THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

Using Verbatim Quotations in Reporting Qualitative Social Research: The views of research users

Anne Corden and Roy Sainsbury

S | P | R | U
SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH UNIT

Contents

Introduction

This is the fourth in a series of six papers presenting findings from an ESRC funded research study of the theory, practice and impact of using verbatim quotations from research participants in reporting qualitative social research for policy. The study was conducted by the authors during 2003-05. Each paper in the series presents findings from the various components of the overall study. The first three are available (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005b, 2005c and 2006) and the two remaining will be forthcoming later in 2007.

There are six parts to the paper. Part 1 explains the background to the overall study and the approach taken. This sets the context for the research component reported here, and explains the methods used. Part 2 explores the kind of output from social research which people in this study group saw, whether they read verbatim quotations included, and their beliefs about authors' purpose in presenting participants' spoken words. Part 3 starts to explore what impact research users thought verbatim quotations made on them, looking at what they found helpful and what they disliked in verbatim quotations they read. Part 4 looks specifically at detailed aspects of presentation of quotations, including views about editing and forms of attribution. In part 5 of the paper we look at how far research users had considered how research participants might feel about the publication of their spoken words, and their expectations and assumptions about the way authors deal with this. The paper concludes with a short discussion of the main points, and the implications.

1.   Background and research methods

1.1   Background

Including verbatim spoken words from research participants has become effectively standard practice in much qualitative social research. Support for this approach is being strengthened in the development of formal methods for critical appraisal and evaluation of policy-related qualitative studies, with the aim of grounding policy and practice in best evidence. Evaluative tools and frameworks which have emerged in the last decade for use in quality assessment or reports of qualitative research have been reviewed by Spencer *et al.* (2003). They looked at both empirically and philosophically based frameworks, emerging from within a range of disciplines. One important quality criterion for which there was broad consensus was how evidence and conclusions are derived, and verbatim quotations were identified as having a key role here. Authors of some of the frameworks developed within the health and social welfare sector spell out how inclusion of excerpts from transcripts of interviews help to clarify links between data, interpretation and conclusions, discussed variously within concepts such as validity, reliability, credibility and auditability (see for example,

Beck, 1993; Greenhalgh and Taylor, 1997; Spencer *et al.*, 2003; Long and Godfrey, 2004*).*

Such evaluative tools and frameworks are mostly recent additions to the research literature. When the researchers planned their overall exploratory study of the use of verbatim quotations, they found that a conceptual and theoretical basis for inclusion of verbatim quotations within social research texts was not well developed. Explanations of the process of selection of quotations were rare, both within methodological texts and the research reports themselves. There were few examples of investigation of the impact on readers of verbatim quotations, and little was known about how research participants felt about the way their spoken words were used. The researchers set out to re-examine the approach to using verbatim quotations, with ESRC funding for an exploratory study.

1.2   The overall study

The aims of the overall study were to investigate the inclusion of respondents' verbatim quotations within written reports of findings from applied social research, from the perspectives of researchers, research users and research participants.

Specific objectives were:
- to review conceptual and theoretical arguments for using verbatim quotations in presenting findings
- to explore current beliefs and practices among researchers
- to explore expectations and preferences among research users
- to investigate the views of people who speak the words presented
- to test, among a range of readers, accessibility, acceptability and impact of different ways of including verbatim quotations in research accounts
- to contribute to knowledge and understanding of qualitative methodology, especially in relation to analysis and presentation of findings
- to inform practice and teaching of qualitative social research
- to inform policy makers and other users of qualitative research.

The study had a four stage design:

1. Review of the conceptual and theoretical bases for including direct quotations in presentation of findings.

2. Desk-based analysis of selected recent social research texts, to explore styles of reporting.

3. In-depth interviews with researchers and research users.

4. Empirical work to test the impact of quotations in a report of an evaluative study of people who took part in that study, and people who read the report.

Findings from the empirical study are available (Corden and Sainsbury, 2005a, 2005b and 2005c). Also available are some findings from the third component described above: a series of interviews with researchers (Corden and Sainsbury, 2006). This paper presents further findings from the third component: a series of interviews with research users. We go on to describe the approach adopted.

1.3   Seeking views and experiences of research users

The aim in this component of the research was to seek views on the impact of verbatim quotations in social research reports and publications among a small group of people known to be active in policy and practice. The study group was built to include senior policy makers and research managers from government departments; senior managers from key UK organisations which fund and disseminate social research; senior personnel in independent and voluntary organisations which both provide services and aim to influence policy; senior practitioners/academics in applied social science university departments and hospital schools. People were identified through the researchers' academic and policy networks. They were known, variously, to be currently active in policy making, policy related research commissioning and dissemination, policy monitoring and commentary, developments in professional practice and teaching, and developments in research methods teaching. Most had either published widely themselves, or had responsibilities for publications coming from their own organisations. Their main areas of current interest covered social care, health, education, social work, employment, regulatory and financial systems, family policy, disability and diversity, nursing and midwifery, and criminal behaviour. Several of those invited to take part were known also previously to have used social research findings in other areas of professional or practice settings.

As a group of research users, the people included were active and likely to be influential across policy formulation and evaluation, building and disseminating knowledge in various policy areas, campaigning and lobbying, control of research funding and dissemination, assessing and maintaining research quality, building expertise in research methodology and passing this on through teaching and training.

The researchers sent letters of explanation and invitation to these people (Appendix A). It was suggested that, in preparation for the discussion, the person invited might like to think across a number of publications reporting qualitative research which had made an impact on them, and how verbatim quotations were or were not included.

All those invited agreed to take part. Most of the interviews took place in mid-2005, and were usually conducted at people's place of work. Interviews generally took between one hour and an hour and a half, and were tape-recorded with permission. The researchers used a topic guide (Appendix B) to explore:
- what kind of research output they read
- beliefs and assumptions about authors' purpose and practice in including verbatim words from respondents
- the impact of the verbatim words
- views on different approaches to presentation and attribution
- beliefs and assumptions about research participants' views on use of their spoken words.

The researchers took to each interview some display material they had prepared in advance, providing examples of some of the issues for exploration: different ways of mixing quotations and narrative; forms of attribution; speech with regional patterns and words, and aspects of presentation of text including font, italics, quotation marks and colour (Appendix C). This material was used variously to open up discussion on particular topics or pursue things in detail, and to explore preferences and assumptions, and reasons for these.

1.4 Analysis

The first stage of analysis was careful reading of the transcripts of the interviews. The data were analysed systematically and transparently, building on the Framework method for data display and analysis, originally developed by the National Centre for Social Research (Ritchie *et al.*, 2003). A thematic framework was developed for classification and summary of data, with headings and classifications that reflected the original matters of enquiry in this component of the research, any new themes emerging from these transcripts, and important findings from other components of the overall research. One of the authors extracted the data manually from the transcripts onto a series of three charts. The same author then used this data reduction and display to explore the accounts of all the respondents within the common thematic framework, with in-case and between-case analysis. Analysis involved search for understanding of the impact of respondents' verbatim words, and the beliefs and assumptions that underpinned this.

The following parts of the paper present the main findings from the analysis. In what follows, reference to 'the researchers' means the authors of this paper (Corden and Sainsbury). 'Research users', sometimes also called 'readers', are those people who took part in the interviews, whose views are described here. The term 'authors' is used to describe the social researchers who wrote the reports, books and articles read by the research users who took part in this study. 'Research participants' are

those people who took part in interviews and group discussions in the social research from which the research users had seen written output.

2.   Reading findings from social research

The researchers asked people about the importance to their current work of reading findings from social research, and what kind of output they regularly saw. People discussed their general approach in dealing with such material, and what they were likely to read in detail. The researchers then focused on verbatim quotations presented in reports of qualitative research, to explore whether people read these, and their perceptions of authors' purpose in including the spoken words.

2.1   The importance of reading about social research

All those interviewed said that reading output from social research was currently, or at previous times in their career, a large part of their work.

Senior policy makers, analysts and research managers within government departments said it was usual for them to read some form of research output every day. For them, reading research output was essential to ensure that evidence fed into the policy making process. Social research was important, along with economic evidence and administrative statistics and, for some, medical research. They expected to look at both quantitative and qualitative empirical work, and reviews and commentary. Systematic reviews were increasingly part of their overall reading. All regularly read research reports from a number of sources including work commissioned by their own departments. They also saw articles in academic and practitioner journals, press cuttings, output from lobbying and campaigning groups, and a wide range of web-based material. The content of material they read was primarily related to the focus of their particular department, but with moves towards 'joined up government' some people were increasingly reading across traditionally separate policy areas. This required some understanding of the different ways in which evidence was presented and arguments made, across different disciplines. The wide range of output read also required making decisions about the quality of the underlying research, and the reliability and robustness of findings reported.

For some senior government research managers, one purpose in their reading was quality assurance of their own departmental in-house reports and research they had commissioned. All prepared ministerial briefings and had to be ready to respond to questions from ministers about research from their own department and material from other sources in which ministers were interested.

Research managers in organisations primarily concerned with commissioning, funding and disseminating social research also expected to read many of the reports funded by their own organisations, and sometimes made editorial suggestions before publication. It was important that they also read widely, however, to build up a broad picture of current policy issues in their particular field, recent research findings, interpretations and conclusions, and the implications for policy and practice. This picture was essential for seeing which gaps in policy or practice new research might fill and to inform funding decisions about new applications they received. Their wider reading was also important in knowing how best to disseminate findings from the research they had funded. They thus expected to look at research reports funded by other organisations, web-based abstracts and summaries, newspapers, newsletters and briefings from a range of groups representing service users and providers and, occasionally, academic or practitioner journal articles in which they had particular interest. As with the senior government personnel, they expected to read material based on quantitative and qualitative approaches.

For senior personnel in independent and voluntary organisations representing the interests of particular groups, maintaining an up-to-date picture of current and developing policy issues in their particular field also meant a great deal of reading. They saw research output in reports, practitioner journals and newspapers, and sometimes academic articles. As well as keeping on top of new information and knowledge, one of their purposes in reading was to observe how arguments were being presented, and which people and organisations had a policy interest. This helped them decide their own lobbying and educational strategies.

Senior practitioners and academics read selectively in the academic journals and reports relevant to their main interests and disciplines, especially when engaged themselves on empirical research. Those with administrative and organisational responsibilities within their institutions also read research findings about management and education. Some had roles in teaching students and practitioners about research methods, and how to assess research findings.

Generally, therefore, people in this study group were regularly reading and using research findings based on both quantitative and qualitative approaches. One person had more limited current experience of reading reports of qualitative research, because research in her area of expertise was increasingly dominated by research based on randomised controlled trials. This person, however, had been strongly influenced by reading qualitative material at an earlier career stage, and continued to point colleagues and students towards this material.

2.2 Reading verbatim quotations

People in this study group expected to find verbatim quotations from research participants in output based on qualitative approaches such as interviews and group discussions. A number of factors influenced whether or not they read the quotations, and how much attention they paid to them.

First, people's general approach to dealing with all the reading material that came before them influenced whether they even looked at the quotations. When people had responsibility for quality control of a report coming from their own departments or organisations they expected to read most of it, including any quotations. Otherwise, however, people said their reading was generally selective. This usually meant skimming or scanning the document, to get a quick impression of content and importance, and then dipping in to those parts which seemed useful or particularly interesting. Some senior policy makers said they depended very much on looking at the introduction, conclusions and executive summaries or abstracts. If these were clear and well written, it was often not necessary to go into the body of the report, which saved them time. The conclusions and summaries rarely included verbatim quotations. When such people did read verbatim quotations, it was when they went in to the main body of the report, either because they were wanted to read some findings in more detail, or because they wanted clarification of points they had not understood from the summary.

Once people went beyond the introduction, summary and conclusions, the usual approach was to make an early judgement as to how authors were using verbatim quotations and how useful it was going to be to read them in full. There were a number of influences on these early judgements. If the first few quotations people read added anything to the narrative or were especially interesting, for example illuminating points made by the author, people were more likely to continue reading them. If they were not well contextualised, hard to understand in any way or interrupted reading flow, they were more likely to be abandoned. On the other hand, if the narrative was poorly written, or seemed bland, some readers said they continued reading by looking mainly at the quotations. Another influence was the source of the material. If readers did not know the authors or research organisation and trust the quality of their work, they were more likely to be wary of the use of quotations. Some said that they rarely read the quotations in research output from some campaigning organisations which wanted to get particular messages across.

Initial judgements about how to deal with verbatim quotations were thus usually made on the basis of the impact of those first read, and readers' assumptions about and expectations of the authors involved. People agreed that it was very unusual to see any statement or explanation from the authors themselves about their selection or use of quotations. The next section pursues what the research users thought lay behind authors' use of quotations.

2.3 Perceptions of authors' purpose in using verbatim words

As just explained, it was rare to see a research report in which the author gave the reader any explanation about their use of verbatim quotations. Yet some readers were confident that they could judge quickly whether it would be useful to read the quotations in detail. We explored this by asking people about their perceptions of authors' purpose in presenting verbatim quotations, and the basis for their beliefs.

Those in the study group who had no direct experience themselves of writing up qualitative research findings said it was often very hard to assess how authors were using verbatim quotations. This view was shared by people who had some, but limited direct experience, for example in theses written some years ago. There was a feeling that authors sometimes just made assumptions that readers would gain insights from quotations in the same way as they themselves did. Some research reports produced the impression of quotations sprinkled somewhat randomly, for illustration, explanation, to support the author's argument or just to break up text on a page. When their own organisation had funded the research, and received a report like this, people sometimes went back to the authors and asked what lay behind their use of quotations. It could be hard to get clear explanations, however, and those which were provided were not always easy to fit with what was in the report. One person was surprised at the different answers about use of quotations received from different authors who produced reports which looked fairly similar.

When it was not apparent to research users how the author was using verbatim quotations, considerable trust was required in order to be confident in the report. When the research user started wondering how or why particular spoken words had been chosen for inclusion, doubts about the author's objectivity could easily arise. There was no way of telling, for example, how the quotations reflected the analytical approach, or whether the quotations presented were those which fitted the author's personal agenda or beliefs.

Research users who had more experience themselves of writing up findings from qualitative research suggested a wider range of reasons why authors used verbatim quotations. Some with recent training in qualitative techniques said they had intellectual understanding of different approaches to using quotations, and how these fitted different epistemologies and roles. People without formal training of this kind had learned how quotations might be used by seeing what other people did when writing up their findings or what was expected in their organisation, and applying this to their own work.

Across the study group, there were various suggestions about the ways in which authors were probably using verbatim quotations:

- *to illustrate points made by the author*
- *to provide extra information*
- *to provide additional understanding and insight*
- *to build up support for the points made*
- *to provide data to enable readers to draw their own conclusions*
- *to enable research participants to have a voice*
- *to give credibility and authenticity*
- *to indicate the balance of opinions*
- *to indicate the speaker's emotional intensity*
- *to encourage people to read research output, by making it more interesting*
- *as a device for crafting a text and making it easier to read*
- *as a technique for presenting a 'message'.*

The following section shows what the research users liked and disliked about some of the ways in which they perceived authors using quotations, and what impact this had on their approach to reading, their understanding of findings, and their subsequent use of the research output.

3.   The impact of verbatim quotations

This part of the paper begins to explore the perceived impact of use of quotations among research users, by looking at what they generally found helpful, and what they disliked. It is important to remember that some people had already explained that they often read research output very selectively. They judged whether to go beyond summaries and conclusions after a quick scan of the document, and those who did engage with the detailed findings sometimes also made quick judgements about whether to skip the quotations. The views described are those offered before the researcher used the prepared material to focus attention on specific aspects of presentation and attribution.

Most people talked about the impact of those verbatim quotations which they read in terms of both positive and negative effects. They described what they liked about presentation of spoken words from research participants, and what helped their reading and understanding. They described also what was unhelpful or irritated them. Differences of opinion among the research users meant that what some people liked and recognised as making a positive impact on their reading and understanding was, for others, disliked and a source of irritation.

When they talked about the impact of verbatim quotations people acknowledged that they often did not know whether this was what the author was aiming at. It was thus not appropriate for them to talk in terms of good or bad practice on the part of the author. What they took from the quotations were their own constructions and interpretations based on experience, assumptions, or their own writing practice.

They acknowledged that these might sometimes not match the author's intentions in using the quotations.

Some people made distinctions between effects they perceived on themselves when they read research output, and the effects they expected of the same material on other groups of people. They were aware that verbatim quotations from research reports could have powerful effects if used in campaigning literature for a general readership, or presentations at meetings or ministerial briefings.

3.1   Context

People liked quotations that seemed to be in context. They wanted to see some relationship between the spoken words and the narrative text, with some fit between what the research participants were talking about and what the author was discussing. They particularly disliked being unable to see immediately the relevance of the quotation to the issue being discussed in the author's narrative. It was not unusual to come across quotations which did not reflect the context. This disturbed reading and broke concentration if they stopped to wonder what they should make of the quotation, and whether there was some message they did not understand.

There was also a general feeling that quotations should always add something to the text; otherwise there was no point in including them.

3.2   Providing evidence

Views were polarised about use of quotations as material for building up a point, or as data from which the reader could draw their own conclusions. Differences in opinion here were probably linked to different disciplines of people in the study group, and different approaches to qualitative analysis. There were some strong views that quotations, as such, are not evidence, and that it can be hard for non-experts to draw their own conclusions from research findings.

3.3   Explanation

For some, quotations were most useful when they communicated something more effectively than the author might and thus helped explain matters. Particular examples given were quotations which illuminated linkages which people made between experiences and beliefs, and the sense they made themselves of their circumstances and what happened in their lives. The author might struggle here to convey the underlying complexities, confusions, precision or assumptions which the spoken words made clear.

Another example was where the analysis was concerned with fairly sophisticated concepts (one example given was the constraining role of women in turning men away from crime). Spoken words which encapsulated elements in such concepts could help explain what the author wanted the reader to understand. This explanatory power of verbatim words from research output could be useful for academic teaching purposes. One person had used the verbatim quotations in research findings about experience of divorce to help explain difficult concepts to students and show them relationships between points made by the author and wider sociological theories.

However, using quotations for explanation or insight could be risky, because authors could not be confident that readers would look at the quotations. Some research users argued that the better the analyst, the less they relied on verbatim quotations to convey the essence of their arguments, and thus the less they risked misinterpretation.

A strong criticism of the way in which quotations were sometimes used to explain research participants' misunderstandings or confusions came from several policy makers and research managers. Their criticism was that misunderstandings apparent in the quotations were often not acknowledged in the narrative text. This could be very unhelpful in disseminating findings or the use made of research reports by campaigning bodies. One example was use of verbatim words to show confusion about entitlements to benefits, when what readers remembered might be wrong information about entitlement. There was a strong feeling that authors who used quotations to explain misunderstandings about services or procedures (which could be useful) should always explain in the text what the correct formal situation was.

3.4   Illustration

Some people liked reading quotations which gave easily accessible illustrative material. Good exemplars presented within spoken words showed how the topic under discussion was important in the lives of real people. This was often helpful if the topic was technical or detailed, such as aspects of administrative process.

Across the overall study group, however, there was not much emphasis on the usefulness of quotations which served as illustrative material for points made by the author, unless they included substantive additional material. One person said he rarely paid any attention to quotations which seemed merely repetitions of the author's points. Another said it was reassuring to feel that he was not missing anything important by skipping quotations, if they were just illustrating points made by the author. One person had strong negative feelings about quotations used for illustrative purposes. For this person, such quotations were irritating, and often seemed to represent an author's defensive need to reassure readers that the

research had been done properly. For this person, heavy use of quotations for illustrative purposes sometimes suggested the author lacked confidence or skills.

3.5   Adding richness and depth

Several people spoke in terms of the added depth, richness and flavour which verbatim words could bring to a research report. The person who spoke most enthusiastically about quotations talked of their bringing the text alive, and giving a sense of people's lives. All those who said they liked the way in which quotations could act to make them feel closer to the research participants were office based senior policy makers and administrators who had few opportunities themselves to talk directly to such people.

3.6   Intensity of feeling

There was some belief that authors sometimes used people's spoken words to show intensity of feeling that was otherwise hard to portray. Research users who found this helpful tended to be those who also spoke in terms of added flavour and depth. However, the point was made that concepts such as 'colour' and 'intensity of feeling' depend on interpretation by the reader. Different readers would see different things, which might not be what the author saw. Perceptions of this kind lay behind one person's strong rejection of the idea that quotations could be useful to show anger or emotion.

3.7   Voice

The different 'voices' in verbatim words and different ways of speaking was one aspect of the way in which quotations could bring life and richness to a report. Seeing people's choice of words and use of language was also useful in its own right, however. Seeing change in use of language could be helpful in analysis of longitudinal qualitative research about the development of people's views. It could also be directly helpful to policy makers concerned with communication strategies and promotional material to see language and terms used by those people in the policy focus.

An alternative view was that verbatim quotations read in research output sometimes seemed banal, and had a flatness which suggested that what had been said was so much constructed by the dialogue steered by the interviewer that it had little meaning.

In this study group, there was little mention of the idea that verbatim quotations gave research participants 'a voice' as a form of empowerment, or enabling people to

make points in their own words. This was not, generally, a reason why people liked seeing spoken words. One person who discussed this concept was critical of the argument that inclusion of quotations acted as a form of advocacy, believing that some parts of the research community liked and promoted this idea, but it was wrongly based. Another person recognised that within a participatory methodology, there was an argument that presentation of verbatim words gave participants 'a voice'. However, to enable this kind of 'voice' fairly lengthy chunks of transcript were generally needed. Short, fragmented sentences did not, in this person's view, give people 'a voice' in a narrative.

There were some concerns about the images of research participants that might be portrayed by the immediacy of their spoken words. One research user believed that the constant portrayal of different kinds of dependency and barriers through spoken words of participants in research on disability had, in itself, been a component in development of negative concepts of disability. Another person did not like quotations in which the research participant seemed inarticulate. There is further discussion about the images of people which are portrayed through representation of their spoken words in the next part of the paper.

3.8   Confidence in findings

Those people who said that seeing the verbatim quotations encouraged their confidence in the findings were those described in section 3.2 as people who believed that quotations provided evidence. They said that seeing the quotations did have an effect in strengthening the validity of the author's findings. People who felt like this were mostly people who were not themselves trained in qualitative research methods, and worked in settings where traditionally there had been greater emphasis on statistical techniques. Some said they would be suspicious if a report based on qualitative interviews or discussions contained no quotations, even if they did not expect to read the quotations themselves. For such people, the quotations acted as a check on the interpretation, and confirmed their belief in the authenticity of the research. However, people who felt like this had noticed that they reacted particularly positively to verbatim quotations which confirmed their own pre-conceptions or rang true to what they already believed. Others dismissed the idea that quotations provided evidence or, an idea they had sometimes heard expressed in the research community, that verbatim material 'spoke for itself'.

Several people stressed the amount of trust in the author's research and reporting that was required from readers of qualitative findings. Nobody in the study group described wondering if words presented as verbatim quotations from participants had actually been made up by the people doing the research. However, as explained in 2.3, without evidence of the way in which quotations were selected, some research

reports left readers wondering whether how far they could trust the author not to have chosen verbatim words from participants which fitted their own personal beliefs.

There was considerable discussion about some of the concerns in readers' minds, and the way these undermined their confidence. There was strong criticism for research output which seemed little more than strings of quotations, linked by rather thin narrative. Readers lost confidence that there had been proper systematic analysis of the data, and suspicions arose about the author's analytic skills or the amount of time they had spent on the work. People who usually did not read many quotations anyway were left with very little to think about if the narrative was thin. People who had commissioned research and received reports in which they perceived too much use of quotations said they might as well just have asked for the set of transcripts, or could get similar information from a journalist.

There was some unease around the idea that some authors used quotations to indicate the balance of opinion among research participants in a quantitative sense. People thought it might be happening, but it was often not clear whether or what balance was being represented. They were sometimes left wondering whether there was some match between numerical representation of quotations and balance of opinion, or whether most of the quotations came from a small group of more articulate and thoughtful participants. One person felt strongly, however, that using quotations numerically was a clumsy and inappropriate tool to represent quantitative balance of opinion. He also queried whether any small fragment of transcript from one interview could ever be said to represent a general view.

Although there were concerns about using quotations to represent quantitative balance of opinion, research users did want to see some balance between positive and negative views among the participants. Even when most respondents in a study expressed negative viewpoints, lack of any spoken words which represented the opposite opinion made research reports hard to use, in terms of mobilising support and interest at implementation level. Some research users said an apparent lack of balance in viewpoints was another way in which their trust in the research was reduced. Some people went further, suggesting that they were sometimes left wondering whether the quotations had been solicited in order to reflect existing agendas, for example by the line of questioning or prompts used in interviews.

Research users said they usually had to rely on their knowledge about different authors and research organisations in making judgements about the balance of views presented. Some were often sceptical about verbatim quotations presented in research output from campaigning or lobbying organisations, because they believed that such organisations would inevitably select the spoken words which would most powerfully make the impact they sought. Research users who themselves also represented campaigning organisations said they were keenly aware that quotations might be used in this way.

3.9 Making reading easier

Another way in which verbatim quotations made a positive contribution was in making a report more interesting to read, and more enjoyable and stimulating. People spoke in terms of the quotations 'lightening' a report or article. Among those readers who liked this were people who themselves purposefully used quotations in this way when they wrote up research findings.

Some people felt that reading long passages of text was sometimes easier when this was broken up by quotations, which could also be an advantage in encouraging the wider readership. However there were also people who had strong negative feelings here. For them, having to move constantly between the author's prose and the representation of spoken words both made the reading task harder and broke the flow in understanding. When there were initial negative impacts of this kind, readers moved quickly to skipping the rest of the quotations in what followed. Such impacts of presentation of text are discussed further in Part 4.

3.10 Helping to convey messages

For some people, the material in verbatim quotations sometimes stuck in their minds in a way that the author's text did not, helping them remember the points in a report which seemed important to them. Research managers who had to put together packages of different kinds of evidence for senior policy makers said it could thus be useful to include one or two key quotations from research participants, to help people remember key findings.

There was some discussion of the way in which verbatim quotations could be effective in conveying findings which were unwelcome to readers. Research users in different settings recognised that quotations could often be useful here. The spoken words of respondents could sometimes create surprise and challenge prejudices among readers who would be likely to dismiss the same ideas if they appeared to come from the author. Using verbatim words could also be a good way of presenting findings which readers might interpret as critical of their policy or practice. One example was the presentation of criticism or negative experiences among service users to the service providers. In some contexts, where providers were defensive or reluctant to acknowledge problems, there were risks that critical commentary based on authors' qualitative analysis might be 'rubbished', or relationships between managers and in-house research staff might be compromised. Such risks were reduced, when the message came clearly through the words of service users themselves.

While using spoken words could be an appropriate and positive device to portray a message, research users also pointed to potential dangers. Using verbatim

quotations from research participants gave authors a powerful tool for using emotional influence to enhance findings. Authors with integrity would guard against this, but it could happen at the sub-conscious level, as well as by intent. In addition, authors had little control over the way in which the quotations they presented were subsequently used by readers of their reports. Any of the quotations presented in their research output provided powerful tools for other people to use, in their own campaigning, lobbying or political activity.

4.   Aspects of presentation

In further exploration of the impact of verbatim quotations the research users were asked their views about different ways of presenting verbatim words on the page; authors' practice in editing spoken words, and different forms of attribution. The display material prepared in advance was used as required, to stimulate discussion. Some research users had also chosen in advance other examples of published research output they had seen, to show the interviewer when explaining their views.

4.1   Textual presentation

For everybody interviewed, the most important aspect of textual presentation was having clear differentiation between the author's narrative and verbatim quotations. Although this distinction was essential, it was also important that there was a smooth flow for the reader, and reading was not interrupted by aspects of presentation. Preferences for the way in which this was achieved varied, according to individual taste and familiarity with different approaches. The point was also made that different forms of presentation suited different kinds of output, and the style of presentation in a report from an academically based author did not always suit a general or non-academic readership.

Some people used to seeing research reports in which quotations were indented from the margin of the narrative text said this worked well for them. However, others found constant changes in margin made their eyes more tired, and some felt that indentation on its own, without reinforcement by different font, did not provide sufficiently clear distinction.

Use of different line spacing or bolder type-face to distinguish verbatim words were both generally popular but there were differences of opinion about the use of italics. Those who liked this approach included people who used italics themselves for this purpose, or whose organisation took this approach in their own research output. Those who did not like italicised quotations said italics took longer and were more tiring to read. It was suggested that italics were hard to read at all for some people

with less than perfect eyesight, and for this reason one person queried whether italics should ever be used in research output.

Some research users liked short quotations embedded within paragraphs of the author's narrative, or within the author's own sentences, if there was clear distinction between the material. One person said that embedding the quotations within the narrative was probably the best way of making him read them. Others, however, found this technique made the text harder to read, and required vigilance on the part of the reader so as not to ascribe the research participant's views to the author and vice versa. People who wanted to be able to skip most of the verbatim words found it irritating to find them embedded in the narrative. On the other hand, the point was made that for readers who relied on being able to locate verbatim quotations quickly, for example to prepare briefings, it was harder to find verbatim words which were embedded within narrative text.

There was a danger, in pursuing clear distinction of the verbatim quotations from the author's narrative, that techniques could lead to their separation from relevant context. There could be some tension between distinction and separation, for example when quotations were presented in display boxes. As explained earlier, there was general dislike of verbatim words which were not well contextualised, or coming across quotations which did not seem relevant to the argument which was developing.

Formats such as boxes or columns, although sometimes successful in helping to distinguish quotations from narrative, had to be used skilfully if the page lay-out encouraged readers to look at everything. Some research users thought they might easily look only at the boxed text, and some felt that there were risks in their giving too much weight to material extracted into boxes. There was a general feeling that putting material into boxes drew special attention to it, and authors needed to ask themselves if the material warranted such special emphasis when they used boxes.

For some research users, however, separation of material to boxes, especially if there was distance on the page between the boxed material and the relevant narrative, made it more likely they would not look in the boxes. Some expressed strong dislike of extraction of verbatim words, or other material, into boxed text. For such people, this technique seemed a journalistic attempt to increase accessability, and they preferred a well written linear narrative. However, some research users who wanted reports to be attractive to other readerships, including practitioners or people wary of the academic style, thought that careful use of boxes or colour on the page might encourage attention. For example, boxes could be helpful to authors who wanted to include a number of different 'voices' among research participants. Boxes could also be useful if there were long quotations presented for illustrative purposes, because readers could easily choose whether to read them, and were not missing points in the argument by omitting the boxes.

Research users agreed that the initial visual impact of the page had an effect both on the amount and type of material they read, and on the importance they gave to it. Pages that seemed 'cluttered' could put people off the reading task. What was meant here were pages which included several different kinds of representation of text (font, type size, indentations) in addition to sub-headings, footnotes, or material separated into boxes or columns. Quotation marks around verbatim words could also increase a sense of clutter.

Some people also thought that having too many quotations on a page made it look cluttered. The next section explores this further.

4.2   Balance between narrative and verbatim words

There was agreement that the balance between the author's narrative and verbatim words, both in terms of the amount of text and the number of quotations, did influence people's readiness to read the quotations or the importance they attributed to them.

Section 3.8 explained how some research users felt uneasy about possible associations between the actual number of quotations and the frequency of views, in numerical sense. Apart from this, however, people said there could be a visual impact of 'too many' quotations on a page. Examples given were series or lists of quotations which took up much of the page. Some readers said this encouraged them to look at the first and skip the rest. Others, however, said that presenting a list of quotations could work well if the researcher explained their purpose. One example might be a series of quotations attributed to people with different roles, to show how people with different roles had different views.

Some research users talked in terms of actual numbers of quotations that were acceptable. One person said that more than six quotations on a double page spread would certainly seem too many. For this reader, so many quotations would suggest that the author was relying on displaying data rather than doing thorough analysis. The feeling that 'too many' quotations easily raised doubts about the quality of analysis was shared by many in the group. For one senior research manager, one set of verbatim words per page was sufficient, with preference for fairly short extracts of three lines or less. Other people shared the view that long quotations, with more than one sentence, or more than one point, were more appropriate for presentation of case history material, rather than research based on interviews or group discussions.

If research users noticed a change in the balance between quotations and narrative as they read through the document, this might raise questions in their minds as to why this was happening. There was rarely any explanation in the text about this,

however, and readers could be left puzzled or concerned that they had missed the point. In a text in which quotations were infrequent, those which did appear might seem particularly important and invite attention.

Techniques which drew strong criticism from some research users were use of verbatim quotations as sub-headings, or opening each chapter in a report with a verbatim quotation. Such ways of using quotations suggested that the author had a pre-determined standpoint, had found a quotation which fitted this, and pursued an analysis along this slant.

4.3   Editing the verbatim words

The researchers explored in detail research users' expectations of the kinds of editing of verbatim words that authors did, and what their preferences were in relation to editing. People were asked to think about the representation of speech that contained dialect, non-standard grammar or swearing, speech patterns associated with minority ethnic groups, or speech affected by stuttering. The researchers used the prepared material to prompt discussion, as appropriate.

It was common for initial views and reactions to become less certain as people discussed the topics further, and thought of different perspectives. Some in the study group said they had not previously thought carefully about these matters.

There was a general assumption that authors probably tidied up excerpts from transcripts to present as quotations, taking out some of the 'ums' and 'ers' and word repetitions which were normal parts of spoken language. This was generally acceptable because otherwise spoken language could look random and incoherent, and it could be hard for the reader to get the sense of the point being made. It was rare for authors to explain their approach to editing, however, in individual reports, so research users rarely knew how much editing of this kind was happening, or whether it was being done consistently.

It was recognised that, depending on the kind of research and the topic of enquiry, hesitations and uncertainties held within the 'ums' and 'ers' sometimes formed part of the research evidence. However, research users in this study group generally did not see much research output based on conversation or narrative analysis. Their general view was that readability and understanding was easier if some of the everyday hesitations and repetitive speech were taken out of the quotations they saw.

The research users were less certain about what should be done about grammatical mistakes or non-standard spoken English. There were a number of components here to put into the balance between readability and accuracy. Some people felt that the diversity of ways in which people spoke brought some of the colour and interest

to reports which included quotations. They liked representation of different kinds of voices. However, grammatical mistakes could be distracting and make reading hard work. Some people felt they were likely to make assumptions about social class or educational background of a person whose language was shown to include grammatical mistakes. They felt that in some studies, the author might intend such an impact, but unless this was made transparent there could be risks in allowing readers to make their own assumptions. Some people said that, although they would prefer this not to happen, they suspected that they might give more weight to views expressed by those who spoke more clearly with fewer mistakes than people whose spoken words were less articulate or less correctly used. This was likely to be a particular problem if there were wide differences here between respondents.

There were mixed views about whether and how words should be presented when spoken in regional dialect, and some people found it hard to have a definite opinion. Some people perceived a distinction between non-standard pronounciation or accent, and local vernacular or words. There was little support for representation of mis-pronounced words or accent, which were thought to be unnecessary and could draw attention in a negative way. Some went further and strongly criticised representation of non-standard pronounciation. One observation here was that if speakers were asked to write down their spoken words themselves, they would aim at standard spelling and not representation of their pronounciation or accent. A technique used by some authors of acknowledging words used or pronounced wrongly by [*sic*] drew criticism, as being patronising and drawing negative attention.

Local phrases or words could be hard for other people to understand and more tiring to read, and one research user described giving up reading the quotations in a study about unemployment because it was often so hard to get the meaning of the spoken words. Some kinds of vernacular, it was believed, led to readers' assumptions about personal characteristics such as social class. When quotations led readers to make assumptions about personal characteristics there could be problems in assessing the evidence from the research. One person went further, suggesting that different local dialects had particular cultural constructs. As an example, reading representations of North Country dialect might invoke feelings of solidarity with the working class while reading representations of West Country dialect might invoke feelings of condescension. There was a view that among some readerships, verbatim quotations in local dialect led easily to stereotyping or reduction in the value attached to the words. Other problems with quotations which included local dialect included issues of confidentiality, because the speech patterns in the quotations might identify a fieldwork site. Problems like this, one policy analyst said, meant that research output from their own organisation was unlikely to include regional dialect, and some participants' words might be put into standard English.

Arguments for not editing dialect included the view that if authors changed participants' words, there was no point having them in the report. Authors would be

putting words into people's mouths when they changed or corrected them. One person thought the matter was more complex. Regional dialect was seen as only one example of many kinds of sub-sets of language which were hard for others to understand, or led some readers to make assumptions about or stereotype speakers. Other examples included jargon, or using a lot of expressions or terms from the world of sport and games. It was just not possible, it was suggested, to prevent such words invoking images among readers, and there was no simple approach. What was important was that authors did their best not to make anybody look stupid, or open them to humiliation.

There were mixed views about swearing within verbatim quotations. Research users agreed that swearing was not unusual in everyday speaking. Some research users assumed that swearing was probably taken out of quotations by many authors. This fitted their experience that they did not often see swearing in quotations they read. A different perspective was that people taking part in research interviews tended to use more controlled language than that for everyday speaking, so that transcripts from interviews generally would not include much swearing.

Research users were generally rather uncertain about what good practice might be for authors in relation to editing swearing. Some said that there was a range of tolerance among readers for different swear words, and some risk of stereotyping research participants or even causing offence among readers. It might thus be better to take out all swearing, and explain this approach in the text. Others, however, thought that a participant's use of swearing could help to build the picture of that person, or might show their depth of feeling. People who felt like this would be reluctant to support a view that all swearing should be taken out of quotations. There was some unease, however, about what the author was doing when selecting for presentation verbatim words including swearing. Some said that finding swearing or particularly colourful language in quotations raised questions in their minds about the author's motives. They might wonder if the author was purposefully aiming to shock readers, or to draw particular attention to something without otherwise explaining it. One policy adviser remembered giving guidance to a research contractor for swearing to be generally taken out of the quotations in their report, unless this meant some loss of meaning. There was little support for substituting asterisks for the spoken swear words, and some found this irritating.

Few of the research users had previously thought much about the representation of impaired speech. When the interviewers suggested, as examples, speech affected by pronounced stutters, facial injury or surgery, hearing impairment, or medication, there was little memory of having read such quotations. Any idea that authors might generally be avoiding such quotations made people uneasy, in case the material was relevant. On the other hand, such quotations might be hard to read or understand, and draw negative attention. Research users found they did not have firm preferences here, and thought authors probably had to make decisions on an

individual basis, depending on what the quotation looked like, the topic of enquiry and the readership. What should be important was that authors made transparent their approach, but again there was little memory of seeing such explanations.

There were rather similar views on verbatim quotations which included patterns of language that might suggest minority ethnic background. Authors probably had to make decisions on an individual basis, but should explain their approach. Decisions about quotations in a report of research conducted mainly with people from minority groups were likely to be different from decisions when only one participant used language indicating ethnic background.

4.4   Attributing the spoken words

Research users recognised that there were different ways in which authors attributed verbatim quotations to the individuals who had spoken the words. They were familiar with the practices of describing some of the key characteristics of the speaker, either within the author's narrative text immediately preceding or following the quotations, or within brackets, at the end of the quotation. Some spoke of the latter form of attribution as an 'identity tag' or 'label' and people who wanted to read this before the quotation itself said it was irritating that it more frequently came after the quotation than before.

The general view was that providing one or two descriptive characteristics in such ways helped to contextualise the quotation, and increase its explanatory value. One person said they would go as far as saying that the information in the attribution was one component in the 'claim of causality' in the author's arguments. At the same time, research users said that the association of an image of a person with their spoken words can have a very powerful impact on the reader, and needs careful handling.

There were strong views that personal characteristics used in attributing quotations should always be directly relevant to the issues being addressed and that the authors should explain to readers the relevance of individual descriptors and how they should be used in building understanding. It was relatively unusual for research users to find such methodological explanations in reports, and this led to some concerns.

It was frustrating to see attributions using descriptive characteristics but not know how much weight to put on the specific characteristics. As an example, seeing quotations followed by a 'label' showing the respondent's age and gender could raise questions in the reader's mind, unless they understood the significance of the 'label'. Without an explanation, readers could be left wondering whether the particular quotation was mainly or only representative of people in that particular age group or gender. They might wonder whether the interviewer had pursued issues differently

among men and women, or among people of different age groups. Research users wanted the analyst to draw out for them what was significant in all the material presented including the attributions, and not leave it to them to try to work out.

Research users did not want attributions to contain personal details of speakers which were not immediately contextually important. There were some concerns that authors might sometimes be using combinations of characteristics in order to make reports more interesting, or to add colour to findings. As an example, in a report about research on employment decisions, a description of the trade or job of the person whose views were presented verbatim might be highly relevant. However, if differences in employment were not immediately relevant to the matter of interest, it would be wrong for the author to use job descriptions as a device to indicate diversity in a study group.

Research users who liked the use of pseudonyms in the attribution of verbatim words to individual research participants tended to be people who used this technique themselves, in their own research reporting. Using pseudonyms was more common, it was suggested, in case study approaches and in ethnographic work, and in research output coming from the United States. When it was important for readers to trace through the report the views and experiences of individuals, and build up separate pictures of people taking part, then pseudonyms or representations such as 'Mr M' became essential. Other research users said that even when research reports were not aiming to build pictures of individuals, using pseudonyms for attributing quotations could help readers think of participants as real people.

There were also, however, strong views that great care was needed in using pseudonyms in attributing quotations. Personal names could give powerful messages about age, race, ethnicity, faith, class and location. They could also mask such identities. Different readers would take different messages and make different assumptions, and these might be the opposite of the author's intentions. Some names might raise unanswered questions in the minds of readers. For some research users, use of first names or abbreviated names such as 'Rob' could seem too informal, even patronising. On the other hand, use of Mr, Mrs, Miss or Ms created a different set of messages.

In research reports which aimed to provide general findings rather than a composite picture of an individual's experience, pseudonyms might actually compromise anonymity, by enabling readers to trace experiences and characteristics of individuals. One research user had direct experience of the distress caused to a research participant and their family who felt they were recognisable in this way, despite the author's attempts to maintain anonymity. As a result of such concerns, some research users had strong views that authors must have good methodological reasons for using pseudonyms at all; must explain this and the way in which names were chosen in the introduction to the report and, ideally, check the acceptability of

the pseudonyms with the speakers. It was very unusual to see such explanations in research reports.

5.   Views on how research participants might feel about publication of their words

Research users were asked whether they ever considered how research participants might feel about the publication of their spoken words, and their expectations and assumptions of interviewers' practice in giving information to participants about this and seeking their consent.

There was a general feeling that there were many people who took part in social research who would find it hard to understand exactly how what they said in an interview or group discussion would be used. Many people, it was believed, would have little concept of the different ways in which research staff might report what they found out, and what this might look like. Even when an interviewer took care in explaining how a report would draw on their views, and might include their spoken words but in a way which maintained their anonymity, levels of understanding would remain low among some people.

As a result, although research users expected those who did social research always to seek people's agreement to take part in discussions and for their views to be included in what was found out, it was hard to know what this meant to different participants. One view was that general understanding of the research process was likely to be increasing within the general population, as a result of research governance frameworks, increased use of project information sheets and signed consent forms. Others, however, thought that many people were not much interested in research process. They suggested that when interviewers explained why tape recorders were used and how transcriptions were made and used, expressing interest and giving consent was one of the ways in which some people managed the interview as a social interaction and dealt politely with the interviewer.

People who commissioned and funded research said they were open to suggestions from authors who wanted to take back to research participants transcripts of interviews or drafts of reports, to show people how their views were included. However, the general view was that this did not often happen, for a number of reasons. Extra time and additional resources were needed to go back to participants, which might affect competitiveness in some research environments. At a more fundamental level, if some participants wanted changes made, this might have significant effects on the response level, the framework for analysis, the quality of information or the findings. Nevertheless, people believed that research participants should be able to withdraw at any stage. Some had personal experiences which

influenced their views here. One person described being re-contacted by somebody whom they had interviewed, who regretted some of the things said and wanted to influence how their comments were used. Another research user had asked to withdraw from a research study in which they had been a respondent, after seeing the interview transcript and being concerned about how their verbatim comments might be used.

While research users thought it was relatively unusual for authors to take drafts back to participants, one way of getting feedback on participants' reactions was to send them copies of reports. Some research users who managed research within their own organisation said this was their standard practice. In general, the feedback was positive and those people who replied usually indicated that they valued having their views and ideas in the report. Another approach which was suggested was inviting a small group of the original participants to come together to talk about the report, including their views on the verbatim words selected. There was a view that in the current competitive research environment, there was likely to be more scope for developing ways of getting participants' feedback on final reports than for seeking their views on transcripts or draft chapters.

It was considered important for authors to think carefully about ethical issues involved in presenting verbatim words, including issues already addressed in this report such as anonymity and appropriate representation of people, and ownership of words. Research users hoped that such issues would form part of researcher training and professional development, although they thought that current provision might be rather patchy. Although research staff should be thinking carefully about such issues and aiming towards high standards, research users thought it unlikely that there would be consensus about the approach taken to explaining to participants how their spoken words would be or had been used, and seeking consent. The amount of explanation given was likely to depend on the purpose of the research, the topic of enquiry, likely forms of output, and apparent levels of interest and understanding. Research users thought there were basic obligations on those who did social research to help people understand what the output would be, how this would draw on their words and might include their words but maintain their anonymity. While some might want more detailed information, there was a danger of overloading other participants with explanation in an attempt to achieve what might be termed fully informed consent.

6.   Discussion

With the publication of this paper, all the empirical research conducted within our overall study of the theory, practice and impact of verbatim quotations has now been completed and made public. Work is ongoing on the literature reviews, and will be completed in 2007. That will be the point for a full discussion of the findings reported

here and their implications, alongside the other empirical findings about views and practices of researchers, and the views of research participants whose verbatim words were used.

To conclude this paper, we summarise the main points and refer to some of the issues and implications which will be discussed in detail when all our findings from the overall study are brought together.

Within this group of active and influential research users there was considerable diversity in approach to reading verbatim quotations. People who relied mainly on reading summaries and conclusions said they often looked at verbatim quotations only if they needed to go into the main body of a report. Everybody said that a number of factors influenced how carefully they read quotations and how much attention they paid to them. People made early judgements, on the basis of the impact of the first few quotations they read and their assumptions and expectations of the authors involved. It was rare to find explanations from authors about their use of quotations, and doubts about the author's objectivity could easily arise.

Differences of opinion among research users meant that what some liked and recognised as making a positive impact on their reading and understanding was, for others, disliked and a source of irritation. Verbatim words could be helpful in increasing readers' understanding and encouraging confidence in findings, but there were shared concerns about selection, and the images of research participants that might be portrayed.

People saw arguments for and against some editing of transcript excerpts by the author. As they went further into this discussion, uncertainties increased about what authors did and should do about representation of speech containing dialect, non-standard grammar or swearing, speech patterns associated with minority ethnic groups, or speech affected by stuttering. Few people remembered seeing any explanations from authors about their approach to editing.

There was general commitment to the idea that those research participants whose spoken words were presented should have as full an understanding as possible about this, and agree with the way they were represented. However, in the current research environment .people thought it was probably hard to achieve fully such aims.

What was wanted by all the research users was greater transparency about the use of verbatim quotations in research output. They wanted explanations from the author about their intention in using spoken words, how quotations had been selected, and what decisions had been taken about aspects of presentation.

References

Beck, C.T. (1993) 'Qualitative research: the evaluation of its credibility', *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 15, 2, 263-6.

Corden, A. and Sainsbury, R. (2005a) *Volunteering for Employment Skills – a Qualitative Research Study*, York: Social Policy Research Unit: University of York, available at http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/sstreps.html.

Corden, A. and Sainsbury, R. (2005b) *Research Participants' Views on Use of Verbatim Quotations*, York: Social Policy Research Unit, University of York, available at http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/sstreps.html.

Corden, A. and Sainsbury, R. (2005c) *The Impact of Verbatim Quotations on Research Users: Qualitative exploration*, York: Social Policy Research Unit, University of York, available at http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/sstreps.html.

Corden, A. and Sainsbury, R. (2006) *Using Verbatim Quotations in Reporting Qualitative Social Research: Researchers' Views*, York: Social Policy Research Unit, University of York, available at http://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/pubs/sstreps.html.

Greenhalgh, T. and Taylor, R. (1997) 'How to read a paper: papers that go beyond numbers (Qualitative Research)', *British Medical Journal,* 315, 740-43.

Long, A. F. and Godfrey, M. (2004) 'An evaluation tool to assess the quality of qualitative research studies', *Int. J. Social Research Methodology,* 7, 2, 181-96.

Ritchie, J., Spencer, L. and O'Connor, W. (2003) 'Carrying out qualitative analysis', in J. Ritchie and J. Lewis (eds), *Qualitative Research Practice*, London: Sage.

Spencer, L., Ritchie, J., Lewis, J. and Dillon, L. (2003) *Quality in Qualitative Evaluation: A framework for assessing research evidence*, London: Cabinet Office.

Appendix A

Letter of explanation and invitation

PAC/SP

Name and address

May 2005

Dear [Name]

Using verbatim quotations in reporting qualitative social research

I am writing to invite you to take part in the research study which I am undertaking with Roy Sainsbury. As you may know, we have an ESRC grant in the current Research Methods programme for a project entitled 'Verbatim quotations in applied social research: theory, practice and impact'. I enclose a flier which summarises our aims and approach, and relevant extracts from the research proposal.

The work is going well, and we are now in the final third phase of fieldwork. We would like to talk to people with considerable experience of reading and using research texts which report qualitative research which has included interviews and/or group discussions. We are approaching you as a person with experience of using research on nursing and medical care, within both academic and policy arenas.

In the work we have done already in this project we have found a variety of ways in which authors use quotations, and a similar range of different ways in which the quotations are presented on the page. At this stage in the project we seek to understand what impact these different approaches may have on readers and users of research reported. We have no views as to whether one way of doing things is any better than another way.

I do hope you will agree to take part in an informal discussion and that we can arrange a convenient time and place. What I would like to explore with you includes:
- the range of qualitative research outputs which you see, and those which you read in more detail
- your views on authors' use of verbatim quotations from respondents
- what influences the way in which you assess the verbatim quotations from respondents when you read reports
- what impact the quotations have on you.

Continued/…

30

In preparation for the discussion you might like to think across a number of publications reporting qualitative research which have made an impact on you, in relation to inclusion of quotations (or not).

The discussion will be confidential, and we shall not identify people taking part in this stage of the work. If you are able to help us you will have early access to results of our study; we will tell you as soon as working papers and reports are available and invite you to dissemination events.

We do hope you will agree to take part, and can suggest a suitable time for us to meet, for up to one hour. I can come to your office, and am available from May. Will you email or telephone me?

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely

Anne Corden
Senior Research Fellow

Enc.

Appendix B

Topic Guide

Verbatim Quotations

Issues for discussion with users of research findings

Role and responsibilities
 current role
 previous roles (researcher, academic, practitioner)
 understanding/experience of different kinds of research

What kinds of research output do they read?
 books, chapters, reports, journal articles, newspapers
 volume and frequency
 purpose in reading
 scrutiny/skimming

Assumptions about verbatim quotations
author's purpose(s) in using quotations
how quotations are chosen
 (representation, illustration, evidence)
how do authors decide on mix and balance with text
 number, frequency, layout
consistency and difference in approach
basis for beliefs and assumptions

Beliefs about research participants' views
participants understanding of how their words will be used
expectations/assumptions about consultation and consent
views on importance of this
what editing is done/desirable

Aspects of presentation
indents/embedded/phrases – preferences
italics and quotation marks – preferences
forms of attribution – purpose and appropriateness (examples: names, age,
categories)
boxes and columns

Impact on reader – explore using prepared material where appropriate
representation, illustration, evidence – refer to earlier views expressed
interest; ease and speed of reading
creating a 'picture' – what features are invoked
language which is 'different'

Ask research commissioners

expectations about quotations in research outputs

basis for preferences/requirements

discussion/negotiation with researchers – how, at what stage

issues arising

examples of 'good practice' in recent commissioned research

Appendix C

Material to aid discussion in interviews

The enclosed material was prepared by the researchers in advance, and taken to interviews with research users. It was used variously, to encourage discussion about particular issues, as appropriate.

Items 1 and 2 contain adapted material, from previous studies with low income families conducted within the Social Policy Research Unit.

Item 3 is constructed solely for the purposes of these interviews.

Item 4 is published material, from pages 17-19 of 'Volunteering for Employment Skills – a qualitative research study', Corden, A. and Sainsbury, R. (2005) ESRC 2045, Social Policy Research Unit. (This paper formed part of the empirical work to test the impact of verbatim quotations on research participants, in another part of the overall study.)

There are examples within this display material of different kinds of distinction between verbatim words and narrative text; different forms of presentation and lay-out; different forms of attribution; grammatical mistakes; local dialect, and editorial techniques such as use of (*sic*).

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

S|P|R|U
SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH UNIT

1. Adapted material from a study of the process of claiming a means-tested benefit

Invasion of privacy in declaring income and personal circumstances

This was found to be a strong negative factor in claiming welfare benefits. This was certainly the most disliked factor among those who had claimed income support and was especially marked among lone mothers who had claimed income support in their own right and been asked questions about husbands and partners:

"They just wanted to know too much about me. I was annoyed by their attitude, and all those questions they asked me" (lone mother)

"It seemed as if they don't believe half of what you tell them. Then they ask more things to try and trick you out. I felt degraded" (husband)

"The first time I went down there it was awful. I felt degraded. Its not the staff themselves; they've got to ask you. Its the questions they have to ask. You have to take all your personal papers and show them everything, and they go on asking about you, and all that you spend" (lone parent)

"That really puts me off anything to do with social security offices. They ask you all those questions in front of everybody else. I hate it" (wife)

There was general recognition that if you were claiming welfare benefits, you would expect to answer a fair number of questions about income, to justify your claim. However, the reasons for personal questions were not always understood. People resented being asked what appeared to be irrelevant personal questions, especially when other people in the waiting area were listening.

THE UNIVERSITY *of York*

S | P | R | U
SOCIAL POLICY RESEARCH UNIT

2. Adapted material from a study of families with low incomes

Perceptions of 'real work'

There was a small group of men whose usual pattern of working was spells of employment, with long working hours and good wages, interspersed with short spells of unemployment when they claimed benefits while they looked for the next contract. Men who had been used to working like this for several years had jobs in construction, transport and engineering, and most had trade qualifications. They and their partners were used to budgeting for their families from variable incomes. They cut down spending during periods on benefit, and settled bills and paid for large items when earnings were coming in.

Some had noticed a new approach in Jobcentre Plus when they went to sign on. They were now being asked detailed questions about the way in which they were looking for work, with suggestions about taking temporary low-paid work in the meantime, and topping up their family income with means-tested benefits. Such suggestions were often unacceptable to men who perceived themselves as people who usually did 'real work', which meant long hours of physically demanding work for which they were well paid. Two qualified construction workers explained how angry they felt:

> *I wouldna' do it; nivver. I wouldna' disgrade (sic) missen. I wouldna' let the wee ones see me doin' 'owt like that. Theres no way I'd do it. I've tried those government schemes before. A lotta rubbish I found them. Unless I can clear £250 a week its gonna be a waste of time, ken?* (Mr MacKenzie)

> *It was hard to get them to understand how I worked. I don't choose to be unemployed; I work very hard for my family but it takes a few weeks to get another contract. The employer won't take you on unless you can start straight away, so you have to be out of work for a couple of weeks. It's the way the work is organised. The Jobcentre staff should understand that. I was very cross.* (Mr Forester)

3. Constructed material

Buying a school meal in a 'cash cafeteria'

Some parents explained that the amount their children were authorised to spend for their free school meal in the cafeteria sometimes did not cover the cost of the meal their children wanted to buy, or a meal that had nutritional value.

When they talked to their children about what they had eaten at school, some saw that children tried to spend what they were allowed in a sensible way, although parents were sometimes frustrated by what happened. Some children just bought what they wanted to eat; sweet and familiar food was popular.

Teachers said that choosing a meal in the school cafeteria was not usually closely supervised, and they did not know much about children's eating patterns at mid-day. The staff who checked the cost of the meal at the till had a good overview of what happened. They knew that some children regularly made what they perceived as poor choices, but they were not authorised to make suggestions to the children.

He came home and said he had two puddings today. There was not enough money for a meal and a pudding, but the puddings looked nice so he had two.

They get one ticket worth about a pound. They can get a ham roll for that, and there is a bit left over. The ham roll is good value, and I like him having that. But they all get a packet of crisps, as well, because the ticket just covers that, with the roll. Well, I'm not at all keen on the crisps every day, but there isn't anything else available to buy with that little bit left over from the roll.

They have to go round and choose – its just sandwiches or rolls and things, I think. I don't know what he spends his pound on – biscuits, perhaps.

4. Published material, from earlier report in the study

Did the project help people move into or towards paid work?

Although nobody had yet moved directly from volunteering into paid work when they first spoke to the researcher, some did feel that they had been helped, and that they had moved forward in various ways. Those who wanted to do paid work eventually felt it might be easier to get and keep paid work in the future, after taking part in the project. People talked about various ways in which they had been helped:

Some had learned new skills
New skills learned during training courses arranged by CVS included basic computer skills and anger management. New skills learned during volunteering included computer skills, business management skills, food hygiene, first aid and people handling. A woman who had been volunteering in a community group said:

> *I've learned different things there. I've learned new skills. I've learned new people skills which has been really important to me. I've learned meeting skills, which I didn't know. You know, I never used to go to meetings before, so I've learned meeting skills. And also being on the board I've learned what boards are all about and how workplaces work a bit more as well; how different workplaces work, which is really good.* (woman, in 30s)

People who had taken part in volunteering talked about gaining workplace-related skills such as routine and time keeping, and how to get along with colleagues and supervisors in a workplace. A man who had not had paid work for several years said:

> *I'm just learning work experience and learning how to get along with people in the workplace, and just getting along.* (man, in 30s)

Some had built up confidence and self-esteem
The project increased people's confidence and self-esteem in various ways. This happened as a result of taking part in and completing training courses arranged by the project:
> *and it gave me some confidence … mixing with people. I felt valued, yes. It got me out, and got me thinking and … doing something positive.*
> (woman, in 40s)

Volunteering jobs which worked well helped to build up confidence in going outside the home environment and mixing with people. A man who had been volunteering in the same workplace for a year said:
> *I enjoyed all of it really. Contact with people. I was getting experience. I also had something to do.* (man, in 30s)

Another man also told the interviewer how his volunteering had built confidence:

Interviewer 2: *You said the work itself didn't help you very much but the other things did?*

Yeah, it is a case of getting back in, which you can't measure, as such, it is getting people back in touch with people, and that is something which you can't measure, you know. That confidence, that being a part of society. (man, in 50s)

Taking part in the social activities and going out with other people had also been useful. A man in his 30s talked about the way *'my confidence was built up'* by going out with the group to places that would have been tricky for him without a bit of help.

New friendships
Some people made new friends through their volunteering, increasing their general support network. However, as we see in the next section, it could be hurtful when such networks broke up at the end of the volunteering.

Feelings of contributing to society
A successful volunteering experience gave people satisfaction that they were contributing something, and generally fitting in:

It feels like you're fitting in in society and it feels like you're a normal person living in society, because I feel like if you haven't got a job, you're not in society. (man, in 30s)

He went on to say that he would also like to learn to drive, like other people. Having a job and being able to drive were what people usually did '*… I just wanna be normal in the world you know, that's the reason'.*

He also felt he was making a contribution by working for a charity:

All the money's going towards a good cause and so that's why I like it so much, because you know you put in a bit of work, and I'm pleased that it's working for other people.

Better understanding of themselves
For some people, doing some volunteering, or even investigating different kinds of volunteering helped them understand better the kind of paid work that would suit them. Their experience confirmed intentions to aim towards a particular kind of work that they enjoyed doing, or helped them understand that some kinds of work might not help their condition or psychological state. For example, going for initial appointments to meet staff and patients at a hospice and a centre for Alzheimers patients had helped different people realise that this kind of work might not be helpful for them, in the light of their family experiences.