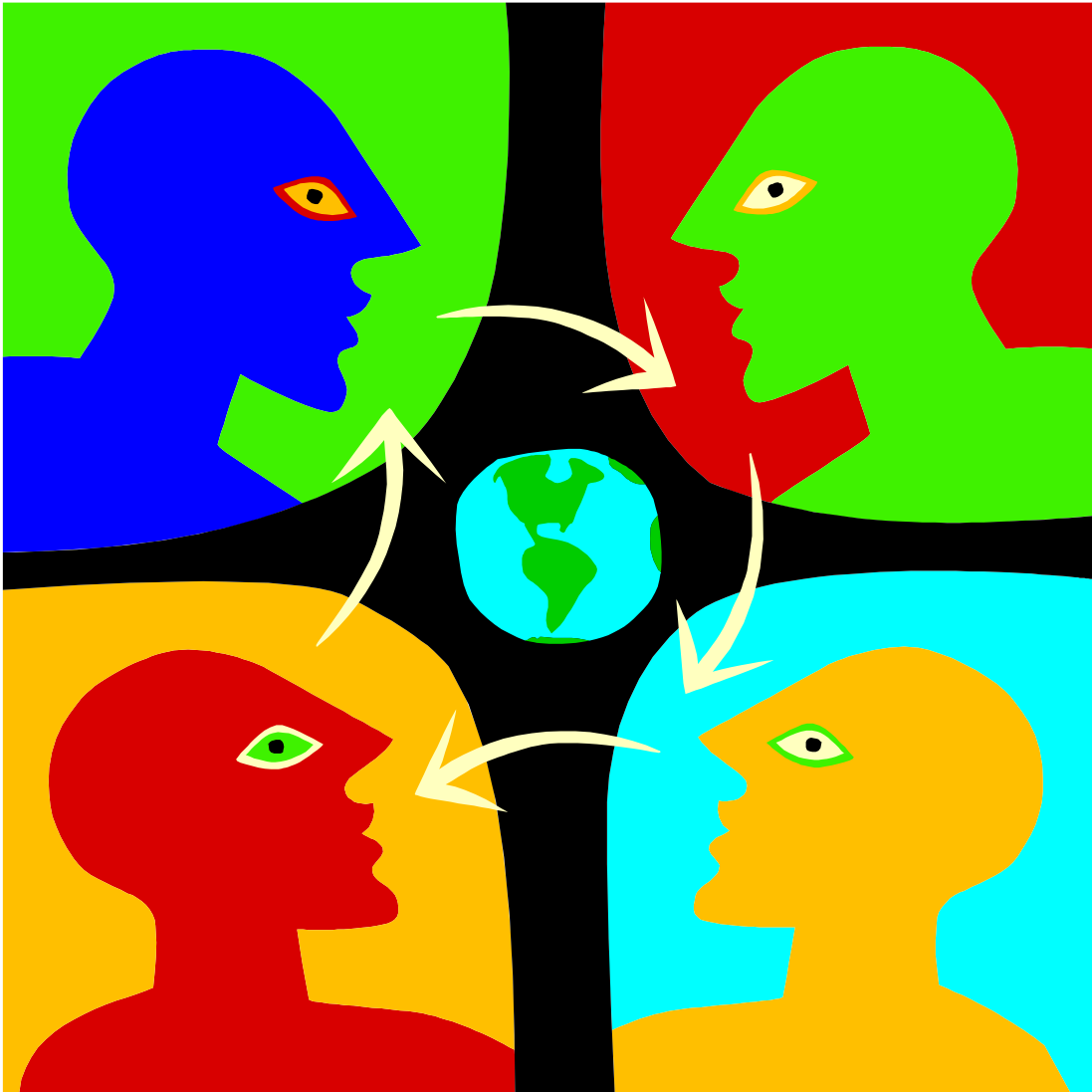


# Qualitative Research Recruitment



***Best practice - rules and guidelines***

## **Structure/agenda**

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Background
- 3 The recruitment process
- 4 Rules/guidelines by:
  - a) client
  - b) researcher
  - c) field (internal/external)
  - d) recruiter
  - e) respondent
- 5 Data protection legislation
- 6 Recruitment from databases

## **1. Introduction**

These rules and guidelines are aimed at those involved professionally in qualitative research recruitment, whether individuals or organisations, primarily research and Field/recruitment practitioners but also clients who commission qualitative research. The rules and guidelines also address the needs, interests and responsibilities of respondents, members of the public who take part in qualitative research.

Why have these rules and guidelines? They have been drawn up for a number of reasons:

- to meet the growing need for common standards in the industry
- to increase and maintain standards of professionalism in qualitative research and to promote the values of honesty, reliability, confidentiality and transparency
- the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA98) requires certain standards and practices to be observed and implemented, by law. These are primarily concerned with protecting the rights of respondents

There is therefore merit in setting out existing (and new) rules and agreed standards, not only for current practitioners and users of qualitative research but also to help to safeguard the future of the industry.

## **2. Background**

For the purposes of these rules and guidelines, qualitative research is defined as marketing or social research:

- which seeks to reach understanding through dialogue and evocation (rather than measurement)

- which uses open-ended, non-directive data collection techniques (not structured questionnaires)
- where the data analysis output is descriptive (rather than statistical)

As qualitative research has grown in volume and in recognition over the last twenty years, so the need for setting out its own recruitment standards has increased. The legacy of applying quantitative measures and methods to qualitative research recruitment has put more pressure on the system. It is one thing to calculate how many

Times readers drive a Rover but it is something else to find a real person who does both and who is male, between 30 and 45 and willing and able to attend a group discussion next Tuesday, for example.

Recruiters are resourceful people. Their priority and their key skill is in finding the right people and when this proves particularly difficult, they may have 'adapted' the sample specification, often with the tacit encouragement of harassed researchers and their contradictory 'rule books'. In practice, serious transgressions are rare. However there remains an uneasy balance between a client/researcher's demands (often over-specified) and a recruiter's delivery, which satisfies neither side – one side feeling that the detailed sample specification may not have been achieved, the other that the sample specification may not have been achievable.

The whole recruitment process is typically seen as a 'top down' process, the starting point being clients, who commission/pay for the process, which then is 'passed down' via agencies, researchers, Field departments, recruiters and finally to respondents. There may also be database departments, Viewing Facilities and other people involved. So many interests being involved has added to the pressure on qualitative research recruitment and may be one of the reasons that industry rules and guidelines have proved so difficult to instigate to date.

The Data Protection Act (see section 5) takes respondents as the starting point and works 'up' the process, a direction which arguably needs reinforcing anyway. The present rules and guidelines incorporate implications of the DPA and MRS Code of Conduct for qualitative research recruitment. We have quoted from the document, 'How To Use The Code In Qualitative Research', available in draft form on the MRS website and due for publication in April/May 2002. The issue of recruitment from lists/databases is dealt with in section 6.

The present qualitative research recruitment best practice (rules and guidelines) have therefore been drawn up, after extensive consultation, with the intention of clarifying the process for the benefit of all those involved and extending the principles of transparency and good communication all the way up the process.

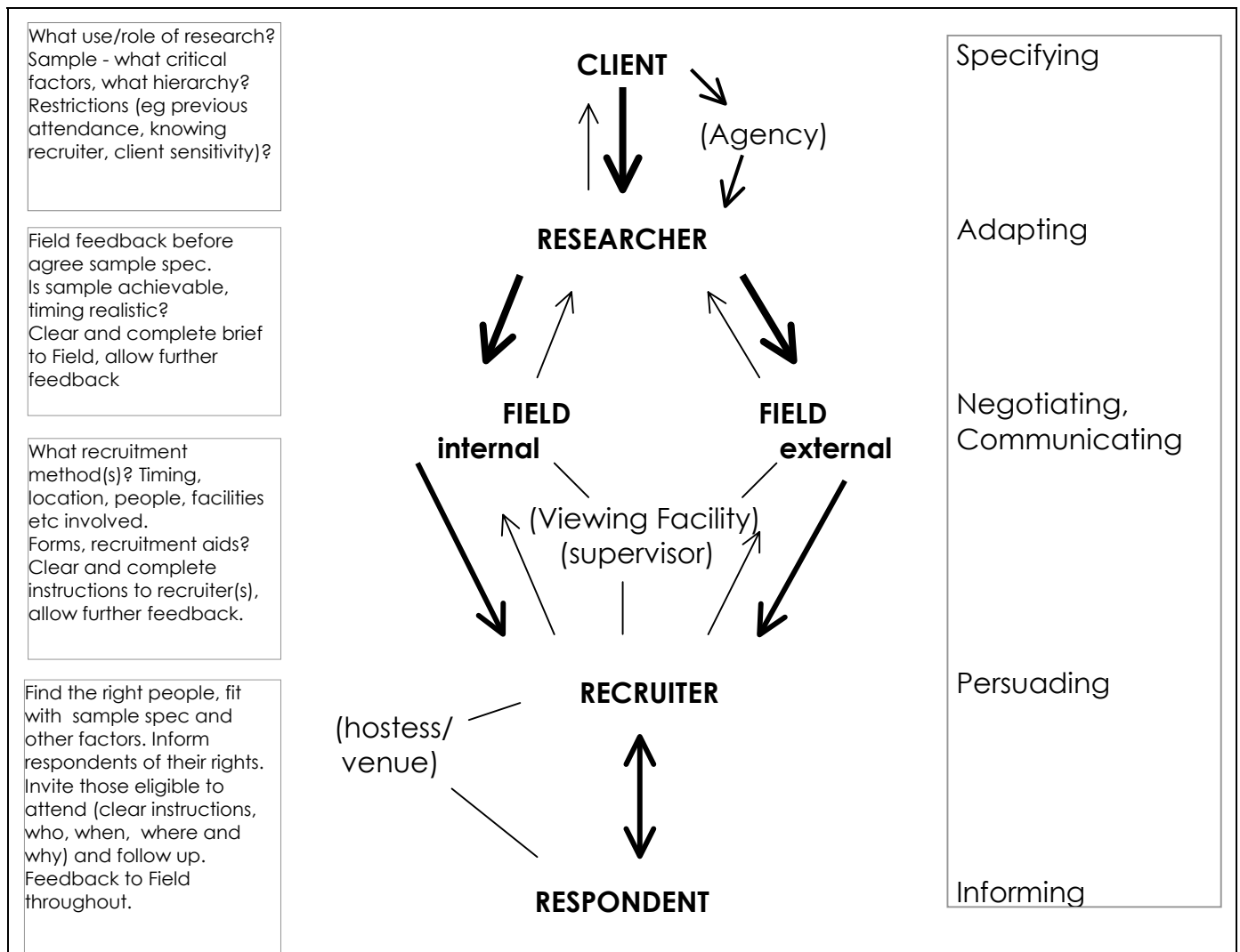
The diagram below (fig. 1) summarises the roles and responsibilities of the key players in the process. The following section lists these roles and responsibilities in more detail.

### 3. The Recruitment process

For our purposes, we define the start of the recruitment process to be the first time in a commissioned piece of research where the sample is being discussed/agreed. The end of the recruitment process is the time when the respondent(s) starts the research session.

Fig 1  
Transaction  
Key Role

Process



## 4. Qualitative Research Recruitment – Rules and Guidelines by Participant

The following is divided into those rules which **must** be followed (by law or by strong common consent – see section 5, Data Protection Act) and then those guidelines which people **should** and can reasonably be expected and encouraged to follow.

### A) Clients

By 'Client' we mean the person who has commissioned the research.

Clients **MUST**:

- Notify with the Office of the Information Commissioner as a data controller if they provide researchers with customer information (eg lists/database, contacts etc)
- Understand and abide by their role as data controller
- State uses to which research data will be put and use it only for these purposes

Clients **SHOULD**:

- Have a full understanding of the qualitative recruitment process, as detailed in these guidelines
- Agree with Researcher clear and achievable sample specification, recruitment procedures and timescales on a project by project basis
- Share all information which will facilitate effective recruitment
- Take on board any recruitment difficulties reported and, if appropriate, adapt the sample specification accordingly

### B) Researchers

By 'Researcher' we mean the person responsible for carrying out the research commissioned.

Researchers **MUST**:

- Notify with the Office of the Information Commissioner as a data controller
- Understand and abide by their role as data controllers
- Treat Recruiters/Hostesses and Respondents with respect at all times
- Respect the rights, property and privacy of Recruiters/Hostesses and Respondents at all times

Researchers **SHOULD**:

- Consult with Field/Recruiter prior to agreeing sample specification with the Client
- Agree with Client clear and achievable sample specification, recruitment procedures and timescales

- Make Client aware of verification procedures and availability of results on request
- Provide Field/Recruiter with precise written sample specification, recruitment procedures, and timescales along with a thorough briefing on project aims/objectives
- Agree with Field/Recruiter details relating to previous attendance of respondents, any exclusions and venue/location needs
- Take on board any recruitment difficulties reported back by Field/Recruiter and take appropriate actions as a result
- Recommend fieldwork venues and locations most appropriate to the sample
- Always carry an MRS membership card or other 'bona fides' as identification when interacting with the public
- Provide feedback to Recruiter/Supervisor and to Field on the accuracy and quality of recruitment after every research session

### C) Field (internal and external)

'Field' refers to executives in Field departments within research agencies (internal) or in separate Field agencies (external).

#### Field MUST:

- Notify with the Office of the Information Commissioner as a data controller
- Understand and abide by their role as data controllers
- Treat Recruiters/Hostesses and Respondents with respect at all times

#### Field SHOULD:

- Seek Supervisor/Recruiter input prior to final agreement with Researcher/Client of sample specification
- Establish clear and achievable sample specification with Researcher/Client, including recruitment procedures and timescales, prior to starting the project
- Clearly communicate sample specification and rationale behind it, to Supervisor/Recruiter
- Give Supervisor/Recruiters precise instructions on what to tell respondents about the project at recruitment, particularly how the research will be recorded and used
- Ensure that all instructions and timings are understood, agreed and accepted by Supervisor/Recruiter
- Provide Supervisor/Recruiter with enough time and help/guidance for their task
- Provide simple and straightforward documentation eg recruitment questionnaire, script/pen portrait (as appropriate) contact letters/cards, information leaflet etc
- Clearly communicate and implement verification procedures on a project by project basis, including recruitment procedures and sample specification
- Provide quick and easy communication path to allow feedback from Supervisor/Recruiter to reach Researcher/Client during recruitment process

- Keep key decision-maker informed of any developments on specification/timing/location and immediately report any difficulties and agree action plan
- Provide feedback to the Supervisor/Recruiter on the accuracy and quality of fieldwork after every project
- Acknowledge and reward good practice, preferably using a bonus payment system
- Agree amount to be paid to Supervisor/Recruiter before project commences, including any additional respondent expenses and pay them on time

## D) Recruiters

By 'Recruiter' we mean the person who carries out the recruitment interview/invites Respondents to attend the market research session

Recruiters MUST:

- Notify with the Office of the Information Commissioner as a data controller if they provide anyone with respondent information ('personal data')
- Understand and abide by their role as data controller
- Treat Respondents with respect at all times
- Inform Respondents of:
  - the subject and purpose of the discussion (market research)
  - who is conducting the research
  - any videoing/audio recording involved and how recorded data will be used, obtaining written consent that this is acceptable
  - what will happen to the personal data collected at recruitment
  - their right to withdraw/withhold information

Recruiters SHOULD

- Acknowledge receipt of documentation from Field and agree to recruiting respondents according to the sample specification and recruitment procedures specified
- Raise any questions on specification/procedure as early as possible
- Provide feedback to Field (person/communication path as agreed) on recruitment progress, especially should any problems or questions arise
- Ensure that each respondent recruited fits the latest, agreed sample specification prior to the fieldwork taking place
- Ensure that respondents arrive at the right place at the right time
- Ensure that research venues are comfortable, well heated, well ventilated and well lit
- Send paperwork and invoices back to the company in good time

## E) Respondents

While it is not possible to legislate for respondents as part of the recruitment process, it is worth outlining what qualitative research professionals expect from respondents.

In summary, it is this:

- that respondents are who they say they are (name, age, occupation, circumstances etc)
- that they observe any conditions set regarding previous attendance at groups, any restrictions on occupation or knowing the recruiter (where relevant)
- that their product/brand usage and/or behaviour is as stated (where relevant)
- that they sign for receipt of their incentive

It would be desirable for qualitative research professionals if respondents signed a form, perhaps immediately prior to attending the market research session, which confirmed receipt of their incentive and also gave an undertaking that the information they had previously given was honest and correct.

## 5. Data Protection Act

The following is taken from the MRS Guidelines 'How to use the (MRS) Code in Qualitative Research', which interpret the principles of the Data Protection Act 1998 and those of the MRS Code of Conduct. These MRS Guidelines are one of a series developed by the Professional Standards Committee of the MRS. For more information about the MRS Code of Conduct and other Guidelines, please contact the MRS office (020 7490 4911).

In the definitions of the Act, the **data controller** is the person who determines how the personal data is processed. Most researchers, research agencies, client companies and recruiters, or anyone else who is a data controller must be notified with the Information Commissioner.

The Office of the Information Commissioner  
 Wycliffe House  
 Water Lane  
 Wilmslow  
 Cheshire SK9 5AF  
 Notification line: 01625 545740  
 Website: [www.dataprotection.gov.uk](http://www.dataprotection.gov.uk)

In the definitions of the Act, **personal data** refers to any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person. For the purposes of qualitative research, this information can be held in any form, including on paper, audio or video tape. For more information on definitions and notification procedures, see the MRS Guide to Data Protection.

### *RECRUITMENT - PRINCIPLES*

This deals with the recruitment interview rather than the research discussion/interview.

Legally, in the spirit of transparency and informed consent, respondents must be informed about the research study to which they are being invited in a clear and unambiguous way. They must not be misled into agreeing to participate.

It is at the recruitment stage that the respondent agrees to participate in the research session and so it is at recruitment that respondents must be told what participation would entail.

Recruiters both use personal data and are **data controllers** in their own right, which means that they have control of their own lists of respondents. Lists cannot be passed from the data controller to anyone else, without the data controller's and respondents' permissions.

#### *RECRUITMENT - PRACTICE*

1. Most recruiters and agencies that recruit respondents must notify with the Office of the Information Commissioner, unless they only recruit on behalf of other agencies and do not hold respondent databases.
2. At the time of recruitment, respondents must be told, either verbally or through invitation:
  - the subject of the discussion
  - the purpose of the discussion (market research)
  - if the discussion is to take place in viewing facilities
    - when and how the discussion is to be recorded (NB respondents must always be told that the discussion will be audio-recorded)
  - the researcher or research agency who will be conducting the discussion, and
  - what will happen to the personal data that has been collected at the time of the recruitment interview
3. Recruitment questionnaires must be stored securely during use and must be returned to the research/recruitment agency at the end of the project.
4. It is unlawful for respondents' personal data to be used by any person or for any purpose other than that for which the respondent has given his or her consent.
5. If the recruiter, researcher/research or recruitment agency wishes to interview a respondent again (other than for quality control purposes), permission for the researcher/research agency to recontact must be sought at the time of the recruitment interview or during the discussion.
6. Recruitment questionnaire, incentive and attendance lists must never be handed to the client without the explicit permission of the respondent and then the documents can only be used for market research purposes.

#### **6. Recruiting From Client Databases**

The following is taken from the same document, the MRS Guidelines 'How to use the (MRS) Code in Qualitative Research'.

1. Before agreeing to the receipt of client databases, the research or recruitment agency should ask the client (the data controller) to confirm that they are notified for 'research purposes' and thus that they have the right to pass customer information to a third party for research purposes.
2. Client databases must be returned at the end of the project or be destroyed, with prior notification to the client.
3. If they ask, respondents must be told the primary source of the list. This means telling them the name of the client company whose list it is. This instruction must be contained within the recruitment instructions. If the client needs to remain anonymous at recruitment stage, then the respondent should be told and be given the choice not to proceed.
4. If a supplied list contains addresses that are incorrect or if an individual on the list has died, then that information may be passed back to the data controller, but not corrected. Other incorrect information, for example about brand usership cannot be passed back.
5. It is good practice for the researcher and client to agree the definitions of customers to be included on the lists. It is recommended that the research/recruitment agency checks if the client includes ex-directory telephone numbers and numbers that have been excluded by the Telephone Preference Service (to anticipate respondents' concerns), asks if the client is aware of any problems with the lists and advises the client not to provide any personal customer information that is not relevant to the study.
6. It is good practice for the client to send 'comfort' letters on their own letterhead to all customers likely to be contacted before recruitment starts. This is particularly important when the customer information could be regarded as sensitive or private. It is also good practice for respondents to be able to ring a freephone telephone number if they want to opt out of the study.
7. It is good practice for the research/recruitment agency to build extra time into the setting up of recruitment, to allow for lists to be produced, telephone searches to be done and recruitment to be completed satisfactorily.

End