both pilots, a common theme was that of researchers recognising the value of the guidance for others but assessing their own practice as already adhering to the principles identified. This may in part reflect the fact that those researchers who were interested to take part in the pilots were more experienced in the area than the average social researcher. Nevertheless, our review of proposals submitted suggested that researchers should not be so complacent, since our overall conclusion was that the issues raised in the guidance documents were inadequately addressed in a majority of proposals.

The inclusion of guidance documents as an optional source of information may be a useful first step, prompting reflection among some researchers and adjustments or confirmation of current approaches, and as such might be expected to incrementally improve practices amongst authors, reviewers and editors. It seems, however, that more active promotion of such documents would be needed to bring about significant improvements.

5 Summary and discussion

We turn now to consider the study's findings as a whole, summarising the key points and discussing their implications for the initial objectives of the project. We conclude by looking to the future and assessing the prospects for enhancing the quantity of UK social research that appropriately and sensitively addresses ethnicity.

Desirability and feasibility

Perceived need

Overall, our project findings strongly suggested that there is a need for greater guidance on how to sensitively and appropriately incorporate attention to ethnicity within UK social research. The review exercises revealed that many common guidance documents directed at social scientists lack such a focus. Meanwhile, our consultation exercises confirmed that researchers in a wide range of settings, as well as individuals who commission and review research, recognise a need for greater guidance. Furthermore, the consultations suggested that current processes of review and scrutiny of proposed research undertaken by researchers, commissioners and ISR/ethics committees in relation to ethnicity are largely informal and heavily reliant on the expertise and interest of particular individuals.

Desirability

Although the study's findings did suggest a generally positive response to the proposal of guidance at different stages in the research cycle, it is important to note some dissenting voices and contradictory messages. First, there is clearly a minority of researchers who are concerned about the tendency for guidance codes, regardless of their exact focus, to stifle research activity and creativity, or actually discourage inclusive research designs. Second is the suggestion that guidance documents, however desirable in principle, can represent an additional burden to the research process. Finally, there is the important observation, discussed further below, that such guidance documents may represent a wasted effort since they do little to shift practice.

Feasibility

Despite the fact that our review work revealed some notable areas of contention and differing opinion, as well as some significant innovation needs, there was a large degree of consensus on many of the ethical and scientific issues that should be addressed when researching ethnicity. Furthermore, the guidance documents that were piloted in journals and the JRF commissioning process were, by and large, found to be comprehensive, relevant and comprehensible by a wide range of social researchers.

Content and form

Different formats for different audiences

The project findings suggested that brief guidance documents or checklists intended to alert social researchers, commissioners and research users to key issues for reflection may well be appropriate to integrate into commissioning and review procedures across the research cycle. A majority of respondents across all our project activities were supportive of this type of concise, prompting tool.

However, the findings from our consultation and piloting exercises also indicated a perceived need for more detailed training resources that can support researchers in navigating the complex issues that arise in designing and executing research that addresses ethnicity. Our review of published papers revealed the very large volume of literature that addresses the varied ethical, theoretical and methodological aspects of researching ethnicity. However, this literature is often difficult to locate and is not always accessible to a multidisciplinary audience. Thus, while it may be useful to include signposting to key papers as an appendix to any guidance checklists adopted within the research cycle, it seems likely that additional material would be helpful. Web-based, graded material that allows researchers to access information as and when needed may be appropriate and cost-effective. The high attendance and very positive feedback at the project's four workshops also suggests a willing audience for face-to-face training in this area.

Encompassing wide-ranging concerns

Our review and consultation exercises underscore the fact that researching ethnicity raises a huge array of ethical, theoretical, methodological and practical issues. Given this, developing brief guidance documents is a major challenge. It is notable that most existing guidelines have tended to focus on particular dimensions to the exclusion of other concerns. For instance, SABRE's (2001) carefully crafted statement is powerful in relation to its focus on anti-racism, but provides little detail on research design issues. In contrast, guidance statements in biomedical journals have tended to emphasise methodological issues, particularly the categorisation and labelling of ethnic groups, to the neglect of wider theoretical and ethical issues (Outram and Ellison, 2005). Clearly, there is a need to balance brevity with clarity and there is a concern that documents that are too short may fail to prompt positive changes in practice, either because their prescriptions are unclear or because they fail to highlight the full range of pertinent issues. In particular, the ways in which issues of scientific and ethical rigour are intimately interconnected should be adequately recognised.

Flexible prompts or rigid prescription

The project identified a number of areas of significant conflict in relation to how research on ethnicity should be framed and conducted, as well as more general concerns in some quarters about the potential for creativity to be stifled by ethical and scientific codes.

While in some situations the promoters of guidance documents may feel able to endorse statements that they know to be controversial and contested, it seems likely that many will need to take a more cautious approach, encouraging researchers to reflect upon particular issues rather than adhere to strict standards. This is particularly the case for research commissioners, ISR/ethics boards and journal editors who deal with a wide audience and a varied mix of social research methodologies. Nevertheless, it is again open to question whether such flexible prompts are likely to have any impact on the quality of research practice.

Privileging ethnicity or addressing diversity more generally

A persistent theme across the project activities was whether it is appropriate and useful to develop and promote guidance that deals with ethnicity alone rather than taking into consideration the full range of axes of difference and inequality. The present project was motivated by a belief that ethnicity did warrant this specialist attention, both because of its significance in modern British society and because of the complexities and concerns that surround research in this area. However, it is clear that research will frequently need to engage with multiple aspects of identity and their intersections, and those researchers who work in or for government need to be able to relate their research approaches to 'Single Equality' legal and policy frameworks. Clearly, crafting guidance statements that are brief and yet detailed enough to prompt changes in practice will be an even greater challenge if their scope is to be broader than ethnicity alone.

When as well as *how* to address ethnicity

A recurring theme across the project activities was the neglect of attention to principles for deciding and justifying whether or not to incorporate attention to ethnicity in any particular research study. We found little concrete advice in the published literature we reviewed, and our consultation and piloting exercises suggested that this is a key issue for researchers, research commissioners and reviewers. While some respondents expressed the opinion that it is always useful and appropriate to include attention to ethnicity in social policy-relevant research – and indeed it is difficult to identify topics where ethnicity can confidently be considered irrelevant – in practice this is clearly not feasible with the resources available. This is particularly evident if one considers the very wide and growing range of ethnic identities that research studies might attempt to include. At the same time, there is a concern that limited resources can too often be used as an excuse for conducting studies that consider only the white British experience and thereby perpetuate the partial evidence base by which policy and practice is informed. Comments from respondents in our consultation exercises revealed that some researchers are acutely aware of this tension:

> *The only challenge is one which we would find, even without the guidance – how to include the voices of as many different groups as possible within project timings and budgets.*

Clearly then there is a need for guidance criteria that can help researchers and other stakeholders to assess whether, and to what extent, any particular research study should incorporate attention to ethnicity. Likewise, justifications for excluding an ethnicity focus, and the limitations of resulting findings, need to be better articulated.

Findings from this study suggested that researchers and research commissioners often prioritise, or justify, a focus on ethnicity when there is prior evidence of inequalities between ethnic 'groups' in the outcome of interest. However, while many social researchers argue that research on ethnicity should be motivated by a concern to further the interests of minority ethnic individuals and communities, it is not clear that an exclusive focus on inequality is desirable. Such a principle would seem to be in danger of reinforcing a deficit model of minority ethnic people and communities; overlooking topics of investigation that are of concern to minority ethnic groups but do not necessarily present themselves in terms of inequalities with the majority white population; being restricted to topics where the large, state-enumerated groups show divergence from the majority and thereby potentially conceal issues that are important to smaller, unrecognised groups; and failing to provide a sufficiently rich understanding of our diverse, multiethnic society.

Other arguments in favour of inclusion of minority ethnic participants or of a central focus on ethnicity relate to (i) the importance of being able to apply findings to a multiethnic population, and (ii) the

lack of prior evidence relating to the experience or outcomes of minority ethnic groups; though these are rarely articulated in detail. There is a need for greater reflection and debate and for researchers to look not just at the specifics of any particular proposed piece of research but at the wider research agenda, the cumulative body of knowledge being generated and the extent to which it serves the interests of all, regardless of ethnic identity. For instance, researchers might reflect on the question 'If only one ethnic group can be included in a study on account of resource constraints, should this necessarily be the white British?' The broad principles identified in Box 2 under the headings of *Responsibilities* are intended to prompt this kind of careful thinking.

Coupled with this, there is a need for methodological innovation to support researchers in their seemingly impossible task of generating research for our increasingly ethnically diverse society, particularly relating to:

- sampling approaches for both qualitative and quantitative studies that link clearly to conceptualisation and measurement of ethnicity as well as planned analyses;

- tools for use in applied research that enhance understanding of processes of ethnic identification, categorisation, inclusion, exclusion and discrimination, rather than working with static ethnic categories – what we might call 'working both with and against ethnic categories';

- approaches to assessing the transferability of research across contexts and appropriately synthesising findings to inform policy and practice for multiethnic populations.

Other development and innovation needs

Other areas in need of methodological development are also apparent. Indeed, the project confirmed the many complex issues that arise in researching ethnicity for which no easy solution exists. Areas that were highlighted by our respondents included ways of engaging new migrant groups and 'invisible' minorities in research studies, and approaches to exploring multiple axes of difference and inequality simultaneously. While challenging, a number of recent initiatives suggest increasing interest and investment in efforts to enhance our ethical and scientific rigour in this area (see for instance the ESRC-funded innovation network; http://www.methods.manchester.ac.uk/events/ethnicityinnovation/index.shtml).

Impact: obstacles and opportunities

At the outset of the project we identified three critical junctures in the research cycle where there is the opportunity to prompt reflection on the design and conduct of research and therefore the potential to significantly increase both the quantity and quality of research that pays attention to ethnic diversity and inequality (see Figure 1 in Chapter 1). These relate to research proposal/specifications development; ethical and scientific review and approvals; and the dissemination of findings via published research papers and reports. Our project findings suggested that currently these points within the research cycle do not systematically act as quality control checks in relation to whether and how social research considers ethnicity. Our findings also suggested significant obstacles to enhancing these quality control functions, as well as some opportunities.

Where should responsibility lie?

Our findings raised questions regarding where responsibility should lie for ensuring that the body of social science research evidence accurately reflects our multiethnic society and that ethnicity is sensitively and appropriately considered within particular research studies. We found evidence that relationships between

researchers and research commissioners may not encourage considered and systematic attention to ethnicity. For instance, at times researchers and commissioners each appear to rely on the other to define ethical and scientific standards for proposed work, with the potential for important issues to be overlooked. Further, we found evidence that commissioners are not always explicit regarding when and how they would like ethnicity to be incorporated into research work, leaving researchers to read between the lines and second guess the commissioner's thoughts. Rather than the tendering process being one based around testing the applicants and achieving value for money, a more open exchange of ideas and information might result in a more consistent treatment of ethnicity and better-quality research outputs. Where commissioners and journal editors rely on unpaid reviewers there are serious concerns that the introduction of additional requirements, such as the completion of guidance checklists, may make people unwilling to act as reviewers and thereby jeopardise the smooth running of the review process. Clearly, in these circumstances it is important that guidance documents help, rather than hinder, reviewers in their job. However, this situation also raises the question of where responsibility lies for ensuring the quality of published research. Are researchers, reviewers and journal editors all complicit in perpetuating the publication of poor-quality work because the system does not support the introduction of rigorous quality control? Similarly, do ISR and ethics boards adequately challenge, and support, researchers to appropriately and sensitively incorporate attention to ethnicity within their work?

Limits on impact

As described in Chapter 5, the findings from our piloting exercises were complex, with the guidance documents receiving a largely positive reception from researchers, but less evidence of impact on practice. A number of issues require reflection.

First, how can a wider audience of social researchers be convinced of the need to address ethnicity? The study's findings tended to suggest that whether and how social research addresses ethnicity remains a minority concern. Although our consultations with government departments and private research agencies revealed that researchers are increasingly required to engage in research that addresses ethnic diversity, our review of empirical work and responses to our pilots suggested that UK social research does not, as yet, take a mainstreamed approach to ethnicity issues.

Second, how can researchers who already work in the field of ethnicity be encouraged to reflect on and improve their current practice? There was evidence across both pilots that the guidance documents had been impactful for some researchers – raising awareness and prompting them to reflect on their work. However, many more researchers responded to the guidance documents by saying that they were already aware of the issues raised and routinely considered them in their research practice. Nevertheless, our review of proposals submitted to the JRF, as well as our reviews of empirical and methodological papers, suggested that there is much room for improvement. Furthermore, while some of the researchers we consulted recognised enduring challenges of research in this area and expressed the need for critical reflexivity, others appeared much more complacent.

Conclusions: moving forward

What then is the likely future role for guidance documents on researching ethnicity within the research cycle? Our project suggests that such documents do hold promise and that researchers are receptive to their introduction. Their use, however, will need to be actively promoted by key gatekeepers. Research commissioners, ethics and ISR review boards and journal editors must demonstrate their commitment to such documents and to raising standards, so that researchers are challenged, and supported, to improve their practice. Even with such commitment, the shift towards higher ethical and scientific standards is likely to be a long, slow process. Many of the common pitfalls highlighted in research in this area are deeply embedded in broader structures, including the poor representation of minority ethnic people

among social researchers and the limited involvement of minority ethnic communities in shaping research agendas. Nevertheless, it seems likely that principles of good research practice can be gradually agreed and established, and that this would in turn encourage progress towards meeting these standards. In this context checklists may well be helpful and, notwithstanding some inevitable initial resistance among people who feel over-worked, can serve to inculcate a common understanding of what constitutes sound ethical and scientific practice.

However, if the wider aim is to increase the volume of research that sensitively and appropriately addresses ethnicity, prompting guidance documents are unlikely to be sufficient. There needs to be a much broader approach and significant investment in increasing the confidence and competence of social researchers to research in this area. Finally, it is worth highlighting the importance of ensuring that any guidance documents developed and promoted should be seen as living documents to be regularly appraised in light of the evolving social world we seek to understand and the ethical and scientific standards to which we aspire.

Notes

Introduction

1   In the US the Health Revitalization Act of 1993 requires that women and members of minority groups be included in all research projects funded by the National Institutes of Health and that a 'clear and compelling reason' be given for inadequate representation of these populations. However, significant practical and economic issues have arisen, as evidenced by the fact that recruitment of minorities to clinical trials in the US remains an ongoing struggle for many researchers (Corbie-Smith, *et al*., 2003).

2   The term 'ethnicity' is currently more commonly employed in UK social research than the term 'race'. However, the two concepts are closely related and both are used somewhat interchangeably. It has been suggested that while 'race' refers to biological features (such as skin colour) to distinguish different groups of people, 'ethnicity' focuses primarily on differences in cultural practices and beliefs. In practice, however, this neat distinction is not consistently applied in either research practice or social discourse. As Gunaratnam (2003) and others have noted, 'race' has always been a far broader concept than physical difference that *also* emphasises differences in a range of social and cultural characteristics. Likewise, though ethnicity tends to emphasise cultural and religious attributes, these characteristics are frequently represented as relatively fixed and inherent, being passed down from one generation to the next through endogamous marriage as well as processes of socialisation. There are disparate opinions as to which of these two terms should be employed by researchers. While some advocate avoiding the use of the term 'race' because of its association with discredited 19th-century work labelled 'scientific racism', other researchers retain its use as a biological, social and/ or biosocial construct. Some researchers go one step further and place the term in scare quotes – 'race' – both to signal its contested meaning and to acknowledge that as long as racism exists within society then race, however problematic, will be needed in research. Few comparable concerns have been raised over the use of the term 'ethnicity' and this partly explains why it is more commonly used within the UK. However, some researchers have argued that 'race' is preferable to 'ethnicity' since the latter tends to obscure the importance of external forces, power and exploitation in the lives of people from minority ethnic groups, and instead ascribe disadvantage to the internal attributes of the groups themselves. Other researchers have suggested a compromise of sorts, in which the two terms are conflated in a joint formulation – 'race/ethnicity' – to encapsulate and signal the diverse biosocial character of both terms while retaining a focus on the role each have played in stereotyping, discrimination and disadvantage.

1   Methods

1   This is the number of Learned Societies that were members of the AcSS at the time of the review work. The figure includes the Public Administration Committee, the Social Policy Committee and the Social Work Education Committee, the three committees that constitute the Joint Universities Council, which is listed as just one Learned Society on the Academy's website. While the Academy provided a useful sampling frame, we recognise that some Societies falling outside this Academy might also warrant separate investigation, notably the Royal Economic Society.

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Appendix 1

List of Learned Societies of the Academy of Social Sciences included in review

Association for Family Therapy (AFT)
Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth (ASA)
Association for Tourism in Higher Education (ATHE)
British Academy of Management (BAM)
British Association for American Studies (BAAS)
British Association for Applied Linguistics (BAAL)
British Association for International and Comparative Education (BAICE)
British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES)
British Educational Research Association (BERA)
British Psychological Society (BPS)
British Society of Criminology (BSC)
British Society of Gerontology (BSG)
British Sociological Association (BSA)
Economic History Society (EHS)
Feminist and Women's Studies Association (FWSA)
Gender and Education Association (GEA)
Housing Studies Association (HSA)
Joint Universities Council (JUC), comprising:
       Public Administration Committee (PAC)
       Social Policy Committee (SPC)
       Social Work Education Committee (SWEC)
Media, Communications and Cultural Studies Association (MECCSA)
Political Studies Association (PSA)
Regional Studies Association (RSA)
Royal Geographical Society (RGS)
Royal Statistical Society (RSS)
Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)
Social Policy Association (SPA)
Social Research Association (SRA)
Social Services Research Group (SSRG)
Society for Study in Organising Healthcare (SHOC)
UK Evaluation Society (UKES)
University Association for Contemporary European Studies (UACES)

Appendix 2

List of journals included in the empirical papers review

Ageing & Society
Area
British Educational Research Journal
British Journal of Educational Psychology
British Journal of Health Psychology
British Journal of Management
British Journal of Politics and International Relations
British Journal of Social Psychology
Compare
Cultural Sociology Journal
European Journal of Housing Policy
Housing Studies
Housing, Theory and Society
Journal of Social Policy
Public Policy and Administration
Regional Studies
Research Policy and Planning: The Journal of the Social Services Research Group
Social Policy and Society
Sociology Journal
Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers
Work, Employment and Society

Appendix 3

Ethnicity and Health Guidance Checklist

Attention to race and/or ethnicity: additional guidance for authors and reviewers (2009/2010)

Please use the prompts below to guide your manuscript preparation (authors) or your review of the paper (reviewers). Please then provide your feedback on the usefulness and appropriateness of the checklist via the short online questionnaire at: http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.aspx?sm=rdW4gocC3wPQvFwWDja1Fg_3d_3d.

Criteria		Comments
Focus of the paper		
1	Is there an adequate justification as to why attention to issues relating to race and/or 'ethnicity is warranted in this paper?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
2	Was the focus/framing of the research informed by those individuals or groups who are the subject of the research?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
Concepts and terminology (ethnicity, race and related concepts)		
3	Are key concepts adequately explained and justified?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
4	Have the authors used terminology consistently and appropriately?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
Categories and labels		
5	Does the paper use/refer to 'racial' or ethnic categories or 'groups'?	□ yes □ no (skip to Q8)	
6	Have the authors carefully considered the appropriateness and limitations of the 'racial' or ethnic categories used for the topic under investigation, be these bespoke or standard categories (e.g. census categories)?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	

7	Is there sufficient detail and justification for how such categories were assigned?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
Care of research participants			
8	For new research/investigation directly involving human participants, were appropriate steps taken to ensure the safety and comfort of study participants regardless of their 'racial 'or ethnic identity?	□ yes □ no	
Sampling and data generation			
9	Were samples of individuals labelled as belonging to one or more 'racial' or ethnic 'groups' used?	□ yes □ no (skip to Q14)	
10	Is the sampling strategy clearly explained and justified?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
11	Was the sampling strategy adequate to generate samples of the different 'racial' or ethnic 'groups' that are comparable?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
12	Was the validity/suitability of the data collection methods or instruments confirmed for the different 'racial' or ethnic 'groups'?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
13	If data were gathered in more than one language, were rigorous methods used for working across languages and ensuring conceptual equivalence?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
Analyses and interpretation: comparisons and causation			
	Do the analyses and interpretation:		
14	exercise appropriate caution in any claims about causal links between race and/or ethnicity and experiences/outcomes? (In quantitative analyses, do the authors avoid interpreting statistical associations as explanations/causal effects?)	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
15	adequately recognise the multifaceted nature of race and/or 'ethnicity' and the need to consider underlying explanatory factors (whether cultural, genealogical, or socio-political)?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
16	adequately engage with the internal diversity of 'racial' and/or ethnic groups? (for instance by gender, socioeconomic, migrant status and religion)	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
17	give adequate attention to absolute levels of key experiences/outcomes as well as relative differences between 'groups'?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	

	Presentation and interpretation		
	Does the reporting and interpretation of issues/findings:		
18	avoid the potential for stereotyping, stigmatising or pathologising certain 'racial' or ethnic 'groups' or populations?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
19	illustrate adequate reflexivity in the work (e.g. acknowledging the researchers' own social position(s) and any assumptions and limitations of the methods used)?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
20	adequately acknowledge the potential role of factors beyond the scope of the analyses and/or alternative interpretations?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	
21	give adequate attention to the transferability of the findings to other research and practice contexts and any limits to this transferability?	□ yes □ no □ N/A or unsure	

Appendix 4

JRF Guidance Document for Applicants

Additional guidance for the preparation of research proposals: diversity and equality

The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is committed to policies and services which embrace diversity and which promote equality of opportunity. The Foundation expects proposals to consider all dimensions of diversity (including, but not necessarily limited to, race/ethnicity, gender, disability, age and sexuality) and, wherever appropriate, to include explicit attention to these issues.

However, we recognise that conducting research that engages appropriately and sensitively with dimensions of diversity raises complex ethical and scientific issues. The guidance below is intended to alert proposers to some of the key challenges that arise in researching race/ethnicity and to encourage careful reflection on whether and how best to incorporate attention to race/ethnicity within their proposed research. This guidance is currently in pilot form and should be regarded as a supplement to the standard guidance for proposers available on the Foundation website. The guidance, though focused on race/ethnicity, should not be taken to imply that other dimensions of diversity should be given less attention. We have chosen to focus initially on race/ethnicity since there are widespread concerns that social research in this area may often lack scientific and ethical rigour.

Researching race/ethnicity sensitively and appropriately

Focus and framing of the research
There will be some areas of investigation in which race/ethnicity is not the most pressing dimension that requires attention. However, race/ethnicity is a very important axis of identity in contemporary societies and there is extensive evidence of significant ethnic variation in many indicators of wellbeing. Proposers should therefore carefully consider the pros and cons of incorporating attention to race/ethnicity within their work. Where studies do not engage with issues of race/ethnicity, proposers should consider the limitations that might ensue in terms of the knowledge generated and its transferability and utility in a multiethnic context. Whether or not proposers decide to engage with race/ethnicity a clear rationale for the approach adopted should be presented.

Proposers that do decide to engage with race/ethnicity should be cognizant of common criticisms that have been levelled at the focus and framing of past research in this field, including:

- a failure to address issues that are of greatest concern to minority ethnic individuals and communities;

- a tendency to overlook the multiple ways in which racial/ethnic identity may impact upon people's experiences and outcomes and rather to focus too narrowly on cultural aspects;

- inadequate attention to racism and racial exclusion;

- a tendency to portray racial/ethnic identities as fixed and unchanging, rather than recognising their fluid and context-dependent nature;

- a tendency to downplay both the diversity between individuals labelled with the same ethnicity as well as similarities across individuals labelled with different ethnicities;

- a tendency to ignore 'majority' and 'White' ethnicities;

- inadequate justification for, and consistency in, the ways in which key terms (such as race, ethnicity, culture, and so on) are employed;

- inadequate recognition of the potential for research in this area to harm the interests of minority ethnic populations if not carefully conceived and conducted.

Operationalising race/ethnicity: categories and labels

Some studies will focus directly on understanding processes of ethnic identification. Qualitative methods are often useful in such studies and researchers will often avoid the use of fixed ethnic categories. Instead, a more exploratory approach that allows the multiple and diverse constructions of ethnicity to be examined will often be appropriate.

However, many studies seek to understand race/ethnicity as a potentially important determinant of experiences and outcomes and such studies tend to be framed differently. Here researchers will usually seek to delineate sets of individuals categorised and labelled as belonging to one or more racial/ethnic 'groups'. Proposers should carefully consider the best way to operationalise such 'group' membership in any particular study and provide clear justification for the approach employed. It should be recognised that particular categorisations will be useful in some research studies but be less helpful in others, depending on the focus of investigation. Unless studies categorise race/ethnicity with sufficient sensitivity and precision they can fail to generate meaningful data. Researchers should recognise the pros and cons of developing bespoke categories as compared to employing standard, administrative ethnic categories (such as Census 2001 categories) which were developed with acceptability and salience in mind. While bespoke categories may be more suited to the research questions at hand, standard categories will enable comparison between research and practice contexts and are used in population estimates.

Proposers should be aware that any attempt at categorising ethnicity is inherently imprecise and be alert to the ways in which the use of fixed racial/ethnic categories can serve to exaggerate homogeneity within 'groups' and differences between 'groups'.

Sampling and sample sizes

In studies that involve data collection from samples of individuals categorised as belonging to particular racial/ethnic 'groups' proposers should give careful consideration to how such samples are drawn. Regardless of whether qualitative or quantitative methods are used, proposers should ensure that the sampling approach employed is appropriate and generates samples of adequate size and comparability for all the 'groups' of interest. It may be necessary to restrict a study's focus to a limited number of delineated 'groups' in order to ensure that analyses are not compromised by insufficient or incomparable data from different groups. For some studies an exclusive sample of people identified as belonging to just one ethnic category may be warranted, but this should be clearly justified by proposers and the implications for analysis and interpretation should made clear.

Generating and analysing data

In studies that involve the drawing of comparisons between racial/ethnic 'groups' or the linking of racial/ethnic 'group' membership to particular experiences or outcomes, proposers should give careful consideration to the data generation tools and analytical methods employed.

Comparative analyses between racial/ethnic 'groups' can be compromised if data collection tools operate differently for different 'groups', for instance because of cultural incongruity. In particular, working

across languages requires the use of rigorous translation techniques with particular attention to ensuring conceptual equivalence. Researchers also need to be well informed about the cultural and social circumstances of research participants so that data are not misinterpreted or misrepresented.

The multidimensional nature of race/ethnicity means that racial/ethnic labels can rarely be taken as proxies for underlying causal factors. Instead, studies should, wherever possible, generate and analyse data on an adequate range of potentially important factors so that underlying causal pathways can be explored. Where such detailed data are not available, proposers should be explicit about the limits to the analyses that they propose to undertake.

Proposers should also seek to avoid the following pitfalls in planning their analyses:

- failure to explore the internal diversity of racial/ethnic groups (such as by generation, education, socioeconomic status and so on);

- uncritically taking the 'majority' or 'White' group as the norm against which other 'groups' are compared;

- over-emphasising 'race/ethnicity' to the exclusion of other axes of difference;

- over-emphasising difference between 'groups' so that absolute levels of outcomes/experiences of interest within particular 'groups' are overlooked.

Presentation and dissemination

Proposers should be aware of the inherently politicised and often controversial nature of research in the area of race/ethnicity. Research findings relating to issues of race/ethnicity often attract significant attention and there is a need to manage, from the outset, the ways in which such findings might be interpreted, distorted and (mis)used by the media and other actors. Proposers should show awareness of these ethical issues in the framing and design of their research and take particular care where there is significant socio-cultural difference between the research team and the research participants.

As with all research funded by the Foundation, proposers should consider carefully the best way to present findings and effectively disseminate to a variety of audiences. Proposers should give attention to how their research products can adequately 'give voice' to, and be a valuable resource for, those who are the subject of research. These issues require consideration from the outset.

Care of participants

Appropriate steps should be taken to ensure the safety and comfort of study participants regardless of their racial/ethnic identity. Minority ethnic participants *may* be at increased risk of vulnerability and there will be a need to consider: power imbalances; how to convey information appropriately; how to gain consent in a culturally appropriate fashion; how to ensure avoidance of participant harm and so on. All research team members should be adequately trained and prepared for their role. Individuals involved in data collection with study participants should be alert to the potential for harm through insensitive or inappropriate behaviour. Many of these issues are not specific to research that involves minority ethnic individuals, but are rather generic principles of ethical research practice. Nevertheless, proposers should show an awareness of how these issues may manifest themselves in their particular study and how they will be addressed.

Involvement of people with direct experience

Drawing on appropriate expertise from minority ethnic communities can help ensure that a study identifies issues that are relevant to these communities and that research engages sensitively and effectively with minority ethnic participants. However, effective involvement requires careful planning and sensitive

orchestration. Proposers should show an appreciation of the potential ethical and practical issues that may arise and ensure adequate planning and resourcing so that engagement is meaningful and participants are not adversely affected by their involvement in the project.

Resources and practicalities

Researching race/ethnicity sensitively and appropriately will have resource implications and there is a need to ensure the necessary skills and experience within the research team as well as an adequate budget. Recruitment of participants from some minority ethnic communities may be time consuming and may require tailored strategies. Working across languages can be expensive if there is a need to pay for external interpretation and translation services. Engaging minority ethnic individuals in the design and conduct of the research, for instance as peer researchers or as steering group members, will also imply additional resources particularly where there is a need to work across languages. Where necessary, proposers are encouraged to seek advice from researchers experienced in these areas to ensure that budgeting is appropriate to the work that is planned.

Proposers are also encouraged to reflect on the social diversity (including, but not limited to, ethnic identity) of their research team and how researcher characteristics may influence the conduct and findings of the research.

Acknowledgements

About the authors

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