

The National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) is pleased to be part of YEF's Race Equity Data Collection Panel.

We are available to support evaluators in ensuring that their data collection methods with children and young people are equitable, inclusive, and anti-racist.

This document outlines our experience and offer. Please do get in touch to discuss how we can help.

1. Our experience and expertise

As outlined below, NatCen possesses both substantive experience in large-scale impact evaluation, as well as expertise in adopting trauma-informed, anti-racist approaches to enable mixed-methods data collection with vulnerable children and young people from minority ethnic backgrounds.

The following project examples highlight our expertise and the range of services we could provide as part of the panel.

- **An evaluation of SOS+**, a peer mentoring, schools-based programme delivered by St Giles, supporting children and young people (aged 11–18) at risk of offending and exploitation across England and Wales. The study includes a two-armed individual-level randomised controlled trial (RCT) with 960 participants across 19 schools over 36 months, alongside an implementation and process evaluation exploring delivery barriers and enablers from multiple stakeholder perspectives. Data collection includes the SRDS and SDQ via online surveys, supported by email reminders and mentor engagement to maximise response rates. The project also conducts community landscape assessments to analyse local sociodemographic characteristics and crime profiles. These insights inform tailored safeguarding strategies, ensure inclusivity through matched-pair moderation, and help identify and address accessibility barriers related to language, culture, or impairment.
- **An evaluation of the Turnaround programme**, an early intervention initiative aiming to improve outcomes for children at risk of entering the Youth Justice Service through tailored support. This project includes a large-scale survey and in-depth qualitative interviews across 156 Youth Offending Teams (YOTs). Over 18 months, data is collected from 448 children and young people (aged 10–17) using the Self-Report Early Delinquency Instrument (SRED), the Student Resilience Survey (SRS), and/or the SDQ. Additionally, it includes remote and in-person interviews with 28 young people and their parents/carers, using a quota-based sampling approach to ensure diversity across key characteristics, including ethnicity. A trauma-informed approach guides qualitative data collection, with a focus on exploring disparities in the criminal justice and education systems.
- **A qualitative study on stop and search**, funded by the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities. The research involved focus groups and in-depth interviews with 27 Black and South Asian young men and 12 police officers, exploring experiences and processes relating to Stop and Search, including Out of Court Disposals (OOCs). The study used an anti-racist, trauma-informed approach, including matched-pair moderation.

2. Embedding race equity in research projects

Race equity is embedded in NatCen projects through its **Social Equity Team**, which focuses on conducting inclusive and equitable research and evaluation with marginalised and minoritised groups.

The Social Equity team provides critical challenge across NatCen, as well as to partners and funders, to ensure race equity is integrated into the design and delivery of research and evaluation projects. This is achieved through expert guidance and training on inclusive and equitable approaches to data collection, analysis, reporting and dissemination, alongside ongoing safeguarding and ethical review.

This includes:

- **Providing training and project support on anti-racist research design.** We design and deliver studies that explore the access, participation and outcomes of minority ethnic groups; adopting an intersectional perspective to explore the nature of drivers of ethnic disparities and recommend actionable solutions.
- **Conducting targeted landscape assessments:** These assessments help us understand the specific needs and challenges of different racial and ethnic groups, ensuring our research is grounded in lived experiences and informs effective interventions.
- **Equality Impact Assessments (EqIA):** Alongside NatCen's Research Ethics Committee (REC) process, we conduct EqIAs to identify barriers to participation and develop tailored safeguarding strategies. Our EqIA framework is rooted in anti-racist, trauma-informed practice to address disparities affecting marginalised groups.

3. Capacity to deliver

NatCen's field force comprises over 200 Policy Research Centre (PRC) staff who have significant experience conducting research and evaluation projects across youth justice, education, health, children services, policing and wider communities. This is supplemented by a team of over 600 interviewers (including NatCen's dedicated Telephone Unit) who provide substantial capacity for face to face and remote data collection and serve as a key mechanism for engaging seldom heard groups through non-digital forms of engagement. NatCen also has specialist methods teams that provide expertise in data cleaning, sampling, weighting, (dis)aggregation and advanced statistical analysis.

4. Ensuring high quality response and engagement

NatCen have developed and refined several strategies to ensure the collection of high-quality data with good response rates from children and young people.

These strategies are rooted in our extensive experience and commitment to rigorous social research. This includes:

- **Building trust and rapport** with young participants. We achieve this through careful recruitment strategies, often in collaboration with parents, carers, legal guardians, trusted adults, schools, youth organisations, and community groups that have established relationships with the target demographic.

- We conduct pilot **testing and cognitive interviewing** with a subset of the target population before full-scale data collection. This helps identify and rectify any issues with question wording, format, or overall survey design, ensuring the final instruments are well-suited to children and young people.
- Our survey instruments are **age-appropriate and engaging**, designed specifically for children and young people. They are tailored to be understandable and interesting, incorporating interactive elements where possible to maintain engagement.
- To improve response rates, we adopt a **flexible and participant-centred approach** offering multiple modes of participation including online surveys, telephone interviews, and face-to-face interactions.
- We ensure all our research materials e.g. information sheets, include, tailored messages to resonate with different subgroups within the youth population, **considering cultural, social, and economic factors**. These messages highlight the importance of the research and how participation can contribute to positive change in their communities.
- We recognise the importance of **safeguarding and ethical considerations** when working with children and young people. We ensure all research activities comply with ethical guidelines, and participants are fully informed about the study's purpose, their rights, and how their data will be used. Parental consent and child assent are obtained where necessary, and confidentiality is strictly maintained.
- We employ different strategies to **minimise non-response and attrition rates**, such as sending reminders, offering incentives, and providing support throughout the data collection process. This support includes accommodating additional needs, signposting to external agencies, and ensuring that a trusted adult is available to offer support post-data collection where possible. **Incentives** can range from small monetary rewards to vouchers, designed to be appealing to young people while being ethically appropriate and not coercive.
- We use **longitudinal study designs** where appropriate, tracking the same participants over time to understand changes and developments in behaviours and attitudes. To maintain engagement, we establish regular communication with participants and provide updates on the study's progress and findings, making them feel valued and involved.
- We also employ **adaptive survey techniques**, tailoring questions based on previous responses to make surveys more relevant to each participant. This reduces survey fatigue and improves data quality. Skip logic and branching techniques streamline the survey process, ensuring participants only answer pertinent questions.
- We employ **creative – visual methodologies** to collect data from children and young people, such as online diaries, journalling, and visual mind mapping tools. These methodologies are designed to be age-appropriate and culturally sensitive, ensuring that the data collection is enjoyable and respectful for young participants.
- We use **interactive digital tools**, such as online bitesize videos featuring participants, to disseminate key findings and ensure that the voices of young people are represented. By including participants in the creation of these videos, we ensure that their perspectives and experiences are authentically conveyed, fostering a sense of ownership and involvement in the research process.

- We place a strong **emphasis on training and supporting field staff** who interact with young participants. Training includes modules on trauma-informed approaches, equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI), and how to safely engage children and young people in research. Field staff are also supported by the organisation through regular debriefing sessions, providing them with the space to address any concerns throughout the research process.

We utilise multiple communication channels to communicate with children and young people (CYP) and their parents. These include:

- Dedicated project emails and phone numbers for participants to ask questions, address concerns, or follow up on updates and progress. Where appropriate, we send regular email and SMS updates to keep participants informed and engaged.
- We provide regular updates and information to parents, carers, and other stakeholders through emails, phone calls, and dedicated project web pages. We also keep open lines of communication with schools, youth organisations, and community groups to support participation.
- We use social media channels such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, and LinkedIn to provide updates, disseminate findings and engage young people in a familiar and effective manner.
- Secure and user-friendly project page hosted on our main website [National Centre for Social Research] provides participants with access to information on their participation, surveys, feedback options, and study updates. This project page includes contact details for the research team, ensuring that any issues or concerns can be promptly addressed.
- We pro-actively and accommodate reasonable adjustments through providing recruitment materials and fieldwork materials in accessible formats, including EasyRead, and work with trusted subcontractors to provide interpretation and translation.

5. Data protection, ethics, safeguarding and information security

NatCen is committed to maintaining the highest standards of data security and participant safeguarding. We are fully accredited to ISO 27001 and undergo annual external audits to maintain this certification. We are also fully compliant with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and ensure that all research participants receive Data Privacy Notices and provide informed consent in line with GDPR requirements. When collecting data on race, ethnicity, and other protected characteristics, we do so under the legal basis of explicit consent and follow guidance from our internal Data Protection Officer (DPO) to ensure compliance.

We have Cyber Essentials Plus certification, through which all data is securely stored on NatCen's servers, accessible only to the research team and approved third parties involved in transcription. Any data transfer between organisations is conducted via a secure FTP server.

Our Safeguarding Policy and processes were developed in collaboration with the NSPCC, and aligns with ESRC and GSR Professional Guidance, as well as MRS standards. All disclosures are managed by a specialised team that works closely with relevant partner agencies to ensure appropriate action is taken when needed.

6. Organisational commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion

As an organisation, NatCen is committed to embedding race equality and equity, both in our research and within our organisation. Guided by our comprehensive equality, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policy, we foster an inclusive environment where all staff and participants are treated with respect and dignity, regardless of race or ethnicity.

We are committed to fostering an equitable and diverse workplace by:

- **Ensuring our policies promote inclusion and anti-discriminatory behaviour:** Our workplace policies are regularly reviewed and updated to uphold equity, diversity, and inclusion. We embed anti-racist and anti-discriminatory principles across all policies, from recruitment and career progression to workplace conduct and employee support. Furthermore, clear reporting mechanisms are in place to address any concerns related to race equity, and we ensure appropriate action is taken when issues arise.
- **Supporting diverse staff networks:** NatCen hosts staff groups focused on race and equity issues, including an internal EDI network and an LGBT+ staff network. These groups provide strategic guidance, collaborate with senior leadership, and influence recruitment strategies to attract diverse candidates.
- **Ensuring fair and inclusive recruitment:** Our hiring processes are designed to attract a diverse pool of candidates through transparent, merit-based criteria that promote fairness and equal opportunity. We actively work to reduce barriers for underrepresented groups by flexible and hybrid working arrangements, diverse recruitment panels, targeted outreach and recruitment strategies, inclusive job descriptions and criteria.
- **Providing comprehensive EDI training:** All staff receive mandatory training on equity, diversity, and inclusion, covering topics such as unconscious bias, cultural competence, anti-racism, and anti-ableism. This training is regularly updated to reflect best practices and emerging issues.
- **Engaging with external experts and stakeholders:** We collaborate and regularly partner with community organisations and advocacy groups to strengthen our approach to race equality and equity, ensuring our research remains relevant and impact

Contact

For further information or to discuss how NatCen can support your evaluation, please contact:

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