

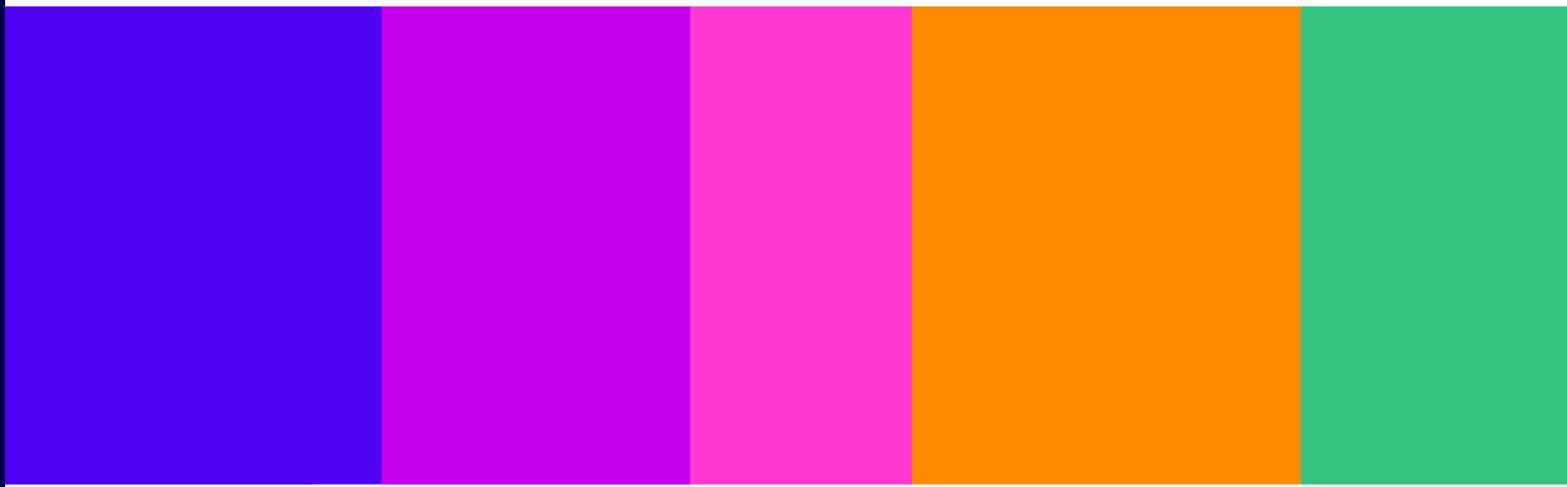
Paving the way for inclusive research

Better practice research with disabled
people and people with long-term
conditions

Ofcom Summary and Next Steps

Report

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Contents

Section

Overview	3
Our research	4
Next steps for Ofcom	6

Overview

What we have done

Ofcom is an evidence-based regulator and research is central to all our decisions. When commissioning research, it is important that it is inclusive of all consumers, including those who are disabled or have a long-term condition.

Ofcom and the Communications Consumer Panel (CCP) meet regularly to discuss current research projects. The CCP has previously encouraged Ofcom to consider other ways of conducting market research, in order to ensure it is more inclusive and less focused on medical model definitions of disability and more focused on understanding needs and overcoming barriers.

To explore this further, Ofcom and the CCP jointly commissioned a research study. The purpose of this research is to explore and identify a more inclusive approach to designing and reporting on studies involving disabled people, people with long-term conditions, and/or people who may face related barriers but do not identify as disabled.

The project included a literature review and an in-depth analysis of language in six of these reports. We spoke to 40 experts, of whom 21 attended a subsequent workshop. These experts were from different sectors, including charities, academia, market and social research, government departments, regulators and diversity and inclusion experts. You can find the full research report [here](#), and more detail on the methodology in this [appendix](#).

Next Steps for Ofcom's Market Research

In this document we have set out some of the areas Ofcom's Research and Intelligence Team will focus on going forward. This includes:

- Reviewing how we ask about disability, and considering how we can ensure our choices are appropriate to each individual research project.
- Being more transparent about the choices we make in asking about and analysing by disability, to ensure participants understand why they are being asked about this.
- Creating a checklist for use on research projects, to ensure we are embedding accessibility from the start of all research, particularly in relation to access needs.

Our research

Why did we do this?

Research is at the centre of many of Ofcom's most important decisions, as an evidence-based regulator. We need to ensure we deliver research that ensures we are up to date with the developments in the markets we regulate. We also need to ensure that we are able to reach all parts of society in our research, including disabled people or those with long-term conditions.

In 2021, Ofcom published its [Diversity & Inclusion strategy](#), and within it highlighted the role research plays in delivering this: *"We commit to undertaking market research to get the views of particular communities that we think may be particularly affected and ensuring the views of under-represented groups are made clear to our senior decision makers."*

A key part of all our research is to identify when some consumers are having different experiences compared to others. We look to understand what's driving that difference and think about the impact it may have on people. To do this effectively, we need to make sure that we adopt an inclusive approach to our market research by reflecting the most appropriate language in terms of how people identify and using the right methods to reach everyone, including those who are not readily available through usual recruitment methods.

In addition, Ofcom regularly meets with the Communications Consumer Panel (CCP)¹ to discuss current research projects. The CCP has previously encouraged Ofcom to consider other ways of conducting market research, in order to ensure it is more inclusive and less focused on medical model definitions of disability and more focused on understanding needs and overcoming barriers.

To explore this further, Ofcom and the CCP jointly commissioned a research study. The purpose of this research is to explore and identify a more inclusive approach to designing and reporting on studies involving disabled people, people with long-term conditions, and/or people who may face related barriers but do not identify as disabled.

What did we do?

In Autumn 2023, we commissioned Magenta to conduct a multi-stage research project, with the core aim of developing a clear set of recommendations for conducting research with disabled people and those with long-term conditions. In summary, the approach involved:

- A literature review and discourse analysis; a review of published literature to explore how research with disabled people and people with long term conditions had been reported on and conducted.
- Expert interviews; 40x45 minute in-depth interviews with stakeholders across a variety of organisation types, including academics, charities, government and public sector, market and social research, academia and Diversity Equality & Inclusion specialists.

¹ The CCP has cross-membership with Ofcom's Advisory Committee for Older and Disabled People (ACOD). Members, in their ACOD capacity, also provide advice to Ofcom on issues relating to older and disabled people which- alongside the CCP's overall remit -includes representation and portrayal on television, radio and other services regulated by Ofcom, and the accessibility of those services

- Workshop; a 2.5 hour workshop with 21 experts from the interview phase, taken from the interview phase.

For more detail on the methodology, please see this appendix.

We would like to thank the CCP for their collaboration on this important project, which has added valuable insight to our research in this space. We would also like to extend our thanks to all those who took part in the project and gave generously of their time and expertise to discussions.

The findings are based on the views of those who were willing to take part. We aimed to ensure a broad representation of expert types, and disabilities and health conditions, but we recognise this project was unable to cover everything. The recommendations and report are grounded in the practicalities of research so far as is possible. However, we are conscious of the diversity of views in this space and acknowledge that no single set of recommendations or guidelines can capture this.

Our intention with this project was to ensure our research is conducted in the most inclusive way we can and to explore what better practice would look like, and hopefully to help others in achieving this too.

Next steps for Ofcom

Reflections on the project

We have reflected on the recommendations made by this report. Some of the recommendations and ideas are things Ofcom already tries to implement where we can; for example, using alternative or supplementary questions about disability and long-term conditions; producing easy-read reports and BSL translations, and being clear about language and terminology in reporting.

However, we know there is more we can be doing, and this report has illustrated different areas we think we can improve on. Importantly for us, we are mindful that this is about 'better' practice; the landscape is always shifting, and we will need to evolve with it as best we can.

We also recognise the wide diversity of opinion in this area, and that there cannot be a one size fits all approach to ensuring inclusion of disabled people within market research. This project has clearly illustrated this, and we know each research project we undertake will be different, with different recommendations and elements of better practice relevant in specific circumstances.

The purpose of this cover paper is to highlight some of the key areas Ofcom will look to focus on going forwards, to improve the way we work. These are outlined below; this is not an exhaustive list, and we will consider all the recommendations made.

Our plans

There are three key areas we want to focus on in the first instance, and below we set out some of the steps we hope to take to implement positive changes.

Language

One of the reasons for commissioning this work was to gain a greater understanding around language and definitions.

1. We are currently considering how we ask about disability, across the range of different types of market research we commission. Currently, most research we commission uses the Government Statistical Service (GSS) harmonised standard, or a version of it, and if we require supplementary questions for specific research projects, then we add them.
 - a) We know there is an important role for the GSS standard and questions in our research, as it is important for benchmarking, is often the question which users are expecting, and aligns with other data collected using the same question (e.g. the Census).
 - b) However, we also recognise the limitations of this approach such as the potential mismatch between what a participant understands when they fill out the questions and the analyst's interpretation.
2. As much as is possible, we will continue to ensure we are reflecting participant language in the market research we do. Whether that is ensuring this information is captured before or during interviews, or when using quotations or attributions in reporting, we want to make sure that we are mindful and considerate of how individuals use language to describe themselves.
3. When we are writing about disability or long-term conditions, we will aim to think more holistically about barriers people may face, rather than just the specific condition a person may

experience. We will also aim to ensure that when we describe the experiences of disabled people and people with long-term conditions, we are mindful of our use of language.

Transparency

4. A key finding from the research was the importance of explaining to participants in market research why you are asking about disability. We will aim to do so, across our quantitative and qualitative research, to ensure that we are creating an inclusive environment, where participants are clear about how their data will be used and why it is relevant and being collected.
 - a) In addition, this has a clear link with the type of question that is being used; for example, when asking about specific conditions, barriers or using the GSS questions, explaining why these questions were selected is important.
5. We know that as a commissioner of market research, we have an opportunity to set the tone, and shape the approach of the research from the start. As far as possible, we want to set out clearly in briefs our expectations around the involvement of disabled people in research, particularly in terms of sampling, but also in terms of language, definitions and reporting. This will help ensure that the project team is thinking about inclusive research design from the start, and allow us to build in consideration of barriers and access needs from the beginning.

Barriers

6. We will create an accessibility checklist, for use in market research projects, which will allow consistent application of these recommendations. It will encourage project teams to be intentional about their decision making on projects in relation to disability and potential access needs on a project.
7. We want to ensure that anyone is able to take part in our market research projects, and access needs should not be a barrier. We have already had lots of experience of carrying out disability-specific research, and placing inclusion at the heart of projects, but we want to ensure this is fully embedded across all our market research projects. Ensuring a mix of recruitment methods or being able to be adaptable on a project as needed are examples of where we can do this.