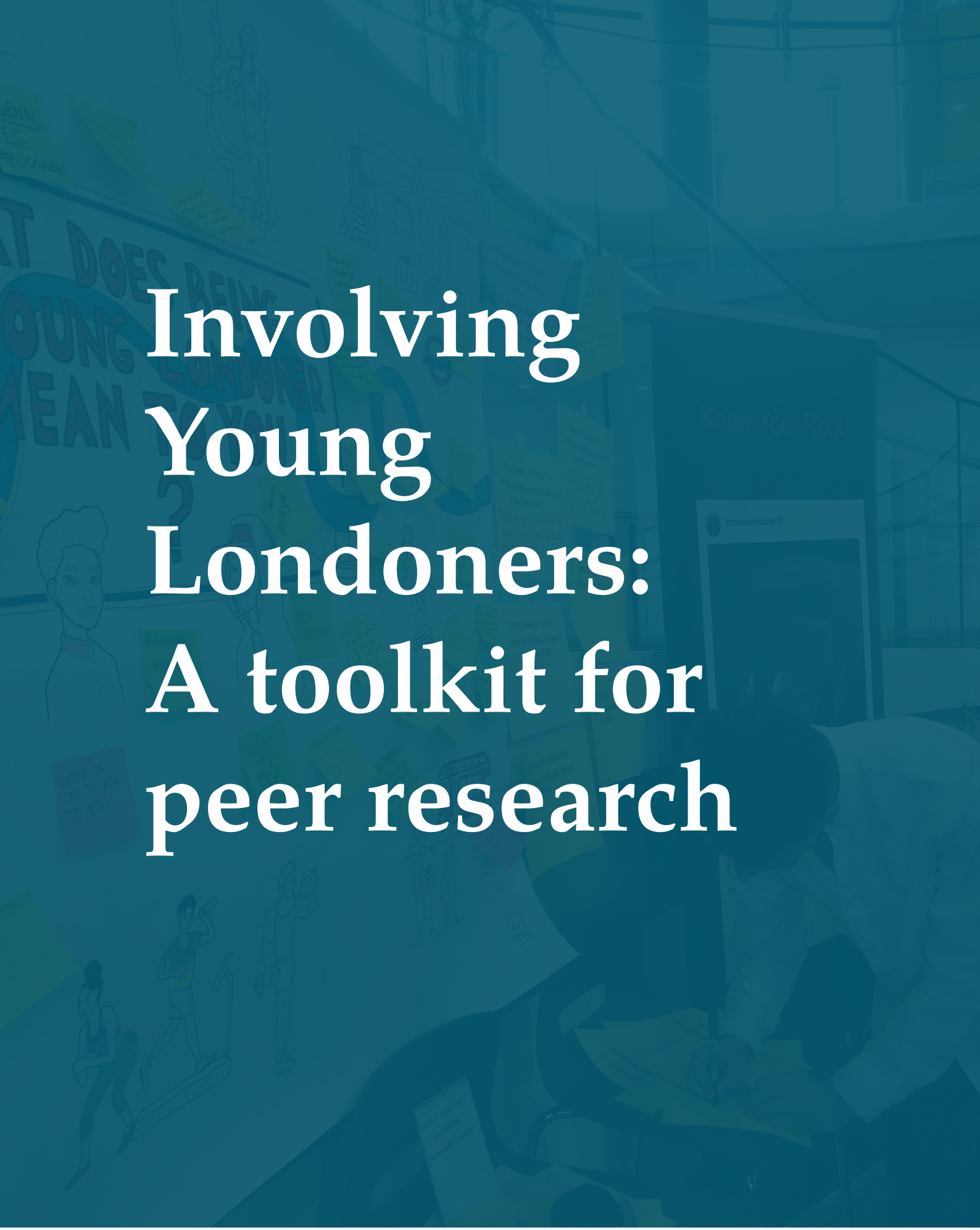

Involving Young Londoners: A toolkit for peer research

Partnership for Young London

Trust for London
Tackling poverty and inequality

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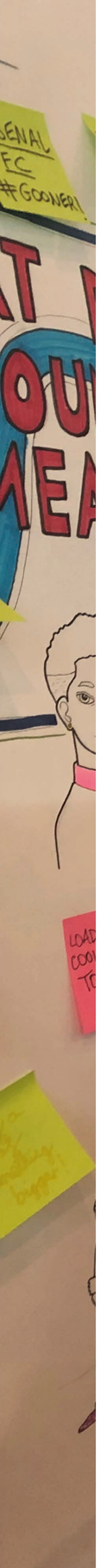

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank all those who spoke to us in interviews for this report, from those working in the youth sector, to peer researchers who gave us their time.

As part of this toolkit, we conducted interviews with 17 organisations with a range of experiences with peer research. We transcribed over eight hours of conversations, and anonymised quotes. All quotes in this toolkit are from those who work with young people, unless stated otherwise.

Partnership for Young London

Partnership for Young London believes in a future where every young person's right to wellbeing is recognised and fulfilled.

With young people making up a quarter of London's population, we have to respect that they are crucial to its future.

Trust for London
Tackling poverty and inequality

Generously funded by Trust for London.

SUPPORTED BY
MAYOR OF LONDON

The Mayor's £45m Young Londoners Fund has supported over 300 youth organisations and over 100,000 young Londoners. The Young Londoners Fund was a partner in the production of this toolkit.

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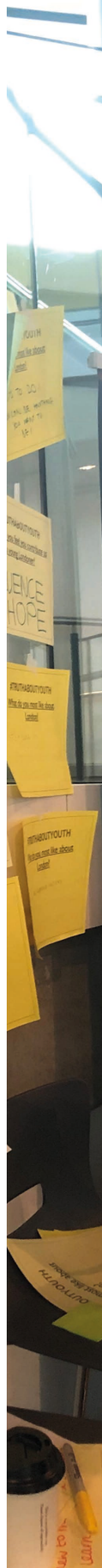
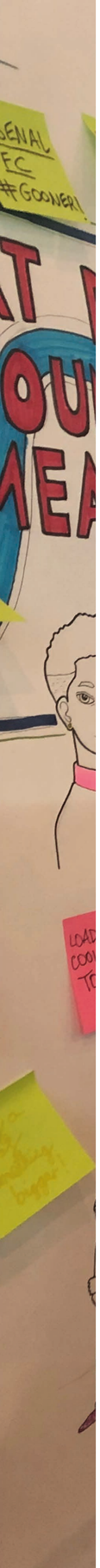




Introduction
Greater London Authority

I am delighted to introduce this peer research toolkit, created by Partnership for Young London in collaboration with the Mayor's Young Londoners Fund. The toolkit expertly demonstrates how organisations can use participatory approaches to involve young people as active decision makers in their work. It is a fantastic example of cross-sector working, showing the benefits of youth organisations coming together to share their knowledge and skills.

Organisations supported by the Young Londoners Fund highlighted the need for a practical toolkit which sets out innovative methods of involving young people in their work. From recruitment and remuneration, to campaigning and fieldwork delivery, this toolkit covers many bases and will prove a useful guide for organisations looking to develop their youth participation work, in particular through peer-led research.

The Young Londoners Fund has brought together over 300 youth organisations, many of whom are experts at involving young people in decision making. Through the toolkit we share with you six case studies from across the Fund, highlighting some of this excellent practice.

I look forward to the toolkit being a practical and useful resource for all those wishing to engage young people in participatory methods.

Joanne McCartney
Deputy Mayor for Education and Childcare

Introduction
Partnership for Young London

This toolkit brings together learning from various peer research projects with young people into one place. As more organisations decide to involve young people in the design and delivery of research, that goes on to inform decisions that impact their lives, we hope this toolkit can support that work.

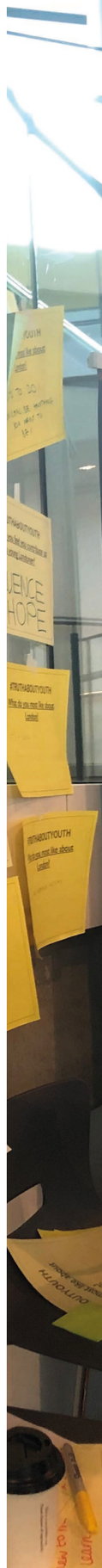
In our previous work, Involving Young Londoners: A review of participatory approaches in the youth sector, we looked at how organisations were starting to do peer-led research. This toolkit builds on that work, attempting to provide a simple guide that takes organisations through a peer research process, from recruitment of young people to co-producing analysis.

Partnership for Young London, since 2019, has supported over 12 organisations with their own peer research projects. We have seen the impact that involving young people can have on the research quality, and the authenticity of findings. Their lived experience provides vital insight into findings, and better access into communities. Importantly, we should be providing young people with skills and training.

This toolkit is a first step, and we hope to continue building on it with additional resources, training, and an update in the coming year. As more organisations involve young people in research, we want to make sure that the sector shares learning, and practical support is available for them.

Lastly, we would like to thank all the organisations and young peer researchers who spoke to us for this work.

Matthew Walsham
Policy and Campaigns Lead at Partnership for Young London



1. Introduction to peer research

What is peer research?

Why use peer research?

What are the benefits of peer research?

What are some of the challenges?

What is peer research?

Peer research is research that is steered and conducted by people with lived experience of the issue being studied.[1] In the context of the youth sector it is a way to meaningfully involve young people in decision making, research design and delivery, and policy making.

In peer research, those in the researched group (in this case young people) "adopt the role of the researcher and are empowered to participate in research by minimizing power imbalances between researchers and participants, contributing to reducing bias and promoting improve understanding."[2]

Peer research as a form of Participatory Action Research

It is easiest to understand peer research as a form of Participatory Action Research (PAR), of which there has been far more written on. PAR can be broken down into its three key components: participatory, action, and research:

- **Participatory –** The project is owned and controlled by the community. In this case young people participate fully in decision making.
- **Action –** The project addresses an issue or acts on a possibility, and the action is guided by that goal. This is not research for research's sake, and is, in the best cases, creative and transformative.
- **Research –** The project is grounded in research approaches, using qualitative (interviews, focus groups) or quantitative (surveys) tools to investigate an issue and identify solutions.

Peer research must follow the principles and approaches of PAR, which has a focus on[3]:

1. **Equal participation by the young peer researchers with the professional researchers -** Organisations must give power to the young people at critical decision points, such as on project goals or methodology, and on how the project is conducted, such as how discussions are lead. This works best with a steady group, involved from start to finish, rather than an ad hoc group of young people called in at various points.
2. **Mutual respect for experience/expertise –** Recognition for the unique and equally important contributions of both the young researchers, and professionals. PAR values the 'lived experience' of young people, and the unique perspectives they bring, and the co-learning that is created between them and professionals.
3. **Informed decision making –** Training is provided to the young researchers, to enable them to collaborate fully and make informed decisions. Young people must be equipped with relevant skills if they are expected to participate in decision making as equal partners to professionals.
4. **Maximum involvement –** As far as possible, the young researchers should be brought into all areas of research planning, administration, implementation, and completion.

1 McPin Foundation
2 Clare Lushey, peer research Methodology: Challenges and Solutions, 2017 (https://methods.sagepub.com/case/peer-research-methodology-challenges-and-solutions)
3 McTaggert, R. (1991). Principles for participatory action research. Adult Education Quarterly, 41(3), 168-187.

Non-participatory research vs Participatory Action Research

A clear way to think about PAR, and thus peer research, is to see how it compares to traditional research. To note, PAR is an approach to research, rather than a research method as the approach is based on certain principles, values and practices in order to carry out research projects using different methods (i.e. interviews, case-studies, surveys, observations, etc.)[4]

Below we set out how they differ in approach, and how to think about them:[5]

Traditional research paradigm	Participatory action research paradigm
Emphasis is on “learning about” research subjects	Emphasis is on “learning from and learning about” research subjects
Objectivity through research valued	Subjective experiences of subjects are also valued
Researcher acts as “professional”	Researcher acts as “consultant,” “educator"
Research is best conducted by “outsiders”	Research must have input from “insiders,” i.e those being studied
Subjects have one role; that of research subject	Subjects have dual roles both as subjects and as researchers
Subjects are passive objects of study and do not contribute to the research process	Subjects are actively involved in the conceptualisation, design, implementation, and interpretation of research studies
Research lends itself to be controlled, experimental (using experiments)	Lends itself to qualitative, ethnographic studies and to studies of the disability experience
Subjects’ involvement in research ends when data collection is complete	Subjects act as “change agents” converting results of research into new policy, programmatic or research initiatives
Research agenda shaped by professional and socio-political forces	Research agenda influenced directly by the concerns of many constituents, including the end-users of services

4 Rachel Pain, Geo Whitman and David Milledge (Durham University) & Lune Rivers Trust, Participatory Action Research Toolkit (http://communitylearningpartnership.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/PARtoolkit.pdf)

5 Excerpted from Rogers, E. & Palmer-Erbs, V. (1994). Participatory Action Research: Implications for research and evaluation in psychiatric rehabilitation. Psychosocial Rehabilitation Journal, 18(2), 3-12.

“I mean housing is number one, but in a way, it could link to mental physical health, because everyone's thinking about housing.

During the pandemic, the only place you had to see was your home. And so now people are thinking about their living spaces.

Now you're spending the majority of your time in your living space and people are coming back to the idea of homes and where they want to live.”

What do young people want from peer research?

When taking a peer research approach with young people, it is important to take account of the needs of those young people who are researchers. In a participatory process, Graham and Fitzgerald (2010) found that children and young people sought[6]:

1. **Respect as equals -** Respect as individuals who could make valuable contributions. Expectations of respect included having opportunities to make choices about participation, and having those choices respected.
2. **Genuine participation -** Genuine opportunities to participate and, through this, to generate change. Participation was linked to a clear purpose, for participants as well as for researchers.
3. **Access to information -** To make informed decisions both about and within research.
4. **Shared, not sole decision making -** Opportunities to engage in shared decision-making, rather than assuming responsibility for decision making.
5. **Working together -** Opportunities to engage in collective and collaborative processes.

Interviews from Young Londoners Fund: Peer Outreach Workers

What was the best thing about taking part in this project?

“I keep on getting what I came for, day in and day out. I came to pick up new skills and also refine the ones I had and have done that.”

“Having the opportunity to have meaningful conversations has allowed me to look inwards and change my entire outlook on life. The way we approach emotions, mental health and feelings here is unique. I feel more confident now.”

“I came to obtain work experience in the media industry and have done that by attending my very first shoot. I came to work with other passionate young people to generate ideas and have done that.”

“Going to work on different sets has been amazing and has helped me a lot with what I want to do in the industry.”

“Young people don’t feel listened to. But I did feel listened to here in the coaching and the content and that’s something i haven’t really felt before.”

6 Dorothy Bottrell, Sue Dockett, and Susan Groundwater-Smith, Participatory Research with Children and Young People, 2014 (https://methods.sagepub.com/book/participatory-research-with-children-and-young-people)

Interview with a peer researcher

I know that peer research is important, both as a working model and what it achieves. To be honest, it’s a no-brainer. It’s one of those things that once you’ve heard of it, you have got to ask why haven’t you been doing this in the first place?

I find it entirely unjustifiable not to be doing participatory work, in some way, whatever project you are undertaking. Not everything has to fit the criteria of being fully participatory, but some co-design must exist.

I think we’re in this place now, with people reading this report; if you’re not doing it, why? It’s not just that we believe this approach is good, but also that we think the alternative isn’t viable. How do you help people by telling them what’s wrong rather than involving them in the process of making things right?

Research in the sector can struggle to be authentic sometimes. Sometimes it’s done, without being rude, by the middle-class types who end up in the sector. I should know. I am one.

The sector often struggles to help because researchers may be sympathetic to an issue or cause but would never know what it feels like to have it affect them personally. That sometimes leads to their research focusing on finding a theme, a stark number, or a really fantastic quote from an interview rather than the reality of what is happening or structural issues.

Peer research injects some humanity into topics. Ultimately it makes research more honest. For better or worse, it is just a more honest reflection of the situation. As a peer research group, we have been much more open about where we are not representative of the area or the group we’re looking at because you’re already thinking about that as part of the peer research process. Peer research isn’t vain or prideful. The process is reflective of the reality of the world around it and owns its shortcomings.

If you’re going to study or look at a particular group that isn’t your own, you can’t look at it from a vantage point that you’re coolly removed from. This view only contributes to unequal power distribution. It’s vital that peer research addresses power imbalances and empowers young people.

If I didn’t participate in a peer research project, I wouldn’t have the skills to, and I wouldn’t have felt confident enough to do the research. I didn’t know a huge amount about the sector before I started. I feel like I’ve learnt loads through it, without even factoring in what the research uncovered. That’s the power of the process itself.

I’ve learnt about myself, about those around me, and the solidarity that comes with it amongst people. Peer research has the added benefit of young people engaging with their situation and looking at an issue from their own lived experience.

I hope that whoever reads this uses this report as a springboard to reflect on the power dynamics at play in their work. You might commission, undertake or analyse research in your job, but ask yourself where the participation is.

How are you including the communities you are studying in this work? If you can’t answer that, or that answer is that you’re not - frankly, the only thing I have to say is, what’s the point? I’m not one for slogans, but if you need one, it is this: “nothing about us, without us, is for us”.

Mikey
24 years old
Peer researcher with Toynbee Hall

10 Principles of peer research

The Institute of Community Studies have developed ten principles of peer research, in general, which organisations should bear in mind:

1. Peer research projects actively involve members of the researched community in the process of generating new knowledge about, or understanding of, their communities.
2. Peer research projects answer a genuine research question and seek to produce high quality findings.
3. Both professional researchers and peer researchers benefit from taking part and gain new perspectives to help strengthen their research practice.
4. Peer research projects strive to involve peer researchers in as many aspects of the research process as possible
5. Peer researchers are informed about the impact of their work and how the findings are being used.
6. Peer research is considered a research approach like any other, with limitations and biases that should be considered and controlled for.
7. Findings produced via peer research are made publicly available where possible with the results published in an open and accessible format for audiences including stakeholders and research participants.
8. Peer researchers are both adequately compensated and acknowledged in project results and publications, and they are actively involved in 'sharing out' findings.
9. Peer research programmes are evaluated for their research outputs, data quality, participant experience and wider societal or policy impact.
10. The leaders of peer research projects take into consideration legal and ethical issues surrounding copyright, intellectual property, data-sharing agreements, confidentiality, attribution and the impact of any activities on communities.

"I think it's really important that peer research is not an extractive approach. That's my problem with a lot of research, that generally with young people, it's extremely extractive.

People go in, they might do an interview or an interview or focus group. But more often than not, the person will go in, say: "Okay, what have you got to tell me?" They'll extract as much knowledge as possible. Say: "Thanks very much goodbye".

And then the person that has conducted the interview, gets all the credit, all the benefit, and the young people aren't left with much. The knowledge has been extracted from them, but they're not left with much really."

Why use peer research?

There are a range of benefits to using peer research with young people. These benefits can come into three key categories: the benefits to the young people, the benefits to the research quality, and the benefits to the organisation.

Benefits to young people

- **Employability –** Young people get work experience and have a project that they have been involved with from start to finish to put on their CVs.
- **Empowerment –** Young people are empowered to take control of the project, reducing the democratic deficit between 'service users' and those in decision makers.
- **Soft skills –** Young people, especially those who are involved in qualitative research, will improve their speaking and listening skills, as they work as a team to develop and execute a project.
- **Citizenship and government –** Young people get a better understanding of services, and potentially policy making when involved in campaigning and report dissemination.
- **Recognition –** Young people are recognised for their work, either through authorship, celebration of their contribution, or payment.

Outcomes for young people in peer research[7]

The Centre for Children and Young People's Participation looked at the outcomes for young people who were involved in peer research. They found outcomes in four key categories; knowledge and skills, emotional outcomes, personal development, and collective outcomes.

Category	Outcomes of peer research
Knowledge and skills	Enchanced knowledge of and access to decision making Research Skills Team work Specific knowledge on a topic Leadership, public speaking Technology and design
Educational outcomes	Improved academic/career outcomes Strengthening college applications Improvements in literacy
Personal development	Increase confidence and self-esteem Greater responsibility and independence Positive self-identity and sense of purpose Feeling valued Building new relationships
Collective outcomes	Empowerment and agency Making a positive difference Collective identity Developing an understanding of community and social issues

7 Adapted from The Centre for Children and Young People's Participation, peer research by Children and Young People and their allies, 2021 (http://clok.uclan.ac.uk/39353/25/39353%20REVISED%20Peer%20Research%20Lit%20Review%20FINAL%206.10.pdf%20)

Benefits for young people involved in peer research projects

The Centre for Children and Young People's Participation also reviewed a range of peer research projects, and have written up a list of common benefits for the young researcher involved:

- Increase interaction between young people;
- Build and enhance skills and knowledge;
- Improved academic skills;
- Independent learning skills;
- Building meaningful relationships and interpersonal skills;
- Greater self-awareness;
- Career achievement;
- Teamwork;
- Improved communication skills;
- The feeling of empowerment, a greater sense of agency and having confidence in their own views and perspectives;
- Develop an awareness of the importance of different perspectives;
- Develop critical civic empathy and cultural competencies and build and develop their own identities;
- Improve levels of confidence;
- Be activated and mobilised to lead on civic action;
- Breakdown stereotypes and preconceptions about young people;
- Elicit information from peers - which adults often cannot access – to build a better understanding of young people's needs;
- Enhance the quality of information and awareness raising of young people's needs; use evidence to further services improvements;
- Secure senior level buy-in;
- Function within transparent processes that have helped to reduce the risk of tokenism.

Benefits for the research quality

- **Better research design –** The research benefits from the lived experience of the young people, who can identify research issues and questions that practitioners may miss or not prioritise.
- **Accessibility –** The research tools (surveys, interview guides) will be worded in a language that is clear to young people, and in a way that will likely be more engaging.
- **Better data collection –** Data collection can be of a higher quality, with more open answers in interviews, because participants feel more at ease talking to a peer about certain topics.
- **Better data analysis –** Analysis of data, especially qualitative, can be improved with the perspectives of young people. They will identify relationships that those without the lived experience, for example of the local area, may not make.
- **Better identification of themes –** Peer researchers will have a different perspective, which can allow them to better explain or understand who may identify themes or issues that are not picked up by professionals.

Benefits to organisations

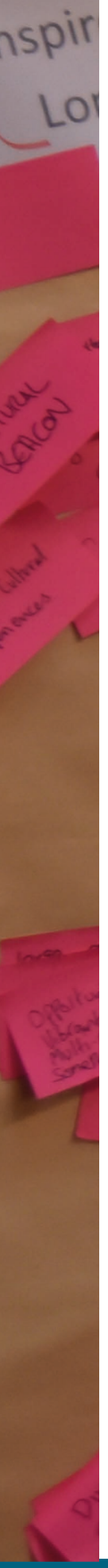
- **Accountability –** Organisations and practitioners are more accountable to young people, and those who might engage with their services, by supporting them to control the research.
- **Improved practice –** Organisations can improve services based on the research and the involvement of young people and embed their participation in decision making at the organisation.
- **Better relationships –** Organisations can improve their relationship with the young people and community that they work with, engaging them in a participatory project where both are equal partners.

"We find that young people are more interested, engaged, and excited. Young people share more interesting and valuable insights when everyone is working together to create a particular thing: It gives them more focus.

It gives people something they can be proud of at the end of it. They can say: we created this."

"There are always young people that don't always see it through. Their life is so complex that you have to have that flexibility. It requires a lot of time and resources. You have to go above and beyond to provide that support that young people need to have a good experience and for the right outputs to happen.

The challenge is finding the right balance of time and money."



Challenges with peer research[8]

There are a number of challenges when using peer research as an approach that organisations need to be clear about, and expect.

Challenges with young people

- **Young people's time is limited -** Young people also have limited time, and the peer research process can increase the time needed, and the budget needed. Relationships need to be built, training needs to be thorough, and decision making must be collaborative.
- **Disconnect between peer researchers –** Depending on the recruitment criteria, or the time allocated in the project for building relationships between peer researchers, there can be a disconnect between peer researchers. For example, if there is an age gap between peer researchers additional work will need to be done as younger members may feel less confident to contribute or take part.
- **Fluctuating participation –** Given how busy young people are, it can be difficult to have a consistent group of young researchers throughout a project. Continuity of a single group throughout is vital to promote cohesion, build trust, and ensure those who are involved with the work are there to reflect.
- **Unmanageable meetings –** A challenge, especially for projects with a larger number of peer researchers is how to conduct meetings and come to coalesce around a clear direction or decision. As the young researchers will have many decisions to make throughout the course of a project, it is important to agree a clear process for how decisions are reached and how discussions are held. Part of this is agreeing upon scheduled breaks, and refreshments.

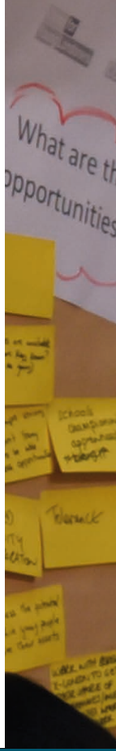
Challenges to the research

- **Issues with confidentiality –** Confidentiality and consent is vital in projects where young people are likely to research their peers and managing the various digital devices that data might be collected on can be challenging.
- **Peer research training may be inadequate –** Given time and budget constraints it can be difficult to provide adequate space and support for young people. Projects might want to involve experienced research professionals who can ensure research quality and identify areas of additional support.
- **Safeguarding and ethics –** Safeguarding and ethics in a research context are less well understood by organisations and can be hard to teach to young people posing risks during the fieldwork stage.

8 Danley KS, Ellison ML., A Handbook for Participatory Action Researchers. Implementation Science and Practice Advances Research Center Publications 1999. (https://escholarship.umassmed.edu/psych_cmhsr/470)

Challenges to the organisations[9]

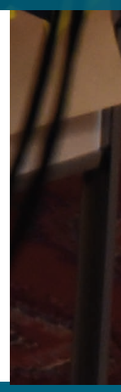
- **Difficult to plan or predict –** Given that young people are involved in decision making about what the project looks like and focuses on, it can be difficult plan or project. Mapping variables, and the different options that young people may choose can help, but a project where young people choose to do interviews looks very different to one where they want to do a survey, or both.
- **Change needs to be built in from the start –** Young people having ownership over the project is high risk and high reward and organisations should ensure that there is buy-in for the research from the start, and that opportunities to influence policy and practice is built in.
- **Building relationships with external partners –** Organisations may have to build additional relationships to expand access to young people from diverse backgrounds for recruitment, either as peer researchers or participants.
- **Training those involved –** The training provided to young people must be high quality and empower them to make meaningful decisions, and minimise risk to them and participants.



"A lot of them acknowledge the email, but they don't respond. So, you have to email them, especially when you're sending attachments, and then message the WhatsApp group to say, "We sent you this email with this attachment. Please read it before you come to this meeting." We don't just leave things. We don't just email someone and just leave it at that.

Communication needs to be constant because they get so much information thrown at them, at school, from the parents, or whatever sports club they might be part of. If you're not sort of reiterating what needs to be done, sometimes you can forget."

"Timing was important to get a good contribution from them. After they went back to school, they had to commute back home, get something to eat, get changed out of the school uniform, and just get comfortable. Just relax for a bit before logging on. So, most of our meetings now start at five/just after five. That's one of the key things in which to sort of get young people involved."



9 Partnership for Young London, Involving Young Londoners: A review of participatory approaches in the youth sector, 2020 (https://www.partnershipforyounglondon.org.uk/post/involving-young-londoners-a-review-of-participatory-approaches-in-the-youth-sector)

Participatory research structure

The following is a rough programme structure, set out in chronological order. It breaks down potential phases in the project, what should happen and what training should be provided at each phase.

Phase	Details
Project set up	Organisation to decide on recruitment criteria for peer researchers, with an aim of recruiting young people with the relevant lived experience. Agreeing budgets and timescales and having a clear understanding of how many hours young people recruited can work and how they will be remunerated
Recruitment phase	Recruit group of peer researchers using the recruitment criteria selected.
Project plan	Peer researchers to decide on how the project proceeds: when to meet how to meet how to communicate with each other and what are the different roles and responsibilities. Peer researchers are introduced to the project approach and begin to build relationships with each other and professionals. Training: Introduction to peer research – Young people are introduced to peer research, in the context of the project, and understand what the approach means. They are also given an overview into research, and why it is important.
Identifying a research or evaluation aim	Peer researchers to decide on a research question, which they will want the project to answer. Peer researchers will better understand the context they are working in, and the data and issues at hand. Training: Setting the research aim – Peer researchers will learn what a research question is, why it is important, and be supported to develop their own potential research questions. They will be provided with additional data and knowledge around the issues they want to explore, and ultimately decide on a research aim.
Identifying the approach	Peer researchers to decide on how they want to conduct research, specifically which research tools they want to use. Peer researchers are taught about research methodology, and a range of tools, to make informed decisions about what they want to do. Training: Research approaches – Peer researchers will learn different approaches to research; qualitative and quantitative, and the strengths and weaknesses of both in relation to their chosen research question. They will then decide on how they want to research their question.
Designing the research tools	Peer researchers to design their chosen research tools, creating interview guides, or survey questions in collaboration with professionals. Peer researchers are taught how to conduct their chosen research methods and do practical exercises around them. Training: Research tools – Peer researchers learn how to carry out their chosen research tools: from practicing in-depth interviews to understanding the basics of survey design. They will use these skills to develop up research tools.
Carrying out the research	Peer researchers to conduct research with their peers, supported by professionals, using the approaches and tools they have chosen and designed. Training: Reflection sessions – Peer researchers will reflect on their progress, and the efficacy of their research tools. This is a chance to improve practice through reflective learning, and collaboratively problem solve as issues are identified.
Conducting the analysis	Peer researchers to conduct analysis on the data that they have collected identifying key findings and themes. They are supported to create an answer to their initial research question. Peer researchers are taught about data analysis, preparation, and analysis of data. Training: How to analyse data – Young people are taught how data they have collected is prepared (transcription for example) and how data is analysed. They are supported to conduct data analysis themselves and co-create the key findings of the research.
Research write up	Peer researchers to decide how they want to communicate the findings of the research and how they want to contribute to this. Training: How to present findings – Young people are provided skills and training corresponding to how they want to contribute to the report dissemination, such as writing skills.
Campaign and comms	Peer researchers to decide how they want to disseminate the findings of the research, and identify opportunities for campaigning and influencing. Training: Public speaking and campaigning – Young people are taught about power, influence, and public speaking. This will assist them to creating a campaign around the findings of the research.

Simplified project structure for young people

Once you have mapped out a detailed project structure it should be adapted to a simplified project structure that can be shared with young people. It is important, from the start, to have a clear programme and structure to communicate to young people, to set expectations and take feedback on.

1. **Introduction to project**
    - Food food food
    - Recruitment opportunity
2. **Qualitative research (internal phase i.e with peer researchers)**
    - Focus group or interview with peer researchers on the subject
3. **Process design**
    - Is this a research project?
    - Is this a social action project?
4. **Setting the aims and the objectives**
    - What does success look like?
    - What skills and training do they want?
5. **Designing the evaluation aims**
    - How should we evaluate this project?
    - Who, and how often, should we evaluate?
6. **Deciding on the methodology**
    - Qualitative or quantitative?
    - Begin to assign roles for project
7. **Designing the methodology**
    - Interview guides
    - Survey questions
8. **Understanding and designing ethics**
    - Consent forms
9. **Conducting the fieldwork**
    - Co-running focus groups
    - Training them to do chosen methodology
10. **Conducting the analysis**
    - Content and thematic analysis
    - Provide quantitative analysis summary
11. **Supporting the writing of the report**
    - Introductions, insights
12. **Campaigning on the findings**
    - Talking at roundtables or events

“My advice for organisations who are starting this is: do not be afraid for it to be messy. I think a lot of people get so worried they get hung up on a lot of the safeguarding considerations and are too concerned with how to do it well, that they paralyse themselves into not doing it at all.

As long as you can say, Oh, stuff is going to go wrong, we're going to make mistakes, someone might have a bit of a rubbish meeting. It’s about responding to that, learning from it, adapting, quickly responding to feedback. Embracing the fact that it is going to be a bit chaotic sometimes. And that's okay."

2. Recruitment & renumeration

What is a peer?

How do we recruit young people?

How do we pay young people?

What is an example budget?

Who is a peer?

“Personal knowledge about the world gained through direct, first-hand involvement in everyday events rather than through representations constructed by other people.”[10]

Young people should be recruited to take part in peer research based on their lived experience. There are various layers to this lived experience, which can track to aspects of severe and multiple disadvantage or the protected characteristics.

Protected characteristics*	Geographical placement	Some examples of severe and multiple disadvantage**
Age	Country	Housing difficulties or homelessness
Disability	County	Mental health disorders
Gender reassignment	Town/City	Chronic medical conditions
Marriage or civil partnership	City	Emotional regulation difficulties
Pregnancy or maternity	Postcode	Substance misuse
Race	Borough	Involvement with criminal justice system
Religion or belief	Ward	Involvement with social care system
Sex	Estate or street	Reported loss of family members or bereavement
Sexual orientation	Other defined space that is commonly understood	Experience of poverty

"We’re obviously trying to get young people with the lived experience. But sometimes, depending on the topic, it's difficult to get in touch with those young people.

Young people who have been involved in knife crime won't necessarily be part of these youth programmes."

10 Oxford Reference (https://www.oxfordreference.com/view/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100109997

* Taken from the Equality and Human Rights Commission, Protected Characteristics (https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/equality-act/protected-characteristics)

** Adapted from "Defining severe and multiple disadvantage from the inside: Perspectives of young people and of their support workers", Rebecca D. Sandu (https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/jcop.22572)

Lived experience

Given how complex the experiences of every young person are, defining a ‘peer’ as simply a young person can be limiting. As within the group of peer researchers, it will not be possible to capture the full range of lived experiences of young people.

The more layers of shared experience the peer researchers have, the more detailed and specific research can be, and the more expertise they can bring to the project. For example:

Specificity ↓

1. Under 25s with experience of homelessness.
2. Under 25s, who live in Lambeth, with experience of homelessness.
3. Young people aged 16-17 who live in Lambeth, with experience of homelessness.
4. Young people aged 16-17 who live in Lambeth, from the Bangladeshi community, with experience of homelessness.

Lived experience and research aims

The lived experience necessary for a peer research project depends on the aims of the research. A diversity of experience is important, especially if you want to bring in a range of perspectives. For example:

- Projects which focus on a specific service or programme would ideally have young people with no experience of the service as well as experience of it.
- Projects which focus on a specific space or place, such as a borough, will want a full range of diversity and lived experience of young people who live there.
- Projects which focus on a combination of characteristics, for example young women, may want to seek a diversity with ethnicity or geography.

There should be a balance between shared lived experience and a diversity of experience when recruiting peer researchers.

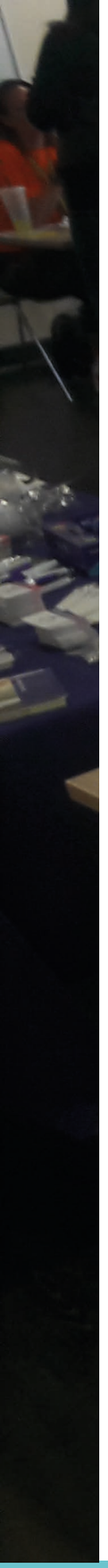
- Too broad of a definition of a ‘peer’ and it will limit the expertise and knowledge that they can potentially bring to a project.
- Too narrow of a definition of a ‘peer’ and it will limit the diversity of lived experience and knowledge they can potentially bring to a project.

However, there should just be honesty from projects about the lack of representation from peer researchers, rather than asserting that a group of young people represent more than they do.

“One of the biggest limitations we have is making sure we've got a 'representative group of people' involved in it.

I see it as chasing an impossible goal, because inevitably, the way that research works is that it's difficult to have that kind of representative group.

As long as you're aware that it's not representative, there are ways around that.”



Stacking the deck

Recruitment, and specifically how a project decides which young people take part, will heavily influence what the project will look like.

Before young people are even recruited to participate and make decisions about the project, practitioners have an opportunity to influence the decisions made (or 'stack the deck') by the young people they choose to be involved. For example:

- Recruiting a group of young people with lived experience of serious youth violence will increase the likelihood that there will be a focus on youth violence.
- Recruiting a group of young people from a borough from a specific ethnicity will likely the increase likelihood that there will be a focus on discrimination.

Young people with specific lived experiences focusing on the issues that are more relevant to their lives is to be expected and is a strength if it matches with the focus of the project.

Types of recruitment

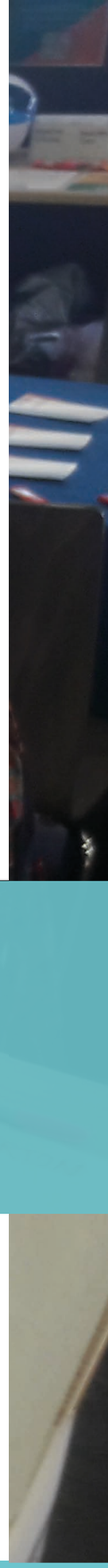
There are different approaches to recruitment that an organisation can take, and which you take as an organisation will depend on your access to networks to young people and the relationships that you have.

Type	Advantages	Disadvantages
Self-referral	Young people are more likely to be engaged from the start, as they have chosen to take part. It is important that some aspect of recruitment be in physical spaces or consider digital access issues. Quickest form of recruitment, as adverts can be disseminated widely through networks.	Harder to control the type of young people who are recruited, as you are relying on them to come to you. May end up with candidates who are already interested. Far more reliant on the quality of the advert and the offer for young people to come to you.
Referral	Getting other organisations to refer young people can be very quick. Improves buy in when referred by someone with trusted relationship. Referrals can more accurately target young people who would benefit from the process. Referrals can be easier for safeguarding or accessing support.	Gatekeeping for recruitment, if you are reliant on other organisations for recruitment. Harder to control diversity of experiences, with snowballing recruitment. You can miss out on young people as a result of referrals.
Normal job recruitment	Young people are more likely to be engaged from the start as they have chosen to take part. It is important that some aspect of recruitment be in physical spaces or consider digital access issues. Quickest form of recruitment, as adverts can be disseminated widely through networks.	Harder to control the type of young people who are recruited, as you are relying on them to come to you. May end up with candidates who are already interested. Far more reliant on the quality of the advert and the offer for young people to come to you.
Mixed recruitment	Getting other organisations to refer young people can be very quick. Improves buy in when referred by someone with trusted relationship. Referrals can more accurately target young people who would benefit from the process. Referrals can be easier for safeguarding or accessing support.	Gatekeeping for recruitment, if you are reliant on other organisations for recruitment. Harder to control diversity of experiences, with snowballing recruitment. You can miss out on young people as a result of referrals.

"We weren't getting enough people.

One or two people were specifically targeted and contacted by us because of their experience and what we already know about them. We contacted them about this opportunity and asked whether they were interested. And they said yes.

Out of the seven, two people were targeted, and the others just applied because they saw it in the newsletter."



Young Londoners Fund Case Study on recruitment and renumeration: Peer Outreach Workers

The Peer Outreach Workers (POWs) are a group of young people from across London that help influence the Mayor's policies. The POWs are made up of 30 young Londoners aged 15-25 from diverse backgrounds and life experiences. They are commissioned by the Mayor to engage, inspire and gather the opinions of other young people in the capital. Their work helps shape the London governments policies, strategies and services.

What are the (personal/material) drives for young people to participate in the POW team?

To gain further life experiences. Young people join because they have a passion for change or politics and are ready to involve or engage themselves with people that can make a difference to our city. We have also built a very strong referral route through youth offending teams and mental health providers. The youth engagement team at the GLA make sure young people know that the team are very inclusive, and that young people get to have the individual choice to be part of the POWs.

How were young people recruited for the team? (Self-referrals, referrals, open recruitment)

We follow a process with any young people who contact us regarding places on the team. We communicate with them and discuss questions around interests and availability so that we can be sure that joining the team is right for them. Sometimes this will also mean conversations with their key worker etc. If the team is right for them they will then be invited for an interview but by this stage they will already almost certainly be offered a place.

The Young Londoners Participation Network which has 400 members that the POWs run and manage is key. We send regular bulletins to the network and quarterly meetings are chaired by the POWs. Our network events show the team in action and this get the interest from practitioners and young people. The team also stay in contact with charities and external organisations for recruitment pathways. External organisations see how good the quality of the POWs role is and then the referrals come in.

How do you retain young people on your projects? Any particular methods?

Providing good quality opportunities. We receive a vast array of opportunities, so POWs get to grow as a person and professionally. We know they may make mistakes. But we cultivate chances to learn and shape policies and see the difference they make as an individual. They receive a chance to be someone that makes a difference and get to be acknowledged for the work they are doing. We make sure to work with each young person. We find out what they need and we always recognise they have different life experiences.

Do you remunerate young people for being involved?

Yes, young people get paid, there is a value put on the time they give. It gives them employment experience not just volunteering. With this we can be quite firm in what you expect from the role. We also want to give young people a longer opportunity, so they often stay with us for a few years and have a chance to grow in the process.

What outcomes do you look at?

Finding and being yourself is a big outcome. e.g. your label is Care Leaver but now your label is Event Manager. Young people graduate in their own time and when they are ready which gives young people a sense of empowerment. We also collate what they go on to do next.

Paying young people as peer researchers

There is an ongoing debate about young people being paid as part of being peer researchers, on how much they should be paid, if at all, and when they should be paid. In our previous review, Involving Young Londoners, we found that only half of the peer research projects we spoke to paid £10 an hour or above. Payment to young people can often be on an ad hoc basis rather than based on an established hourly wage structure.

However, it is vital that young people are paid for two key reasons:

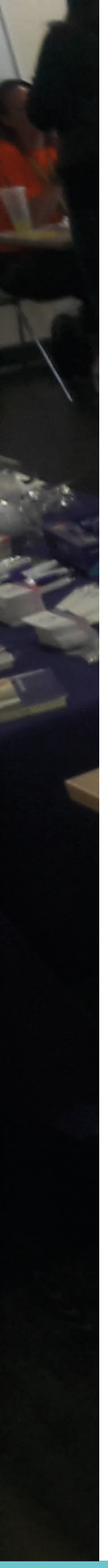
- **Equity:** Monetary payment for their participation is important to balance the power relationship between them and the paid staff they are working with as it is unfair to ask them to work for free when other members of the research team are paid.[11]
- **Perpetuates socio-economic disadvantage:** Many young people from marginalised communities already face socio-economic discrimination and there is a danger that young people are engaged as 'experts by experience' and have their identities commodified all while being precariously employed or expected to volunteer by a cost effective approach to peer research.[12]

Of course, you can have the discussion around payment with young people, but we do not advise making it a decision they make. If young people decide that they do not want to be paid, it should still be the role of an organisation to remunerate them.

Type	Advantages	Disadvantages
Cash - Young people are paid directly in cash in-person.	Direct and easy to track through paper forms. The most convenient for the young people.	Not advisable to send a young person off with cash. Less convenient in a world of digital purchases. This is seen as a payment by HMRC, should be reported, and will impact on benefits.
Bank payment – Payments go to young people's bank account.	More convenient for the young people. Young people are paid the same way staff are.	Potentially additional administration needed by organisation to send payments. Can be flagged and impact on benefits.
Cash vouchers – Young people are paid with gift vouchers.	Not likely to impact on benefits, not as clear cut about whether they should be reported. Easy to administer and can be delivered digitally or physically. Certain gift vouchers can be redeemed in a majority of shops.	Can be less clear when providing hourly payment (usually comes in multiples of five). Can symbolicly feel patronising not as serious as being paid in cash or bank transfer.

11 Hamilton, S. (2009) 'Money', in Wallcraft, J., Schrank, B. and Amering, M. (eds), Handbook of Service User Involvement in Mental Health Research, New York, John Wiley & Sons, pp. 213–26.

12 Voronka J. (2017) ' Turning mad knowledge into affective labor: The case of the peer support worker', American Quarterly, 69(2), pp. 333–8. Google Scholar



Renumeration structures

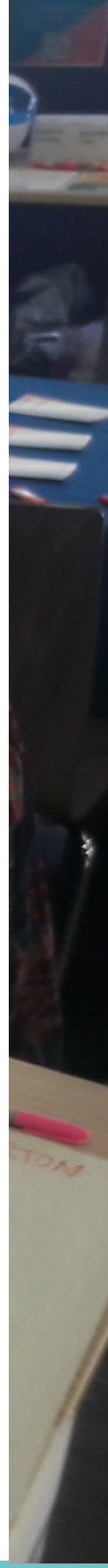
Once you have decided if the peer researchers will be remunerated financially and the payment method you will need to budget for when and for what you pay them for.

Type	Details	Advantages	Disadvantages
Self-referral	Young people are not paid for their participation in the project and are full voluntary.	Low cost to organisations, allows for more contact time. Some organisations report that young people who participate voluntarily are more engaged, motivated by change and not the financial incentive.	Creates a power imbalance, where the young people are not being remunerated for the time, experiences, and knowledge. Potentially unethical and exploitative; using young people as free labour. Reduces access to those who can't afford to participate.
Rewards for participation	Young people are 'rewarded' for their participation once, or throughout the project.	Lower cost to organisations, allows for more contact time. Lower admin of renumerations, as hours and time does not need to be tracked. Rewards more typically done through vouchers, which can be more straightforward than direct payments.	Not being paid per hours worked still creates an imbalance, where they are not equal to paid staff. Depending on reward structure it can amount to less than minimum wage when calculated as an hourly wage.
Hourly wage as paid researchers reassignment	Young people are paid based on the hours that they work. Either for everything, or just the fieldwork.	Creates the most equality between the young peer researchers and the paid members of staff. Can increase commitment and engagement of peer researchers as payment comes with obligations and expectations.	Most expensive approach which can lead to less time to conduct research or provide training. Hourly wages can mean more administration as hours need to be logged and payment needs to come out regularly. Can be tricky too for organisations to do direct payments rather than vouchers.

Costs and expenses as part of peer research project

As well as paying young people for their work on a peer research project there are also additional costs that organisations should keep in mind.

Potential costs for young people	Potential costs for the project
• Travel expenses for peer researchers. • Childcare expenses for peer researchers. • Phone expenses for peer researchers. • Stationary for peer researchers (pens, bags, notebooks). • Lunches for peer researchers on workshop and fieldwork days. • Drinks and snacks for peer researchers on workshop and fieldwork days.	• Qualitative research incentives (vouchers for focus group participation). • Quantitative research incentives (prize fund for surveys, advertising). • Qualitative research costs (transcription, voice recording equipment, materials). • Quantitative research costs (survey platform like SurveyMonkey subscription). • Travel costs for practitioners to support young people doing fieldwork. • Venue hire for recruitment, or report launch, event.



Example budget for a peer research project

Peer research can be difficult to budget for as it will depend on what decisions the young people make over the research process. Below is an example budget for a peer research project with notes that attempt to price in the unexpected costs across three expenses:

Cost	Description	Pricing
Payment for peer	**Minimum** Five peer researchers will be paid £10 an hour. We expect there to be five sessions, lasting two hours each in the core modules. **To be decided** We will also provide young people an option to choose what they want to learn, over two additional sessions, lasting two hours each.	**Minimum** Five peer researchers at £10 an hour, for five sessions lasting two hours = £500 **To be decided** Five peer researchers at £10 an hour, for two sessions lasting two hours = £200
Training costs	**Minimum** There will be five modules at core: deciding a focus, deciding an approach, training in that approach, fieldwork reflection, data analysis **To be decided** We have a range of external trainers who can cover: public speaking, campaigning, vlogging and filmmaking, photography, and leadership training.	**Minimum** Five modules, trainer costs £200 a session = £1000 **To be decided** Budget to be allocated = £500 Which should allow for one, to two extra training sessions based on what they want to learn.
Fieldwork costs	**Minimum** We expect there to be at least a survey and interviews to be conducted as part of this work. **To be decided** We are training young people in a range of different research methods and expect them to decide on a creative approach too.	**Minimum** Survey costs = £3000, interview costs = £1000 **To be decided** An extra £1000 to be allocated, either to be collapsed back into chosen methods, or to fund additional method.

"There are some issues collecting interviews because the peer researchers are finding it really hard to find people who want to be interviewed.

They are hoping that we could give them - the people who they interview - an incentive to do that, so like a voucher but that is not what many funders would do.

We have to come up with how to do that and go back to the funder and ask, 'If you want the data, we have to give the interviewees [something]' because as I said before, 'why would I give you my time if I don't know why I'm doing this?'"

"A lot of that is about pushing for this recognition of lived experience having real expertise, having real value.

It's about supporting young people to realise that and understand that they've got a lot of power and a lot of expertise and knowledge that is valuable.

But also trying to convince decision makers and structures that haven't really valued that expertise in the past to recognise it in a way they haven't before."

3. Decision making & training

What decisions are there to make?

What does training look like?

What additional support is needed?

How do we co-design an aim?

An overview of young researcher decision making

It is useful at the start to map all the different decisions that need to be made throughout the course of the project. There are three types of decisions throughout a participatory project:

1. **Decisions out of your control –** These are decisions that have already been made, usually by external forces, such as the requirements of the grant.
2. **Decisions for you as an organisation –** These are decisions that you as an organisation will make about the project before young people are involved. For example, budgets.
3. **Decisions to be made by the young people –** These are the decisions that will shape the design and execution of the project that the young people involved with make.

Below are some initial questions to be posed around the research process, adapted from Gubrium and Harper's (2013)[13] book on participation. It is a good starting point to think about the different decisions to be made throughout the different stages:

Research process	Collaboration/participation
Research design, development and planning	• Who plans/designs the research? • What questions are investigated? • Who decides these? • Are research questions developed collaboratively? • How does research as a practice, reflect collective action? • What opportunities are there for capacity building, to enable children and young people to participate in the research in multiple ways?
Data generation	• Who generates data? • Who participates? • What processes promote opportunities for participation?
Data analysis	• How are participants involved in discussion and analysis of the data? • How is this facilitated? • For example, is there opportunity for the participatory editing of visual and/or verbal texts?
Dissemination and reporting	• Are there opportunities to develop multiple research products, with multiple research authors, designed for multiple audiences? • Who makes decisions about audiences and outcomes? • Is reporting regarding as an opportunity to gauge the impact of research?

13 Aline Gubrium and Amherst Krista Harper, Participatory Visual and Digital Methods, 2014 (https://www.routledge.com/Participatory-Visual-and-Digital-Methods/Gubrium-Harper/p/book/9781598744897)

Organisational vs youth-led decision making

Peer research is about equity with young researchers but not total independent control and decision making by them. Decisions need to be made together and aspects of the process should be co-designed.

Having an understanding in your project about what decisions the organisation will make versus the decisions the young people will make is important. Communicating this mapping with young researchers provide them an opportunity to challenge your decisions and assumptions and increase transparency in the process.

Below is an example where decisions have been mapped out between an organisation and young people using the 'Five Ws' – Who, What, When, Where, and Why:

Cost	Description	Pricing
Who	Typically, organisations need to decide about who the research wants to speak to. This will allow the organisation to recruit peer researchers with the relevant lived experience.	Young people can use their knowledge, local or otherwise, to make decisions about who they speak to within the scope of the research project using their own lived experience.
What	Organisations often have a view on what the research should focus on and provide advice and experience but should not make the decision for the peer researchers.	Young people should be in the driving seat when deciding what the research project should be about. They should be making the decisions, not the organisation.
When	Organisations often have project plans and budgets that mean work has to take place at certain times. However, whatever flexibility there is should be handed to the peer researchers to make decisions about.	Young people should decide when engagement, training or meetings, should happen to suit them best.
Where	Organisations with a range of contacts can provide this to young people to make decisions about which they want to reach out to or prioritise. Often organisations will know more about local, or regional, infrastructure and can provide opportunities for research for the peer researchers.	Young people should support organisations in thinking about spaces and places to conduct research in. Their lived experience of the subject will provide them with valuable knowledge of where would be most suitable. They will also have relationships and contacts with spaces that might not be know to the organisation.
Why	The initial why of 'Why this group?' or 'Why this project?', has to be created by the organisation. The organisation should bring in their expertise, from research or evaluation data, about why they think the project is important and communicate this to the young people.	Young people once recruited will have to think about why they have chosen to look at the issue that they have decided to look at.

"Being clear about the scope of decision making and scope of what's happening is important. I think everyone, including young people, respond well to that.

Because what you're saying is: in this sphere we want you to take a lead and we'll listen to you and we will act on what you're saying.

But there are other things around here: health and safety, legal requirements, that are not things that we can override. They are not things that I can change any more than you can change. So, let's be just clear about where we can influence, challenge and change and where we can't. That's another example of power sharing: transparency. Transparency is so important."

A timeline of decision making for the young people

Once the decisions that need to be made have been mapped out, it is useful to plan the order of which they will be made. Especially those decisions made by young people for two key reasons:

- **Ensuring participation -** This allows you to review the extent to which the project is participatory, by mapping the exact decisions that they will make. This can often reveal imbalances in process decisions, wherein the decisions the young people make are more frequent in certain phases of the process than others (i.e lots of say about how to research, but not what to research).
- **Increased transparency -** It also serves as a document, or agreement, that can be shared with peer researchers at the start of their involvement to set an expectation about their involvement.

Project phase	Decisions to be made by young people
Week 1 – Project set up	• How do they want us to communicate with them, and each other (WhatsApp, email, phone)? • How do they want to meet and how often about the project? • What skills do they want to learn, and what is their input on the training that is scheduled?
Week 2 – Aims setting	• What is the aim of the research? • Who do we want to speak to as part of this research?
Week 3 - Methodology	• What research methods do we want to use (surveys, focus groups, interviews)? • What do our research methods look like? (Co-designing surveys, interview guides)
Week 4 – Fieldwork	• Where do you want to go to speak to people, or collect surveys? • What support would you like when conducting fieldwork?
Week 5 – Analysis	• What are the key findings from the research? What are the key themes from the research? • What do you want the report to look like? • How do you want to contribute to the writing, or design, of the final report?
Week 6 –	• Where should we publicise the report? • Who do you want to speak to about the findings? • Do we have a launch event? What does that look like?

Young Londoners Fund case study on decision making & training: Refugee Education UK

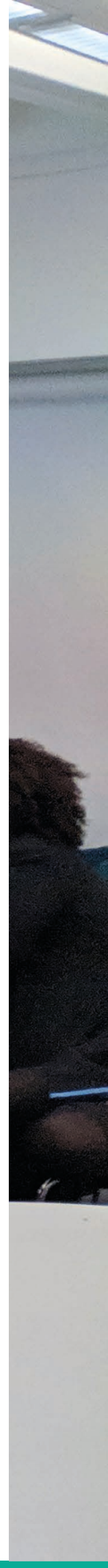
Refugee Education UK are funded by the Young Londoners Fund (YLF) to support young asylum seekers, refugees and survivors of trafficking by providing educational mentoring as well as intensive casework and bespoke support. The organisation felt that co-producing their YLF project's theory of change (TOC) with young people was crucial.

Refugee Education's Safeguarding Lead invited young people on their YLF project to input and feedback on an initial draft of the TOC. One young person then took a leading role on looking at the outcomes and mechanisms of change. He decided that underpinning all the outcomes, there should be a separate outcome on self-esteem/believing in oneself. This was taken on board and influenced the broader TOC approach and strategy.

The young person suggested an additional mechanism of change linked to trust and having a consistent supportive relationship. This was not previously considered by the project team leads. The idea was filtered into the strategy going forwards. Ideas were then taken to the Youth Advisory Board to sense check and finalise the TOC.

Refugee Education UK recognise that a TOC shouldn't be static as the needs of young people change. They suggest keeping curious about what you're seeing and asking questions like: 'Does what worked two years ago still work? Do our systems work the same? How do we respond to them?'

Using the dual method of youth board session feedback and giving one young person a lead role in co-production helped centre their project around young people's views



Training peer researchers

The most important aspect to the success to a peer research project is the time reserved to training the young people in research and campaigning. Research is not an easy thing to do and the involvement of young people will not make the research quality better without adequate support and learning.

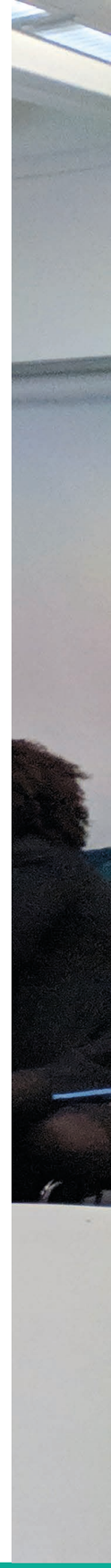
Strengths of a robust training programme	Aspects to be aware in training design
Outcomes for young people Training will provide research skills and improve soft skills for the young people involved. Young people may have skills that they want to learn and, if possible, you should tailor training to provide this. Ideally you want to co-design an evaluation process with young people, that they find engaging, and helps focus on the learning they should be getting out of it.	**Adequate time for training** To achieve these outcomes for young people, adequate amount of time needs to be provided for training. Training needs to be meaningful and aim to empower young people to make meaningful decisions about the process rather than train them to conduct the work.
Empowered decision making Young people should receive appropriate training at every point where they are expected to make decisions to ensure informed decision making. Participatory approaches do not work if the young people are not adequately informed of the different options, and their strength and weaknesses.	**Training can be staggered, or upfront** Training should be directly linked to the practice decisions that young people will make as part of the project. As such, training should be staggered, and learning should take place throughout the project. Front loading learning can be overwhelming otherwise.
Power balance Teaching young people research skills reduces the imbalance of power between them as professionals, allowing for more challenges or accountability. Training should teach young people the key aspects of research even the areas that are more often seen as the reserve of professionals; like ethics, safeguarding, evaluation, analysis.	**Ensure that young people have the right equipment** Part of the readdressing the power imbalance is making sure that young people have access to the materials and equipment that they need; paper, pens, recording devices, and a secure means to send data collected. It is also an opportunity to create a sense of collective identity, through lanyards, staff badges, or uniforms.
Better research Conducting research, like focus groups, is not easy, and young people need to be supported to learn these skills, which will in turn make the quality of data collection far greater. Ensuring that there is not only training for the research methods they have chosen, but also reflection and reviewing of fieldwork as it happens, to make sure that young people are learning from practice.	**Training should have practical exercises, not just theory around research** Training programmes should have the space to allow young people to apply learning in hands on exercises. This might mean interviewing each other, taking part in mock focus groups, or having the opportunity to design research methods in hypothetical research projects.

Example participatory action research training programme

The training provided for young people will change depending on the scope of the project, and the skills that young people say they want to learn. There will be basic modules though that can be planned for, based around the research process: what is peer research, setting aims and research questions, methods, training in those methods, fieldwork training, data analysis, and campaigning.

However, given that young researchers are expected to make informed decisions about the research process, it is worth matching up training and decision making. At each stage of the research young people learn and gain skills then apply what they have learnt to make a meaningful decision that will alter the future direction of the work. In the example below, we chart how training should be linked to decision making:

Training	Skills gained	Decision to be made
What is peer research?	Understanding of what research is and why it is important to creating change Explore the concept of lived experience, and peer research.	How often, where, and when do they want to meet? How do they want to communicate? What skills, and training, do they want to receive?
Research aims and questions	Understanding of what a research question is and how to generate one. Explore the issue or topic at hand, with data and examples.	What do you want this project to be? What is the question we're trying to answer as part of this project?
Research methods	Understanding the difference between qualitative and quantitative research. Learn about the different approaches to research and data collection, and their strength and weaknesses.	How do you want to collect data in this project? Focus groups? Surveys? Creative approaches? Who do we want to speak to and where?
Methods training	Understand how to effectively design chosen research methods (like surveys). Practice how to conduct effective fieldwork and collect data (interviews).	What questions do we want to ask on the survey or in the interviews? How do we ensure we speak to who we need to speak to?
Fieldwork training	A check in session at different stages of the fieldwork, to reflect on how practice can be improved.	How have the questions and research methods worked so far and what needs to be improved?
Analysis training	Understanding of how we analyse data in research, both qualitative and quantitatively. Practice research methods, like creating transcripts and thematically coding.	What are the key findings of the research? What are the key themes of the project? What are the recommendations, i.e. what do we want to see changed based on the evidence?
Campaign and public speaking	Understanding of how campaigning works and how social change can be achieved through research and policy. Practice public speaking.	What does a campaign based on the research look like? Who do you want to speak to and what do you want to say to them?



Additional support and training examples

Alongside core modules around research and the research process, the success of a peer research project revolves around building in time and training in four key areas: relationship building, teamwork skills, knowledge building, and reflection.

Support	Examples	Impact
Relationship building	**Sharing food –** Build in opportunities, during workshop days or outside of it for young researchers to eat together and build a sense of community. **Ice breakers –** Important to start with icebreakers to build up trust at the start of every session. **Communication –** Shared communication on familiar platforms like WhatsApp (if they want) can help build relationships.	Building a sense of community is vital to the success of a peer research project. One of the most long-term outcomes can be the lasting friendships made during the project. Additionally, it can drive up engagement, and reduce the dropout rate.
Teamwork skills	**Residential days –** For larger projects, a residential trip or opportunity to do something together that isn't part of the project is great. **Group work –** Ideally having enough young researchers will allow you to run more workshop exercises in two groups, with competition elements. **Roles and pairing –** Young researchers can be paired together for certain aspects, such as running focus groups, to support each other.	Research can be difficult and young researchers need to support each other. They will have different skills and must work together to achieve their goals.
Knowledge building	**Literature review –** Providing a literature review or data for young people to go through can give them context to their project. **Employment and soft skills –** Linking research skills and data collection to the soft skills that young people develop is important at keeping track of young people's knowledge and skills. **Exploration of their interests –** Organisations should support young people to learn more about a subject or aspect of a topic and follow their own line of enquiry.	Young people are expected to make decisions about what the research focuses on and the research question. As such, they need to be supported to build their knowledge around the issue. However, there is a fine balance between empowering them to make informed decisions and professionalisation.
Reflection	**Debrief sessions –** Either individually or as a group time should be given to debrief and reflect with young researchers at different stages. **Reflection exercises –** There are a range of exercises that can be used with young people to help them reflect on their progress and the progress of the project.	Young people can often be expected to learn a lot and make a lot of decisions. Frequent reflection is important, to solidify learning and create space to reflect on peer researchers mental health and wellbeing,

The Young Foundation: Level 2 Award in peer research

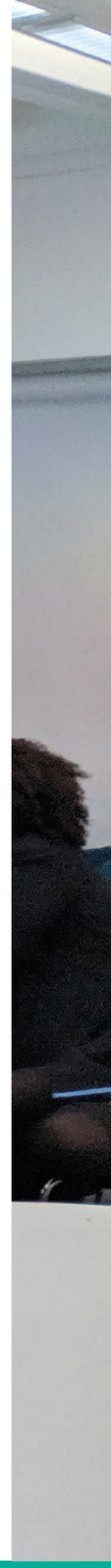
The Young Foundation has released a new qualification, accredited by the Northern Council for Further Education (NCFE)*. It is a Level 2 Award, comprising three compulsory units and one of three optional units. These modules allow learners to demonstrate their understanding and application of core components of the research process in their peer research role. It covers both technical skills and knowledge as well as personal skills.

It is designed to be a highly accessible qualification with learners able to demonstrate how they have met the learning outcomes primarily through a portfolio of evidence gathered through their everyday work as a peer researcher.

For more information, please go to: https://www.youngfoundation.org/peer-research-network/

Unit	Learning outcome
Compulsory: Fudamentals of research	**Learners will be able to:** • describe different research methods, including what peer research is and how it differs from other methods. **They will also be able to demonstrate that:** • they can recruit appropriate participants for a peer research project; • are able to use appropriate technology or software to support their research; and • can effectively manage their role in a research project.
Compulsory: Research integrity	**Learners will demonstrate they:** • can carry out research fieldwork in line with ethical guidelines; • store data in line with data protection laws; and • can recognise and respond appropriately to safeguarding issues.
Compulsory: Research analysis & communication	**Learners will be able to demonstrate:** • how they contributed to the analysis process of a peer research project; • they can design an appropriate way of sharing research findings; and • they are able to critically reflect on their research.
Optional: Research interviewing	**Learners will be able be to demonstrate how they:** • minimise bias in the interview process; • use core listening and questioning skills; • are able to handle interviews on sensitive topics.
Optional: Research focus groups	**Learners will be able be to demonstrate how they:** • minimise bias in the interview process; • use core listening and questioning skills; • are able to handle interviews on sensitive topics; • use essential group facilitation skills.
Optional: Creative methods in research	**Learners will be able be to:** • describe creative research methods and their relative pros and cons; • minimise bias in the interview process; • use core listening and questioning skills; and • are able to handle interviews on sensitive topics.

* The qualification has been developed to meet the specific needs of the learners and has been accredited by NCFE demonstrating the quality and rigor. NCFE are an awarding organisation recognised by the qualification regulators for England (Ofqual, Wales (Qualification Wales) and Northern Ireland (CCEA Regulation). This is an unregulated qualification and is not a nationally recognised qualification.



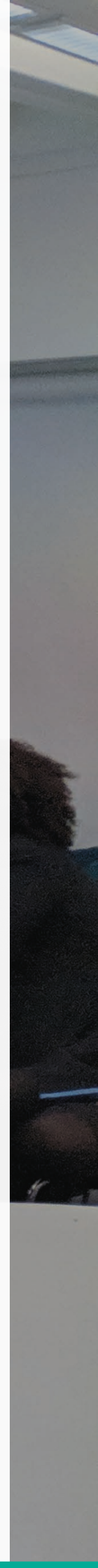
Co-designing research aims

Young people should be supported to create a research question. This will be the guiding question that the project should seek to answer.

Usually young researchers will be provided a topic by organisations which they had in mind when recruiting them for their lived experience. Very rarely will a group of young people be recruited with absolutely no topic in mind, and that process of fully participatory research can be more challenging.

The following is an outline of stages taken with young people to produce a research question for the project (where a rough topic has been already decided during recruitment):

Stage	Action	Example
Background: Recruitment	Organisation has decided to examine a topic and has recruited young people with the lived experience of that topic.	The organisation wants to explore the experience of young women in London and has recruited a diverse group of young women who live in London.
Stage 1: Literature review	Young people or the organisation examine and reflect on existing research, data, and projects that look at the topics they are interested in.	The organisation provides data and insight about inequalities faced by young women in London to the young researchers.
Stage 2: Mapping topics and questions	Young people have an open brainstorm about some of the issues around a topic and begin to generate questions they are interested in.	The young researchers are particularly interested in the issues of safety and employment. They have generated a range of concepts, questions, challenges and ideas related to that.
Stage 3: Generating research questions	Young people are taught about research questions and try to generate a few potential research questions that encapsulate the topics and questions they have mapped out.	The young researchers generate two research questions, one around feelings of safety on Transport for London services, and one on employment in London's creative industry, for young women.
Stage 4: Deciding on a research question	Young researchers decide on research questions collectively through a vote or a discussion about which would be most effective at providing insight and change.	Noting that more questions around safety and transport were mapped out, they decide on the research question: "How safe do young women feel on different Transport for London services?"



Interview with a peer researcher

Peer research is good because it allows the young people to do something in their communities. Rather than getting an external person, some random man from Oxford, you get someone from that community. It makes sense since young people would know more about their area, about the people in the community, and the problems that they have.

I really enjoyed creating questions and thinking about what to research as part of our project. I got choice on what to ask, and that's important because it allows you to get the answers the way you want, honestly, rather than in a way that fits some agenda.
I've never done anything like designing research before, but I learnt so many things. Patience, and listening, from listening to the input of other people, since you have to make decisions all together.

This project helped me think for myself, do things for myself, and learn something new – so I was able to organise something positive, something that I can put on my CV. Instead of following what you wanted, what some adult wanted, we had an input and we had control. I was happy with the questions in the end.

There's a sense of ownership there, because I was helping to design the questions, my peer research colleagues did the interviews, and then we worked together to finish the project. We all did it as a team, we all did our part. In our project, I think the chemistry was right, it was good to see everybody in person after so much time in lockdown with Covid-19.

Young people do enjoy research – travelling around to other places, and other areas, speaking to different people, that they might not have spoken to before. Going to another part of your area and having conversations with other young people like you is great.

Young people are more likely to trust other young people especially those in similar situations, like care leavers, who are in the same boat. They give us answers they wouldn't necessarily give to adults, to a stranger.

I would be a peer researcher again, and I would say to any young person who is thinking of doing it, to do it. Step out of your comfort zone, see if you like it, and see if you enjoy the power of getting answers to questions.

Ibrahim
20 years old
Peer research with the Care Leavers National Movement

Stage 1: Literature review

Literature reviews are a common component of research that researchers often undertake at the start of a project before deciding on a research question. A literature review is defined as:

"An assessment of our current state of knowledge about a topic. Conducting a literature review is necessary to familiarise yourself with the conceptual, theoretical, historical, and factual background to a subject and the gaps in existing knowledge. Projects similar or identical to yours may have already been undertaken and the findings published."[14]

It is unlikely that you will need to undertake such an extensive literature review for your project, as your organisation should have an understanding about the current state of knowledge about the topic you want to explore. However, it will be useful to review the following ahead of engaging the peer researchers:

- **Similar research projects –** It is important to understand what other projects there are in the same space, to avoid duplication and provide potential opportunities to build on.
- **Business case –** You will have recruited young people from a specific lived experience, with a certain broad topic in mind for the project. Collating existing data about why this issue was chosen is important to present to young people.

Stage 2: Mapping topics and questions

While an organisation may have an idea of what group (disability, care leavers, employed young people) or broad topic (employment, youth violence, mental health) will be researched, it is important that young people design the research question.

It is a good to begin by getting young people to map out on flipchart paper all the different topics and questions they're interested in answering. Key to the success of the project is that the young researchers are invested in the topic, and questions being answered.

Mapping exercise

- Stop and search
- "Do you trust the police?"
- Racism and discrimination
- Police during lockdown
- "Would you go to the police?"
- "Do you feel safe walking around at night?"
- Night buses

"For me, it's about the peer researcher involved being involved from A to Z, from the design until the end.

They see something through and they're involved throughout. It is important that they have a say and decision-making power in terms of design, implementation, and output."

14 SOCIAL POLICY - Edited by John Baldock, Nick Manning and Sarah Vickerstaff, 2011, (https://blackwells.co.uk/bookshop/product/Social-Policy-by-John-Baldock-editor-Lavinia-Mitton-editor-Nick-Manning-editor-Sarah-Vickerstaff-editor/9780199570843

"Guiding how to make questions has been challenging for me. Letting go is challenging. But having constant reflections has helped. We constantly reflect with myself, with my co-facilitator, and with my supervisor.

The designing of the project is hard. You always have to think and engage with the young people and talk about topics that are very sensitive, about racism, about ableism."

Step 3: Generating a research question

A research question is a question that the research project aims to answer. It should come from the young people and will be the focus for the entire project. Once ideas, questions, and topics have been mapped young people should be encouraged to encapsulate these into single research questions.

Mapping phase	Summarised questions
• Stop and search • "Do you trust the police?" • Racism and discrimination • Police during lockdown • "Would you go to the police?" • "Do you feel safe walking around at night?" • Night buses	• What do young people think about the police in London? • What makes young people feel safe, or unsafe, in London? • How do young people feel at night when walking, or on transport, in London? • Were police being fair to young people during lockdown? • Are the police racist towards young ethnic minorities?

Research questions are key in defining the project, and it's aims. Young people should be supported to understand about what a research question is and what makes a good research question.

One such approach is the FINER method[15] laid out below, which is a good criterion to refine questions into research questions:

FINER	How does it relate to a research question?
Feasible	• How feasible/manageable is the scope of the project? • How feasible is the project given the timescales, and budget?
Interesting	• How interesting do the young people find the research question? • How interesting will those taking part find the research question? • How interesting is research question to those who will benefit from it (local authority, youth sector organisations)?
Novel	• Is the research new, or has it already been done? • What are you finding out that nobody already knows? • What new perspective, or approach, are you using?
Ethical	• How ethical is your research question? • What are the risks of this research question, to the participants or to the peer researchers?
Relevant	• How will answering this question contribute to change or practice? • Is the research question relevant to what we want to find out?

15 Stephen B Hulley, Designing clinical research, 2007 (https://www.worldcat.org/title/designing-clinical-research/oclc/71223173)

The next step is to get the various summarised questions and try to collectively craft a few research questions that the project could focus on. In the example below, summarise questions are reworked into research questions. These are and try to keep the essence of the enquiry, but are reworded to make them clearer and more specific.

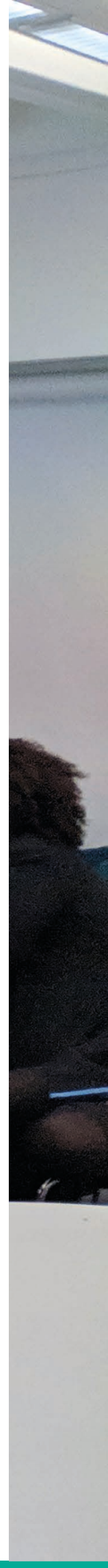
Summarised questions	Research question
• What do young people think about the police in London? • What makes young people feel safe, or unsafe, in London? • How do young people feel at night when walking, or on transport, in London? • Were police being fair to young people during lockdown? • Are the police racist towards young ethnic minorities?	• What was the relationship between young people and the local police in the local area during lockdown? • What are the factors that influence how safe a young person feels when out at night in (local borough)? • What is the experience of discrimination of young ethnic minorities when dealing with the police in (local borough)?

Step 4: Deciding on a research question

Once several research questions have been generated which capture most or all of the topics and issues expressed in the mapping exercise, the young people need to make a decision on which questions they want the project to focus on.

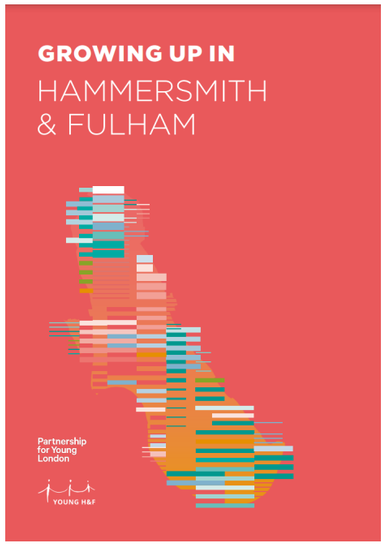
This can be done as simply as a vote. The research question with the most votes is the one the project would focus on. However, rather than a First Past The Post system you might want to use a ranked preference system to ensure that a research question is chosen that on average, hs the highest level of interest amongst the young people.

Ranked voting system	Outcome
Young people are asked to rank the three research questions on preference, one to three. Rank 1 gets 3 points, rank 2 gets 2 points, rank 3 gets 1 point. • **Wider relationship:** What was the relationship between young people and the local police in the local area during lockdown? • **Factors of safety:** What are the factors that influence how safe a young person feels when out at night in (local borough)? • **Discrimination and the police:** What is the experience of discrimination of young ethnic minorities when dealing with the police in (local borough)?	1. Discrimination and the police gets 23 points overall 2. Factors of safety gets 12 points overall 3. Wider relationship gets 6 points overall The research question around discrimination and the police is chosen, with the highest average ranking.



Hammersmith and Fulham Foundation: Growing Up in Hammersmith and Fulham

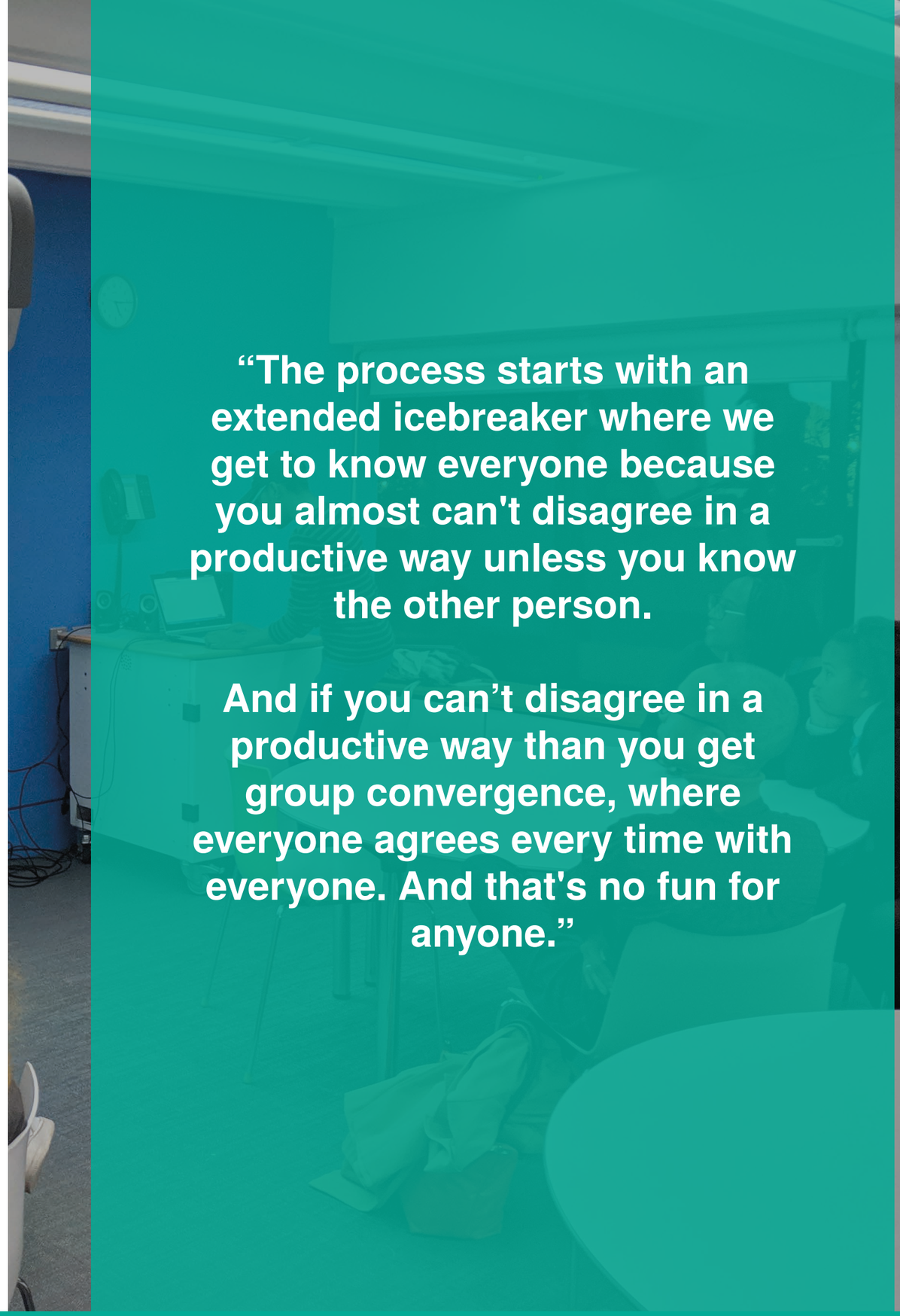
Hammersmith and Fulham Foundation is a local membership charity that supports the infrastructure of the children and young people's sector in the borough. They worked with Partnership for Young London to train a group of young people to conduct a participatory needs analysis for the borough; Growing Up in Hammersmith and Fulham.



Young people met twice a month over several months to learn about research, and the research process at a youth club after school locally in Hammersmith and Fulham. At the end of each stage of their learning, they would use this to make decisions about the research process. Ultimately, they chose the issues to focus on, the research methods to use, and what questions were asked in those surveys and focus groups.

Following on from the work, the young people who were involved in designing and conducting the research have been a key part of campaigning too. As part of this, they have received additional training in public speaking and structuring arguments, and how to create and structure a podcast in preparation for a series of podcasts about the findings that will be launched this month.

As a result of this work, the peer researchers also presented an idea for a fundraising campaign to key stakeholders in the borough, to tackle some of the issues raised. As a result of the meeting, £220 has already been donated, and the group hope to launch a fundraising campaign in the coming months.



"The process starts with an extended icebreaker where we get to know everyone because you almost can't disagree in a productive way unless you know the other person.

And if you can't disagree in a productive way than you get group convergence, where everyone agrees every time with everyone. And that's no fun for anyone."

4.
Deciding on methodology

What are different research methods?

How do we co-design a survey?

How do we co-design interviews?

What are some creative approaches?

Qualitative vs quantitative

One of the key decisions to make in a participatory project is the methods that will be used in the project to answer the research question. There are two key ways that young people can conduct research; qualitatively, and quantitatively.

Type	Definition	Methods
Quantitative data	Quantitative research deals with numbers and statistics. Findings will come in the form of percentages or graphs.	Survey and questionnaires Evaluation forms and data Experiment Secondary research
Qualitative research	Qualitative research deals with words and meanings. Findings will be come as concepts, themes, or experiences.	In-depth (one to one) interviews Focus groups Surveys (open ended questions) Case studies Observations Secondary research

Advantages and disadvantages

Ideally projects should use a mix of both qualitative and quantitative methods to get the full picture. However, a project that focuses on either qualitative or quantitative should be aware and upfront about the limitations of the methodology and adjust the research aims to suit.

Qualitative research	Quantitative research
More concerned with the why - It can provide detail and depth, analysing thoughts, feelings, and attitudes. Allows an exploration of the 'why'.	**Less concerned with why -** Less detail as surveys will often be limited by multiple choice and explore less the reasons why someone answers the way they do.
More complicated - Findings can be less clear, more complicated, and harder to summarise clearly and concisely.	**Clearer findings -** Findings can be far clearer with percentages, and graphs that can be communicated clearly.
More flexible - It can be a more flexible, and subject to change and evolve as the research goes on.	**Less flexible -** Quantitative is less flexible as the survey would need to stay consistent throughout the project.
Hard to generalise - Generally small sample,; harder to generalise findings to larger populations.	**Easy to generalise -** Generally large sample sizes, allowing for broader topics and more generalisation.
More time consuming - Takes more time, as interviews and focus groups in person need to be arranged and conducted.	**Quicker to conduct -** Can take less time, with advertising especially and the use of online platforms allowing surveys to be completed on phones.
More cost effective - Generally, more cost effective as often organisations will have access to young people for interviews and focus groups.	**More costly -** Can be more costly, depending on existing networks and how a large sample is achieved. If the survey needs paid advertising or a prize draw it can be expensive.

Advantages and disadvantages for different common methods

The three most common methods for peer research projects are surveys, interviews and focus groups. These are not the only ways to conduct research (we will go into creative approaches later) and other approaches include: case studies, participant observation, ethnographic research, questionnaires, document review, or experimental.

There are advantages and disadvantages to surveys, interviews, and focus groups. All methods, not just these three, should be touched on with young people and provided as an option for them to use if they want.

Organisations must be clear with young people about the strengths and weaknesses of considered methods, and also how appropriate each is to: the subject matter, the groups that they want to speak to, the timescales and budget of the project, and their interest and skills as a group.

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Surveys Young people fill out a form, either online or paper.	• Doesn't take much of the peer researcher's time, if young people fill out the survey online. • Large samples can be compelling evidence for decision makers. • Survey data is easier to make comparisons between groups (gender, ethnicity). • Surveys can be made interesting through visuals, or videos, or use of interesting design.	• Hard to go into depth in a survey, with no chance to follow up. • Information less likely to be in the authentic voice of young people. • Harder to understand why something is the case. • Surveys can be less accessible, for disability or those with English as a second language.
Interviews Peer researchers conduct one on one interviews with a young person.	• Information is far more detailed. Even one interview will provide a wealth of interesting quotes. • Interviews are great at going into detail to explain why something is the case. • Interviews can be flexible, and tailored to the participant, making them more accessible.	• Can be quite time consuming, arranging, conducting, and transcribing. • Small sample sizes, hard to generalise results. • Can be harder, and more time consuming, to analyse in participatory way with young people. Open to more interpretation than survey data.
Focus groups Peer researcher chairs a discussion with a group of young people.	• Great for capturing a discussion, and the diversity of views within a certain group. • Easier to speak to a lot of people compared to interviews. • Allows for unexpected issues to emerge naturally in discussion between participants.	• Much harder to facilitate effectively than interviews. More training, or professional support, needed. • Similarly, small sample sizes, though usually larger than interviews. • Data can be less in detail than interviews, and less conclusive than surveys.

Young Londoners Fund Case Study on deciding on methodology: The Sycamore Trust

Sycamore Trust are a charity funded by the Young Londoners Fund whose project focuses on supporting young people with Autism to develop social and independence skills. Young people were supported to make meaningful decisions on the learning resources used in their project, with the aim of making them more autism friendly for their peers.

Young people were invited to join a steering group and review the resources used on the project. Youth workers noted 'This is such an important part of making sure our resources are autism friendly. The best people to ask are the young people, with their input –they can become better documents and that's brilliant. It's good for them to have ownership.'

The young people were asked to assess whether the units were useful, relevant and autism friendly. They worked in groups with highlighter pens to check whether the documents were easy for them to understand. Then the groups got together and compared notes, coming up with a consensus and a final draft. One member of the steering took on the role of typing up the changes.

Now each of the resource booklets states that it has been reviewed and edited by the steering group. This opportunity was something that the young people really enjoyed. They felt very proud of the improvements made for their peers.

Survey design

One of the most important aspects of surveys and questionnaires is the sample. Unlike more qualitative approaches like interviews and focus groups a large sample size is more important for the validity of the research.

"A sample is a portion, or a subset of a larger group called a population." (Fink 1995: 1)

There is a no clear and straightforward answer to how large a sample should be, and no formula that tells you how many people need to complete your survey before it is significant, and valid. SurveyMonkey have a sample calculator that can be found here, that might give you a better idea.

Surveys, like peer research projects in general, are more effective for youth sector organisations with a narrower focus and population. It is easier to get 10% of the young people who use a certain youth centre, then 10% of the young people aged 16-25 in London, for example.

What can be more important than simply the number of people in a sample, is the representativeness of a sample. A sample needs to be representative of the population that you're looking to study.

To ensure a representative sample, you must have a clear understanding of the population you are studying, such as the demographics that make it up:

- For example, if you are researching care experience young people in a certain borough, it would be useful to know the ethnicity data of that population, to replicate it in your sample.
- For example, if you are researching experiences of school in London, your sample would need to be as close to 50% male and 50% female (which would be the make up of the school population in London) as possible.

Types of surveys and use

There are two types of surveys that are used: factual and attitudinal:

- **Factual surveys –** These are the oldest type of surveys. They aim to gain information about a material situation, rather than thoughts or opinions. For example: How many hours of exercise do you get a week?
- **Attitudinal surveys –** These surveys look at what people think, and their attitudes towards, certain topics or items. It is far more subjective, with political polling in this category. For example: How do you feel about exercise in your area? (Negative to positive scale)

However, surveys can take a mixed approach, exploring both factual and attitudinal questions.

One of the most useful insights a survey can provide is the relationship between attitudes and behaviour. For example, the relationship between attitude towards exercise and the number of hours of exercise a week that someone gets.

One of the other most common insights provided by surveys is the relationship between background or circumstance and attitudes and behaviours. Especially with a generation as diverse as the current one, surveys provide an opportunity to explore how different groups feel and act. For example, the relationship between attitude towards exercise (and subsequently hours of exercise a week) and different ethnicities.

Types of survey questions

Surveys can be complicated, with a range of ways that a question can be asked, below is a breakdown and examples of some of the most common ones.

Type of survey question	Example questions	Example answers
Multiple choice questions The most popular form of question. Participants can either select one, or multiple answers. They're easy to use, and implement, but restrict the answers a young person can give.	• How happy are you with your learning? • Which issues are you concerned about?	• Choose one: Very Unhappy, Unhappy, Neither Happy nor Unhappy, Happy, Very Happy • Choose multiple: Housing, Education, Safety, Transport, Politics
Demographic questions Demographic questions come in a variety of formats but are usually at the start of a survey. They help us understand who the participant is.	• Which best describes your ethnicity? • What is your gender?	• You can use the ONS standard of ethnicity options found here. • •Male, Female, Non-Binary, Prefer Not to say, Other (please describe)
Rating scales Rating scales provide answers on a scale, usually one to five, or one to ten. Participants will have to decide where they fall on the scale.	• How happy are you with your learning? • How concerned are you about safety?	• 1 to 5 scale, one being Very Unhappy, and 5 being Very Happy. • 1 to 10 scale, 1 being Very concerned, and 5 being Not concerned at all.
Likert scales Likert scales are useful for testing opinions and attitudes of participants to certain topics or ideas. They most commonly come as agree and disagree multiple choices.	• "I would speak to my teacher about my mental health" • How often do you worry about your safety?	• Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree. • Never, Rarely, Sometimes, Often, Always
Open ended questions Open ended questions get qualitative data from participants. It is way to open it out to the participant to answer how they want to answer.	• What would you change about your education? • What word, or phrase, comes to your mind when you think of safety?	• Open box that allows for paragraph of text. • Open box that allows for a sentence of text.
Drop down questions Similar to multiple choice but allows participants to choose from a far greater number of options.	• What borough are you based in? • Which school do you go to?	• Drop down list of all 31 London Boroughs. • Drop down list of all the schools in the area

Focus group and interviews

In-depth interviews are one way that young researchers can gather qualitative data and usually involve a sit-down conversation, recorded, lasting between 10 to 50 minutes. There are four different types of interviews, which go from most structured to least structured:

- **Structured interview –** Interviews are conducted with the same set of questions, in the same way. There is no room for variation between interviews. The aim is to be able to compare answers between different participants.
- **Semi-structured interview –** Interviews are conducted with a specified set of questions but are free to ask to follow up questions and add their own questions as the conversation evolves. This is the most common approach in peer research, providing a structure, but allowing the young researcher freedom to build on answers.
- **Unstructured or focused interview –** This is the approach that most closely resembles an informal conversation. This style of interview is more focused on the participant, their perspectives, and the discussion they want to have.
- **Group interview and focus group –** Group work is well suited to explore norms and dynamics for certain issues. Ideally for focus groups, most of the conversation will take place between participants, with the young researchers taking a chairing role.

Generally, a semi-structured interview will most likely be best suited to your peer research project. However, the approach taken to qualitative data collection should depend on four key factors:

1. **The soft skills and confidence of the young researchers –** If young people feel confident taking the initiative and want freedom to explore a topic then interviews should be less structured. However, structured and semi-structured interviews are more accessible. The interview guide, while rigid, supports young researchers with a list of questions to fall back to.
2. **The target participants that you are speaking to –** Certain groups may have language accessibility issues, or higher levels of need, both of which require a more thought out interview guide that has been crafted specifically for them. In the moment, follow up questions may add pressure, or not be easily understood, and thus more unstructured approaches may be less well suited.
3. **The research question of the project –** The topic that has been chosen by young people will also be a factor in how much freedom is afforded to the qualitative approach. Projects with narrow scopes should favour structured interviews, to keep participants on topic. Projects with broader scopes should favour unstructured, to allow more exploration of an issue.
4. **How important comparisons are –** A key advantage of a structured, or semi-structured interview is that you can ensure all participants are asked the same questions, which will enable you to compare responses. If this comparison element isn't needed, then more freedom can be allowed.

Interview guide

The aim, if structured or semi-structured interviews, is to create an interview guide. An interview guide is a set list of questions, that allow for a discussion and exploration of the topic. There are some key considerations:

- **Keep it simple –** Keep interview guides relatively simple, that explore topics broadly, especially if it is a semi-structured interview, to allow young researchers more space to ask their own questions.
- **One page –** Interview guides should ideally be no longer than a page, as you don't want to exhaust the participant with questions, or not get to the topics that are covered later in the interview guide.
- **Accessibility –** Young researchers should be able to develop an interview guide that is accessible to their peers, with key considerations around language, and readability. Furthermore, interview guides should ideally reflect the group that you are speaking to.

Like surveys, there are a range of different types of questions that can be used when creating an interview guide. Below are some of the different question types, and when they would be used:

Question type	Example question	Purpose
Introduction questions	How are you today? Where did you come from today?	To put the participant at ease, to build a relationship with a participant, and make the interview feel less formal
Direct questions	Do you find the cost of transport expensive or not?	Often closed questions, yes or no questions. They aim to get a definitive answer. Questions can be leading and should be left to the end of an interview.
Indirect questions	What do you think about the cost of transport?	Often open questions, often asking about the topic broadly. Questions are meant to start an exploration of a topic.
Specifying questions	Are you worried to go out at night?	Specific questions look to open a line of enquiry into a specific experience, time, or place. More suited for peer evaluation.
Structuring questions	What do you think about the cost of transport?	Questions that help the interviewer move on, and check that the participant is happy to move on.
Follow up questions	You said X, how would this be different on the tube, or train?	These questions are impromptu, and not on the interview guide. Follow ups are for when something a participant says prompts a new line of enquiry by the young researcher.
Probing questions	Why do you think that is? You said X, can you expand?	Probing questions are for when a participant has given an answer that is short, or unclear. Young researchers can ask participants to expand, or provide more information.
Interpreting questions	Is it fair to say that free transport is important to you?	These questions, would could be leading, are about interpreting what has been heard and trying to clarify. Interpreting questions would not usually be on an interview guide, and would react to what has been heard.

Young Harrow Foundation: Harrow Change Champions Northwick Park Project

In the summer of 2019, the Change Champions received training from Partnership for Young London on how to conduct peer-to-peer research. They took these learnings into the A&E department of their local Northwick Park Hospital to speak to young people and hospital staff. The aim was to robustly understand the need and gaps in support for local young people who present in A&E. Collectively they conducted over 25 interviews.

The group were focused on mental health and youth violence because these were the urgent needs identified by Northwick Park Hospital Staff. Within these key areas it became clear from the research that there were three areas (irrespective of need) that support gaps existed:

1. Support within the A&E department itself
2. How young people are connected to support beyond their hospital experience
3. Training and support for staff around youth violence and youth mental health

The Change Champions, young people with lived experience of either youth violence or mental health, spent time in Northwick Park hospital interviewing staff and other young people. As part of this project, they designed the following interview guide for clinical staff:

Clinical staff interview guide

- What is your age, gender, and role in the hospital? Ward/Section?
- What is your experience with young people dealing with mental health/youth violence issues?
- Have you noticed youth violence/mental health issues increasing since you've worked here?
- What are the main causes or factors of mental health issues?
- What are the main causes of factors of youth violence?
- What is the peak time that young people are admitted with mental health, and youth violence issues?
- What support do you have for young people dealing with youth violence, and mental health issues?
- What additional services or support do young people need within the hospital in your opinion?
- Do you have any awareness of where they can be referred?
- How often do young people open to you regarding youth violence/mental health issues? If they mention lying. Why and about what?
- Do you feel equipped to talk to young people?
- Do you ever feel intimidated by young people? Why?
- What's the relationship with parents like?
- Are there any incidents of youth violence that fly under the radar or are missed?

"The peer researchers rehearse the interview guide, they rehearse the interviewing.

It's really simple, not complicated, because we have different levels with some of our peer researchers not being in university or might have left school before finishing.

So the interview process needs to be very accessible, for everyone."

Co-designing surveys and interviews

Young people should be the ones designing up the survey questions and interview guides to be used in the research. The process for co-designing these materials is like earlier processes around designing a research question but bringing in more specific knowledge around question type.

Young people should aim for a survey that takes no longer than 15 minutes to complete. Any longer and it makes it quite inaccessible and raises the amount of effort needed to complete.

Co-designing process example:

1. **Mapping questions -** Now that young people have a research question to guide them, they should explore and discuss all the various questions they have that might answer their original research question. Using a flipchart and post it notes, try and get as many questions they have down. At this stage it doesn't matter if they're "good" survey questions, or "good" interview questions.
2. **Review question themes -** Once we have a lot of questions, it is time to thematically group them (if possible) and reflect if there are lines of enquiry that they are missing. The question 'What are we missing?' should be an ongoing challenge from the facilitator to the young people throughout.
3. **Conversion into survey/interview questions -** By this point young people should have been taught about types of questions for surveys and interviews. They should attempt to think about how to write the questions they had in the mapping stage as a survey question, or interview questions. Especially for the former, encourage them to construct multiple types of survey question (open ended, Likert scale, etc) from the same question.
4. **Organisation and flow -** Once they have a range of survey and interview questions, break young people into groups and get them to pick and choose questions to construct a survey or interview guide. In this stage we want to talk about coherence and segues and discuss why they ordered questions the way they did.
5. **Testing phase -** Finally, we want to give young people the opportunity to test, reflect, and adjust the surveys/interview guides they have created. They can go straight into this, or set it to one side while you teach them about how to conduct interviews.

Creative research methods

While surveys, focus groups, and interviews are the most common way to conduct peer research, there are also a range of creative approaches that work well with young people. There is a lot written on creative research methods, and with technological advances there are growing applications of it.

There are clear benefits but also challenges to using more creative approaches to research[16]:

Benefits	Challenges
More fun for young people Can be far more engaging as a research method, as creative methods that utilise arts or music can be more interesting then a survey.	**Time consuming and expensive** Unlike a simple survey or an interview, creative approaches can be more time and budget consuming. Art materials need to be provided, and it may take more time than a simple conversation.
Intuitive to young people Some creative methods, such as a photo or video, can be intuitive to young people who already have camera smartphones, and an understanding of video content.	**Creative expertise** Projects may not always want to provide additional support and training to young people around creative and arts approaches. Bringing in a local artist to work with young people, for example.
A picture paints a thousand words The data collected from creative approaches is extremely rich, especially when participants are tasked in creating more abstract artistic pieces.	**Harder to analyse data** The data collected from creative approaches is valid visual data for research. However, it can be more difficult to analyse this data, compared to the simple graphs of a survey.
More engaging for campaigning The data collected, especially though arts-based approaches, can be fantastic assets for subsequent campaigns, communicating the findings of the research in an visual way.	**Ethics and ownership** There is more of a question with the data collected in arts-based approach around ownership and fair use. While consent is an absolute minimum, organisations must ask themselves more tricky ethical questions if they are using a young person's art work for campaigning or report use.

16 Adapted from Inspiring Impact's work on creative methods (https://www.inspiringimpact.org/learn-to-measure/do/creative-methods)

Ten tips for using Creative Approaches from Inspiring Impact

Inspiring Impact has some fantastic resources around using creative methods to gather data which can be found here. Below are their top ten tips for using creative approaches:

1. **Be clear on why you are doing it, the questions you are seeking to answer and what value it brings to your work and to your users experience.** When using creative methods, it is important to reflect on the particular needs of your target audience. Use creative methods when they are appropriate, when they add value and when they represent your users' views more accurately and are more inclusive.
2. **Creative doesn't mean quicker.** Be realistic about how long it takes. As with other evaluation methods, time should be taken to make sure it is done well, the information collected is meaningful and it is used in appropriate ways. When it comes to analysing the information, interpretation may require a high level of skill and aggregating the data may be difficult.
3. **Choose methods that are appropriate for your audience.** Think about how creative methods could fit into your existing interactions. You might not always be able to do this, but do consider the time implications for the users and be transparent about it. Keep in mind potential challenges of creative methods. For example, some participants may lack confidence in drawing or storytelling.
4. **Involve users throughout the evaluation process.** This might include involving beneficiaries in discussions about the most appropriate method to use and analysing the data together and discussing the implications of the learning.
5. **Make sure you are aware of who you could be excluding by using creative methods.** Make sure your methods are culturally appropriate and think about how your methods will impact upon different cultures. You should also explore the accessibility of the methods you have chosen. Do they allow for a range of voices to be heard? Whose voices are not being heard?
6. **Evaluation methods should improve equity.** The methods, process and outputs should lead to greater equity. You should seek out voices that are not being heard and the evaluation should not only look at the individual's journey, but also at how structural factors influence inequality. This can help drive systemic change.
7. **Think about mixed methods.** Try to complement more traditional methods with creative methods. For example, you could accompany visual methods with semi-structured interviews. Keep checking what works and be open to adapting your methods. As with all your work, you should have a regular process for reviewing the information collected and the processes used.
8. **Don't just think about creative methods, think about creative ways of sharing too.** Creative collection isn't always possible. If you have collected data in more formal, traditional methods, that doesn't mean it has to stay in that format. For example, videos, animations, user created content are creative ways you could share this data.

Examples approaches to creative research methods

There are a wide range of creative research methods, utilising a range of artistic approaches and mediums. If you want to know more, please look at Helen Karr's textbook 'Creative Research methods: A Practical Guide' which you can find here. Many creative research methods have a long history of use in social sciences, with evidence for their efficacy in a range of settings, and with different groups.

Below is some examples of creative research methods that we have, or have seen, used with young people in participatory research projects. It is not an exhaustive list and is there to just give you an idea.

Arts based	Photography	Drawing	Video and film
Theatre based – Participants are supported to create a small performance that explores the topic.	**One photo –** Participants are asked to submit one photo that represents a concept, or aspect of a topic to them.	**Portraiture –** Participants create portraits of themselves which is good at exploring identity.	**Video blogs –** Participants capture their thoughts and views to camera, in a series of videos.
Spoken word – Participants explore a topic through the creation of spoken words that express their perspective.	**Google Photos –** Participants are asked to find a photo or photos, that represent or relate to how they feel about a topic.	**Projective drawings –** Participants are asked to draw or paint a person, object, place, or a situation.	**YouTube selection –** Utilising YouTube, participants are asked to find a video or videos, that represent or relate to how they feel about a topic.
Lego sculptures – Lego produce 'Serious Play' kits that are used for research. Participants have to construct a sculpture that represents or relates to how they feel about a topic.	**Photo diary –** Participants are asked to capture a series of photos over a set amount of time, that express how they are feeling, or what is significant to them.	**Collective mural –** Participants are asked to draw or write on a single page/wall/board around a single topic. Like a visual mind map.	**Vignettes –** Participants are asked to go out and submit a short, ten second or less, video clip that is relevant to the topic.

Advantages and challenges for drawing, photography, and video methods

Below is an adapation of Helen Karr's 'Creative Research Methods: A Practical Guide' which can be found here. We have only explored the advantages and disadvantages around three of the most common creative approaches: drawing, photography, and video/digital storytelling.

Method	Advantages	Disadvantages
Drawing	• Can be less confronting than more formal approaches. • Can establish rapport and set up a relaxed interaction. • Can act as prompts for conversations. • Focus on non-verbal – as well as verbal expression. • Activities can be open-ended. • Drawings can take time and do not require a quick response. • Participants can change drawings during the activity. • Drawings and the materials used are often familiar to young people. • Participants can elaborate drawings with written text and narrative.	• Drawings can be altered – so the meaning and intent may not be clear. • Cannot assume that all participants enjoy or choose to draw. • Drawings may reflect an easy or quick way to complete a task, rather than tapping into relevant issues. • Prompts may be too open or vague. • Participants may produce 'expected' or stereotypical drawings. • Drawings are situated within specific contexts, time and culture, as well as the materials available. • Analysis of images alone may misrepresent the intentions of the drawer. • A single drawing provies a snapshot view – a point in time, rather than changing perceptions.
Photography	• Participants are often familiar with the technology. • Digital technology is readily available and accessible. • Participants can control what is photographed and how. • Photographs can be deleted and re-taken until the desired outcome is achieved. • Photographs can help evoke information, feelings or memories that would not otherwise be accessible.	• Some technology is not readily accessed by all potential participants. • Equipment both supports and constrains photography. • Photographs can challenge confidentiality and privacy. • Who owns the photographs and can use/publish them? • Photographs are situated within specific contexts, time and culture. • Photographs are always socially constructed. • Analysis of images alone may misrepresent the intentions of the photographer..
Video/digital storytelling	• Children and young people often have high levels of technological skill and knowledge. • Videos are often a familiar format. • Video enables the study of both verbal and non-verbal expression. • Children and young people may feel positive about research that offers them the opportunity to use valuable equipment. • Video production occurs over an extended time, providing opportunities to revisit or reflect upon the data. • Video can facilitate feelings that are hard to verbalise. • Videos can be taken without the researcher's presence. • Video provides the opportunity to make choices about what to leave in or edit out.	• Videos and home movies can take on ritualised forms – depicting situation and events that perpetuate stereotypes. • Making videos can be resource intensive. • Equipment, and the skill in using it, influences the generation of data. • Video can capture a great deal of data, but also miss a great deal. • The amount of data generated through video is extensive and analysis can be challenging. • It can be difficult to translate video to text – either for analysis or reporting. • There are ethical challenges in protecting the privacy and identity of participants. • The images captured on video can be difficult to interpret on their own. • Having no immediate access to participants means that there is no opportunity to intervene if necessary – for example, if the research provokes strong emotions or reactions.

Young Londoners Fund Case Study on deciding on methodology: Catalyst in Communities

You Me Us TV is a project led by Catalyst in Communities that is funded by the Young Londoners Fund. Through the project young people can learn how to create, curate, and commercialise original digital content. The team at Catalyst in Communities enable young people to receive expert industry masterclasses, authentic work experience and professional training. They engage young people and use transformative mindset coaching leading to positive behaviour changes.

Collaboration, co-creation, and shared group identity is essential to Catalyst's creative approaches. They believe youth workers are not 'the teachers', it is not their process, it is the young people's. This is their project and it must work for them. At first young people don't believe them – it takes a few sessions for them to recognise that it is totally up to young people to decide on a topic and what they want their project to be.

Catalyst don't decide on learning outcomes prior to a session. They must meet young people and come together to decide on the outcomes. They try to tease out who the young people are through creative sessions and use coaching techniques and conversations to help young people create their own programmes.

Previously, Catalyst had used more traditional creative mediums to help young people to communicate issues they cared about. However, based on feedback, they adapted their approach.

Most young people live in a 'digital first' world. They both consume and produce millions of pieces of content, through their phones and digital devices. For Catalyst, incorporating this 'digital first' landscape means young people are more likely to be attracted to and fully engaged in the project. Catalyst now specialise in delivering digital media masterclasses and online coaching, supporting young people to develop and commercialise their own digital content.

"Young people are very interested in the research topic, because all of them have, either personally or through family and friends experienced the issues.

So, they are definitely passionate about it, because they all have personal experiences and they know that something needs to change."

5. Fieldwork & delivery

What does survey collection look like?

How should we conduct interviews?

What are research ethics?

What are safeguarding risks are there?

Conducting surveys

There are a wide range of ways that surveys and questionnaires can be completed but we will focus on the two most common types, online and paper surveys.

- **Online survey –** Online surveys use a platform, like SurveyMonkey, to provide a link that someone can complete the survey on their computer, phone, or tablet. They are the easiest way to conduct a survey, but do require digital accessibility.
- **Paper surveys –** Paper surveys can be much more accessible than online surveys but are far more time consuming because the data will need to be entered onto a computer manually. They are also limited in the types of questions they can include.

For online surveys, there are loads of choices for which platform you can use for example:

Survey Monkey	TypeForm	Google
One of the most established platforms for conducting online surveys. It had the most options when it comes to question types, and the best on-platform analysis tools. Cost: £25 a month	A newer survey platform. Easy to use and can create far more aesthetically engaging surveys. Less functionality compared to SurveyMonkey. Cost: £21 - £41	The most basic option, in terms of question types and visual options. Cost: Free

Tips for using digital platforms for surveys

When using online survey platforms there are some key points to keep in mind throughout the process:

- **Short and sweet -** Surveys, both online and for paper, should be less than 15 minutes to complete. Online tools like TypeForm and SurveyMonkey should give you an estimate completion time and estimated completion rate.
- **Consent and prize fund should come first -** Young people's consent to participate in the survey should always come first. However, if there is a reward or prize draw for the survey that should come soon after to incentivise completion.
- **Monitor completion rate -** Tools like TypeForm can provide quite in-depth monitoring data for your survey such as how many people see the survey, how many complete it, and where participants are giving up on it. This data can be invaluable for tweaking the survey, if you find completion rate is dropping off at a certain point.
- **Test, test, and test -** Online surveys should be tested by the peer researchers at minimum, but ideally by a sample group that represents the participants who will be completing it. Being physically present as a group to test run the survey also allows for troubleshooting and for you to pick up any issues.
- **Data protection -** It is important that the survey account is private, and you are aware of who has access to it, due to the potentially sensitive information that it is collecting.

Collecting surveys

There are a range of ways to collect survey responses depending on whether the survey is online or in physical paper copies. Below are a few examples of how young researchers might disseminate a survey, and the strengths and weaknesses of each approach:

Methods	Details	Strengths and weaknesses
Printed flyers with a QR code provided at youth spaces	A QR code is generated that links to the online survey. Flyer is printed with this QR code, and details of the survey is printed.	Can target physical space and places that young people spend their time in, giving access to the survey from groups that might not see it through other means. However, can be time consuming and has printing costs. There also needs to be a clear incentive, like a prize, or opportunity, for a young person to go through the extra effort of their own accord to scan the QR.
Paper copies of survey provided at youth spaces	Paper copies of the survey are printed and available for physical spaces that young people might see it.	Can target physical space and place, but with printed copies, the survey might be easier to complete. Staff and youth workers can encourage completion. Collating paper copies into a digital database can be a nightmare for capacity, especially in large numbers.
Social media advertising	A link to the online survey is provided through various social media platform adverts (Twitter, Facebook, TikTok, Instagram). Adverts can be promoted with a budget.	Allows survey adverts and easy to click through survey link to reach a wider audience. Adverts can be promoted through a budget to reach huge numbers of young people. Can be quite imprecise, and harder to target specific groups. Also requires a creative capacity, as different platforms require different engaging content. Organisations tend to be most adept at Twitter, which also tends to be the worst platform for engagement.
Email newsletters	A link to the online survey is placed on email newsletters that go out to groups of young people.	Allows an advert to reach a large audience, who might already be rather engaged, with relatively little effort. Reaches only young people already engaged with that network, and young people less likely to look at emails.
Workshops and activities	Time is organised for groups of young people to come together, physically or online, to complete the survey then and there.	Guarantees survey responses and groups with specific lived experience can be targeted to complete the survey. Allows follow up for qualitative data, or support with the survey. Hugely time consuming, and only small numbers.
In-person collection	Copies of a paper copy, links to an online survey, or digital tablets with the survey are taken around physical spaces by young researchers to find people to complete	A way of utilising young researcher's links into a community, or space, to get more responses. It can be quite an effective way to get responses, on a sunny day. Can be ineffective, depending on the skill of researchers, as approaching strangers is not easy. Also depends on the time of the day, the weather, and the length of the survey.

Interview with a peer researcher

I really like being a peer researcher because it helps me speak to my peers and find out their concerns, their views, and their feelings on topics. It helps me implement youth voice, in whatever it is that I'm researching.

When I first did peer research, it was not what I expected. I thought it would be more like the more intimidating research interviews and surveys that I had experience with, but instead it was a very pleasant experience. I found the conversations very engaging and enlightening, I felt more of a sense of trust and openness, built in that interview, between me and the person I was speaking to.

I worked on a project in Northwick Park hospital, where we did interviews with clinicians, patients, and young people. It was a mix of young people and professionals. Our role in designing the interview guides was to bring a perspective that might be overlooked. A more human perspective, which sounds mean to everyone else in research, but I mean the average person. The interview process, for me, feels more relaxed. It doesn't feel serious or intimidating. It feels like an encouraging space.

I think a peer research approach makes the experience a bit more personal. You're speaking to a peer, you're more likely to open up, more likely to be honest. It slightly differs if you're participating in research by a company, or a survey, it is impersonal. Especially if you're dealing with personal or sensitive issues. Peer researchers are more connected to the issue and connected to the individuals that are being researched. This means they know the sample group better, than if it was conducted by a company or a third party. Peer research can be a longer process, but it is one I feel like it is worth going through.

Conducting interviews also gave me valuable skills. Firstly, there was the technical side to interviews. Obtaining consent and making sure anonymity is respected, which are things I would overlook if I didn't go through my training as a peer researcher. Secondly, were the soft skills that aren't as measurable, like empathy, understanding, patience, and being able to engage with difficult topics and being sensitive to people's personal situations.

I think peer research gets a more accurate voice of young people in research. A lot of the time with research you realise the results don't quite accurately reflect the issue. That's because young people have reservations to speak up about the full story, and I think peer research tackles this challenge because it's more trusting, and more open. It encourages details and stories that might be overlooked in formal interviews. The most important aspect of peer research is voice; whenever you're tackling anything, it's the voice of the people who will be impacted by the change that matters the most. That's what peer research is it gives the voice to those affected.

Mathura
19 years old
Peer researcher with Young Harrow Foundation

How to conduct interviews and focus groups

Young researchers should first familiarise themselves with the process of interviews and the stages of conducting in-depth interviews. An example of an interview process would look like[17]:

1. **Selection of research topic and consideration of available research methods:** the research question has been selected, and in-depth interviewing has been chosen as the most appropriate method.
2. **Prepare an interview guide:** a list of questions that will be used in the interview.
3. **Pilot the interview guide:** by doing some test interviews to see if the questions 'work', as well as checking for time taken to conduct an interview.
4. **Select participants:** think about the numbers and types of interviewees that you want. Do you have a balance of female and male respondents? How will you find respondents?
5. **Arrange the time and location of the interview:** have a device ready to record the interview, if that is the plan, or materials to take notes.
6. **Make sure respondents can give informed consent:** that they understand what the interview is about, that the contents will be confidential, and that they are at liberty to terminate the process at any point
7. **Transcribe the interview and develop a strategy for data analysis:** organise audio files, make anonymised transcripts along the way, and think how you will analyse them.

Training young people to conduct in-depth interviews

Young researchers should be provided an opportunity to practice interviewing and test the interview guide with each other. Training should focus on twelve key things that young researchers need to be[18]:

1. **Knowledgeable -** Is thoroughly familiar with the focus of the interview; pilot interviews of the kind used in survey interviewing can be useful here.
2. **Structuring -** gives purpose for interview; rounds it off; asks if interviewee has questions.
3. **Clear -** asks simple, easy, short questions; no jargon.
4. **Gentle -** lets people finish; gives them time to think; tolerates pauses.
5. **Sensitive -** listens attentively to what is said and how it is said; is empathetic in dealing with the interviewee.
6. **Open -** responds to what is important to interviewee and is flexible.
7. **Steering -** knows what he/she wants to find out.
8. **Critical -** is prepared to challenge what is said, for example, dealing with inconsistencies in interviewees' replies.
9. **Remembering -** relates what is said to what has previously been said.
10. **Interpreting -** clarifies and extends meanings of interviewees' statements, but without imposing meaning on them.
11. **Balanced -** does not talk too much, which may make the interviewee passive, and does not talk too little, which may result in the interviewee feeling he or she is not talking along the right lines.
12. **Ethically sensitive -** is sensitive to the ethical dimension of interviewing, ensuring the interviewee appreciates what the research is about, its purposes, and that his or her answers will be treated confidentially.

17 Adapted from SOCIAL POLICY - Edited by John Baldock, Nick Manning and Sarah Vickerstaff, 2011
18 Adapted from Havard University, Social Sciences Department (https://sociology.fas.harvard.edu/files/sociology/files/interview_strategies.pdf)

Focus groups

Moderating a focus group is a very difficult thing to do, and generally we find it is unreasonable to expect a young person to do this alone. There are a few key considerations when conducting focus groups:

- **Adapt interview guides for a focus group –** Focus groups should not be run with an unchanged interview guide. Young researchers should create a separate focus group guide, that address questions to the group and pose questions that get people talking to each other.
- **Conversations between participants –** Focus groups are most valuable in the conversations between participants in a topic. Young researchers should try not to intervene or disrupt any conversations.
- **Co-chairing and moderation –** One approach is to co-moderate the focus group with them, providing support and intervention where needed. This can shift the power dynamic, so it should be set up that the young researcher takes the lead.
- **Keep it interactive and visual –** It can be difficult to chair a conversation between a group, that includes all the voices in the room. Instead, providing opportunities for young people to gather around flipchart, write on post it notes, or use creative approaches, can break up conversation.
- **Integrating icebreakers into focus groups –** Focus groups can feel too formal, especially if participants don't know each other. Treating the focus group like a workshop and starting with fun ice-breaker exercises that get conversations starting will lead to far more conversation between participants during the focus group.
- **Record with more than one device –** Focus groups, and the space needed, can sometimes be difficult to accurately record. Simply doubling up recording devices will prevent audio being lost.

"They had training before. They did mock interviews. They had a mock interview process where they went to Masbro Youth Club, and they had to approach people there. And we reflected on this experience. And they had an interview structure, an interview guide to help them. And we also said that we would also be available by phone if they needed us.

One person that we work with is quite shy, but she felt like the interviews were really powerful. It was eye opening. She said that she found out more about the experiences of other young people. She was the one who gave us most of our feedback when it came to face to face interviews."

Research ethics and consent

Ethics in research is there, first and foremost, to protect participants and the integrity of the research project. It is important that your participatory research project have ethical principles that it adheres to that inform the decision making within a project to avoid the risk of making decisions based on expediency.

There are some key tips around research ethics:

- **Consent should be an ongoing process –** Consent can be heavily reliant on written consent forms but it should be an ongoing process rather than a one-off event. While consent is gained at the start of a process, if there is ongoing engagement, challenges around consent can arise at any stage.
- **Information sheets should be available –** An information sheet providing detailed knowledge of the project, should be available for young researchers to provide and speak through with participants. This should be separate from the consent form which already has enough information on it.
- **Consent for under-16s can be challenging –** Informed consent needs to be sought from both young people, and their guardians/parents before you can conduct research with them. This can't be done retrospectively and must be sought before young researchers speak to them.

Five ethical principles for social science research[19]

It is important to teach young researchers about research ethics at the start of a project, when teaching about research generally. As decisions around methodology has not been made at that point training should focus on young researchers agreeing ethical principles. As an example, the UK Academy of Social Sciences have five key principles for ethical principles:

1. Social science is fundamental to a democratic society and should be inclusive of different interests, values, funders, methods and perspectives.
2. All social science should respect the privacy, autonomy, diversity, values and dignity of individuals, groups and communities.
3. All social science should be conducted with integrity throughout, employing the most appropriate methods for the research purpose.
4. All social scientists should act with regard to their social responsibilities in conducting and disseminating their research.
5. All social science should aim to maximise benefit and minimise harm.

19 Adapted from Academy of Social Sciences: Five ethical principles for social science research: generic ethics principles for social science research

"I think there needs to be that space to allow for young people to make mistakes, to learn, to grow.

Also, just trust the process and try and be hands off because at some points I noticed that I was being a bit too hands on.

I need to step back because this is their thing. It's their project, and they'll work it out. You can be there to support but they need to be able to work it out. You just need to enable and facilitate."

Consent forms

Consent forms are one of the most common and straightforward ways to obtained informed consent from participants. Below we break down each point that is on an example consent form:

Consent statement	Details
“I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.”	Young people must not be coerced or forced to participate. They must understand that their participation is on a voluntary basis.
“I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.”	Consent is an ongoing process, and participants must be made aware that they can change their mind at any point. They can stop the interview at any point and there will be no negative consequences.
“I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.”	This point gets participants to focus on after the interview is conducted and that the data, audio files or notes from the interview can still be deleted if they want it to be.
“I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.”	It is important that consent is informed and the young researcher (utilising an information sheet) has explained the project to the young people.
“I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.”	There should be transparency about whether participants are being rewarded for their participation.
“I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.”	If interviews are being recorded, they need to be made aware of this.
“I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.”	The first of multiple points on privacy, and confidentiality. This point assures them that everything they disclose is confidential.
“I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous.”	Participant’s identities will be protected as part of the research and that nobody will be able to identify them by what they say. This is particularly important to state if you are recording their voice.
“This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.”	This point goes into further detail about how they will remain anonymous, and that anonymity is extended to the people they speak about too.
“I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted.”	If you intended to quote from the interviews in the final report, or publications, they need to know this.
“I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities.”	This is informing them about the limits of confidentiality, when there is a safeguarding concern. Young researchers will have to disclose information if there is a risk of harm and participants should be aware of this.
“I understand that the original audio recordings in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for 6 months, until the anonymised transcripts are produced.”	This is informing participants about what happens to their data, in this case audio recording. You must tell them how long you are going to keep the data and the purpose you are keeping them for.

Consent form example

Example Research Project

- I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.
- I understand that even if I agree to participate now, I can withdraw at any time or refuse to answer any question without any consequences of any kind.
- I understand that I can withdraw permission to use data from my interview within two weeks after the interview, in which case the material will be deleted.
- I have had the purpose and nature of the study explained to me in writing and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.
- I understand that I will not benefit directly from participating in this research.
- I agree to my interview being audio-recorded.
- I understand that all information I provide for this study will be treated confidentially.
- I understand that in any report on the results of this research my identity will remain anonymous.
- This will be done by changing my name and disguising any details of my interview which may reveal my identity or the identity of people I speak about.
- I understand that disguised extracts from my interview may be quoted.
- I understand that if I inform the researcher that myself or someone else is at risk of harm, they may have to report this to the relevant authorities.
- I understand that the original audio recordings in which all identifying information has been removed will be retained for 6 months, until the anonymised transcripts are produced.
- I understand that under freedom of information legalisation I am entitled to access the information I have provided at any time while it is in storage as specified above.
- I understand that I am free to contact any of the people involved in the research to seek further clarification and information.

Signature of research participant

---------- ----------
Signature of participant Date

Signature of researcher

I believe the participant is giving informed consent to participate in this study

---------- ----------
Signature of researcher Date

Safeguarding in a research context

There are a range of safeguarding concerns that are unique to a research project context. Organisations must ensure that the young researchers collecting data in the field are safe but also that the young people they may be speaking to are too. Below are some potential safeguarding issues, adapted from Health Sciences at Nottingham University[20], and some potential mitigating strategies :

Issue	Challenges and risks	Mitigating strategies
Power relationships between researchers and participants	While young researchers will be speaking to their peers, there can still be potential imbalance. Young researchers are coming with questions, recording devices, and might be older. This, combined with a sensitive issue to explore can make participants feel uncomfortable or pressured to answer.	There should be an emphasis on equity between young researchers and those they talk to during training. Young people should be taught to have informal conversations with participants before conducting research, to build trust.
Exploring sensitive and emotive issues	The key risk is around re-traumatisation, of both the young researcher and participant. Sensitive and emotive issues can be challenging to handle, and young researchers may not be adequately equipped.	If sensitive issues are explored in the project, training needs to be provided to young researchers around identifying risk. Co-produce a clear guide of what to do when risk is identified, and a clear safeguarding risk.
Researching in the field and lone working	There is always a risk when young people are conducting research out in the field. This is particularly acute if they are alone and conducting fieldwork in dark or quiet areas.	Always, where possible, accompany young researchers in the fieldwork phase. At minimum, young researchers should work in pairs. Make sure there are clear lines of communication, and an emergency contact if they come into trouble.
Maintaining professional boundaries	Participants may bring up sensitive issues or challenges they might have around their wellbeing or their mental health. In those situations, young researchers may empathetically want to provide support, help, or advice, that they may not be qualified to give.	Young researchers need to be clear about their role as researchers, and researchers only. It is not their role to provide mental health support. There should be information that staff and young researchers can signpost participants to if certain topics arise.
Disclosure of abuse or safeguarding issues during the data collection	Young researchers may touch on sensitive issues and personal topics during their conversations with participants. Participants may disclose abuse or safeguarding issues to young researchers.	Young researchers should be clear about examples of disclosure sound like and have a clear policy on what to do. There should be a key point of contact, a staff member on the project, who young people can go to.

20 Nottingham University, Safeguarding considerations for researchers and research students, (https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/healthsciences/documents/safeguarding-researcher-guidelines.pdf)

Young Londoners Fund Case Study on fieldwork & delivery: Da'watul Islam

Da'watul Islam's Safe Campaign engages 800 young people, families and frontline professionals over a three-year period to foster community resilience against gang violence. From this programme 120 young people become certified community organising and sports leadership-trained Safe Mentors who engage and support hard-to-reach peers. Safe Mentors have training sessions on capacity building as well as first aid, workshop facilitation and presentation training. The organisation also encourages previous mentors to come back and assist with each new cohort's training sessions.

There are a mix of roles offered to young people after their initial training. For example, young people help co-chair youth crime workshops and help run summer school boxercise classes. Young people help run anti-county line workshops and are coached to share their own lived experience and lead role play situations with their peers. From the series of anti-knife crime sessions young people ran, the Safe Mentors selected 4 key issues which were presented to the Mayor of Tower Hamlets. Youth worker Nurul Ullah notes 'Our young people who take on leadership roles become more conscious of their actions and how to manage internal conflict.'

Action, research, and evaluation are three pillars to Da'watul Islam's workshops. The young people engage in verbal evaluations after every session they conduct with their peers which helps them to modify and improve workshops.

6. Co-producing analysis

How do we analyse the data we collect?

How do we analyse qualitative data?

How do we analyse quantitative data?

How do we design recommendations?

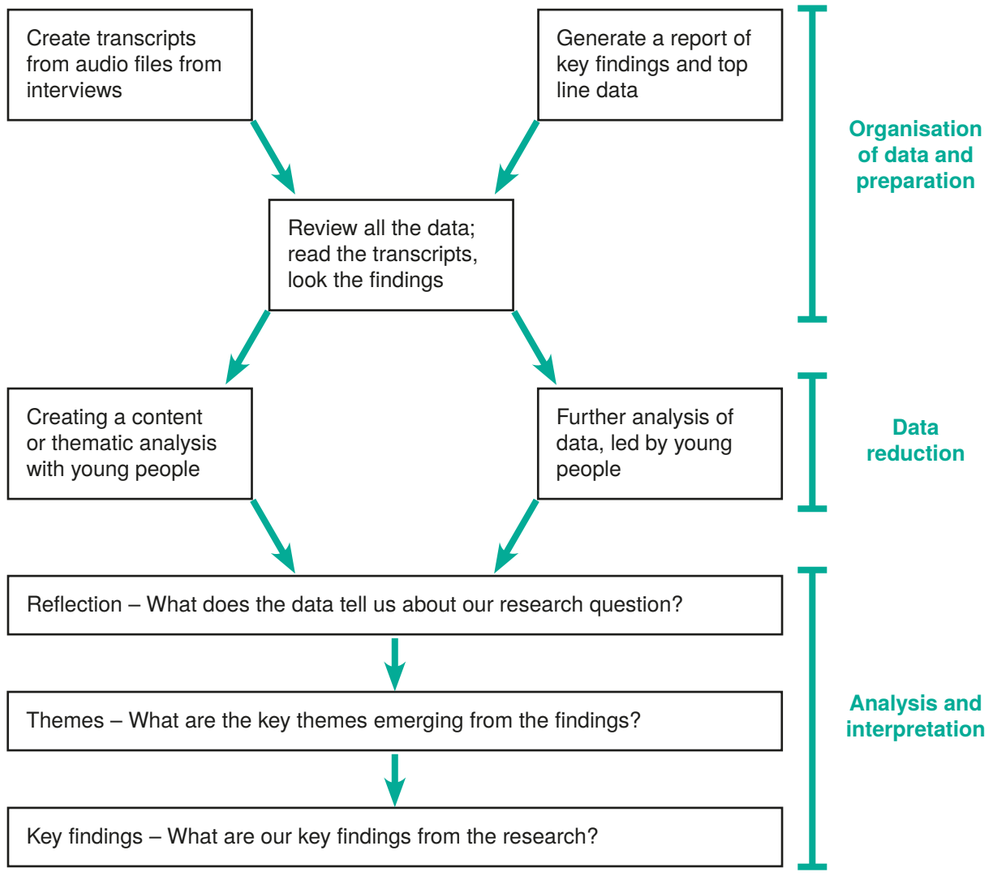
Introduction to data analysis

Data analysis is the process of taking the data that we collect from surveys, or interviews, and cleaning, transforming, interpreting, and visualising it. We want to make sense of the huge amount of data that has been collected and distil it into clear learning and insight that can inform policy and practice. Young people's participation in the analysis stage is one of the most important parts of a participatory project.

- Their lived experience of the topic, group, or area being studied will provide additional insight in the analysis stage.
- As co-designers of the research, they must be involved in analysing results and make decisions about what the key findings are.
- Peer researchers who have conducted qualitative research will also be best placed to analyse the findings, having been present for the interviews or focus groups.

Distilling data into insight

Regardless of whether peer researchers are analysing qualitative or quantitative data, we want to distill the vast amount of data collected into key insights like key findings or themes:



Involving young people in quantitative analysis

Young people should be involved in analysing quantitative data and seeing the results of any survey that they helped design and deliver. However, we should not be expecting young researchers to be learning statistical analysis and crunching numbers and percentages. Where they are more valuable to add their experience and perspective is in the interpretation and prioritisation of key data.

There are varying levels of complexity in quantiative analysis, and the ability to meaningfully involve young people depends on mainly their age. There are three general stages:

1. **Preparation of the data -** Ensuring that the data from the survey is presented in a way that is accessible for the peer research group.
2. **Discussion and reflection on the data -** Peer researchers should be presented as much of the data as possible from the survey, to prompt a discussion about meaning in relation to the research question.
3. **Summarising key findings -** After a discussion, it is worth thinking about key findings, and whether peer researchers have an opinion on which data points are more or less important to the project.

Preparation of the data

Peer researchers should not be expected to prepare the data collected through the survey, though there must be transparency about how you have prepared the data for them. Analysing data can be time consuming and can require statistical knowledge and software. For the purposes of this toolkit, we will simplify it to two key levels of complexity:

1. **Basic summary of the data -** This is usually already prepared by the online platforms like SurveyMonkey, and is a simple summary of the survey results. This is usually prepared as percentages, or in simple charts. For example, 35% of participants said they were very happy, 25% said they were happy, 20% said unhappy, and 20% said very unhappy.
2. **Relationships between questions -** This is more easily done through data analysis software such as SPSS, and requires knowledge about statistical significance. In this stage we want to look at the relationship between different questions, for example between equalities questions and the rest of the survey. For example, young women were twice as likely (40% to 20%) to say that they were very happy than young men.

In either level it is about preparing a summary of all the findings from the survey and all the statistically significant relationships between different questions. At this point, we want to provide peer researchers with all the data, regardless of what we feel is revealing or important.

Interview with a peer researcher

Peer research is important because there is only a certain extent that a professional researcher can be reflective about the process. Peer research is research that involves those who are affected. Their lived experience can provide a more nuanced approach, especially in the analysis stage, where there might be themes and ideas brought up that the “professional” researcher might not have picked up.

It’s important to involve young people in data analysis because on the one hand, it gives young people lots of good skills. I not only learnt about research, interviewing, and data analysis, but also about teamwork. It was interesting learning to work as a team in an adult context, organising with others for dates to speak to young people, or plan the research process. It’s about giving back to the community, the young people, that you’re taking from.

It was good to be involved in the analysis for the peer research project I worked on with Merton Council and Partnership for Young London. It was interesting to look at quantitative data analysis, the correlations coming out of the data, the relationships between the variables, and the key findings of the research. Young people as peer researchers identify patterns that won’t be obvious to the “professional” researcher, with their local knowledge. Because you have the nuance, and the context in which the data was collected. It’s not removed, you’ve been there when the data is being collected, doing those interviews. It’s not like you know every single story, but you know what the people are trying to put across, and to see that reflected in the results and the analysis is important. Peer researchers involved in the analysis can make that connection, during the analysis, because they were there.

It’s also important that young people are involved in co-producing key findings, so that they don’t feel removed from them. It is frustrating to be on the receiving end of policy development and being told as young people what others have found and what they think should happen because of findings that are not coproduced with peer researchers. The fact that we are actively participating in producing this project is key as our perspectives guide the outcomes and key findings towards direct relevance for young people in Merton. Furthermore, having peer researchers who know the area and relate to the people participating in the research to some extent acts as a proxy, or amplification, for voices that may otherwise be overlooked.

The concept that we as young people can then use the outcomes to guide our own work with Merton, as well as demonstrate that we have a published research project gives added gravity to our own career progression and personal development going forward. Overall, peer research and analysis are key in enabling access and diversification in research as well as passing along key skills that will be used in the future.

Halima
23 years old
Peer researcher with Merton Council

Discussion and reflection on the data

Peer researchers should be provided an opportunity to familiarise themselves with the data summaries first before going into a discussion about the data. We want peer researchers to consider the data points in relation to their own lived experience. There are some key questions for them to focus on:

- What are the most interesting data points in this research?
- Which of these findings do you most resonate with? Why?
- Which of these findings are the most surprising to you? Why are you surprised?
- How do these data points answer our original research question?

Once there has been an initial conversation about the data it is worth considering if there are any emerging themes in how participants answer questions. Are participants more positive or more negative? Are there certain groups that are consistently answering in a different way? Thinking about emerging themes is important for the write up, but especially important if the project has qualitative data that you would want to compare and contrast survey data with.

It is important to emphasise with peer researchers that the survey data will not be complete, provide a full picture, or necessarily answer the research question. If the project does have qualitative data from interviews, and focus groups it might be worth generating questions from the quantitative analysis to be answered later. For example, why did participants answer in this way?

Summarising key findings

Lastly, we want the peer researchers to make a decision about which data points are more or less interesting, relevant, or important to the research project.

Any decisions about key findings in this stage are not final, especially if there is qualitative data to be analysed, but can be helpful in getting a collective sense of what the peer researchers think are the key findings. This can be broken down into categories too, depending on if the research project looks at different topics. For example, what are the key findings for the topic of health, or education?

Different peer researchers will have different key findings from the research too. It is a good exercise to get them to create their own, individual lists of key findings, and compare and contrast.

"And when it came to getting them involved, we used online tools that encouraged discussion rather than them telling us what they think should be done, like JamBoard, Trello, and Mentimeter. You could tell them what we need their opinion, views or decision on…and they were free to go and do it in a way that was easy and interactive."

Involving young people in qualitative analysis

There are a range of approaches to analysing qualitative research and it depends on the amount of data collected and the tools available. Generally we would analyse the quantiative data before qualitative, as we would partly use the qualitative to understand why participants answered the way that they did in the survey. Some commonly used approaches are:

- **Content analysis –** One of the most straightforward approaches, content analysis examines the literal content of conversation. For example, the frequency a word is used by participants.
- **Narrative analysis –** Narrative analysis is used when looking at stories, told by participants, and interpret them for their meaning in the context of the research topic.
- **Word clouds –** Clouds of words from interviews ordered in frequency, can be created through analysis software or online. They provide a visual snapshot of the key words that came up.
- **Sentiment analysis –** Software like NVivo can take interview transcripts and conduct a sentiment analysis on them, providing insight to where participants are negative or positive in their response to certain questions.

There are other approaches too, like discourse analysis, or using a grounded theory approach. However, for this toolkit we will focus on one approach that can be used with young researchers; thematic analysis.

"Thematic analysis is a method of analysing qualitative data. It is usually applied to a set of texts, such as interview transcripts. The researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes – topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly."[21]

Thematic analysis in participatory research should be a collaborative process involving the views and perspectives of both the peer researchers and professionals. It is vital that young people who conducted the interviews are involved in the interpretation and analysis of the interviews.

For a thematic analysis there are five stages to run through with the peer researchers:

Stage	Action
Step 1: Transcription	Young researchers support with transcribing audio files from the interviews they conducted into written documents.
Step 2: Familiarisation	Young Researchers should read the transcripts and hear the audio files of the interviews they and others conducted.
Step 3: Coding	They go through the transcript text and highlight sections that stand out to them, and assign them a "code" a shorthand label.
Step 4: Generating themes	They collectively look over the codes they have generated and try to generate some key themes from them.
Step 5: Reviewing themes	Now themes are generated, the transcripts and audio files are reviewed again with the initial themes in mind.

21 Scribbr, How to do thematic analysis, (https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/)

Stage 1: Transcription

To conduct qualitative analysis with young people, the first step is the creation of transcripts. This is when the audio file from recorded interviews and focus groups are written up into a document that can be read and examined by the young researchers.

There are different approaches to transcripts:

- **Verbatim Transcript –** A transcript is written up exactly from the audio file, accurately reflecting all details and information from it. This will include non-verbal audio, such as coughs, and exactly how somebody spoke, including stutters, false starts, hesitation words (ums, or likes).
- **Intelligent transcript –** A transcript is created from the audio file, but is edited for clarity, with all the "ums" removed. The aim to edit the transcript as lightly as possible, to make it understood.
- **Edited transcript –** A transcript is created from the audio file but is potentially heavily edited for maximum clarity. This is usually how quotes would be edited when published in reports.

There are also tools and services that you can use to support in the transcription of interviews and focus groups:

- **Online artificial intelligence tools –** There are tools, such as Otter.ai or Google Voice, that can help convert audio files into written transcripts. They will never be 100% accurate, and quality will vary on the clarity of the audio. However, they give a good first draft that can be worked from.
- **Paid transcription service –** For projects more concerned about time than budgets, you can commission a professional transcription service to do this work. They charge anywhere between 80p to £1.30 per minute of audio file, for an interview.
- **Transcribe yourself –** This is the most traditional approach, and time consuming, where the audio file is transcribed yourself. It is usually more effective to listen to the audio at a reduced speed that matches your typing speed.

It is important to involve young people in the process of transcription. Turning audio files into the written transcripts that they will go on to analyse is an important step, and they should be provided the opportunity to create a transcript themselves.

They should also be supported to understand the difference between verbatim, edited, and intelligent transcripts. This provides transparency about the process, and helps them understand any discrepancies between the interviews they conducted and remember, and the non-verbatim transcript they may be working from later. However, it can be a long and difficult task to transcribe all audio files, and there should not be an expectation on young people to do all the transcripts.

Step 2: Coding

Young people should be involved in coding transcripts. it's a way of thinking about what was said in an interview in a more analytical way. There is no right or wrong approach to coding, and what is key at this stage is to begin to distil the information gathered in interviews.

Young people should be given a transcript, and coloured pens, and be talked through a hypothetical example of how to go about coding. For example:

Transcript text example	Codes identified
Interviewer: Where do you go to get support for your mental health? Participant: Uh, I'm not sure you know. I guess, I would go to my family or friends first, people I trust. I was gonna go ring up the NHS or something, but my friend went ages ago and is still waiting to see someone.	• Uncertainty • Friends and family • Trust • NHS services • Waiting lists

Young people should try not to be too specific with codes and keep them relatively broad so that they might to use the same codes repeatedly over the course of a transcript. Eventually, the frequency of certain codes throughout an interview provide an initial understanding of what issues or ideas are most relevant.

Step 3: Generating themes

Once transcripts have been coded by young people, it is important to collect all the codes generated and have a rough idea of how commonly each were used. This will allow young people to have a conversation about emerging themes and collaboratively decide on what they believe the qualitative data is telling them.

Young people should be given information about the codes they all generated, and should be talked through an example of how codes can be combined into themes:

Codes identified	Potential themes
• Uncertainty • Not sure • Don't know	• Uncertainty
• Waiting lists • Nobody to talk to • Didn't help	• Bad experience with services
• Trust • Family and friends • Professionals	• Trust

Step 4: Reviewing themes

Once a range of themes have been created, young people should reflect on the themes and the interviews that they have read. It is important for young people to ask themselves:

- Which are the most important themes from what we've read?
- Which themes go the furthest in answering the original research question?
- Do the themes adequately capture and reflect what we're hearing in those interviews?
- What have we missed?

Furthermore, if you have conducted quantitative research, this is where you think about how the themes and findings from the qualitative research adds to this. For example, if young people map out the key findings from the survey, how do the themes and findings from the qualitative research explain them?

From the themes, young researchers can start to collaboratively create key findings from them. The themes they have identified, and the key findings of the research, sometimes may be one in the same (for example, if they identified loneliness as a theme, then a key finding is that they found young people feel lonely). However, often key findings may be a more focused, specific point, that speaks to the themes.

Step 5: Write up

Once themes have been decided in the qualitative research, as well as key findings in the quantitative analysis generated, the findings can be written up. The key aspect of the write up is to ensure that the key findings, key themes, and any conclusions from the research project are from the peer researchers and that the final write up reflects their feelings and decisions. Below is a general example structure for a full report write up:

Section	Contents
Introduction by organisation and peer researchers	• Introduction from you as an organisation reflecting on the key findings and recommendations • Introduction from peer researchers collectively reflecting on the approach, key findings, and recommendations
Key findings and recommendations	• A clear summary of the key findings of the research. The key findings are derived from the themes identified by young researchers in relation to the original research question. • Recommendations co-designed with young people
Methodology	• Important to share the participatory approach taken, looking at how young people were trained and involved in decision making • A summary of the sample: how many young people did you speak to, how did you speak to them, and over what period
Research findings in detail	• Each section can have an introduction written by individual peer researchers • Research findings can either be organised thematically, or by topic depending on the scope of the research • Young people should have ultimate say about how this section is structured, from the analysis work with them

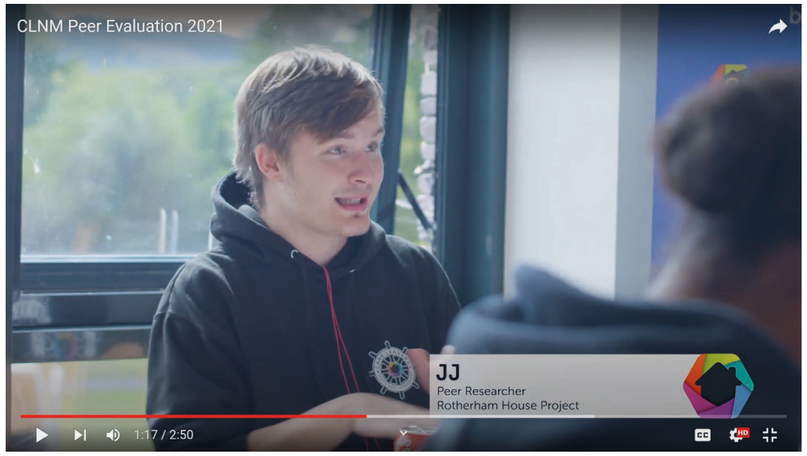
The National Care National Movement: A peer evaluation of The National House Project

Partnership for Young London (PYL) worked with The Care Leavers National Movement (CLNM) to conduct a peer evaluation of 13 House Projects across England and Scotland as part of The National House Project's (NHP) commitment to the voice of young people being at the heart of developing practice. Young people designed their own evaluation framework and the findings will inform the strategic direction of the Charity over the next year.

Young people in CLNM with lived experience of being in House Projects codesigned and led the peer research with the ambition to improve the way in which young people are supported. The project was guided by four key principles:

1. **Power sharing -** CLNM have been equal partners with the NHP, and PYL in designing this work. Young people decided what they wanted to focus on, how they wanted to focus on it, and what they believe should change as a result.
2. **Mutual respect for experience/expertise -** This project recognises the unique perspectives from young people in CLNM, their valuable lived experience of the House Project as well as the important contributions of staff.
3. **Informed decision making -** At each stage of decision making young people have been provided with the necessary training and skills to ensure that they are making informed choices. CLNM have learned about research, interviewing, and how other Local House Projects work across the country.
4. **Maximum involvement -** This project involved peer researchers in all areas of research planning, administration, implementation, and completion. They have been extremely generous with their time, supporting this project.

The peer researchers decided on the aims of the research project, designed the questions to be asked, developed on online survey, conducted over 15 in-depth interviews, and came together to analyse the data and co-produce the key findings. To see some of the analysis day please see this video here.



Recommendations

Once key findings have been created, it may be important for the research project to produce a series of recommendations. Young researchers expect changes to be made from what they have found out and organisations should support them towards this.

There are a few key tips around co-designing recommendations with young researchers:

- **Build in change from the start –** There should be a clear opportunity to create change or a budget to act on recommendations built in from the very start of the project. This might be about building relationships and interest from decision makers in the project.
- **Recommendations should be co-designed –** Organisations are equal partners to young researchers in crafting recommendations and must provide context about current or past solutions and be transparency about the capacity there is to test out solutions.
- **Start asking about changes during the research –** One of the most common questions at the end of the interview guide is: 'What would you change about X?' It is important to ask what changes participants want to see and reflect on this during the recommendations.
- **Ambitious vs achievable –** It is important to have a mix of recommendations, some big picture ambitious, and smaller more achievable, recommendations. There must be space for the larger ambitions for young people, but also some key actionable points.
- **Engage wider stakeholders –** Young researchers are responsible for the research and the key findings but recommendations can be done collaboratively with a wider group of stakeholders. Co-creating recommendations with the different stakeholders in the community who can act on them is effective in getting buy in, with young researchers being the voice of the research.
- **Less is more –** It is better to focus on a smaller set of recommendations then to have an exhaustive list of potential changes that young researchers want to see.

"Especially working with the one of the hardest to reach/marginalised communities, peer researchers can access people that we could never. That is the main point.

But the second point is the slogan that we use, that comes from the disability movement: To encourage them to get involved with the work we had planned, we firstly had to put it on a platform that was best suited for them, then it was a case of identifying what's the best way we can message them. Anything that we wanted them to work with us on…an email was sent just to keep that trail on our side and then we followed it up with WhatsApp messages."

Toynbee Hall: The challenges of renting in London as a young person

Over the course of two years, Toynbee Hall worked with 23 peer researchers to carry out participatory action research to explore the risks young private renters face in East London.

The peer researchers worked together with the research and policy team to design the research, conduct and analyse data from surveys and interviews, and host co-design workshops with landlords to develop recommendations to improve the private renting experience for young renters. There were nine key stages to the process:

1. **Building a team -** Over the course of 2.5 years, 23 peer researchers have taken part in the research, and a core group of 7 in the co-design of recommendations and action phase. Peer researchers were all aged between 18-30, and either currently rent from a private landlord in East London, or have done so within the last five years.
2. **Decide the aims of the project -** The peer research team felt that while tackling affordability would make the largest impact in preventing homelessness amongst young people, this was not achievable within the scope of the project. Instead, it was decided that understanding how young people might be better supported to access and understand their housing rights would be the most effective focus for the project.
3. **Choosing and shaping the methods, and conducting research -** The peer research team decided surveys and interviews were the best methods to use and worked with the research manager to decide on questions and wording. 80 young private renters filled out our survey and 14 took part in in-depth interviews. The peer research team and the research manager came together to analyse the findings.
4. **Choosing a focus for action -** The peer researchers reviewed key findings from their research and generated initial proposals based on recommendations from participants and learning from their own experiences. A SWOT analysis helped to decide the strongest ideas. Our steering group member, Private Renting Policy Officer from London Borough of Tower Hamlets Housing Team, helped the group to assess the strongest proposals to take into the co-design process.
5. **Co-design workshops with landlords -** The peer researchers ran a sharing workshop with landlords to get their input into which proposals should be developed through the co-design process. Based on their feedback the renters ran three further proposal development workshops with landlords.
6. **Feedback from specialists and decision-makers -** The team took the proposals they developed with input from landlords to the projects' steering group for feedback on feasibility. The steering group consisted of representatives from the Greater London Authority, local authorities, housing charities, renters rights organisations and a university housing team.
7. **Refining proposals -** The peer researchers discussed and refined their proposals based on the steering groups' recommendations and shared the refined recommendations with the landlords for them to have their final input into the co-design process.
8. **Taking action -** From January 2021 until September 2021, the peer researchers took action to share their learning with a variety of stakeholders and attempt to influence policy and practice.
9. **Learning -** A variety of learning has emerged about the Participatory Action Research process. This learning will inform Toynbee Hall's approach to future projects and we hope will be useful to other practitioners in the field.

Interview with a peer researcher from the Toynbee Hall project

"I joined the Young Private Renters project after seeing the voluntary position advertised by my university Queen Mary, University of London. At the time, I was trying to secure a tenancy for my final year of studies. My experience of the London market during that time was particularly stressful. I had been frustrated by the poor quality of housing and prospective property management of letting agents and landlords experienced in our viewings, especially considering the extortionate rent we were expected to pay despite seeking some of Tower Hamlets lowest rent.

I voted on research methodology, despite not being present for in-person discussion in London. When I began attending meetings, the first task I contributed to was the analysis of the survey's results. This was great, as I love the illustrative ability of statistics and data in helping you understand a demographic or issue. Additionally, to begin discussing my experience and the experiences of my fellow peer researchers was really enjoyable. The atmosphere of our discussions has always been really supportive throughout.

Planning interview questions together followed on from this analysis as we considered which issues we wanted to probe based on our results. This was the first instance when we considered the scope of the project. Although we recognised that there were massive changes needed in renting on a market level, we acknowledged that it was important to focus our project in a way that it could be the most effective. We subsequently took a focus on young people's access to renting advice and information in the interviews.

We scrupulously discussed the wording of our questions to ensure they were received and understood properly. To be a private renter deciding on these details and then to follow on as interviewers felt appropriate, despite not necessarily having prior experience. It was therefore great to be supported through this by research manager, Philip. To have the interviews, the qualitative data collection, as a conversation between individuals of the shared lived experience was brilliant.

I, along with other renters, held serious scepticism regarding the initial co-design phase of the action stage. We certainly questioned the idea of working with those who owned the property to skew the focus away from renters and their powerlessness that our research had highlighted. Even despite the move online spurred by Covid-19, the co-design phase with landlords was instead really constructive. Working with them was very eye-opening to me. Particularly in terms of the shared concern for the malpractice of letting agencies, but it was also telling of the importance of the landlord/renter relationship and how it could be the foundation for improving the quality of one's renting experience. I'm not sure these findings would be possible without such a participatory and collaborative approach to action research.

As the co-design stage draws to a close, I continue to maintain my excitement about the outcomes of the project that I've had throughout. Despite having to manage expectations, the feedback from the steering groups and other organisations of the potential for impact has really emboldened my optimism. My main hope is for improving communication between landlords and renters. I believe both parties largely share a common interest in managing their ethical concerns in a market that encourages the opposite."

7. Communicating findings

How do we co-create a report?

How can young people campaign?

Writing a report based on findings

Rarely will the young researchers who are part of the project be responsible for writing up the report. It is for organisations to take their analysis, their decisions around key findings and themes, and write up the findings in a way that is true to what they have decided.

That's not to say that the young researchers couldn't write the report, but they would require additional training or existing skills and more time and budget to pay them for that work. However, there are some key ways that young researchers can contribute to the final report:

- **Authorship and author biographies –** Young researchers should be, at a minimum, co-authors of any report or publication created from the project. You can also provide photos of the young researchers and biographies of them too.
- **Collective introduction –** Young researchers can contribute an introduction to the report, that is written collectively or from an individual but signed by the collective group.
- **Individual introductions –** Individual young researchers can contribute introductions to each section of the report, reflecting on that chapter's key findings and how it relates to their own lived experience of the issue.
- **Visual and artistic contributions –** Young researchers can contribute to the visual design of the report, choosing colour schemes, photographs, or by getting paid for their own contributions to the artwork or photography.
- **Other written contributions –** Young people can add other written contributions to the final draft, like a running commentary. Ask young people to choose their favourite survey data point, or their favourite quote, and write a few sentences why they have chosen it.

Report structure example

Reports, or any finished publication, will vary in size and structure depending on the scope of the research. However, below is a example structure:

1. **Introduction to the report –** This can be either written by a peer researcher, organisation, or both. It will set out the basic information of the report.
2. **Key findings and/or recommendations –** Clearly share the key findings from the report, and set out the changes that you want to see as a result.
3. **Peer research approach –** The decision to use a participatory approach and involve young people is a key part of the project. Provide a space to discuss the process, and the way in which young people shaped the project.
4. **Research approach –** It is important to set out some basic information about the research approach; how many people did you speak to, how did you speak to them, how was data analysed.
5. **Research findings –** This is the bulk of the report, typically broken up into chapters organised by themes or topics, depending on what emerges in the analysis with the young researchers. Each chapter can have an introduction, summarise that chapter's findings.

Co-design a communication plan

Once the report is completed, it is good to co-design a communication plan with young researchers. Initially it is worth collectively coming up with answers to the following questions[22]:

- Who are the target audiences?
- What are the key message(s) you want to convey to your audiences?
- What do you want the target audiences to do with the information?
- What format(s) will you use to communicate the results (e.g. infographics, videos, printed reports)?
- When and how frequently do you plan to communicate?
- Who will be doing the communicating (which young researchers)?
- What resources are available for communicating?

Approaches to communicating results

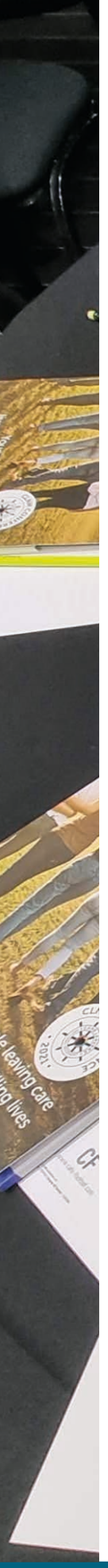
- **Research report –** A larger report that can be uploaded online or printed. Generally, provides the most detail about the project, from the approach to the findings.
- **Summary sheet/research brief –** A short one or two-page summary of the research findings that can be easily digested for those who have less time to read the full report.
- **Data visualisation –** Taking the data and findings from the research report, and visualising this in a creative way. This can be infographics or individual charts for social media.
- **Interactive web-pages –** Putting information and data on a webpage on your website will allow people to access the project easily. Also allows you to integrated multi-media content like photographs, videos, and social media accounts.
- **Photo/Video content –** Using creative approaches, like peer researchers summarising findings on camera, can bring to life the research in an engaging way.

22 Adapted from LISC, Participatory Research Toolkit (https://www.lisc.org/media/filer_public/6c/3f/6c3f4b71-48ab-4081-b0da-46ae3dca1dec/011320_cbcr_lisc_toolkit_91018_lfa_final.pdf)

“Instead of them just telling us their experiences and their views or recommendations for us to then have the meeting with whoever it might be, we try to have young people be the ones who are speaking directly to decision makers whenever we can….cut out that middle person as much as we can.

It's going to be more valuable for them to hear directly from young people rather than through us…

It's about trying to disrupt some of the weird power hierarchies that can often exist in quite a lot of this work.”



Young Londoners Fund Case Study on communicating findings: All Change

All Change is an organisation supported by the Young Londoners Fund which has an emphasis on arts activism. Their B Creative project is co-produced with young women for young women. Young women work with inspiring female artists to find their voices through different art forms, and to express their ideas and affect change. They have created campaigns and events to tackle discrimination and period poverty, to support their community during Covid and to contribute to the Black Lives Matter conversation.

All Change hires a variety of creative professionals to work alongside their young people. These artists use creativity as a means of starting a conversation. The artists devise creative workshops to get their group thinking. The key is to listen to young people's ideas and not be dismissive. Young people are treated as equals – they are also experts in the room. Artists put in place a structure where they are always honest with the young people. For example, they let them know only one idea for their campaign can be chosen. Good facilitation and modelling decisive behaviour is key.

All Change has a group of Young Creatives which they hire and train. There is a simple application process and interview so young people get job hiring experience. Another young creative sits in on each interview to provide peer support. Jobs offered are tailored to each young person. Roles include: peer support, devising and delivering outreach on programmes, co-designing and delivering workshops and events planning. All Change factors in Young Creative roles into their budget and fundraising. The Young Creatives are experts in being young women and knowing the issues faced by their peers. They help get other young people involved. There is a mentoring process for each young person – they are encouraged to try things they are less confident in and have 121 sessions. They are also part of regular staff team meetings. The Young Creatives were vital to setting the campaigning programmes agenda and supporting their peers.

A top tip is to be brave and get the right experts in. It is also about respecting the young peoples expertise. After the project we held an evaluation and reflection process on what worked well / what didn't. Having paid roles for young people is helpful as they feel invested in the project's outcomes. They are with the ACA team for a few years so can see the projects through from inception to completion.

Responses from young women from the All Change Arts project

Why did you decide to take part in this project?

"I have been a part of the B Creative project for a long time, this particular project really interested me because it was nice to have a discussion about women's safety with a female-only group."

"I decided to take part because I like writing poems and I like being around inspiring women, and sharing our stories."

What was the best thing about taking part in this project?

"It was a very comfortable space to express our opinions, I felt very empowered."

"Seeing how talented people are, even when they thought they might not be. Seeing it all come together at the end, the final product of the chalking was amazing."

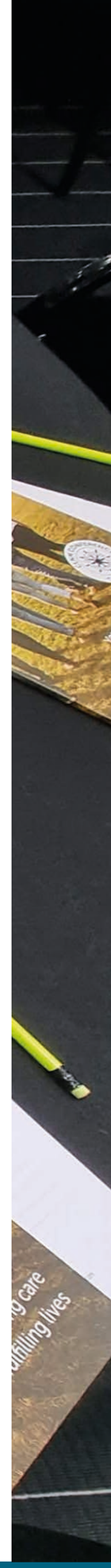
What are your recommendations for other youth organisations who want to do a similar project to this?

"Go into things with sensitivity as you don't know what you could run into, it could be triggering for some people. A female leader that the group feel comfortable with is important."

"Make sure that it's accessible and safe for everyone, think carefully about the public space that you choose."

Are there any changes you would make to the project?

"I would have it on a larger scale so we can spread our messages further and hear more peoples' words of wisdom."



What next?

The Future of the Toolkit

Involving Young Londoners: A toolkit for peer research is a first attempt to collate information into a practical toolkit for organsiations to use. However, we are aware that there is so much more to say and include. Partnership for Young London will continue the work that the toolkit has started, and will continue to update it, share practice, and bring organisations together.

Living website

We will be hosting the toolkit here and will continue to update the page over the following six months. We will look to:

- **Signpost to peer research projects -** We want to provide links and additional information about some of the fantastic peer research projects happening across London, and the UK.
- **Provide exercises, resources, and worksheets -** We will be uploading resources, like the powerpoints we have used for peer research, on the website for any organisation to use over.

London Peer Research Network

Funded by Trust for London, Partnership for Young London also host the London peer research Network. This brings together youth sector organisations, local and regional government, and Universities together to look at participatory research. To join on to the peer research nework, please go here.

Training and support

We will running a series of training sessions based on the peer research Toolkit, from November 2021 to April 2022. To see the full list of training events, please go here.

Partnership for Young London

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