



**SPORT ENGLAND:
GUIDE TO RESEARCH**



INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

Without high-quality insight we're unable to see beyond our own knowledge.

Long-held assumptions can stop the sport and physical activity sector engaging with people outside of our traditional strongholds. And that means we can't appeal to new audiences – people who are so important to the success of Sport England's new Towards an Active Nation strategy.

Insight is only as good as the research that underpins it – so this guide is designed to help you carry out top-quality research that has a big impact on your organisational goals. And it doesn't have to be expensive or complex. The key is being clear about what you're trying to understand. What do you need to know? Once that's set in stone, it's time to use the most suitable approach to your research. This guide helps you to establish both. That's why we've split the publication into two distinct parts – firstly, an introduction to research itself – and secondly, how to choose your methodology.

The guide can be used in different ways; perhaps you want to increase your understanding of research, how it is carried out, and how it might help your organisation. In which case, you might like to focus more on the first chapter. Or you might already be working on a research project or have one in mind, and want to look deeper into specific aspects of the design or different methodologies. In this case, you might like to use the index to jump to specific areas of interest.

Whatever your goal, the guide is designed to help you to decide where research can be useful for your organisation, and provide guidance around how to select the best approach.


If you have any outstanding queries after reviewing this guide, please get in touch with your Sport England contact for more information.

I really hope you find this guide a useful resource to draw on as you plan and develop your research programmes in this exciting new era for sport and physical activity.

Lisa O'Keefe
Director of Insight
Sport England

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A young boy in a blue racing suit is leaning on the side of a white boat. He is smiling and looking towards the camera. In the background, other team members in blue suits are visible, some giving thumbs up. The scene is outdoors, likely on a body of water.

CHAPTER 1: AN INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH

SECTION 1: WHAT IS RESEARCH AND WHEN IS IT NEEDED?

1A. THE DEFINITION OF RESEARCH

Research is the process of gathering and interpreting information. It can involve exploring and understanding people's behaviours, attitudes, experiences, needs and desires, with the purpose of helping a company or organisation to make business decisions regarding their target audiences. It can also be used to find out about organisations and markets; understanding more about providers such as clubs, universities or commercial suppliers.

It can involve **quantitative methods** (online surveys, questionnaires) that provide more robust and measurable data around particular aspects of a target audience (see section 4 in this chapter for a full definition). It can involve **qualitative methods** (e.g. focus groups, ethnography, depth interviews) that allow for a more in-depth exploration of the consumer and their world (see section 4 in this chapter for a full definition). Either way, research helps uncover information about a target audience that will help organisations to more effectively connect with people (via policy, communications, products, services etc).

Research is often used to:

- Understand more about specific audiences – e.g. where they live, their lifestyles, attitudes, motivations and barriers to physical activity, current behaviour patterns and triggers
- Develop new offers, services and marketing – e.g. things that will encourage people to change, or support/sustain their behaviour
- Track audience attitudes and behaviour, or shifts in the market landscape – e.g. how interest in physical activity, or in particular offers and services changes or evolves over time
- Understand more about providers or suppliers – e.g. the role they play in implementing initiatives or supporting behaviour change.

1B. DECIDING WHEN RESEARCH IS NEEDED

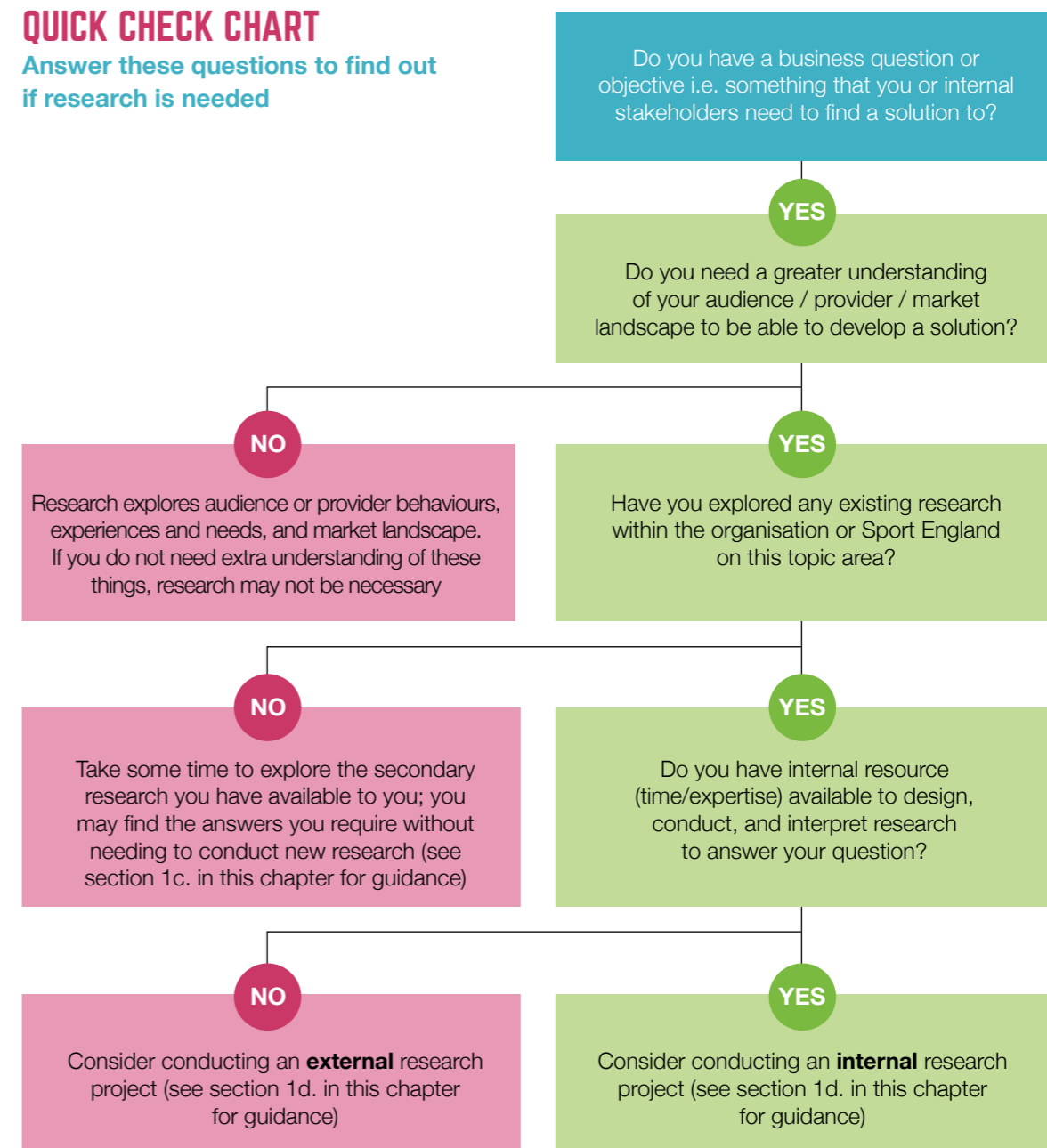
So how do you decide if research will benefit your organisation? There are lots of factors that feed into the decision to conduct or commission a piece of research. To enable you to navigate this, we've outlined the below flow of questions you might like to consider. But first and foremost, you need to have a particular business question or objective. It may be that you have more than one business question or objective; if this is the

case, take each one in turn and run through the below process to decide whether research is needed to help answer them individually, or if they are best addressed together. It might be that for one objective, you don't actually need research.

Running through these questions will allow you to determine whether research will help you to achieve your business goals.

QUICK CHECK CHART

Answer these questions to find out if research is needed



1C. THE ROLE OF SECONDARY RESEARCH

Secondary or desk research can be used to help you understand a little more about a particular topic or target audience, and to help you decide if you need to conduct primary research to help you answer your business question or objective. This can involve exploring what relevant research has been conducted internally at your organisation, or by us – our research can be accessed here: sportengland.org/resources. You can also look online for other public research resources that may be useful e.g. government data, academic papers, Office for National Statistics data, British Library resources etc. Reviewing existing reports or further analysing existing data may help you to find the answers you need.

You may not find all the information you're looking for, e.g. the existing research may be outdated, incomplete or doesn't cover the exact information you need, and you may therefore feel further research is required to explore the topic at hand. In this instance, the secondary research you have conducted will help you to identify where the gaps in your understanding lie, allow you to develop hypotheses and provide a broader, contextual understanding of the topic or audience. This knowledge will help to shape the areas of exploration for the research (your research objectives) as well identify the most interesting and relevant people to talk to (your sample).

If you choose to partner with an external supplier (see the next section for more detail on supplier types), it's best practice to share any relevant previous research presentations or reports with them when the project is commissioned, to help ensure the new research builds on (and does not duplicate) existing insight.

“SECONDARY RESEARCH CAN BE USED TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND A LITTLE MORE ABOUT A PARTICULAR TOPIC”

1D. INTERNAL VS. EXTERNAL RESEARCH

There are no set rules as to when to conduct research internally vs. when to use an external partner, but a few considerations are outlined below.

Conducting research internally

You may choose to conduct research internally for some of the following reasons:

- The resources exist internally to conduct the research – if you have people with the time and expertise to conduct the research
- The target audience is very easy to access – you may for example have a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) database that provides easy access to your target audience (e.g. current club members for a particular sport, or facility users)
- When the research question is simple – sometimes the question you need answered can be really straightforward, such as people's preference between two options for naming a new initiative
- The financial budget is limited – by conducting research internally you may still incur costs (e.g. need to pay a fee to recruit respondents or to hire a research venue), but you will not need to pay a supplier to conduct and manage the research.

Conducting research externally

You may choose to conduct research externally for some of the following reasons:

- When you need an impartial perspective – often research is conducted by an external supplier as they are an independent 'voice' that is not influenced by internal discussions or politics around a particular topic within an organisation. This means stakeholders can trust that research findings are unbiased and reliable.

- When the research question is complex – many external suppliers have specialisms in particular topics or sectors (such as sports research) or methodologies (such as quantitative or qualitative research). If your research question/s are multi-layered, complicated or broad in scope, you may prefer to enlist the help of an external supplier who is an expert in the field, and can draw on their knowledge and experience to help you address your business objectives.
- When there are limited internal resources to conduct the research – if there aren't people in the organisation with the time, knowledge and experience to conduct the research to the required standard.
- When the target audience is less accessible or the sample is larger – external suppliers have well-established relationships with a range of providers who can recruit almost any sample required, even very niche audiences, large samples or harder to reach people (see section 5 in this chapter for more detail on sampling).
- **Consultants:** usually operate independently and often specialise in a particular type of research or sector. They may not offer a full service approach and may work in collaboration with suppliers or agencies when conducting research.
- **Academics:** specialise in a particular topic and are often brought into research projects to offer expert advice and guidance in a consultative capacity. They can help to ensure the research is well-informed or cutting-edge.

The MRS research buyers' guide gives more guidance around how to select a supplier. theresearchbuyersguide.com Remember, whatever you choose, if you are outsourcing the research, you play a crucial role in managing it, checking it is meeting your objectives throughout the process, and providing the link between stakeholders and the supplier to ensure their objectives are met.

Types of external supplier

If you decide to approach an external supplier to conduct the research for you, it's important to consider the different types of suppliers available, and make sure you go for one that can best meet your specific research needs. The main types of external supplier that can help you with research are listed below:

- **Full service research agencies:** will manage the entire research process for you, from design through to reporting. They often specialise in a particular sector (e.g. sports research, media research etc.) or a particular type of research (e.g. qualitative or quantitative research, or they can be integrated agencies doing both).
- **Field and tab research agencies:** will only manage the data collection (fieldwork) and /or data tabulation for you. Sometimes they will also include a brief summary of the results. This service is applicable to quantitative research (we will be covering this in more detail in section 4 of this chapter).

“IF YOU APPROACH AN EXTERNAL SUPPLIER... MAKE SURE YOU GO FOR ONE THAT CAN BEST MEET YOUR SPECIFIC RESEARCH NEEDS”

TEST YOURSELF ON WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT SO FAR

- What is research?
- What factors contribute to the decision to conduct research?
- Why is it important to conduct desk research before a project starts?
- What are the considerations when deciding whether to conduct research internally or externally?

SECTION 2: THE PROJECT LIFE CYCLE

A typical project life cycle



2A. OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT LIFE CYCLE AND TIMINGS

Although project stages and timings can vary dependent on the project, and whether it is being conducted internally or externally, a typical flow and some typical timings have been included as a broad indication below.

- **Defining your research objectives/research brief written** by client (see section 3 of this chapter for more information).
 - **Research approach designed internally/external suppliers briefed and proposals written** – if conducting research externally, supplier proposes research approach (see section 4 of this chapter for more detail), and client selects supplier. Usually 1-2 weeks. Can involve a face to face pitch with short-listed suppliers.
- **Firm up the research approach/kick off meeting with selected supplier** – to agree details of methodology (see section 4 of this chapter for more detail), sample (see section 5 of this chapter for more detail) and outputs before starting any research.
- **Recruitment** – sample is sourced. Usually takes around 2-3 weeks, but it can be quicker if using an online panel sample or take longer for low incidence or larger samples (see section 5 for more detail).
- **Questionnaires** (for quantitative research) or **discussion guides** (for qualitative research) are written (based on research objectives), and any stimulus materials created (see section 6 for more detail). This usually takes 1-2 weeks depending on the scope of project.
- **Fieldwork** – research is conducted (see section 6 for more detail). Timings vary dependent on the scale of the project.
- **Analysis** – findings are analysed then debrief or report written. Again, timings vary dependent on the scale of the project, but this typically takes between 1-3 weeks.
- **Presentation of findings** to the team/ stakeholders and discussion of actions or decisions to be taken.

2B. STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT THROUGHOUT THE PROJECT LIFE CYCLE

For research to have an impact within an organisation, internal stakeholders need to be involved; it can be challenging without their backing or acting on the findings of the research. When starting a research project, think about how you and your organisation want to use the research – who will it impact upon and who will use the findings? These are the people who need to be engaged in the research from the outset.

It is also important to consider the stakeholders' objectives and how they will use the research once it's completed to ensure that it is being shaped from the outset to meet these goals. For example, they may want the research to help them develop a new product or service, in which case a useful output from the research would be a set of design principles. Or perhaps they want to be able to present impactful and robust research findings at a conference, in which case providing some clear statistics in a research report would be most suitable. This needs to be fed into the research brief.

Here are a few examples of when you might need to involve your stakeholders:

- **Scoping the research/writing a research brief** - you may well be working towards the same business objective, or they may have their own areas of exploration that they would like covered in the research. If their areas of exploration are different to the focus of the research project in hand, it may be that a separate research project is required.

- **When firming up the research approach at the kick-off meeting:** it can be useful to involve key stakeholders when pinning down the specifics of the research approach before it begins. This ensures the research design will deliver to their objectives for the research, and enables the internal and any external research teams to tap into their knowledge and areas of expertise to help inform and shape the research.
- **During fieldwork:** if stakeholders view the fieldwork (for qualitative methodologies), they can hear feedback 'straight from the horse's mouth', which can help them to engage with the results.
- **At the presentation of findings:** stakeholders will usually be present at this final meeting, to hear the results of the research and ask questions. It can be helpful to run this session as a workshop, where the stakeholders get the opportunity to brainstorm the implications of the findings and what this means for their broader business objectives. If you are working with an external supplier, you can always ask for an opportunity to review the final report or output with them prior to sharing with a wider team or key stakeholders.

TEST YOURSELF ON WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT SO FAR

- What are the key stages of the project life cycle?
- Why should you involve stakeholders in the research?
- When should you involve stakeholders in the process?

SECTION 3: DEFINING THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND WRITING A BRIEF

Once you have a clear **business question** and have established the need for research to help address it, the next task is to refine your **research objectives**. If using an external supplier, you will also need to formulate a brief to share with them. A research objective can be simply defined as the questions the research needs to address in order to help answer the business question. Your research objectives will shape the whole design and approach, so it's essential that you are clear on what you want to achieve from the outset.

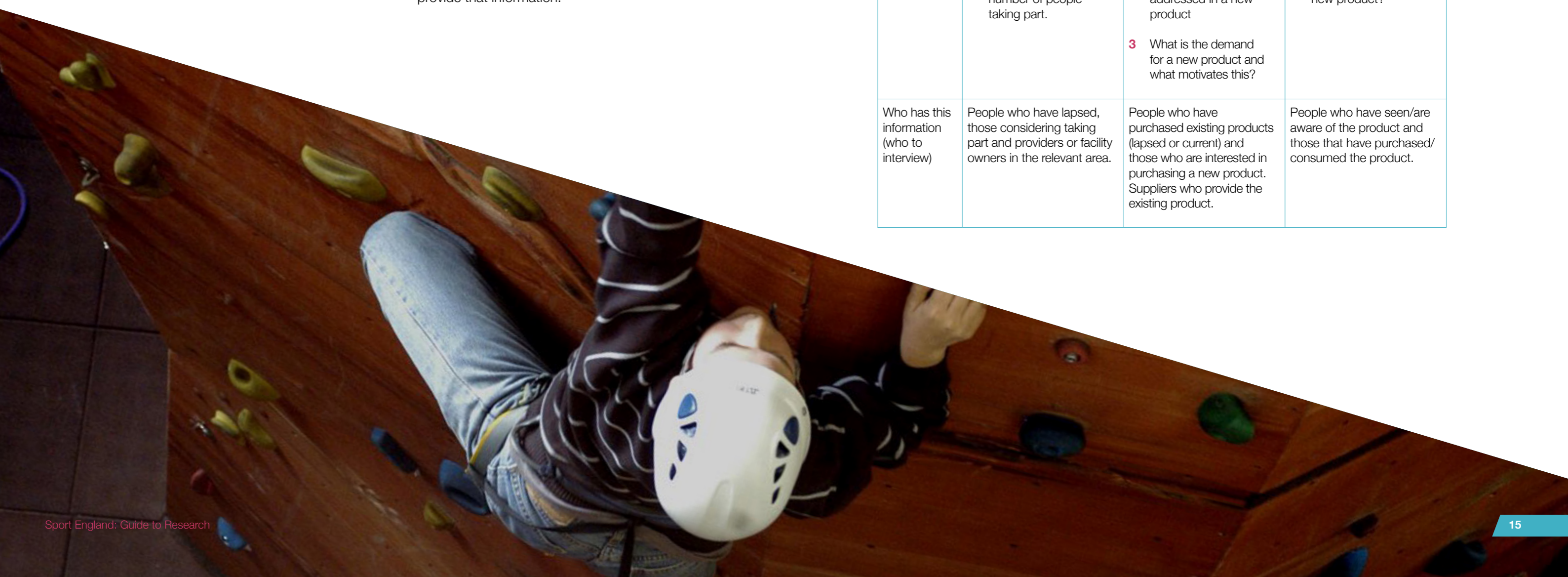
3A. TRANSLATING A BUSINESS QUESTION INTO A RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

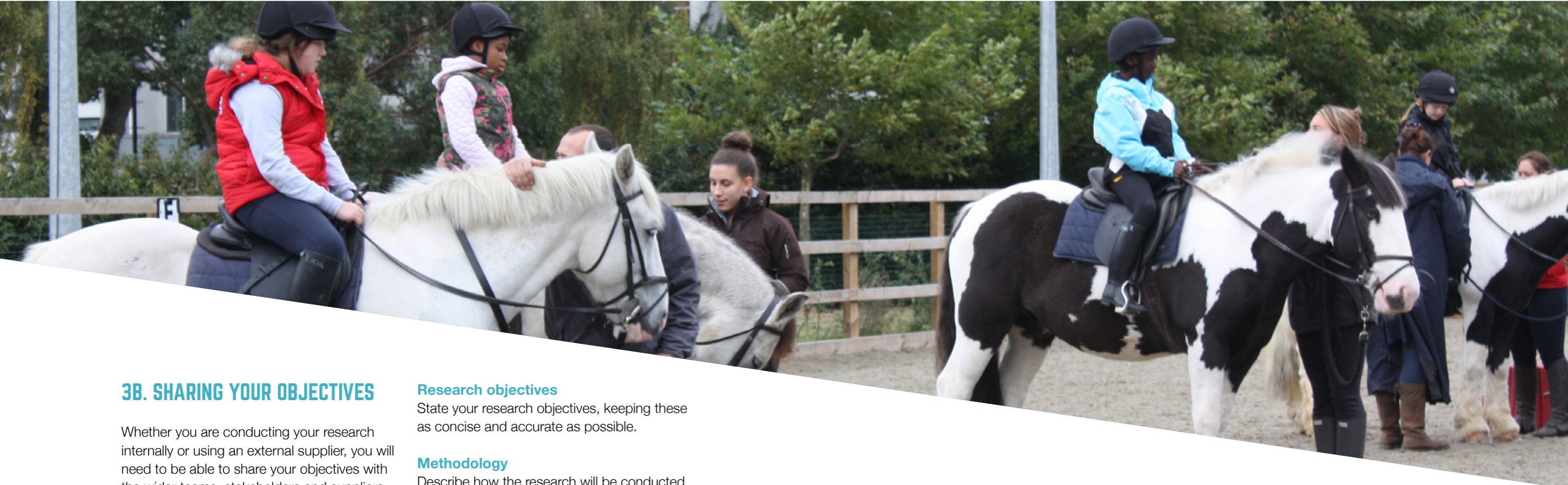
While a business question or objective will provide the premise for a piece of research, it does not always translate directly into a research objective. For example, it could take multiple research objectives to answer a business question.

To translate a business problem into a defined research objective, start by asking 'what do we need to learn?' and then identify who can provide that information.

For example:

BUSINESS OBJECTIVE	ADDRESS THE DECLINING NUMBERS OF PEOPLE IN YOUR SPORT	DEVELOP A NEW PRODUCT THAT WILL INCREASE THE NUMBER OF CUSTOMERS	EVALUATE THE SUCCESS OF YOUR NEW PRODUCT
What you need to learn (research objective)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Who has dropped out and why 2 Who is interested but not yet taking part and how to motivate them 3 How changes to provision have impacted on the number of people taking part. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Who has purchased any existing products, and where 2 Customer satisfaction with any existing products, including strengths, weaknesses and areas of optimisation that can be addressed in a new product 3 What is the demand for a new product and what motivates this? 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Who is aware of/ has used the new product and how they discovered it 2 Profile those who are aware of/have used the new product 3 How satisfied is the customer with the new product?
Who has this information (who to interview)	People who have lapsed, those considering taking part and providers or facility owners in the relevant area.	People who have purchased existing products (lapsed or current) and those who are interested in purchasing a new product. Suppliers who provide the existing product.	People who have seen/are aware of the product and those that have purchased/ consumed the product.





3B. SHARING YOUR OBJECTIVES

Whether you are conducting your research internally or using an external supplier, you will need to be able to share your objectives with the wider teams, stakeholders and suppliers that are involved.

Taking the time upfront to clearly outline your objectives will save time later on, ensuring that stakeholders can feed into the research, and allowing suppliers to provide you with the best possible approach to meet your needs. The best way to share your objectives for research being conducted externally is to write a full brief. For research being conducted internally you may not need such a formal document, but it is still helpful to write a research plan covering similar points. The guide below outlines the type of information helpful to include.

Introduction

Introduce your organisation – who you are, the context of your work, and any future development plans or objectives connected to the area you’re researching.

Background/Context

Explain how you have arrived at the research need. State the business problem or objective, and any broader context or secondary research findings you have available.

Research objectives

State your research objectives, keeping these as concise and accurate as possible.

Methodology

Describe how the research will be conducted (e.g. using quantitative or qualitative techniques). If using a supplier, you can share any thoughts you might have as to the research approach you feel would best fit your needs or ask them to advise. See section 4 for more guidance on methodologies.

Sample

Outline who you need to talk to in order to help you answer your research questions. It may be a very specific audience (e.g. people who swim weekly) or a more general audience (e.g. men, women or the general public). Indicate if you have any thoughts on the number of people you need to speak to. See section 5 for more guidance on sampling.

Deliverables

Outline the format you want for the end results, e.g. will results be shared as a written report or a visual PowerPoint? If using a supplier, be clear what you expect to receive from them, and specify if you expect a face to face presentation of results, as this all contributes to their project costs.

Timings

Outline project timings, and if conducting externally, whether there is a specific internal deadline that you need all results by (e.g. publication of a report, a particular meeting). This can help you (or your supplier) develop an overall time-line for your research. See section 2 of this chapter for more guidance on research time-lines.

Cost/Budget

Either the exact amount you have available or an estimated range. This is particularly important when sharing with an external supplier as it will help them tailor their response to something that is achievable for you.

Evaluation Criteria (how supplier quotes will be assessed)

If you are using an external supplier, outline how you will assess the responses and decide on a partner. Typically, this includes: ability to deliver to objectives and timings, expertise/experience of supplier in relevant research/sector, appropriate approach and value for money.

If using an external supplier, they will take this brief and write a proposal outlining an approach to the research that they feel will deliver to your research objectives, along with costs, timings and details of their expertise. Using your evaluation criteria, you will select the best approach and supplier to work with. If you are conducting the research internally then you can add details of the approach, costs and timings into the plan yourself.

TEST YOURSELF ON WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT SO FAR

- What is the difference between a research objective and a business question?
- How do you translate a business question to a research objective?
- What are the main sections to include in a brief?

SECTION 4: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

There are many different ways to conduct research, some of which we will cover in more detail later on in the guide (See Chapter 2). But broadly speaking, all methodologies will fall into one of two camps; qualitative or quantitative.

These two approaches to research differ greatly; from the type of information you will receive to the way the research is carried out. This is why it is important to have clearly defined objectives and outcomes before settling on an approach.

4A. QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Quantitative research is designed to measure and generalise behaviours and attitudes. For that reason, quantitative findings are primarily in the form of numerical data (e.g. numbers and percentages).

Example quantitative research objectives:

1. **How many** people take part in a particular activity in our area?
2. **What are the top reasons** people take part in a particular activity? **What are the most common barriers** preventing them from doing more?
3. **How often** do people use our services?
4. **Which** of our potential future campaigns has greatest appeal?

So, quantitative research allows us to:

- **Quantify** – e.g. percentages of the population who display a behaviour or opinion
- **Compare** – e.g. performance of one product/brand vs. another
- **Profile** – e.g. groups of consumers or types of businesses
- **Rank** - e.g. the importance of triggers and barriers, behaviours etc.

4B. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research is used to provide a deeper understanding of an audience or subject. It can uncover reasons, opinions or motivations underlying people's decisions and behaviours.

The emphasis is on exploration, rather than measurement. Because of this, qualitative findings are usually rich and detailed, using words, descriptions, images and quotes to describe meaning.

Example qualitative research objectives:

1. **Why** do people take part in a particular activity? **Why** have people lapsed from involvement in our initiative?
2. **What underpins** the reasons people do/don't take part in a particular activity?
3. **How** can we build a product or campaign that resonates with people and motivates them to change their behaviour?
4. **How** can a provider optimise their offer to meet the needs of people taking part?

So, qualitative research allows us to:

- **Explore** – e.g. the full picture of people's lives and values, and the context to decision making
- **Discuss and probe** – e.g. people's attitudes and needs, and the driving forces behind them
- **'Co-create'** (i.e. work with consumers to create) – e.g. products or services
- **Optimise** - e.g. concepts or campaigns

4C. INTEGRATED RESEARCH APPROACHES

While some business questions can be answered using just one approach, other questions may require a combination of both approaches.

For example, a qualitative approach may be employed to explore the multitude of reasons why women choose not to take part in rugby, followed by a quantitative approach to establish the rank order of barriers to help prioritise future efforts and campaign messaging to overcome this.

TEST YOURSELF ON WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT SO FAR

- What is quantitative research?
- What is qualitative research?
- When should we use each of them and why?

SECTION 5: DEFINING AND RECRUITING YOUR SAMPLE

It's important to define clearly who you need to talk to in order to answer your research question and business objective. The people you choose to engage with through the research are your 'sample'.

5A. DEFINING YOUR SAMPLE

Sample criteria

The sample criteria outline the demographics or characteristics you want your sample to possess. If in doubt, think back to when you defined your brief and answered the question 'who can give us this information?' Some examples of sample criteria are:

- Demographically defined: gender, age, ethnicity, socio-economic group (SEG) or location. For example, you may be interested in the opinions of women, so your sample would be only female, or you may only want to talk to Londoners.
- Behaviourally defined: activity, ownership, other common lifestyle trait. For example, you could be interested only in the opinions of people who have / have not taken part in a particular activity, or bicycle owners, or only people who regularly visit a certain facility.
- Attitudinally defined: those with a particular attitude. For example, people who swim for fitness benefits, or those who are dissatisfied with a product.
- A combination of demographically, behaviourally and attitudinally defined

Best practice is to define the sample criteria as clearly as possible. For example, if you are looking to speak to men who regularly play tennis, it is not sufficient to use 'men who play tennis' as the sample criteria, as you may end up recruiting people who have only played once in their lives. It would be necessary in this instance to define the frequency of play in the sample i.e. men who play tennis at least once a month.

Sometimes it's beneficial to set quotas within your sample. A quota is a maximum limit that is assigned to one or more sample criteria to make sure different groups are fairly represented in your results. So for the tennis example above, quotas could be set on gender to make sure both men and women are equally represented, or on frequency of playing tennis to make sure you represent different levels of engagement.

Sample size

This refers to how many people will be included in the research. Best practice for sample size differs depending on your approach, so we will break this down below.

- **Quantitative approaches:** Quantitative approaches typically have bigger sample sizes than qualitative. As a rule of thumb, you should never analyse data based on less than 50 people, and a minimum of 100 is preferable. For example, if you wanted to split out the opinions of men and women, your overall sample size would be more than 200 to ensure you have at least 100 of each gender.

Qualitative approaches: Qualitative sample sizes are generally smaller as the emphasis is on depth of exploration rather than breadth; we 'deep dive' into the lives/needs/interests of a smaller sample of respondents. Chapter 2 gives an indication of suitable sample sizes for different qualitative methodologies.

Incidence rate

The incidence rate of a sample simply refers to how well your sample criteria is represented in the population. It's important to consider this when designing your sample, as it impacts on both costs and time-lines.

- A high incidence sample is an audience that is highly represented in the market. As there are more of them, they are both easier and cheaper to reach.
 - 'Women' are an example of a high incidence sample, as we know they make up around half of the adult population.
- A low incidence sample is an audience not well represented in the market. As there are less of them, they are harder and more expensive to reach.
 - Females taking part weekly in field hockey is an example of a low incidence sample, as they don't make up a big proportion of the population.

5B. RECRUITING YOUR SAMPLE

There are many options available for reaching your sample; some of these can be done internally, whereas others need involvement of an external supplier.

Customer databases: contain contact details for people who have usually had some kind of interaction with a brand or service, and have consented to their details being shared for marketing or communication purposes. This could include people who took part in a recent event, people who are members of a particular club, or people who live in a certain area. They offer an effective way of reaching a very specific audience group.

- This approach can be more cost efficient than using other sourcing methods as you're not paying an external supplier to find people. It can be used on its own, or in conjunction with other sources to provide comparison groups.
- However, it can be difficult to guarantee a specific sample size when using a customer database as you can't always predict how many people will respond. As a rule of thumb, for every 20 people you invite to participate, just one will complete the research, so you need a big database to get a good sample size. Offering a financial or gift incentive can help to boost response and shows your customers that you value their time and involvement. You may need to make a couple of attempts to contact people on your database, which should be factored into your time estimations.

Before using a database, you must be sure that it was clear when you collected personal details that these might be used for research. More information on this can be found in the MRS Code of Conduct.

mrs.org.uk/code

Online panels: are external suppliers who manage huge databases of consumers who regularly complete research for a small incentive.

- You pay for the sample on a 'cost per interview' basis, so the investment needed for this source varies depending on your sample size and criteria. As online access in the UK is so high, online panels provide an effective way to reach much of the population.
- There are many companies nowadays that provide specialist services to target populations that were once hard to reach, e.g. children or high-income earners. You can work directly with a panel provider if running research internally, or via a full service supplier. They manage the fieldwork, ensuring you get the sample size and criteria you want within your specified time frame, so it requires little time investment from you.

- There are other databases which can provide sample. For example, postal address files provide names and addresses of individuals or organisations which can be used for postal surveys or to issue invitations to take part in online research.

Face to face exit interviews: is a useful source if you want to talk to people who have accessed specific facilities or events, as you can talk them in person then and there.

- You need permission from the facility or landowner in advance and it best suits short surveys that can be administered quickly so it's not too disruptive to respondents.

Random sampling: is typically an offline method that can be used when you want to reach a random sample of respondents, and can be done via telephone or face to face.

- **Random digit dialling** generates land-line phone numbers at random for you to administer research to a random sample over the telephone. Be aware that people are moving away from land-line use, with a growing number of households (particularly young households) only having mobile phones – which adds extra cost and typically gets a lower response rate.

- **Face to face in-home interviewing** is an alternative option for reaching a random sample of respondents. This is more suitable for reaching a sample in a specific area.

Independent recruiters: are a network of recruiters around the country who will source respondents from a variety of channels (databases, social networks or via face to face recruitment) depending on your sample criteria.

- If you're working with a supplier, you'll agree a screener with them and they'll brief recruiters who will manage the rest of the recruitment process.

TEST YOURSELF ON WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT SO FAR

- What are the main considerations when defining a sample?
- What is an incidence rate? And what impact does it have on the research?
- What are the different sample sources, and which would be most relevant to you?

SECTION 6: SOME QUICK TIPS FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH

BELOW ARE A FEW BEST PRACTICE TIPS FOR DESIGNING AND CONDUCTING RESEARCH THAT WILL ENSURE YOU GET THE MOST OUT OF IT

6A. TIPS FOR CONDUCTING QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

- Keep it short. People don't want to spend a long time completing a questionnaire. If talking to a 'normal people' (e.g. those who are not on a research panel and don't frequently take part in research) your survey should be a maximum of 15 minutes long, ideally 10. If talking to panel members who are used to taking part in research, you can probably get away with 20-25 minutes.
- Keep it concise. Get to the point with your questions.
- Word things clearly and simply so people can understand and are able to answer your questions.
- Keep it interesting. Think about different ways you can show questions to a respondent, particularly if it's a long survey. Most online survey websites offer ways to customise the look and feel of questions to make them more visually appealing.
- When designing the content of your research e.g. the questions themselves, here are a few pointers to keep your research open, balanced and engaging:
 - Avoid leading or closed questions that might bias the respondent. For example, rather than saying "how likely are you to recommend this service to a friend?", use "how likely or unlikely would you be to recommend this service to a friend?".
 - Consider a scaled answer option instead of a 'yes/no' response. Our minds don't always work in black and white, many of us fall into the grey zone in between. It's important to make sure you can capture this and not force respondents to select an answer that is not a true representation of their opinions. E.g. rather than asking "do you agree that the services in your local area are satisfactory?" with a yes/no answer, ask "how much do you agree or disagree that the services in your local area are satisfactory?" with a scaled response (strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree, not sure).
 - Draft out the flow of your questions upfront to make sure you are not biasing your respondents. For example, always ask brand awareness and perceptions before you introduce any information on your brand; you want to make sure you are getting honest opinions, representative of real life.
 - Where possible, try to avoid too many open-ended questions where respondents type in their answers. This can be a) very time consuming to condense (imagine you have 2,000 responses to read through) and b) often doesn't provide you with a definitive answer. It can also be time consuming and frustrating for your research respondents. It's better to have a well-rounded and thought out answer list where respondents can select multiple options that apply to them.

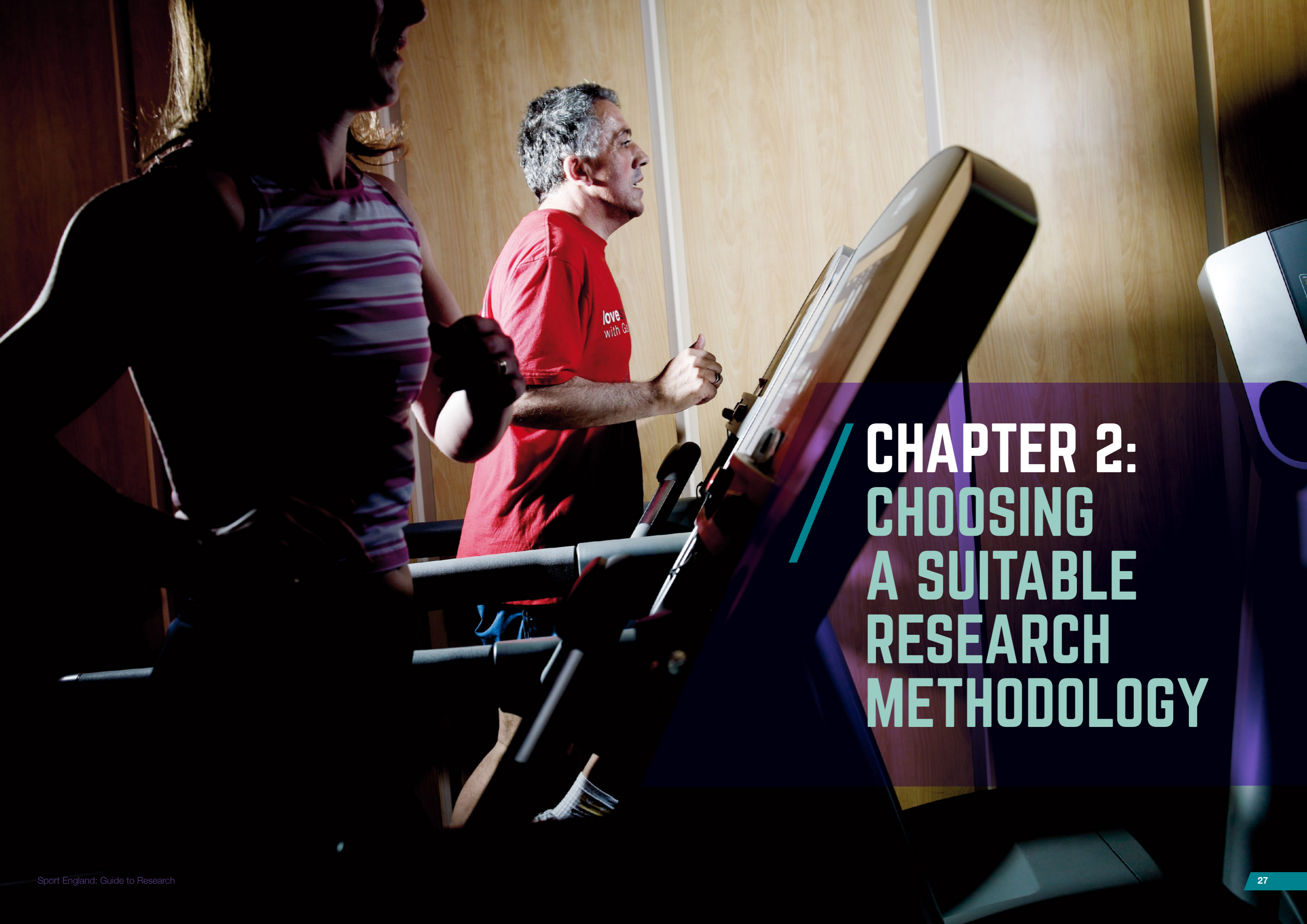
- Always carry out a pilot, or ask a few people in your team to read your questionnaire before you carry out the research. The more diversity the better, that way you can ensure you have questions and answer options that are relevant to everyone.
- If you are using a technique that requires a form of statistical analysis (e.g. a segmentation) it's advisable to develop your questionnaire with the statistician. That way they can ensure your questions are compatible with their statistical techniques, which can save a lot of stress in the long-run.
- Ask open, non-leading questions – to encourage respondents to answer questions honestly and in detail.
- Be comfortable with silences – don't rush to fill them with another question as this can mean that respondents are contemplating their answer and can lead to more insightful comments.
- Be encouraging and supportive – remind them that there are no right or wrong answers and all their thoughts and opinions are valued.
- Record the conversation – on a dictaphone or your smartphone (with the respondent's permission), so that you don't have to write down lots of notes and you can focus on the conversation.

6B. TIPS FOR CONDUCTING FACE TO FACE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

- Make the space comfortable and the atmosphere relaxed – you want the respondent/s to feel at ease and able to talk openly.
- Ensure you are familiar with any discussion guides (i.e. a document outlining the questions to be asked during the session) or stimulus materials (i.e. any written or visual materials brought along to stimulate discussion) – so that the conversation can flow naturally and be led by the respondent/s.
- Try to build a rapport with your respondent/s – a good way to do this is mirror their body language and the words they use, but just smiling and being friendly is also effective.

TEST YOURSELF ON WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT SO FAR

- How can you make your surveys as effective as possible?
- What are some of the things you should remember when conducting face to face research?



CHAPTER 2: CHOOSING A SUITABLE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION TO METHODOLOGIES

There are lots of different research methodologies and each has its own unique set of strengths and suitability to different research questions.

Once you have clearly defined your research objectives, you can look at the methodologies in this chapter to decide which one/s best suit your needs.

1A. THE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT

Thinking about where your research objectives fit among the stages outlined below will help you to decide which methodology to use.



At this stage the types of research questions you will be exploring will often be broad and multi-layered, such as understanding the values and interests of your target audience, exploring broad behaviours, or why people have dropped out of activity or a particular sport.

You want to use methodologies that will help you understand the audience in a holistic way - understanding the context to their attitudes, beliefs and behaviours, such as ethnography, segmentation, usage and attitude surveys or customer satisfaction surveys.

At this stage, you will be developing concepts, propositions or products that will engage and motivate your target audience, or already have examples that you want to explore and test with your target audience.

For this research objective you want methodologies that focus on developing the ideas and providing constructive feedback. You may also want help prioritising which ideas to select. Focus groups and testing and evaluation surveys are most suitable for this.

Once you have launched a product or campaign you may want to track its impact and success, to understand where your approach is working or not to achieve your business objective. For example, you may find that while an initiative is working well with those already taking part in the sport, it may be having less of an impact than you had hoped on those not taking part.

You may also like to track behaviour over time to see how it is changing among particular target groups, track changes to provision to evaluate the impact, or track cost effectiveness.

Tracking surveys, project evaluation and depth interviews are the best methodologies to achieve these aims.

* Throughout this chapter, 'Products and campaigns' refers collectively to products, services, initiatives, propositions, campaigns, messaging or communications.

1B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES: CHOOSING THE RIGHT APPROACH

The list of methodologies below covers some of the most common methodologies used in research (it is by no means a full list of all that is available).

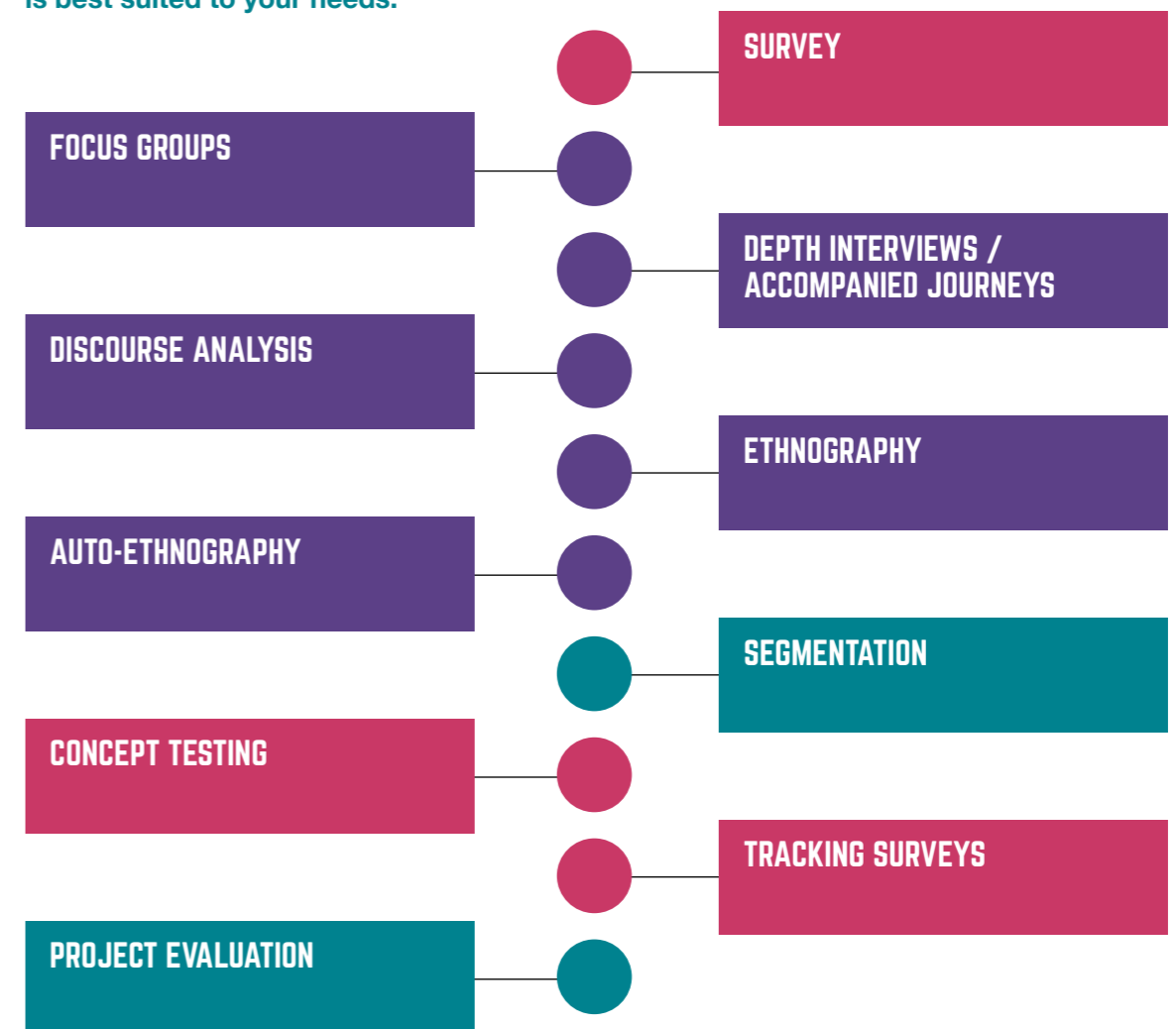
Think about your sample to help you choose an appropriate approach:

- Who do you want to respond to the research?

- How can you reach them? E.g. are they able to complete online surveys?
- What environment will be suitable? Can they work together in a focus group or do you need to speak to them individually?

You may also choose two or more approaches in combination to address your objective (e.g. a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods).

Use the information below to help evaluate which methodology is best suited to your needs.



/ SURVEY



What is it?

Surveys are a set of questions asked to a large number of people. They are predominantly conducted online, but can be carried out using self-complete paper questionnaires, face to face or by telephone.

Surveys provide numerical data (percentages and rankings), and results can be delivered in a variety of data formats such as Excel, SPSS etc. If working with an external supplier, they will likely provide you with a report of key findings in PowerPoint or Word.

What this will give you

The outcome of a survey will be dependent on the types of questions you ask. There are many types of question you could ask, but a few examples and their outcomes are:

- **Usage and attitudes:** will tell you about people's behaviour and opinions in relation to a given topic.
- **Customer satisfaction:** will give you an understanding of satisfaction with different aspects of a place/service/product, and allow you to pinpoint areas that need attention.
- **Brand exploration:** will help you to understand how your brand/service is perceived (e.g. awareness, affinity and perceptions) and allow you to identify whether people's opinions of your brand are in line with your internal goals, and pinpoint areas for development.

When is it best used?

Surveys are very flexible and can be used at all stages of development.

Strengths:

- ⬆ Can get views from a large number of people in a cost-efficient way
- ⬆ Most online survey platforms and providers can ensure the survey is compatible with mobile devices so it is convenient and easy for people to complete
- ⬆ Depending on the complexity of your sample, surveys can give you quick responses
- ⬆ A flexible approach which can be used across the different stages of development

Limitations/Weaknesses:

- ⬇ If targeting an audience not represented online, it can be expensive
- ⬇ Be careful not to try to cover too many topic areas in one online survey as this can be confusing for the respondent; always keep the experience of the respondent in mind. It's better to explore one topic area thoroughly rather than multiple topic areas in less detail

Example:

Leisure Operator X wanted to understand how satisfied local residents were with the different facilities in their area and the programme of activities on offer.

A quantitative survey was carried out among residents of the local area, and quotas were applied to ensure representativeness of the area.

This research allowed the operator to identify who was and wasn't using the facilities and their experiences. It identified different areas for improvement at different facilities and, by connecting with usage data, informed programming decisions.

/ FOCUS GROUPS



What is it?

Focus groups are group discussions. They usually involve bringing together about 6-8 like-minded people, e.g. who behave in a similar way (such as all cycle to work) or who feel similarly about a certain subject, to allow for in-depth discussions. You may have a series of groups that allow you to compare opinions across different audiences (e.g. male commuter cyclists compared to female commuter cyclists). They are usually quite dynamic in nature and allow ideas to be discussed and developed as a group. The discussions will be structured around a discussion guide with a moderator asking questions and encouraging involvement from everyone within the group. Creative and projective tasks can be included to help to reveal insight around topics people feel less comfortable discussing in a group, or more subconscious attitudes and feelings e.g. by asking respondents to project their feelings onto something or someone else.

What this will give you

Focus groups provide an in-depth understanding of a particular group of people's attitudes, behaviours and ideas. The group dynamic allows people to build upon one another's ideas which leads to group consensus and more evolved thinking than one on one sessions provide. They are often used to develop or refine concepts and the outputs are often optimised concepts that are rooted in insight around people's needs (usually in a PowerPoint document, or posters).

When is it best used?

Groups can be effectively used throughout the stages of development, but they are most regularly used at the 'Understanding your audience' and 'Concept, product or campaign development' stages.

Strengths:

- ⬆ Efficient way of speaking to larger number of people qualitatively
- ⬆ Creative and energising environment
- ⬆ Good for discussing, developing and evaluating concepts
- ⬆ Can include pre-tasks or private response to capture more personal/contextual insights

Limitations/Weaknesses:

- ⬇ Social dynamic can mean people are led by what others say (rather than always stating their own opinion)
- ⬇ Risk of one or two people dominating the group
- ⬇ Out of natural context people can misreport behaviour and preferences

Example:

Organisation X set out to explore their customers' experiences of one of their initiatives. They wanted to review how well the initiative was meeting their needs, and how it could be improved and marketed more effectively.

They used a series of focus groups to explore their target audiences' lifestyles, behaviours and attitudes around their sport, and then explored the initiative in this context. They conducted separate focus groups with men and women, and people at the pre-family and family life-stages, to enable them to identify differences in response across their target market.

The research identified some key areas for development of the initiative to make it more appealing to customers, and encourage them to keep taking part. For example, while the performance of the staff was a key strength, the promotion and marketing of the initiative could be improved to bring to life the positive experience of taking part. This helped them to refine the product idea, and root it more effectively in people's needs. It also identified the 'hooks' to use in marketing and communications to engage the audience.

DEPTH INTERVIEWS/ ACCOMPANIED JOURNEYS



What is it?

Depth interviews are interviews with a single individual or sometimes with two or more people, for example pairs or triads, a household or family. It can sometimes be more appropriate or effective to speak with a group rather than individuals, e.g. teenagers can feel more comfortable and open up more if they are with one or two friends. They can be carried out face to face, by phone or online (e.g. via Skype).

Accompanied journeys are similar to depth interviews in many ways but include an additional ethnographic element where the researcher accompanies the respondent on an activity/routine.

Both depth interviews and accompanied journeys are usually 1 to 2 hours in length. They tend to follow an overall discussion guide but are flexible, allowing for follow-up questions to probe and further understand an interviewee's views.

Strengths:

- ⬆ Less cost and time intensive than ethnographies
- ⬆ Gives respondents space to answer independent of others, therefore minimising the impact of others' opinions on theirs
- ⬆ Useful for sensitive topics where comfort/privacy may be needed
- ⬆ Useful for particular audiences who may be hard to get to come to a group or participate in ethnography (e.g. experts or stakeholders)
- ⬆ More structured than an ethnography so allows more specific/targeted questions to be asked

What this will give you

This gives you the time and space to have an in-depth conversation with your interviewee. You can fully explore and understand their thoughts, behaviours and/or feelings about a particular area. The output is usually in the form of a report or PowerPoint presentation, summarising the views of different individuals and brought to life with verbatim comments.

When is it best used?

This methodology can be used at any stage of the development process – to understand more about a target audience, to help develop a concept or to evaluate the impact of a product or campaign.

Limitations/Weaknesses:

- ⬇ Often smaller sample sizes due to cost and being time intensive
- ⬇ Less of a creative/dynamic environment – respondents more likely to answer in a more linear/structured manner

Example:

A Local Authority who is working in partnership with various organisations are looking for feedback to evaluate ways of working on a new initiative. They want to understand how well the current partnerships are working and how they can be improved to give the new initiative the best possible chance of success.

Depth interviews were conducted over the phone with a selection of providers who work with the Local Authority, during which researchers were able to probe on specific strengths and weaknesses around the ways of working.

The research identified some key areas for development for the partnerships when considering working together on the new initiative. For example, while the communication was good at the management level between the Local Authority and partners when new initiatives were implemented, many of the operational staff were not aware of or communicated to about changes made to the initiatives, and so this was highlighted as a key area for development.

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS



What is it?

Discourse analysis looks at media and literature sources to explore the narratives that play out in the world around us.

What this will give you

This gives you an understanding of the popular narratives around particular topics to identify themes that underpin and inform people's values, attitudes, behaviours and preferences. It is a way of identifying insights that people cannot explain themselves, and provides an in-depth understanding of the audience and how to connect with them. The output of this methodology is a summary document explaining the themes and insights that have emerged, with visual evidence to illustrate this.

When is it best used?

Discourse analysis is best used at the 'Understanding your audience' stage (chapter 2 – 1a). It is often used right at the start of a project to inform the following stages.

Strengths:

- ⬆ Can tell you things that people can't see or articulate but that are hugely powerful in influencing behaviour
- ⬆ Can provide a great springboard for innovation and concept development by uncovering opportunity spaces that are not tapped
- ⬆ Rich and visual outputs

Limitations/Weaknesses:

- ⬇ Often can't tell you what people think or feel
- ⬇ Can be difficult to focus on particular target audiences (as generally mass media analysis)
- ⬇ Can be time consuming to conduct

Example:

Organisation X wanted to:

- Explore the language used around women playing sport;
- Understand the 'invisible' barriers that exist that put women off from taking part in sport; and
- Identify how to address these through a campaign to encourage more women to get active.

A number of key themes were identified around the way women playing sport are portrayed in the mass media, including the sexualisation of women in sport, the dominance of 'great' men in sport vs. real women, and the way sport can provoke sexism.

This provided the client with inspiration for a marketing campaign that tackled these barriers to taking part.

Discourse analysis was conducted across a wide range of sources, including newspapers, magazines, social media, academic sources and blogs.

ETHNOGRAPHY



What is it?

Ethnography is the study of people's behaviour in context. It can include observation of behaviour (e.g. observing the social dynamics and profile of people taking part in sport activities in the park at the weekend) or participatory – where a researcher accompanies someone on their daily activities to understand their motivations, behaviour and experience in context. Ethnography sessions would usually be at least 3+ hours long.

What this will give you

Ethnography allows us to be a 'fly on the wall' of someone's daily life. By observing them (and often asking questions) in their real life context, we can understand truths about them that they may be

unwilling or unable to tell us (e.g. things they don't realise they do), and we can pick up on the smaller detail of what makes them tick. This leads to insights about people's lives, values and priorities. The output of this method is rich, visual information (e.g. in presented in PowerPoint with photos and quotes, or through video) that brings to life the respondents' worlds.

When is it best used?

Ethnography is best used at the 'Understanding your audience' stage of development (chapter 2 – 1a), as it allows us to 'get close' to our audience and explore their lives, often providing the foundations for product or campaign development.

Strengths:

- ⬆️ Reliable capture of behaviours as observed in real-time rather than reported
- ⬆️ Ability to probe and question (often subconscious) habits and behaviours 'live' (less post-rationalisation in responses)
- ⬆️ Comfortable for respondent as they are in own environment/context
- ⬆️ Can uncover personal beliefs, attitudes and motivations as well as the environmental and social context for behaviours
- ⬆️ Visually engaging outputs e.g. video

Limitations/Weaknesses:

- ⬇️ Can be cost and time intensive
- ⬇️ Often smaller sample sizes due to costs and time needed e.g. 5-10 in typical project
- ⬇️ Less relevant for product or campaign development (unless you are testing a product in context)
- ⬇️ Best if conducted by experienced researcher/ethnographer with skills/training to make respondents comfortable and uncover insights through observation and natural interactions

Example:

County Sports Partnership (CSP) X wanted to understand the role of sport and physical activity in the lives of inactive adults in four of their local authority areas. They wanted to explore their deep-seated perceptions, drivers and barriers around exercise, to ultimately inform strategy designed to increase the number of adults taking part and improve the overall health of the area.

Ethnographies were conducted across a broad sample of inactive adults. Researchers went to their homes and spent time with them and their families and friends. They immersed themselves in their worlds, understanding life from their perspective, and the role sport and fitness plays within it.

These sessions revealed what the audience cared about in life and what motivated them. By understanding their value systems, the CSP could develop product and communications ideas that deeply resonated with the target audience.

AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY



What is it?

Auto-ethnography is the self-capture of people's behaviour in context. Respondents are tasked with recording details of their lives and experiences while going about their day to day business. This is recorded on paper or via their smartphones; there is no researcher present. This could involve tasks like recording a diary of their physical activity behaviours over a week and the associated motivations and barriers.

What this will give you

This provides in-the-moment insight into peoples' lives and worlds; capturing feedback from them before they have had the chance to post-rationalise or forget, and without the influence of a researcher. This approach provides rich data in the form of verbatim comments, photos and stories to use in research outputs to bring it to life.

When is it best used?

Auto-ethnography is best used at the 'Understanding your audience' stage of development, as it provides an accurate picture of people's real life experiences and behaviours.

Strengths:

- ⬆️ Can set a wide variety of tasks and exercises
- ⬆️ Captures people's behaviours, thoughts and experiences in the moment (without any influence from a researcher)
- ⬆️ Comfortable for participant as they are in own environment/context
- ⬆️ Visually engaging outputs (photos, video)
- ⬆️ Larger sample sizes are possible as cost per respondent is lower and it's less time intensive for researchers

Limitations/Weaknesses:

- ⬇️ Data-heavy – time consuming and more expensive to analyse large amounts of data
- ⬇️ Less relevant for product or campaign development (unless you are testing a product in context)

Example:

National Governing Body (NGB) X were keen to understand the lives and worlds of teenage boys playing their sport. They wanted to get close to the moments of play, their social interactions and their media worlds, to be able to eventually develop marketing messages that support this audience, via appropriate media channels.

They used auto-ethnography to do this. The respondents captured moments in their day to day lives on an app on their phones, recording their authentic, in-the-moment behaviours, experiences and ways they connect to their friends.

This uncovered fresh insights about the way the boys play the sport, the emotional connection they have with it and how they talk about it to their friends.

This helped the NGB see their sport through the eyes of the target audience, informing and inspiring new marketing messages.

SEGMENTATION



What is it?

Segmentations involve identifying groups of people who respond in a similar way to a range of questions. The aim is to identify distinct groups or segments of people with certain shared characteristics; each group can then be targeted in different ways. There are many ways to segment an audience, but some common examples are by behaviour, attitudes, needs or values.

Segmentations are typically quantitative, using specific analytical techniques to 'find' the groups. They can be enriched using qualitative approaches.

What this will give you

A segmentation provides an overview of how the market breaks down into clusters/segments, what defines each segment, and how they differ from

one another. Outputs vary depending on the type of segmentation, but will usually identify the size of each segment and have a profile of each group – for example, who they are, their behaviours and attitudes.

It is also common to identify a small number of 'golden questions' from the main segmentation survey which allow you to approximate the segmentation results. These can be used in future surveys for example to link further research to the segments or to screen sample for specific segments.

When is it best used?

Segmentations can be used at different stages of development but are most often used in the 'Understanding your audience' stage (chapter 2 – 1a) to define the audience and identify priority groups for targeting.

Strengths:

- ⬆ A robust and statistically sound way of pulling apart your audience to identify key groups to target or prioritise
- ⬆ When done well, segmentations can stand the test of time and be used for years to come
- ⬆ Quantitative segmentations can be replicated in any future research, and used across all stages of development

Limitations/Weaknesses:

- ⬇ Requires big sample sizes to make sure each resulting segment can be analysed
- ⬇ The need for analytical support means it can be expensive
- ⬇ Requires some thinking time upfront to ensure you pick the right type of segmentation for your organisations needs

Example:

National Governing Body (NGB) X has a business objective to increase the numbers of people taking part in their sport by 2020. They had a lot of existing research about why people took part in their sport, but weren't sure how to reach the wider audience of people who aren't currently involved.

Their sample was primarily people who are not currently playing their sport, but would like to in future. They also included a small sample of people who are currently taking part in their sport as a comparison group. Respondents were asked about their attitudes, motivations and behaviours in relation to both organisation X's sport, and health and fitness more generally.³

The segmentation was based on people's needs and attitudes towards health and fitness in general, and 6 distinct segments were identified.

From this, the NGB felt there were 3 segments that offered the best opportunity to increase the number of people taking part, and used qualitative techniques to enrich understanding of these segments' motivations, and develop ideas of provision which would kick-start their involvement. They could then approach and work with provision providers to identify which segment is the best target for them and explain how to tap into that group's needs.

CONCEPT TESTING



What is it?

Concept testing allows you to test concepts, products, ideas or initiatives (single or multiple for comparison) and identify how they perform on any key measures you may have (e.g. appeal, likelihood to act etc.). Concept tests can be conducted on written material (e.g. a brief description of initiatives) or on visual stimulus (e.g. posters for promoting initiatives). While development of the concepts will usually be done through qualitative techniques, concept testing is usually done quantitatively.

What this will give you

- If done on a singular concept/product, it can tell you how well it does on key measures and any future optimisations or pain points.
- If testing multiple concepts/products, it can give a comparative view of performance to identify the strongest options and any opportunities for optimisation.

The output is usually in a data format (e.g. Excel, SPSS). If carried out with an external supplier, they will likely provide you with a PowerPoint report of results.

When is it best used?

Concept testing is used in stage 2 'Concept, product or campaign development' (chapter 2 – 1a), when you have a piece of material to test.

Strengths:

- ⬆ If conducted online (as quantitative research usually is) it can give you quick results among a large group of people and you can compare results across different groups
- ⬆ The quantitative focus gives you numerical evidence of which concepts perform best

Limitations/Weaknesses:

- ⬇ Depending on the nature of the material you want to test and the sample you require, it can be expensive
- ⬇ It requires you to have already prepared some kind of material (written or visual) to test, which may require prior research

Example:

University X developed two new exercise-class concepts as a way of getting new people interested in being active. They know sport at their university can be perceived as quite hard-core, so developed new ways to make it more accessible. They wanted to know which of these ideas resonated most with their priority audience (those looking for opportunities to meet new people and take part casually), and any optimisations that could make it more appealing to that group.

Respondents were shown one concept, and asked to evaluate it for key measures (e.g. appeal, relevance and likelihood to play). They then answered the same set of questions for the second concept. After this, they were shown both side by side and asked to pick their favourite.

The research helped identify which concept had the greatest potential among their target audience, and the likelihood of encouraging action. It also highlighted areas for optimisation by picking up aspects of the concept that were unclear.

TRACKING SURVEYS



What is it?

Tracking surveys are a quantitative way of measuring activity and change over time. They can be applied to a spectrum of business questions e.g. tracking activity level, tracking campaign effectiveness, tracking brand awareness etc. The key for any tracking research is to keep all questions and samples consistent, this way you can be confident any changes in your data are reflecting true changes in behaviour or opinion, rather than being a result of changes you have made to the research.

What this will give you

Tracking tells you whether attitudes or behaviours are changing over a period of time. You can either monitor at set time points to get regular feedback (e.g. monthly) or around periods of activity to assess impact (e.g. before and after key sporting events throughout the year).

The output is in a data format (e.g. Excel, SPSS). If using a supplier, they will usually provide you with a report or dashboards that shows all of your tracking data over time so you can see any changes visually.

When is it best used?

Tracking is most suited to business questions that require long term monitoring of change. This requires that you have a specific measure in mind that you want to monitor over time. This is used at the third stage of development – ‘Ongoing evaluation’.

Strengths:

- ⬆ Allows for flexibility on how frequently to track e.g. monthly, after key events/activity
- ⬆ While it can be costly to set up at first, continued tracking allows for more cost efficiency; after the first month there are no set up or design costs to take into account
- ⬆ Ongoing tracking provides a benchmark within the study, so you can assess change after periods of activity

Limitations/Weaknesses:

- ⬇ For tracking to be comparable over time, you need to keep your questions and sample the same every wave. This requires some extra effort upfront to ensure you are asking the right questions to the right people
- ⬇ It takes a lot of activity to change public opinion or behaviour, so tracking data can sometimes be repetitive unless a big effort has been made to change consumer mindset. Small efforts may not always show up in the data, especially if the sample is quite broad (e.g. nationally representative)
- ⬇ Its best practice to interview new people every time you track. If you have a narrow sample in mind, it can become difficult to source large sample sizes over a long period of regular tracking as new sample runs out

Example:

Organisation X wanted to know whether certain events were impacting on their brand and the appeal of sport and physical activity. They run a tracker once a quarter that monitors both behaviour (how often people take part) and engagement with physical activity.

Each month they survey a nationally representative sample (matching the overall demographic profile of the UK population), and are provided with a monthly dashboard that tracks their key measures. They use these dashboards to demonstrate how different events and activities impact on public perceptions of sport and physical activity. These key measures provide them with internal benchmarks they can use to evaluate the impact of activities.

PROJECT EVALUATION



What is it?

Project evaluations allow you to gather evidence to assess the strengths and weaknesses of a project or intervention, to understand its impact and improve its effectiveness. It typically involves bringing together information collected using a mixture of several of the other methods included in this guide.

A few broad types of evaluation include:

- **Formative evaluation**, used at the project planning and development stage to explore the problem that needs to be addressed and how it might be solved e.g. by reviewing existing research evidence or information from previous projects
- **Process evaluation**, used at the project implementation stage to understand the extent to which a project is being implemented as planned e.g. using information collected from project monitoring or from stakeholder interviews to measure and understand what activities have been delivered, how many people have been turning up, if they are from the target group etc.
- **Impact or outcome evaluation**, used to investigate the short, medium and/or long term effects of a project e.g. by carrying out pre-project and post-project surveys to measure any change in outcomes. Information from impact evaluation is sometimes used to assess value for money by comparing the costs of an initiative with the value of the outcomes achieved e.g. cost-benefit analysis or social return on investment analysis.

What this will give you

A way of monitoring progress against objectives, an understanding of what works and what doesn't and why, information to help you improve and/or replicate what you do, evidence of impact and return on investment.

Evaluation findings are often pulled together into written reports or presentations.

Key information and headlines can also be pulled into other outputs such as short summary documents, case studies, dashboards with tables and charts, infographics etc.

The output is usually in a data format (e.g. Excel, SPSS). If carried out with an external supplier, they will likely provide you with a PowerPoint report of results.

When is it best used?

Evaluation comes under stage 3 ‘Ongoing evaluation’ (chapter 2 -1a). It is best to begin planning your valuation early, when you are still developing your project. This means that you can build any evaluation data collection requirements into your project design e.g. you might want to create some sort of registration process to collect basic information about the people joining your project.

It is often useful to design your evaluation so that you get data and feedback as you go, rather than just in a final report at the end. Collecting feedback and monitoring progress as you go gives you the information you need to make improvements to delivery and so maximise the success of your initiative.

If you want to understand the long term effects of a project, then this involves continuing to collect information over time (e.g. follow-up data from people that took part in your project), not just during an initial delivery period.

Strengths:

- ⬆ Allows you to track progress
- ⬆ Helps you understand what works
- ⬆ Gives you the information you need to improve
- ⬆ Can help you prove the impact and value for money of your work

Limitations/Weaknesses:

- ⬇ Can be costly
- ⬇ Can be difficult and resource intensive to collect evaluation data e.g. follow-up data from individuals that are no longer involved with an initiative
- ⬇ Need to be very clear about your objectives and how the evaluation information will be used, otherwise you can put a lot of effort into collecting data that isn't useful

/ PROJECT EVALUATION – CONTINUED



Example:

Organisation X wanted to understand the effectiveness of a new pilot programme of sports sessions that they were setting up to try to encourage relatively inactive local women aged 35-45 to take part in more sport. They also wanted to understand which features of the sessions particularly appealed to their target audience.

They collected registration information from all of the women that took part in the sessions so they could keep track of who was taking part and how active they were when they started. They interviewed some of the women as well as staff involved in delivery to gather their feedback on which particular features of the pilot had and hadn't worked well. They also carried out follow-up surveys and interviews with some of the women to see if anything had changed following their involvement in the project e.g. if they were now taking part in sport more regularly.

The evaluation research helped the organisation adjust their marketing to make sure they were attracting the right women (those that were previously relatively inactive), to find out what were the crucial success factors (e.g. having friendly and encouraging session leaders), and to demonstrate that the sessions were effective in increasing overall activity levels among the women that took part.

For more information about anything in this guide or if you have questions about a piece of research you'd like to conduct, please contact your Sport England contact.

Other useful resources:

- mrs.org.uk
- mrs.org.uk/code
- aqr.org.uk/
- qrca.org/





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