

A methodological workshop on attitudes to equality in Scotland

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Executive Summary

Current surveys, such as the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, provide a valuable insight into attitudes to discrimination and what people do not want. But we have less insight into what people want in terms of a positive vision of equality, and what measures they are prepared to support in order to achieve a more equal society. What people mean by equality will fundamentally shape the steps Scotland takes towards achieving that equality.

In February 2008, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in Scotland commissioned Blake Stevenson to develop a bank of questions on equality and to engage the research community in Scotland in the debate about what is meant by equality and why it matters. The purpose of the project was to help inform the Commission's future research and policy agenda for 2008/09 and beyond.

The project culminated in a seminar organised and facilitated by Blake Stevenson consultants for around 30 participants in Glasgow. The seminar was held as part of the Commission's work to create a shared understanding of what is needed to make further progress in the field of equality and human rights. The specific aim of the event was to explore with Commission staff, the research community and other interested stakeholders, draft questions and topics related to measuring attitudes to equality and the ways in which public attitudes to equality can be measured and changed over time.

The seminar provided an opportunity for stakeholders and Commission staff to explore the different ways in which the understanding of attitudes to equality can be extended, ensuring that the Commission's future work in this area builds on current research expertise and practical insight.

Two workshops were held during the course of the seminar. This briefing summarises the discussion in those workshops and draws some implications from the event in terms of research design and future research on equality in Scotland.

What did we find out?

Participants were aware that surveys on equalities have often focused on discrimination and negative factors. They liked the way this project took a positive approach to understanding attitudes to equality and wanted to see the focus on a positive vision maintained in any quantitative survey or qualitative work.

Overall, participants thought that a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches are best suited to measuring attitudes to equalities and change over time.

General issues

Any survey questionnaire should aim to avoid generic statements and focus on easily understood but thought-provoking specific statements. One way of doing this is through the use of contrasting pairs or 'mini' scenarios, rather than simple agree / disagree options.

Qualitative methods are probably more appropriate for exploring more generic issues. Background information would be needed to set the context for a focus group or similar event and could also be used to provide facts about equality in Scotland as a basis for discussion.

Survey methodology

Participants thought that a quantitative survey based on a representative sample of individuals, such as the sample used in the annual Social Attitudes Survey, would be a useful tool for obtaining information on the attitudes to equalities of people in Scotland. This approach offers a snapshot of widely held attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs in the population and is useful for policy makers and practitioners in assessing and ranking the concerns of ordinary people at any one point in time.

One advantage of a regular, repeated, quantitative survey is that it meets the Commission's need to measure trends over time. Such a survey could be used, for example, to assess the speed and intensity of impact of changes in government policy or practice on equalities.

However, surveys are expensive and the methodology is unsuitable for asking questions in depth of large numbers of people, so it is not possible to gain a clear or comprehensive understanding of why people hold the views they do. In addition, language can be a limiting factor as there is not usually time to explore people's understanding of the question.

Participants did offer suggestions about methods which attempted to introduce a slight qualitative element into a quantitative survey, such as having more open-ended questions or using scenarios to explore in more detail an initial response to a question.

It was felt that a small scale survey using cognitive techniques to assess what people understood by certain words or phrases would be a first step. People could be asked, for example, if they agree 'it is important to maximise economic and social wellbeing', then asked exactly what they understand by that phrase and whether it might be better put another way, such as 'it is important for everyone to have enough money to live on and to be part of society'.

It is also possible to use follow up questions to see if people understand the implications of what they are saying. For example, if people say they agree that everyone in society should have access to a roof over their heads, another question might be to ask 'are you prepared to pay more taxes for that to happen?'

In depth methods

It was generally agreed that many of the issues relevant to equality are more appropriate to qualitative, more in depth methods which explore through probing, deliberative enquiry, or open-ended discussion the experience, level of knowledge or understanding which inform people's attitudes, perceptions and beliefs. The need to identify and reach different vulnerable groups for qualitative work in order to get a broad range of views and experience was also recognised.

The use of scenarios in qualitative work was thought to be useful, with the caveat that giving examples can potentially influence people's responses, depending on the exact examples or scenarios offered. Qualitative work needs time and expert and experienced facilitation to explore complex issues in depth.

Next steps

The questions developed in the course of this project cover issues of equality, fairness, rights and resources, contradictions, and conflicting entitlements. These are long-standing philosophical and conceptual issues which people have struggled with for thousands of years. Given the challenge of this work, small steps and careful piloting of different approaches are important in progressing the work further.

It is clear that a number of the topics under discussion need further examination to clarify the intent behind them and to firm up specific topics to be covered, particularly for the qualitative research. This is possibly best done by the Commission further developing its thoughts and consulting with key individuals who have knowledge of different research techniques, as well as knowledge of the subject matter.

Building on the findings from this preparatory study, a four-stage approach may be most feasible. First, qualitative work could be undertaken, perhaps with focus groups, to explore people's understanding of equalities and to determine which questions would be suitable for a survey. Second, draw up questions which can be asked in a survey and carry out some small scale cognitive testing to refine the language used and the structure of the questions. Third, fully develop and run the survey, possibly by inserting a module in the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey to enable trends in attitudes to equalities to be measured. Finally, follow up some of the survey participants to explore in greater depth their responses and understanding.

Introduction

In February 2008, The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) in Scotland commissioned Blake Stevenson to develop a bank of questions on equality and to engage the research community in Scotland in the debate about what is meant by equality and why it matters. The purpose of the project was to help inform the Commission's future research and policy agenda for 2008/09 and beyond.

The specific aims were to:

- Establish the means by which current perceptions and attitudes towards equality of different social groups in Scotland can be measured;
- Enable trends in these perceptions and attitudes to be monitored over time; and
- Build effective relations, develop capacity for equality work and share information with the research community in Scotland.

On 1 May 2008 Blake Stevenson consultants organised and facilitated a seminar in Glasgow to explore with EHRC staff, the research community and other interested stakeholders, draft questions and topics related to measuring attitudes to equality.

The seminar was held as part of the Commission's work to create a shared understanding of what is needed to make further progress in the field of equality and human rights. The specific aim of the seminar was to explore the ways in which public attitudes to equality can be measured and changed over time.

Existing surveys, such as the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, provide a valuable insight into attitudes to discrimination and what people do not want, but we have less insight into what people want in terms of a positive vision of equality, and what measures they are prepared to support in order to achieve a more equal society.

The seminar was seen to provide an opportunity for stakeholders and Commission staff to explore the different ways in which the understanding of attitudes to equality can be extended, and offering an opportunity to ensure that the Commission's future work in this area builds on current research expertise and practical insight.

Two workshops were held during the course of the seminar. This report summarises the discussion in those workshops and concludes by drawing some implications from the event in terms of research design and future research. Seminar participants are listed at Appendix 1 and presentations given at the seminar are in Appendices 2 – 4.

Workshop 1

In the first workshop delegates were invited to consider whether simple survey-type questions offer a suitable method for measuring attitudes to equality, and monitoring progress or change over time, and to comment on some examples of survey questions that might be used. The survey questions had been developed by Blake Stevenson Ltd in consultation with the Steering Group for the project.

For each question the group was asked the following:

- Is this the right sort of content? If not what should we be asking? Are there suggested changes to the wording of the question? Would this question work in a survey format? Why wouldn't it work?
- How could it be improved?
- What alternative approach (other than survey) could be taken to gain a useful response to this question?

Each question is set out below and responses and views follow the question. We have categorised comments on the questions as follows:

- Question wording.
- Response categories.
- Question suitability for quantitative and/or qualitative methodology.
- Other methodological issues.
- Implications for research design.

Question 1

In your view is an equal society one where: (show card)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Everyone is treated the same.					
Everyone has the same opportunities.					
The gap between the haves and have-nots has disappeared.					
Everyone is given the opportunity to improve their situation.					
Everyone has the freedom to choose to live in the ways they value and prefer.					
Everyone is treated with respect.					
Everyone is treated differently according to their individual needs.					
Some people earn a great deal of money and others earn very little.					

Wording

This question attempts to explore what people think an equal society should be like. It was suggested that it would be useful to have a preamble to the first question offering some definitions or explanations about what is meant by 'society'.

Suggestions for the wording of the first question included:

- 'Would society be better if....?' or
- 'If Scotland was an equal place to live, everyone would be treated the same etc?' or
- 'Would Scotland be better if....?'

An advantage of the above suggestions is that the question is moved from the rather abstract concept of what an equal society might look like, to the more specific, and arguably easier, concept for respondents to relate to, of whether the country they know and understand would be a better place if certain things happened.

In terms of the statements following the first question, there was a suggestion that 'everyone is treated the same' and 'everyone has the same opportunities' might be combined into an either / or question. The argument was that this could have the benefit of making the respondent think about the different meaning behind these two ideas.

Combining two contrasting statements into an either / or question is seen as a useful approach. However, we would suggest combining the two statements 'everyone is treated the same' and 'everyone is treated according to their individual needs' into an either / or question since these are more appropriate contrasts, and also convey the important idea that in order to treat people equally they sometimes have to be treated differently.

This approach may necessitate the survey researcher being briefed to be able to explain the difference if necessary. It might however get closer to understanding people's view of the basic concept of 'equality'.

The last statement 'some people earn a great deal of money and others earn very little' was seen to 'not fit' with the remainder of the statements, as was the statement about the 'haves and have-nots', with some people being unclear about exactly what was meant by this latter statement.

There was a view that whereas all the other statements refer to quite generic concepts of equality, these two statements are specifically related to one aspect – income / wealth – and as such were not appropriate for this question.

Response categories

There was a suggestion to remove the 'don't know' option in order to encourage respondents to make a positive choice, and there was also a suggestion that agree / disagree options may not work and that another option may be to ask people where they might fit on a spectrum – although in effect this is what the current response categories allow for.

In addition to the specific example of contrasting statements given above, there were a number of comments around the benefits of using contrasting pairs or 'real life' statements to encourage respondents to choose positively between options, rather than agreeing or disagreeing with each separate option. This does seem to be a helpful approach, particularly if the statements were made more specific or 'real life'.

Other methodological issues

There was quite a strong view that it may be useful to give some background information to respondents. However, if the questions are to be part of a larger quantitative survey, such as the Social Attitudes Survey it would be difficult to provide background information in the time allowed for the survey interview – and also may not fit with the overall survey approach. On balance, we believe that providing information for clarification purposes may be useful, but only if this is thought necessary and the methodology enables such information to be provided.

Question suitability for quantitative or qualitative investigation

Quantitative survey statements are seen to be useful if they are more specific, used in contrasting pairs, relate to 'real life', fit logically together in a group, and encourage a considered response.

More generic statements such as 'everyone is given the opportunity to improve their situation' and 'everyone is treated with respect' are seen as being more appropriate for qualitative investigation. With this approach, vignettes or scenarios could be used in a focus group situation to open up discussion around the generic statements.

Implications for research design

Any survey questionnaire should aim to avoid generic statements and focus on easily understood but thought-provoking specific statements, using contrasting pairs rather than simple agree / disagree options. Qualitative methods are probably more appropriate for exploring more generic issues.

Whilst it is not seen as practical to provide background information in a quantitative survey, in a qualitative research setting such as a focus group information may need to be given. This could be for two purposes – to provide facts regarding equality in Scotland for people who are simply unaware of the situation, but also in some circumstances to counter myths and misconceptions which some people hold.

Question 2

I am going to read out a series of statements. For each one please tell me whether you agree or disagree:

	Agree	Disagree
Achieving a more equal society is important to me.		
Some people are more deserving than others.		
An equal society gives everyone a fair chance in life.		
The interests of society should come before those of the Individual.		
Greater equality will make society stronger economically.		
Some people will have to give something up so that others become more equal.		

Wording

This question and these statements are trying to find out people's views about two different concepts. The main concept being explored is related to whether people find it easier to relate to and / or support the idea of equality for individuals rather than for society as a whole, the other concept, which is included in the third statement, is that of 'fairness'. However, from the way the statements were worded it was judged difficult to understand exactly what the aim of the question was.

On the whole, the wording of the statements was thought too generic for a quantitative survey and it was suggested that more specific statements giving examples would make it easier for respondents to give a considered view and to test out, for example, whether people have positive attitudes regarding being 'fair' to individuals but less positive attitudes about 'fairness' for groups.

Response categories

There was a view that respondents may feel they need to agree to statements and that contrasting statements or 'mini' scenarios would elicit a more useful response.

Question suitability for quantitative or qualitative investigation

Contrasting statements giving easily understandable examples of what equality might mean for society and what equality might mean for individuals - and demonstrating that these might sometimes be in conflict - would be possible for a quantitative survey. The broader concepts of whether people are more in favour of equality, or find it easier to empathise with the individual rather than the group would be better explored through qualitative methods.

Implications for research design

This question is probably over-ambitious in what it is trying to cover. It would be clearer to separate out the concept of the individual and society from that of equality and fairness and the difference, or not, between the two.

The 'individual and society' and 'equality and fairness' are two separate, complex issues and there is no obvious benefit to be obtained by trying to address them both within one question or set of statements. However, it was thought that using both quantitative and qualitative methods to look at people's understanding of and views on the difference between equality and fairness, would still be useful.

Question 3

Please rank these statements where 1 is important to you and 10 is unimportant to you

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Everyone is treated the same under the law.										
Everyone can access further or higher education, if they choose to.										
Everyone can afford to buy or rent a house.										
Everyone can earn enough to live on.										
Everyone can access high quality health care.										
Everyone can get a job.										
Everyone can earn enough to feed and clothe their family.										
Everyone can go on holiday once a year.										

Wording

This question tries to obtain people's views on whether they believe that everyone should have some basic entitlements. The wording in these statements was not seen as problematic, possibly because they deal with more specific issues.

Response categories

For this question the response categories were seen as the area which might need more clarification. The way the statements and the response ranking are set out at present, respondents are asked to rank each statement in terms of how important it is to them personally, they are not asked to give a comparative view in terms of whether one statement might be more important to them than another.

It was suggested that as the response categories are currently laid out respondents could give a 1 to all the statements – except possibly the last one, and this would not provide very useful information. It was proposed that respondents might be asked to rank the 8 statements in terms of their relative importance in two ways: firstly to the individual and what they judge to be important to themselves, e.g. I give ‘everyone can afford to buy or rent a house’ a 3 because that matters to me, and I give ‘everyone can get a job’ a 7 because I am retired and it is not important to me. However, this could result in respondents simply stating what their own particular situation is at this stage in their life and would not really tell us much about their views on equality.

The second approach suggested was to rank the statements in terms of how they view society, for example I give ‘everyone is treated the same under the law’ a 2 because it is important to me that people should not get preferential treatment, but I give ‘everyone can get a job’ a 6 because whether or not people I do not know get a job is not important to me.

Methodological issues

Of the eight statements, the first seven might be judged to be the basic entitlements – or certainly aspirations – of citizens in an advanced western democracy. The eighth is clearly not and as such it would be more helpful not to have it in this question since it distracts from the other statements.

Looking in depth at this question it is unclear that what it is trying to achieve will be met even with ranking in terms of relative importance. Respondents could still say that they are all equally important and that they find it impossible to rank them.

Question suitability for quantitative or qualitative investigation

This question is probably best addressed through a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methods.

Implications for research design

After discussion it was suggested that for this question to work in a survey, the statements need to be made even more specific, and to offer mini scenarios, to tease out whether respondents really do believe that everyone should have what might be seen as basic entitlements. An example might be, 'everyone, including an alcoholic who has already had two liver transplants and kept on drinking, is entitled to high quality health care'; or 'everyone, including new immigrants to this country, can get a job'.

The responses to the quantitative survey would not give information on what informed people's views or attitudes. However, once the responses to more specific questions have been analysed it might be possible to use qualitative methods to focus down on areas where the respondents have the most difficulty with the concept of universal entitlements and this would provide useful information.

Question 4

Some groups of people may not have the same opportunities as others in society. What is your view of the following statements?

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Disabled people should get equipment and aids to help them go to work.					
Lone parents should get assistance with childcare to help them find work.					
People from ethnic minority groups should receive extra training to help them get positions in public life e.g. as councillors, MSPs.					
Poorer families should get help with tax credits.					
Disabled people who apply for a job for which they meet the requirements should be guaranteed an interview.					
Returning soldiers should receive priority NHS treatment.					

Wording

This question aims to test out whether people think that groups or individuals who have suffered disadvantage should receive treatment or services to put them on a level with everyone else. The wording of the statements is therefore deliberately specific in referring to particular instances of disadvantage. Whilst there was little comment on the wording of specific statements, there was a broader methodological issue, which is addressed below.

Response categories

These response categories were not remarked on.

Question suitability for quantitative and / or qualitative methodology

This type of question relating to a very specific 'real life' situation is seen as suitable for a quantitative method since it enables a response that demonstrates the attitude held by the respondent.

Methodological issues

Quite a few seminar participants seemed to think that the question and the statements were trying to cover all groups or individuals who faced disadvantage. Comments made, which illustrate this confusion, included: "Maybe there should be something about groups which suffer double disadvantage, for example, black and a woman"; "Which groups are to be included – LGBT / older people are not included here"; "I am not sure why the soldiers question is in"; "There is a need for more representation of people from ethnic minority groups but the problem is not that there is a need for more training".

Perhaps given the Commission's remit, to cover age, disability, ethnicity, gender, religion or belief and sexual orientation, there is a tendency to assume that all areas of disadvantage will be covered in such a question. Other comments included, for example, "There is no parity between these groups" and "Are you trying to cover too much with these questions – is it possible to cover everything?".

Implications for research design

For this question and these statements to work in a quantitative survey there would need to be a preamble which explained that the question was asking about their attitudes towards examples of situations faced by some individuals. The situations illustrated would need to be carefully chosen but there is no need to try to cover all

eventualities. Instead, they should provide a good reflection of people's attitudes about whether, in certain circumstance, it is right to treat people differently in order to give them equality of opportunity.

It would be possible, using qualitative methods, to explore a wider range of different examples and in more depth. As with the quantitative method, it would be important to explain clearly the principle being addressed, and that the examples are only to open up discussion around the principle.

Question 5

Is it personally acceptable to you that:

	Yes	No
People living in deprived areas have double the suicide rate of the rest of the population.		
Individuals from ethnic minority groups are twice as likely as individuals from other groups to be in-patients on mental health wards.		
19% of men are employed as managers compared with 11% of women.		
The income of households in the top 10% is more than 4 times higher than those in the bottom 10%.		
Lone parents are more likely to be living in poor quality environments.		
Children in Pakistani and Bangladeshi families are more than twice as likely than children in the general population to be living in poverty.		
A higher proportion of girls than boys achieve five or more good Standard Grades or equivalent.		
On average men's full-time hourly earnings are 18% higher than women's.		
19 years olds with a disability or health problem are nearly 3 times more likely not to be in employment, education or training than those without a disability or health problem.		

Wording

This question tries to explore whether individuals actually care about whether society is equal or not. It was suggested that the question 'Is it personally acceptable to you?' is a leading statement and this could mean that we might not get an honest response.

The statements in this question are quite specific and factual and were not commented on.

Response categories

There was a question about why we moved from one scale to another, the answer to which is that changing scales in a survey is used to give some variety for the respondent, and to try out different approaches to eliciting responses.

There was a view that people might not feel they could answer ‘no’ to some of these questions, even if they believed that, because they would know that it would be socially or morally unacceptable. It was suggested that a way round this might be to use a scale with the question ‘How acceptable is it to you?’.

Implications for research design

A preamble to the survey question which reminded the respondent that their responses are anonymous and that we are interested in their honest views might encourage a more open response to what might be seen as statements with a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answer.

As with Question 4, there would need to be a preamble which explained that these are only some examples of inequalities in society and not all groups or sub-groups are being addressed.

Question 6

Whose responsibility is it to bring about a more equal society?

Rate on a scale of 1 – 10 where 1 is total agreement and 10 is total disagreement

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Central Government

Local Authorities

The EHRC

Voluntary organisations, like
pressure groups

Employers

Trade unions

Mine

Wording

It was suggested that this question might be split into two: 'Who is currently responsible for bringing about a more equal society' and 'Who should be doing it?' or 'Who should be doing it more?'

Clarification of what 'society' means would be useful, although that may be covered by the preamble at Question 1. Another suggestion was that the question could be 'Who is responsible for ensuring accountability on equalities?' This is however a different question from the one in Question 6.

It was suggested that 'mine' should be changed to 'individuals', although perhaps 'everyone' would be more appropriate and fit with the wording in other questions.

It was pointed out that voluntary organisations are not always pressure groups and that perhaps 'pressure groups' could be dropped, or 'campaigning groups' substituted for the current wording in this statement.

Response categories

There were no comments on the response categories

Question suitability for quantitative and / or qualitative methodology

This question is quite straightforward and would seem to be suitable for a quantitative approach. Using qualitative methodologies in addition to the survey approach would allow for exploring issues around, for example, what it is that different organisations are doing or could do more of to bring about a more equal society. Using focus groups it would also be possible to inform participants about what particular organisations e.g. public sector bodies, are bound by law to do to bring about equality.

Other methodological issues

There were a number of suggestions about changing or including additional organisations into the list offered:

- Central Government should be split into UK Government and Scottish Government.
- Add in:
 - Community Councils
 - Media
 - Businesses

- Schools
- Health boards
- Churches / religious groups.

Whilst one suggestion was to explain what the Commission is, there was a view that there was no need to ask about the Commission in this question, because this is their *raison d'être*. However, it may be useful to include as a means of assessing how aware people are of the Commission and its remit.

Implications for research design

It was proposed that options could be randomised the so that the government is not always first. Rather than having a very lengthy list of organisations, it may be easier simply to have an ‘other’ category and people could be asked to suggest any additional organisations. It was felt that ‘employers’ is not a very useful category since most organisations are employers. It might be better to substitute ‘businesses’ for employers if that is what is meant here.

Question 7

What would you be prepared to do to help bring about your idea of a more equal society?

	Definitely	Very likely	Possibly	Not very likely	Definitely not
Vote for a political party that is standing on an equality agenda.					
Boycott goods from a company with poor employment rights.					
Contact your MP, MSP or Councillor.					
Take part in a peaceful campaign or protests.					
Support someone being treated unfairly even if at personal risk to you.					
Other.					

Wording

One suggestion was that the wording for this question might be: ‘Have you ever done any of these things?’. This would tell us what percentage of respondents had

taken action on certain issues, which may be useful but is different from what is being sought here, i.e. the extent and the degree to which individuals are prepared to promote or defend an equal society.

Some of the statement wording was found to be confusing. The meaning of the first option was not thought to be clear, and it was suggested that the second option should be made more specific by giving a practical example, for example, a company which was known to break the law regarding maternity rights.

People also questioned what 'support someone being treated unfairly even if at personal risk to you' meant, since there are different ideas of risk which will lead to different answers. Again it was suggested that giving an example might help e.g. 'helping a work colleague who was being harassed – if it was your boss who was the harasser'.

It was thought that in general, the statements were not specific enough and that they would need to be made more personal and concrete. There was also a view that the statements would encourage positive responses, although given that, in fact, very few people do contact their elected representatives or boycott companies about anything, this is probably unlikely.

Question suitability for quantitative and / or qualitative methodology

Another suggestion, for a different question was 'do you think doing this would make a difference?'. This might be a useful question for a follow up qualitative approach using a focus group.

Other methodological issues

It was suggested taking out the 'possibly' option, presumably to encourage a more definitive positive or negative answer.

Implications for research design

The statements would need to be made more specific and tested out to ensure that respondents understood them.

Workshop 2

Before the second workshop, Norma Hurley gave a presentation on different methodologies which could be used for more in-depth and qualitative research on attitudes to equality, plus themes that could be explored in this way (a copy of the presentation is in Appendix 3). Tania Burchardt from the London School of Economics then gave a presentation on different methodologies used to create the capabilities list and the Equality Measurement Framework. The Commission is developing the Framework to measure the extent of equality in Britain, as recommended by the Equalities Review.¹ Tania focussed particularly on deliberative consultation methods (see Appendix 4).

In the second workshop participants were asked to develop the discussion from the first workshop. The aim was to look more closely at alternatives or additions to the quantitative survey approach that would enable the Commission to explore public attitudes in more depth, and help to shape attitudes in the future.

Challenges

Some of the challenges of exploring public attitudes include how to get below the surface of people's immediate responses to a question. On some issues people might give what they judge to be the publicly acceptable answer, for example, that they would not mind their daughter marrying someone from a different race, although that may not be their true view. In these instances it is important to have tools and techniques to be able to probe effectively but sensitively for underlying attitudes.

There is also a challenge in being able to differentiate between genuine lack of knowledge, which leads people to have certain attitudes or beliefs, and prejudiced attitudes which are maintained even in the face of facts. For example, some people may believe that migrant workers in this country all live rent free in council flats, but once informed of the truth will change their belief. Other people may insist that migrant workers do receive favourable treatment and simply refuse to acknowledge the facts.

It is important that in any work on equality, researchers do not give the impression that they are the 'experts' on equality. Issues of language, and of understanding what 'treating people equally' means, are complex and can be intimidating for some individuals who are not steeped in equalities work. They may be wary of using the

¹ <http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/equalitiesreview/>

'wrong' language or of having the 'wrong' view and may be too frightened to participate fully in a discussion, in case they are publicly corrected by the 'expert'. Ground rules need to be established at the beginning of any workshop or focus group that set the parameters for discussion and debate. Participants must agree that there should be open discussion and that everyone who is genuinely trying to engage in the process should have their views respected, regardless of how they might express them. Only by encouraging such an approach will people feel free to discuss their true feelings and beliefs. Clearly where individuals are knowingly and persistently using racist or sexist language or in other ways insulting others in the group, that cannot be tolerated. This should be made clear in the ground rules at the beginning of any discussion.

For the second workshop a list of key topics were offered and participants were asked to consider first, which of these might be better addressed using qualitative methodologies and second, which particular qualitative methods would be appropriate. The workshops also provided an opportunity for delegates to comment on additional topics they felt should be a particular focus for the work.

Topic Questions

Some of the key topics the Commission is currently considering, and the response of seminar participants to the questions on these topics, are set out below:

Does the language of fairness have more meaning for people than that of equality?

This is an important question in the context of current thinking within the Commission. The Final Report of the Equalities Review is titled 'Fairness and Freedom' and there are frequent mentions of a 'fairer and more equal society' in the report.

Participants in the workshops felt that the language of fairness and the language of equality were not necessarily the same and there needed to be a debate led by the Commission on exactly what is meant by 'fairness' and 'equality'. What may seem 'fair' to one person, for example giving extra support to people who have faced historic disadvantage, may seem unfair to someone else who is not receiving that extra support.

'Fairness' or 'being fair' has traditionally been perceived as a very 'British' characteristic, but it is a concept which may need to be explored and defined more closely, particularly when what 'Britishness' itself means – and its continuing

relevance – is being debated within a politically devolved and ethnically diverse Britain. There was also a very practical view in the workshop that it would be difficult to think of examples of what the law might do to address ‘unfairness’.

Participants thought that finding the language that resonates with people on the street is essential, and that a question might be ‘what is your vision of equality and of fairness, and what is the gap between your vision and now?’ and ‘what is required to give everyone a fair chance in life?’.

This question of ‘fairness’ and of ‘equality’ is one which is so complex that it would benefit from in-depth exploration through a focus group rather than through a survey. In order to provide structure to the focus group and to give context to the discussion, clarification of EHRC thinking around what might be meant by ‘fairness’ and ‘equality’ would be required.

Why do people support equality?

It was suggested that first there should be a question around whether people in fact supported equality, before then asking a second question about why they support it. Both of these questions could be included in a quantitative survey, and for the second question, a range of options could be offered with an ‘other’ option for respondents’ own view.

As with the first question, this is an extremely broad issue and it was suggested it would benefit from being more fully explored in a focus group or other qualitative method. It was proposed that in a focus group discussion it would be helpful to be able to link in to some key points of reference, for example equality in the home, amongst family, amongst friends, in employment and so on, to enable concrete examples and experiences to be explored.

Will people support processes that lead to equality of outcome?

There were seen to be two underlying aspects to this question. The first is the implication that people do not have equality of outcomes at present even if, as some people might argue, there is equality of opportunity. The second issue which was seen to be implicit in the question, is that in order to address inequality of outcome it may be necessary to take action which some people may view as ‘unfair’ or ‘unequal’.

Participants thought that these are certainly issues for qualitative examination, possibly using deliberative enquiry, whereby people in a focus group or workshop

are given specific information about equality of outcomes and methods for addressing inequality of outcomes.

Before addressing the first issue, examples and statistics relating to different groups and their 'outcomes' in terms of e.g. equal pay, representation in the Board Room, in the judiciary, in certain occupations, and so on, could be provided to demonstrate current inequalities and to explore how these inequalities arise. Further information around historical, institutional, and structural barriers to equality of outcomes could also be appropriate for this part of the discussion, although care would need to be taken not to overwhelm participants with information.

Using deliberative techniques could lead into an explanation of the rationale for positive action, and, if necessary, the difference between that and positive discrimination. Discussion could then move towards exploring whether or not people would see such processes as continuing to be necessary and relevant in today's society, and whether they would be willing to support such processes.

Are people more likely to support equality for an individual rather than for a group?

It was felt that there needs to be more clarity of purpose about why the Commission is asking questions about groups and about individuals. For example if, as is likely, it is found that people tend to support equality for a specific individual whose case is seen to be 'worthy', but that they still hold prejudices about the general group, where might that lead in terms of the development of policy or practice?

It was suggested the issue of the individual versus the group may also tend to become confused with the territory of individual rights rather than equality. For example, in the interests of 'equality' or 'fairness' people might support the right of a Muslim women to wear a veil, but they might also support the right of airport security staff to search her or ask her to remove her veil in order to protect the general public at the airport. If the thinking behind this question could be made clearer, it would contribute to developing both quantitative and qualitative ways of exploring these important issues.

Are there some inequalities that are acceptable in society?

This question was seen to be linked into the one above in that it could be seen to be associated with legal and human rights. There were views expressed that one person's 'equal treatment' could be seen as someone else's 'unequal treatment'. For example, if a powerful pressure group succeeding in having a play banned because

it offended their view of the world, it could mean that the theatre company was being treated unequally.

This issue of conflicting rights and entitlements in a fair and equal society is extremely complex. It may be possible to introduce some survey questions which posed contradictory questions and asked respondents for their views. However, this may only serve to confuse respondents and may not provide particularly helpful information.

Whilst using qualitative techniques would enable a fuller discussion, this is such a complex area that it may be over-ambitious to try to introduce a discussion on it at this stage in the work of the Commission, when exploration of more fundamental attitudes is still to be undertaken.

Even though people may state they support equality, is there a limit to what they will do to defend it?

This question was not addressed in any depth in the workshops. It would be possible to have questions in a quantitative survey which offered individuals examples of action they might take to defend equality in general – for example campaigning for equal pay – as well as defending equality for individuals, for example speaking up for oneself or for someone else who is being racially abused. Qualitative methods could then be used to explore why people might or might not take action to defend equality for themselves or for others.

Implications for research design and future studies

Overall, participants at the seminar thought that a mix of quantitative and qualitative approaches would probably best meet the aim of measuring attitudes to equalities and change over time. Participants were aware that surveys on equalities have often focused on discrimination and negative factors. They liked the positive approach to understanding attitudes to equality and wanted to see the focus on a positive vision maintained in any quantitative survey or qualitative work.

General methodological issues

Any survey questionnaire should aim to avoid generic statements and focus on easily understood but thought-provoking specific statements, using contrasting pairs or 'mini' scenarios rather than simple agree / disagree options. Qualitative methods are probably more appropriate for exploring more generic issues.

Whilst it is not seen as practical to provide background information in a quantitative survey, in a qualitative research setting such as a focus group, information may need to be given. This could be for two purposes – to provide facts regarding equality in Scotland for people who are simply unaware of the situation, but also in some circumstances, to counter myths and misconceptions which some people hold.

It is necessary to be clear about the target age range for any study. If conducting research involving children and young people, the research will need different language, structure, and methods.

Quantitative issues and methods

In general, participants thought that a quantitative survey based on a representative sample of individuals, such as the sample used in the annual Social Attitudes Survey, would be a useful tool for obtaining information on the attitudes to equalities of people in Scotland. A survey approach offers a snapshot of widely held attitudes, perceptions, and beliefs in the population and this is useful for policy makers and practitioners in assessing and ranking the concerns of ordinary people at any one point in time.

One advantage of a regular, repeated, quantitative survey is that it meets the Commission's need to measure trends over time. Such a survey could be used, for example, to assess the speed and intensity of impact of changes in government policy or practice on equalities. The ability to measure trends over time also enables analysts to identify when a particular attitude may be being affected by significant

external events. For example, a terrorist scare shortly before a survey takes place may cause a noticeable surge in a certain kind of response in that year.

Trying to measure or understand such change by using qualitative methods, such as running focus groups every year or two, would not be a robust method since, even if the groups were composed of the same individuals (which would be difficult to achieve) they would not be representative of the population as a whole. However, the limitation of a quantitative survey is that it is too time-consuming and too expensive to ask questions in depth of large numbers of people², and it is not therefore possible to use qualitative methods such as probing, deliberative enquiry, or open-ended discussion to explore the experience, level of knowledge or understanding which inform people's attitudes, perceptions and beliefs. The result is that this approach does not enable researchers to gain a clear or comprehensive understanding of why people hold the views they do.

Participants did offer suggestions about methods which attempted to introduce a slight qualitative element into a quantitative survey, such as having more open-ended questions or using scenarios to explore in more detail an initial response to a question. However, these add to the time and therefore the expense of what is already a relatively expensive research method. The different understanding of language can also be a limiting factor in quantitative surveys where there is not usually time to explore people's understanding of the question.

An initial, small scale quantitative survey was suggested whereby, using cognitive techniques, it would be possible to assess what people understood by certain words or phrases. One way of doing this is to say the same thing in different ways to test out understanding. For example, people could be asked if they agree 'it is important to maximise economic and social wellbeing', then asked exactly what they understand by that phrase and whether it might be better put in another way, for example – 'it is important for everyone to have enough money to live on and to be part of society'. People could also be asked what words they would use to phrase the question. Using this technique with a number of respondents enables a sense of what people commonly understand by certain words, to be drawn out.

It is also possible to use follow up questions to see if people understand the implications of what they are saying. For example, if people say they agree that

²The current Scottish Household Survey cannot ask all its questions of all respondents at each sweep because there are too many questions for respondents to answer in the time judged reasonable for the survey to last.

everyone in society should have access to a roof over their heads, another question might be to ask 'are you prepared to pay more taxes for that to happen?'

Qualitative issues and methods

It was generally agreed that all the topics discussed in the second workshop are relevant and appropriate for qualitative follow up to a quantitative survey. Qualitative work, for example through a focus group, would enable more in depth probing of issues, an exploration of misconceptions about equality and to explore myths and misunderstanding. Some prioritisation of questions was thought necessary since a lot of issues are covered by the topics under discussion. However, it was suggested that it might not be necessary to ask all groups the same questions.

It was suggested that the sample for the qualitative follow up should be drawn from those who had agreed in principle to participate in future research when they took part in the quantitative survey (this is the approach used in the Scottish Household Survey). It was also proposed that it would be necessary to identify and reach different vulnerable groups for qualitative work in order to get a broad range of views and experience.

The use of scenarios in qualitative work was thought to be useful, with the caveat that giving examples can potentially influence people's responses, depending on the exact examples or scenarios offered.

It was also recognised that qualitative work needs time and expert and experienced facilitation to explore complex issues in depth.

Next steps

The questions developed in advance of the seminar, and those developed at the seminar, cover issues of equality, fairness, rights and resources, contradictions, and conflicting entitlements. These are long standing philosophical and conceptual issues which people have struggled with for thousands of years. Given the challenge of this work, small steps and careful piloting of different approaches are important in progressing the work further.

It is clear that a number of the topics under discussion need further examination to clarify the intent behind them and to firm up specific topics to be covered, particularly for the qualitative research. This is possibly best done by the Commission further developing its thoughts and consulting with key individuals who have knowledge of different research techniques, as well as knowledge of the subject matter.

In addition, carrying out some small scale cognitive testing of questions to be used in a survey would inform the refining of the language and structure of the questions. Once this was done it may be possible to develop and insert a module in the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey to enable trends in attitudes to equalities to be measured. Once the quantitative survey work is undertaken – or possibly once the cognitive research which will inform the survey questions has been done – it would be possible to explore some of the more complex issues through qualitative research, using focus groups or workshops.

Appendix 1

Seminar participants

Delegate	Organisation
Catherine Bromley	Scottish Centre for Social Research
Tania Burchardt	London School of Economics
Dr. Nicole Busby	Senior Lecturer, School of Law, University of Stirling
Claire Cairns	RNIB
Sara Dodds	Equalities Research Team Scottish Government
Jennifer Dunne	Equality and Human Rights Commission Wales
Carol Flack	Engender
Kay Gilbert	Department of HRM, University of Strathclyde
Tim Hopkins	Equality Network
Norma Hurley	Blake Stevenson Ltd
Professor Jeff Hyman	University of Aberdeen Business School
Dr. Nicolina Kamenou	School of Management and Languages, Heriot-Watt University
Sarah Kyambi (PhD)	Scottish Council Foundation
Gwynedd Lloyd	Moray House School of Education, University of Edinburgh
Jennifer Lambert	Blake Stevenson Ltd
Dr. Suzi Macpherson	Employment Napier University
Ros Micklem	Equality and Human Rights Commission Scotland
Gordon Miller	Parliamentary and Equalities Officer
Gillian Munro	Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People
Rami Ousta	BEMIS
Tanveer Parnez	BEMIS
Morag Patrick	Equality and Human Rights Commission
Dr. David Perfect	Equality and Human Rights Commission
Professor Sheila Riddell	University of Edinburgh
Pat Scrutton	Scottish Older People's Advisory Group
Dr. Andrew Smith	School of Law & Social Sciences Glasgow Caledonian University
Liz Speed	Equality and Human Rights Commission
Glenys Watt	Blake Stevenson Ltd

Appendix 2

Development of the equality questions presentation

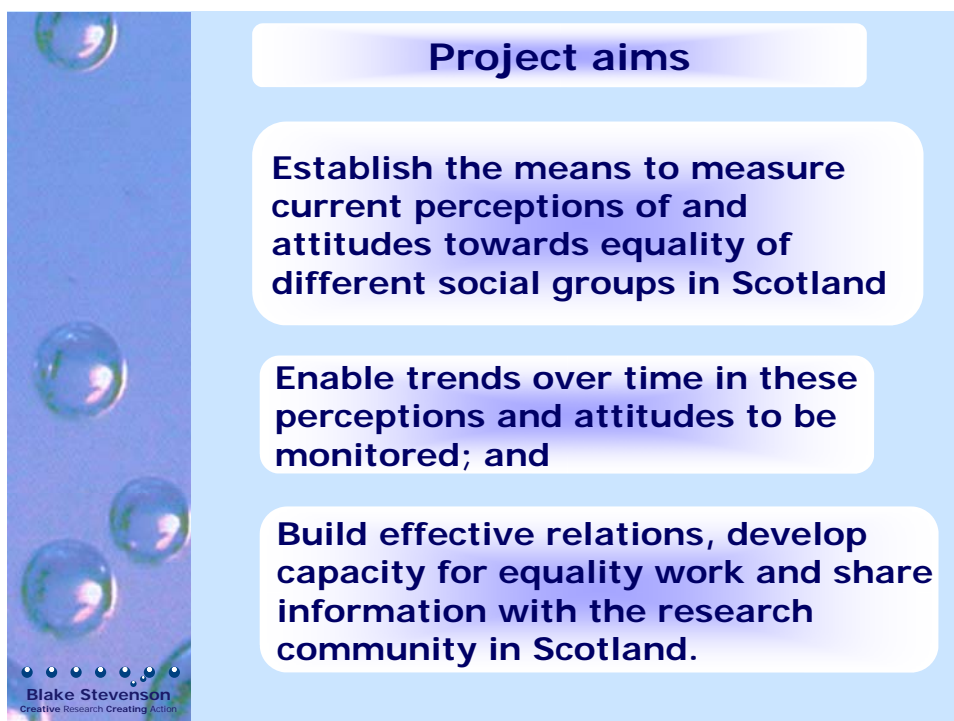


**Development of the
Equality Questions**

**EHRC Seminar
1 May 2008
Glasgow**

Blake Stevenson Ltd

Blake Stevenson
Creative Research Creating Action



Project aims

Establish the means to measure current perceptions of and attitudes towards equality of different social groups in Scotland

Enable trends over time in these perceptions and attitudes to be monitored; and

Build effective relations, develop capacity for equality work and share information with the research community in Scotland.

Blake Stevenson
Creative Research Creating Action


Process: Desk Research

- Fairness and Freedom: Equalities Review 2007
- Definition of equality and framework for measurement (Tania Burchardt and Polly Vizard 2007)
- Scottish SAS 2006 – discrimination
- What Equality Means in Britain today (IPSOS Mori 2006)
- General Public Perceptions Research Survey (GfK NOP 2007)
- Approaching stereotypes and myths in social Surveys: Example of British Social Attitudes (Clery and Johnson Natcen 2006)
- The Measurement of Capabilities (Paul Annand the OU and others)
- ONS briefing on Cognitive Testing 2006

Context

“Evidence shows that there is still a lack of awareness and understanding about what equality means, how it relates to what organisations do, or what is required (or permitted) under the law in practice, and who is responsible for delivering on this.”

(Equalities Review 2007, chapter 4 page 93)




Context

Conversely, Natcen, IPSOS/Mori research shows people seem to know the “right answer” or “what the researcher wants to hear”

Finding out about attitudes of “what equality is/should be” is more difficult than finding out about discrimination

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Creative Research Creating Action



Context

Challenge:


Everyone believes in an “equal society” – saving the planet, keeping fit

But:

It means: giving stuff up; make an effort; feelings of guilt

People find it difficult may not want to know

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Context

Challenge:

- How to get below the surface?
- How to probe?
- How to differentiate between lack of knowledge and prejudice?
- How to avoid whiff of moral superiority?

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Iterative Process

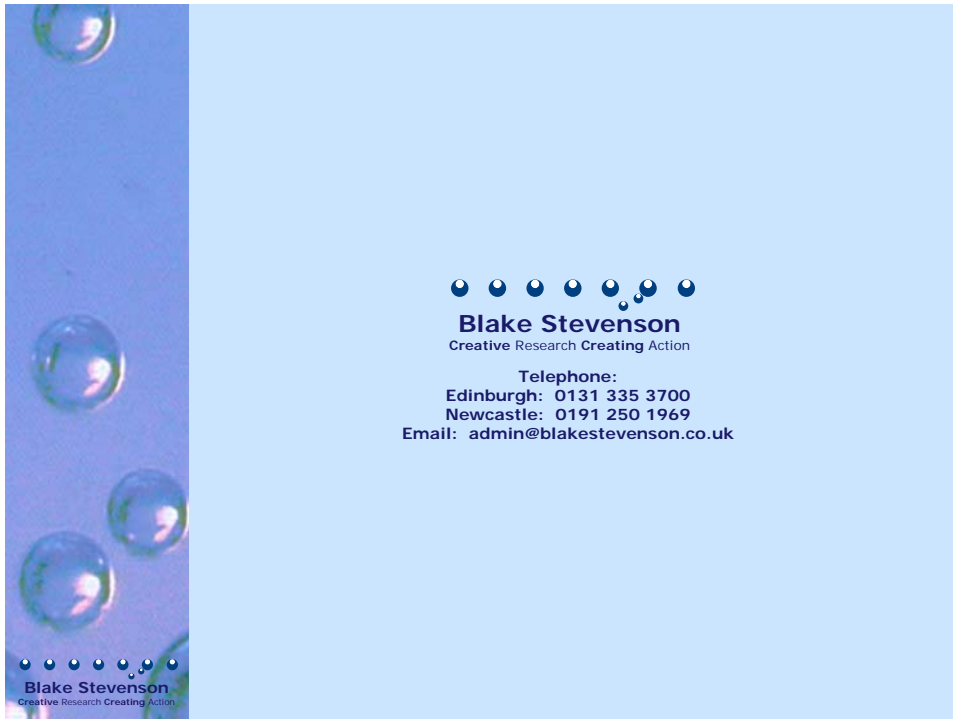
Production of Interim Report and question frame

Decision to take phased approach

Development of simple survey questions

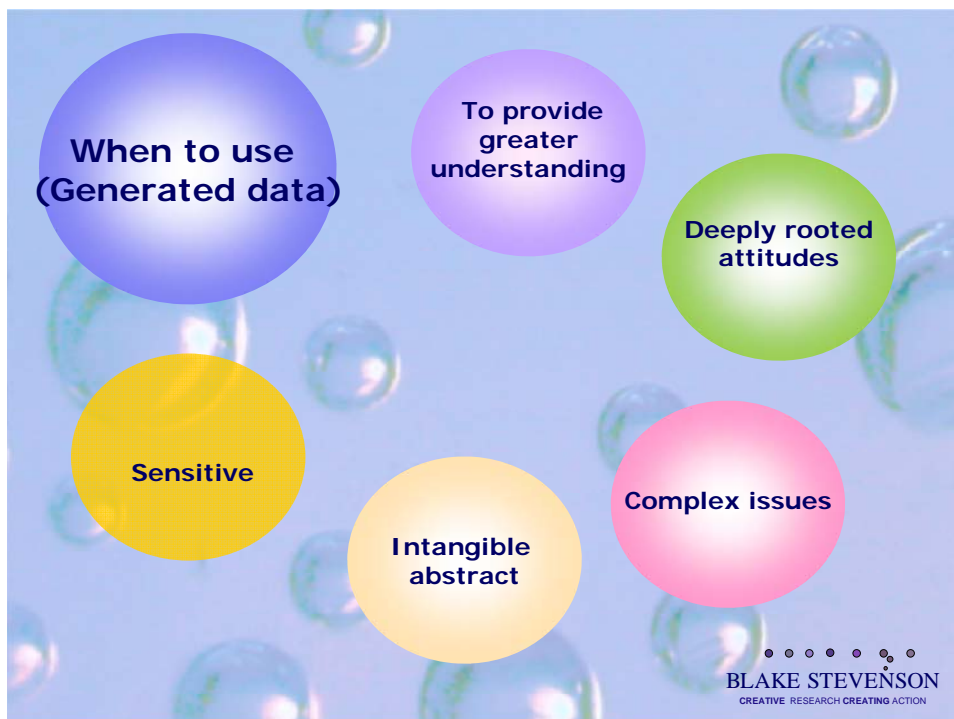
Amendment and production of final draft list

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Appendix 3

Qualitative methodologies presentation



Topics

Language - fairness or equality?
or both?

Equality of process or outcome?
Equality for individual or for a group?

Are some inequalities acceptable in society?

Even though people say they support equality is
there a limit to what they will defend if?

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**What to use
- simply
qualitative**

**Biographical
methods**

1:1 interviews

**Focus Groups
Group
discussions**

**Paired or
Triad interviews**

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CREATIVE RESEARCH CREATING ACTION

What to use
- mixed
methods

Qualitative
preceding
statistical work –
to inform

Qualitative
alongside
statistical
enquiry

Triangulation
-Qualitative
Quantitative
Literature
review

Qualitative
as a follow
up to
statistical
research

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Appendix 4

Deliberative methods presentation

EHRC seminar on attitudes to equalities in Scotland, 1 May 2008

Deliberative methods

Tania Burchardt
London School of Economics

Developing the Equality Measurement Framework

- In what aspects of life is it important to achieve equality?
 - health, employment, standard of living...??

- Part 1: international human rights conventions
 - aspects of life protected by civil and political rights
 - aspects of life protected by social, economic and cultural rights

- Part 2: deliberative consultation
 - general public
 - groups at particular risk of discrimination and disadvantage

What is deliberative consultation?

- Group discussion
- Extended
- Stimulus / information provided
- Opportunities for reflection and debate
- Process as important as outcome

Common forms:

- Citizens' juries
- Standing panels
- Deliberative polling

Format

- Recruitment
 - general public (2 x N=30): random by phone and on street
 - groups at risk of discrimination (8 x N=6 to 32): random or through existing networks
- Moderated, recorded and transcribed
- Exercise 1: spontaneous
- Exercise 2: responsive
- Post-tasking: opportunity for further feedback
- Thematic analysis, comparing to human-rights based list

Example of deliberation

- Bangladeshi men discussing the meaning and importance of diversity and integration

Examples of additions to human-rights based list

- living in a healthy environment, free from pollution
- having access to green spaces and the natural world
- being able to care for others
- being able to develop as a person
- being able to be yourself in public spaces
- knowing that your personal data will be secure

Pros and cons of deliberative consultation

PROS

- People's own words
- Can evaluate what information makes a difference
- Opportunities for debate and engagement
- Interest in process
- In depth
- Empowering

CONS

- Difficult to summarise
- Overly influenced by stimulus provided
- Need to recognise power dynamics within groups
- No clear outcome
- Not representative
- Disempowering if no feedback or results not used

Closing remarks

- Needs extended design and piloting phase
- Ideally, stimulus audited by independent / user panel
- Ethical requirements:
 - transparency about how results will be used & how influential
 - commitment to act
 - timely feedback
- Clarity over purpose: why deliberative?
- One possible technique alongside others
 - in-depth interviews (especially for voices not usually heard)
 - representative survey (before or after)

Other surveys provide a valuable insight into attitudes to discrimination and what people do not want for Scotland. But we have less insight into what people do want in terms of a positive vision of equality, and what measures they are prepared to support in order to achieve a more equal society. This report takes the first steps in helping us to develop a bank of questions that can be used over time to assess public attitudes to equality. Working with the research community in Scotland, we explored the different ways in which we could improve our understanding of attitudes to equality, and how those attitudes could be measured and changed over time.

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