

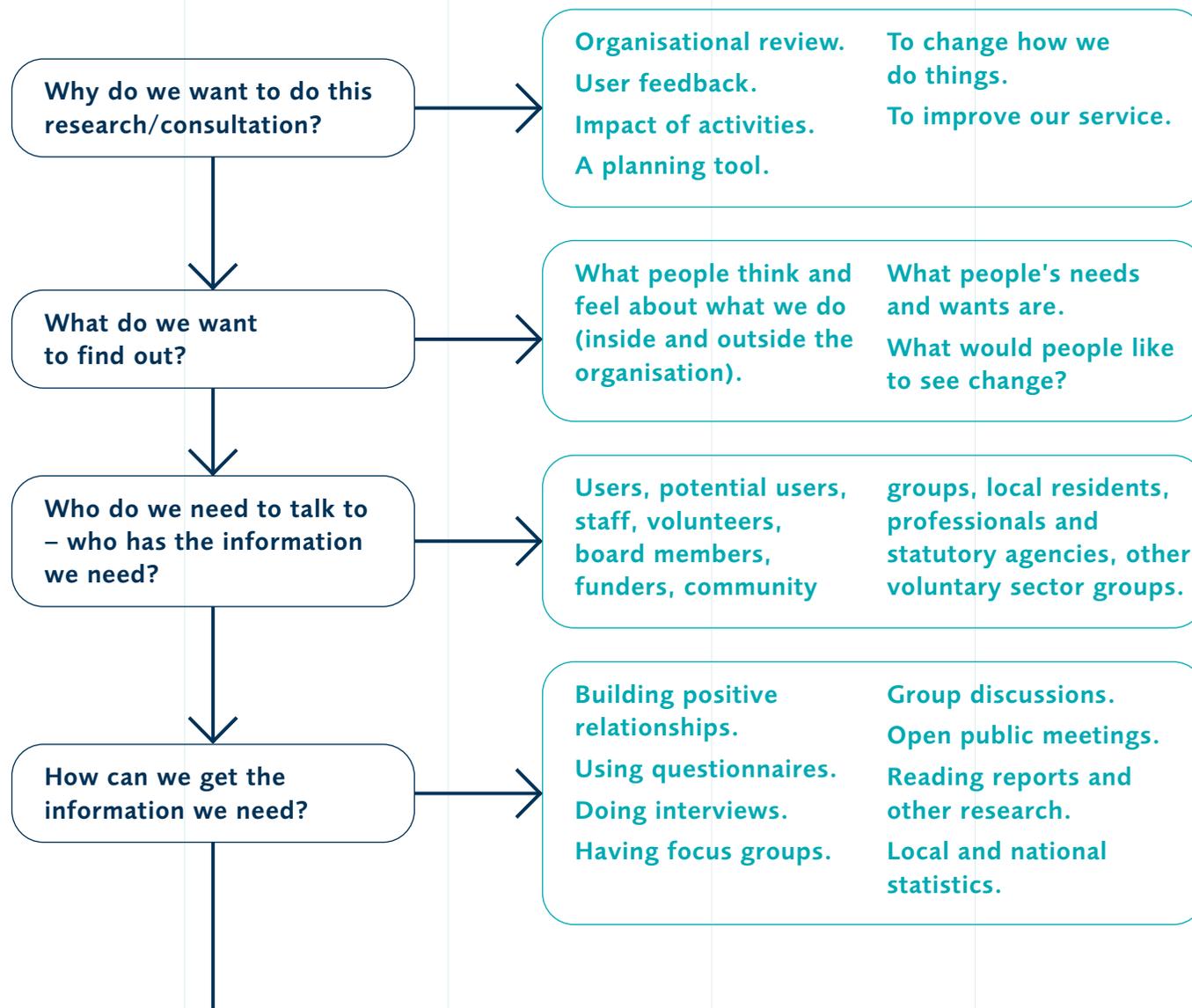
3 Planning your research?

This section gives you some tools to help you plan your research project. We provide a flowchart for groups just beginning to think about undertaking research. Working through the questions it asks should help clarify what you are looking at and why, and give you some ideas about how to go about it. Don't feel limited by the responses in the boxes. They are just suggestions and you will have your own ideas for who to talk to and what to do with the information you collect.

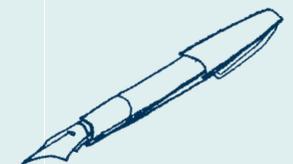
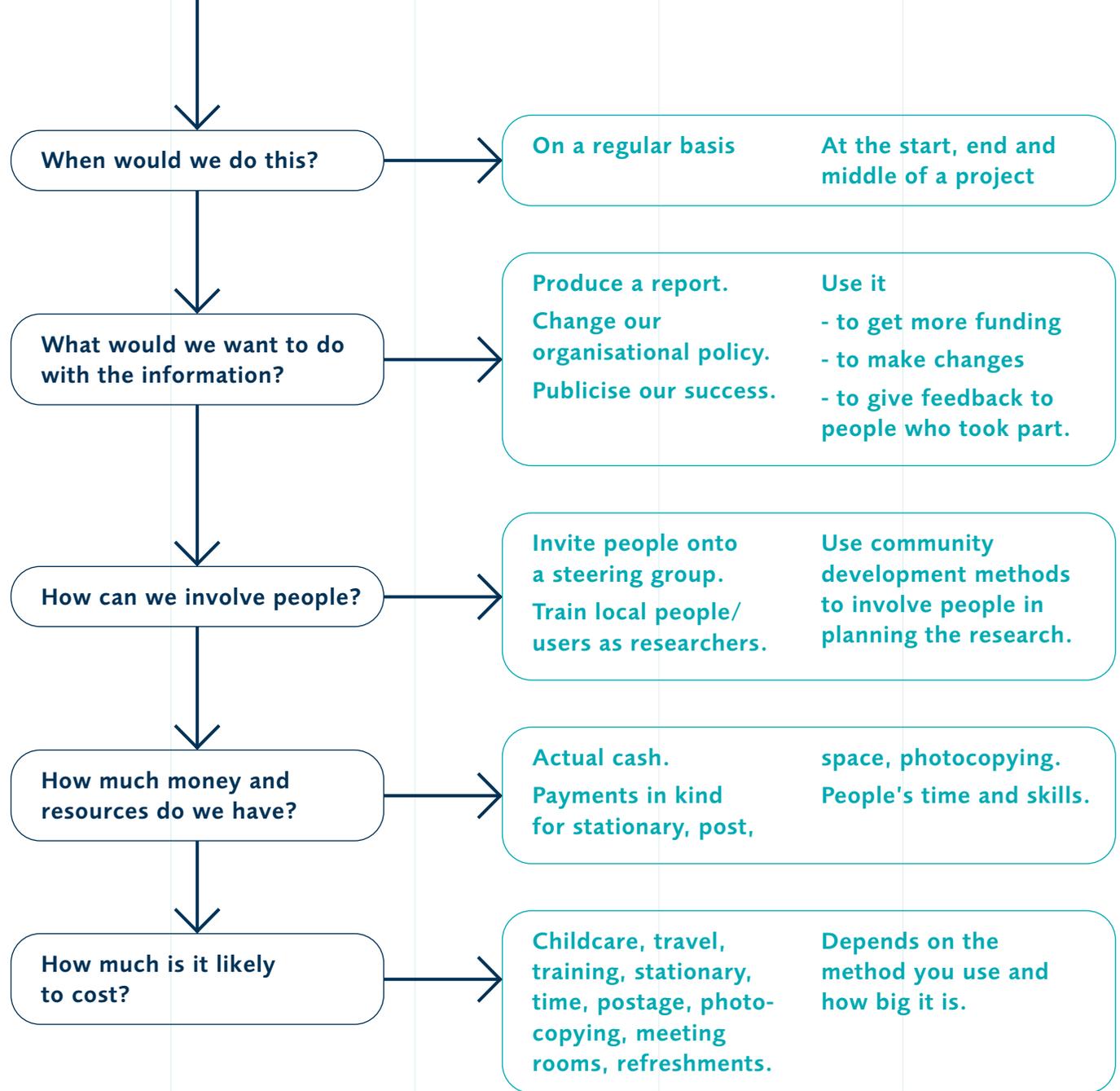
The next section 'Managing your research project' looks at some of the practical issues raised in the flowchart exercise in more detail.

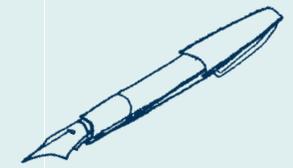
In 'Designing your research' we explain how to construct your specific piece of research so that it provides meaningful answers to the questions you want to address. We show how to plan your research incorporating the theory you learned from section 2. In ARVAC's work with groups, we use a research design template. Here we provide an example of how one group used it to plan their research. (There are blank templates for you to photocopy in section 8, pages 70-79)

a Planning your research – a flowchart



Lastly we look at sampling – how to ensure that you are getting views from a cross section of the people that your research is about. When working with a limited budget and limited time, as most community groups are, you do not want to compromise the value of your research by talking to too few people. Nor do you want to set yourself unrealistic targets, such as trying to contact everyone on a large housing estate, when you do not need to.





b Managing your research project

In order to make your research happen you need to plan it well. This section B outlines some of the more practical issues and section C looks at planning your research in detail. In practice, you will find the two processes overlap. Getting an overview of the practical issues involved may influence some of the decisions you need to make when designing the research. Equally, understanding the steps you need to go through in a well-designed piece of research will help you resolve some of the issues described below.

Is there a deadline?

- **have you got to fit into a particular time-scale?**
- **are you using the research as part of a funding bid that has a set time limit?**
- **are you wanting to fund the research from year-end spend?**

If you *are* working to a deadline, you will need to plan accordingly and judge if what you have in mind is realistic and achievable. You need to allow time for each of the following stages.

- **defining the problem**
- **designing the research**
- **involving people**
- **training and support**
- **planning, piloting and revising data collection.** *
- **carrying out the data collection**
- **coding information**
- **analysis**
- **producing results and using them**
- **dissemination**

these stages are explained in more detail in the next section

How much time do you have?

How many actual hours are available for the research process? It's often useful to consider who can be involved and how much time they have; volunteers, paid staff, management committee etc. If you are thinking of using a paid researcher, you will probably need to judge how much of their time you can afford.

Ideally you should go through the whole of your research process, using a small sample, to ensure you are using appropriate methods and that you can actually answer the questions that you have set yourself with the

information you are gathering. In practice you may find you can only pilot parts of your research, such as a questionnaire.

Who is going to be involved?

- **will everyone in the organisation get involved, or will a few people do the work?**
- **will it be a mixture of management committee members, paid staff and volunteers or will it be a group of local people who carry out the research?**
- **will they get involved in the design of the research, as well as routine tasks such as delivering questionnaires or more skilled tasks such as interviewing?**

Whoever gets involved, you will need to check out insurance details and health and safety guidelines. Safety should be given serious consideration and agreed guidelines negotiated. Some issues to consider are carrying identification, working in pairs, leaving contact details and providing mobile phones.

What training and support is required?

Being involved in research can be an enjoyable learning activity if people are supported and given the relevant training. Support can take the form of travel and childcare costs, as well as having meetings at times and places that are convenient for people to attend. Training in interviewing methods, communication skills and using questionnaires is helpful for people and can contribute to their personal development. Some agencies that provide training are suggested on page 56, section 7a. You will need to budget time and money for training.

Who is responsible for what?

Co-ordination is a key function of any research process and requires clarity and understanding of the various roles and responsibilities. Everyone needs to know what they are responsible for, how it fits into the process and the time-scale. This is probably best done via a steering group that meets regularly and oversees the process.

You will need to decide who has the following responsibilities:

- **administration and contact point**
- **facilitator and trainer**
- **envelope stuffing**

- **steering group member**
- **field worker**
- **interviewer**
- **analysis of data**
- **pulling the themes together**
- **writing a report**
- **taking action**

How much will it cost?

Research is often under-costed and 'invisible' items can use up a fair amount of resources. Possible costs include:

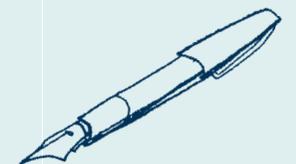
- **time, especially paid staff time**
- **resources: computer, software, printer, phone line**
- **transport**
- **stationery**
- **postage**
- **meeting rooms**
- **photocopying**
- **phone bills**
- **childcare**
- **training costs**

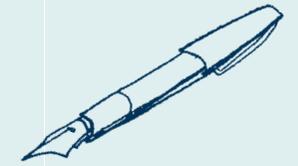
- **employing facilitators and/or interpreters if needed**
- **incentives/expenses for participants**

Using an external researcher

If you have decided to employ an external researcher, clarity and monitoring are essential. Areas to consider when planning this:

- **have a clear selection/tendering process. Drawing up a research brief will help clarify what the research question is. Don't be too prescriptive about the methods – your researcher should be able to suggest suitable research methods**
- **be clear in your brief; spell out what you expect and by when**
- **be clear about fees and expenses**
- **be clear about the areas of expertise you need and ask questions**
- **interview people in the same way as you would for other vacancies**
- **set up regular milestone meetings**
- **clarify what degree of involvement you will have in the research process**





- **be clear what kind of report you need – do you want to look at the raw data?**
- **get a signed contract before any work starts**
- **if you can, get legal advice on the contract.**

Working with research students

If you are offered help by a student, establish what they need to do for their course and why they want to help you with this particular research. Clarify how much say you will have in the research design and process. Who will be managing the research overall? Clarify the roles and expectations of your steering group and the student's research supervisor. Will academic schedules and deadlines fit in with your own group's timetable? What will happen to the research when it is completed? Will they be able to present their findings in a format that is appropriate for your needs as well as meeting any academic requirements? How can you support them, for example by ensuring they have a good understanding of your work and your target groups?

c Designing your research

Working your way through our research design template should help you plan your research. We show how one group worked through the template. You can copy this template for your own use from page 75 [section 8].

Try to get as many people involved in designing the research as possible and encourage open discussion. Don't think of it just as a form to be filled in, but use it as a trigger to discussion. This is the key stage for defining the future direction of your research and it is worth spending some time on this

process. When ARVAC works with community groups, the Outreach Worker facilitates this stage. If you are using the pack yourself, you may find it helpful to have someone acting as facilitator who can encourage people to join in and solve any disagreements with diplomacy.

1 Research proposal

You will find it easy to establish the broad area you want to conduct your research in: youth unemployment in your borough, or concerns that local members of an ethnic group have about using local health services, for example.

Example

A completed research design by a campaigning and awareness raising body for young people affected by sickle cell disease and their carers. The organisation is in the early stages of its existence and has decided to carry out a needs assessment. This example is followed step-by-step.

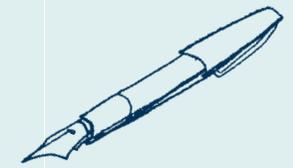
Assess the need for raising awareness of sickle cell disease in Lewisham (including the local education authority, schools, parents, children and young people.)

2 Purpose of research

Think about what outcome you expect from your research - will it identify a specific need that you plan to remedy? Or suggest changes to your project? Or highlight gaps in local service provision that you want to campaign around? This is the research purpose.

- To establish whether there is a need to raise awareness of the impact of sickle cell disease on its sufferers, with the LEA and in schools
- To establish whether there is a need to raise awareness among parents and young people both with and without sickle cell disease
- To highlight the impact of sickle cell disease on young people at school
- To identify structures and procedures currently in place to enable sickle cell sufferers to continue in their schooling
- To inform parents and young people about the services available





3 Issues to be studied

Identify the issues you are trying to explore, using anecdotal statements made by members of your group. Brainstorming sessions may reveal that different people involved in the research group have different ideas about the actual issues, so this stage needs to involve as many people as possible.

- Lack of awareness of the impact of sickle cell disease in schools and LEA - or is it a low priority?
- Are children and young people in schools being excluded as a result of their sickle cell disease?
- Lack of awareness for sufferers of what structures exist to help them with their schooling

4 Defining your research questions

The next step is to make your research both meaningful and manageable by thinking of the specific questions you are trying to address. These questions should closely relate to the issues identified above. These are the questions that will form the basis of your analysis. Phrase them carefully as this will help narrow down your research. Be sure to include boundaries for your research by adding in phrases such as 'in this estate,' 'by young people aged 16 to 25,' wherever appropriate.

- What is known about the impact of sickle cell disease on educational attainment, quality of life, and standard of living?
- In Lewisham, what level of awareness is there among schools, LEA, sufferers and their parents of the impact of sickle cell disease?
- What experiences have sufferers and their parents had with schools/LEA in Lewisham?
- What statutory structures and procedures are in place to support sufferers in their schooling?
- What other services (in the voluntary sector) are provided to this group in Lewisham to support them with their schooling?

5 What data will you collect?

This is the stage at which you begin to select a strategic approach. If you are asking 'how many' or 'how big' you are taking a quantitative approach. If you are asking questions beginning 'why' or 'how' you are taking a qualitative approach. Remember you can combine different approaches and methods.

- Secondary sources ie research that has already been conducted.
- Individual interviews will provide this information.
- Individual interviews.
- Information from the LEA, Sickle Cell Society.
- Contact details and information about services provided and to whom.

6 Where will this information come from?

By identifying the type of information you need and the people or other sources able to provide it, you will be creating the right mix of methods. Think about whether you need a broad overview or an in-depth response. Are you looking for factual information, opinions or personal accounts?

- OSCAR, SCAR and Sickle Cell Society will be starting points
- Primary and secondary schools and Lewisham LEA
- Members of the organisation
- Sickle Cell Society information service.
- Lewisham LEA Directories, Lewisham CVS

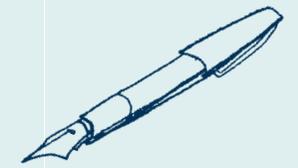
7 Who will collect this data?

One member of the management committee and volunteers.

8 How will the information be recorded?

Individual interviews will be recorded with a dictaphone.





9 How will the information be put together or analysed in order to answer the above questions?

- Secondary sources will be used to identify the impact of sickle cell disease on educational attainment, quality of life and standard of living. Current research will be assessed to decipher what is

- already known in this area.
- Individual interviews to be transcribed and analysed in relation to research questions.

10 How will the findings (the answers to the questions) be presented, disseminated, used or passed on?

- A play highlighting the impact of sickle cell disease to be performed in schools.
- A directory of services and structures/procedures to enable sickle cell sufferers in their schooling.

- A written report.
- Funding applications.
- Presentation to LEA and schools.

Finally, it is good practice to keep a record or diary of your research process, from your first thoughts, through sampling, research approaches and methods to your final analysis. In doing this you provide a clear account of what has influenced the decisions about the research.

d Who to talk to – sampling

When designing your research, you will need to decide on who and where you will gather data from and how this will be selected. The size and composition of your sample will affect the validity and reliability, see page 8, section 2a of your research and are therefore extremely important.

Sampling frame

A sampling frame is a complete and up-to-date list of everyone relevant to your research. If, for example, you wish to survey everyone over 18 living on a particular estate, you could use the electoral register, available from local libraries or the local town hall, to compile a mailing list. Remember the electoral register does not provide any information other than addresses. It does not list those under 18 or people who have not registered to vote.

When those you wish to research are of one particular ethnicity or are in one particular age group, you may need to compile the sampling frame yourself, using a variety of sources such as contact lists.

With some groups such as refugees on an estate or homeless people you may not be able to construct a sampling frame at all. In that case you will need to use one of the other approaches described below, such as snowball sampling. In other cases when the population of study is widely dispersed and the research has limited resources, you can use cluster sampling. This approach is useful where it is not possible to construct a sampling frame because there are no comprehensive lists of names and contact details of the population of study.

Example of cluster sampling

If you wished to survey nurses in NHS hospitals throughout London you would randomly select hospitals from a comprehensive list. From a list of all the nurses in those hospitals selected you could then randomly select a sample of nurses. This is called cluster sampling because the nurses are clustered in the respective hospitals.

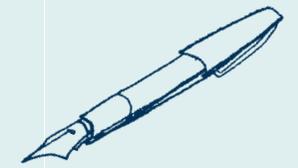
Sampling techniques

Sometimes you can include everyone that is in your sampling frame in your research – for example, if you planned to include the views of all your users in an evaluation. In that case you need go no further in the sampling process. Mostly however you will only be able to include a proportion of your sampling frame. Unless the community is very small, or your resources large, you will need to draw a sample from the community you are interested in. This section looks at different sampling techniques. They are divided into probability and non-probability samples.

Probability samples

Probability sampling means those included within your sample are representative of the whole community, groups of people, or set of organisations that your research is interested in and you can therefore generalise your findings to this group. There are several different methods for this.





- **Random sampling** is where you select at random from your sampling frame. You may choose to select names out of a hat until you get the number of names you need. Or you could roll a dice to get a series of numbers and use these to select from the sampling frame. For example, mark the fourth name on your list, then the third after that, then the sixth after that. Alternatively, use the numbers to locate the page, column and line in a telephone book or on an electoral register.
- **Systematic sampling** is a variation of random sampling. Samples are chosen mathematically ensuring everyone has a fair chance of being selected for the sample. You might choose every 100th person from the sampling frame to receive a questionnaire.

Sometimes these techniques, particularly with very small sample sizes, will not produce a representative sample of the people or groups which the research is interested in. For example, the sampling frame contains both men and women but your sampling technique has only chosen men. Community groups are unlikely to have

the resources to deal with a large enough sampling frame to ensure a truly representative sample. In this case use one of these methods

- **Stratified sampling** works by ensuring that your sample contains the correct percentage of a certain group in relation to a wider group or the whole population.

Example

Greenwich Education Authority wanted to find out reasons why people who live in the London Borough of Greenwich go to university. Their aim was to compare women's and men's reasons. 58% of people at university from Greenwich are women and 42% are men, so a sample of 50 students needs to contain 29 women and 21 men.

You may also want to ensure a correct age balance. So if 64% of students are under 30 and 36% are over 30, your sample would need to include 32 people aged under 30 and 18 over 30.

- **Quota sampling** is based on the same principles as stratified sampling but it is not a random selection of people. Instead it is left to the researcher to find the people and fill the quotas for each group or strata. You would need to ensure that there is no bias when selecting these people – what someone is wearing, the way they are acting or who they are with should have no bearing on them being selected for interview.

Non-probability sampling techniques

Sometimes it is inappropriate or impossible to get a representative sample. Typically this might be a small-scale study where the population is unknown or where it is difficult to contact people such as homeless people, drug users or refugees. In such cases you will need one of these techniques.

- **Purposive sampling** is when the researcher selects those to be included in the sample because they will provide valuable data for the research. Though this sacrifices the representative nature of probability samples, this may not be important for your research as the information gathered from these individuals is critical for the research.

- **Snowball sampling** is where the sample grows through people suggesting others for the study based on the research criteria. This is an effective way to build a reasonable sample with little or no information for a sampling frame.

Sample size

There is no strict mathematical formula to help you make this decision. It depends on how large your total population of study is, how many subdivisions are in the sample (e.g. gender, age, ethnicity, disability), the area covered and what data you require. For instance if you are studying one estate of 3,500 people, a reasonable number might be 10% or 350 people.

Other projects may start without knowing the exact size of their sample. The more in-depth the information you are seeking, the smaller your sample is likely to be.

Response rate

The use of postal questionnaires in market research achieves a response rate of about 5%. Community organisations may receive a higher response when conducting postal questionnaires and some have achieved rates of up to 40%. Following up non-returns is one way of increasing this response rate and will require patience, perseverance and a way of identifying people who do not reply.

Telephone and face-to-face interviews achieve a much higher response rate, but also require more resources. Allowing for those whom you cannot make contact with and those that do not wish to be interviewed will lower your response rate to perhaps 70-80%.

A low response rate can invalidate your research, especially if the people who don't reply have something in common. If you were doing a doorstep survey and only called in daytime, you could find that you are excluding the views of many employed people. A postal survey might not be completed by people who have reading problems, lowering your response rate and excluding their views.

