

**Research Design
Formative mid-term
2018**

Read carefully the following scenario.

The Training Agency (TA), an arm of a government department, is putting out to tender a research contract. The contract is for a study to evaluate the success of one of their adult vocational training schemes. The Job Training Scheme (JTS) gives full-time off-the-job training, with financial support, to people aged 20 or over who are unemployed, have previously held paid employment and have not been in full-time education during the 24 months preceding the start of their training. Participation in JTS is voluntary. Training courses are offered in both manual and non-manual skills and typically last between 3 and 9 months. Some lead to nationally recognized qualifications, others to course attendance certificates.

JTS is about to be 'wound up'. The last cohort of trainees will finish their course in 6 months' time. The evaluation study should commence in September 2018 and a report must be on the desk of the Secretary for Education and Employment by September 2020.

The TA will make available to the researchers course registration information on a random sample (N = 3000) of individuals completing a training course between January 2018 and May 2018. This will contain some basic demographic data (i.e. age, sex, ethnicity) some information about past employment and education, a current address, **and nothing else**. These are the only data that the TA are willing and able to supply. Sufficient funds will be available to conduct about 1600 face to face interviews. An additional sum of money, if required, will be made available for a self-completion postal survey.

The TA are interested in answers to the following questions (in order of importance):

1. Did JTS enhance the employment prospects of participants?
2. Did JTS increase the earning power of participants?

The task.

You are a member of the Oxford Research Services (Sociology) team which is tendering for the evaluation study contract. Formulate an outline research design that would enable your team to answer the TA's questions. Bear in mind that the TA is a hard-nosed outfit. It is not interested in the attitudes, perceptions, feelings and so forth of the JTS participants. **They want to know whether the programme has helped people get back into work and, if possible, whether they are earning more than they otherwise would have.**

What should your research design look like? To focus ideas here are some questions that you will need to have answers to.

1. What data are you going to collect?
2. Who are you going to ask?
3. When (on what time-scale) are you going to ask them?

4. How (what method) are you going to ask them?
5. **How will you be able to decide whether it is really participation in a job training scheme that enhances individual employment prospects?**

Of all of these, **number 5 is the most important. Any proposal that does not have a considered answer to this question will be inadequate. You should expect to write most about this part.**

This is not an exercise in which there is one correct answer. So don't waste time looking for the perfect response: there isn't one. Bear in mind that you are dealing with the real world. In the real world compromises have to be made. That means that you have to display in your answer that you have good judgment in making decisions about which design elements are crucial and which, though in theory important, are likely to be less critical.

Write a report of up to 1500 words setting out the research design you would recommend, bearing in mind the priorities of the client. You may recommend a single design or you may wish to discuss the relative merits of several possible designs. **The writing of the report must be your own unaided work**, but you are permitted to discuss the issues with colleagues or anyone else you think will be helpful (except me!). NB normally you are not permitted to discuss assessed work with others so please do not generalize this permission to other courses or other occasions. Also be aware that permission to discuss your work with others does not absolve you from thinking for yourself.

You should submit your report to me by Friday week 5. You should put it in my pigeon hole in the Department. **No email submissions.** Please make sure that all pages are numbered and firmly attached to each other and that you write your name on the report. It would also help if you left wide enough margins so that I can write legible comments.