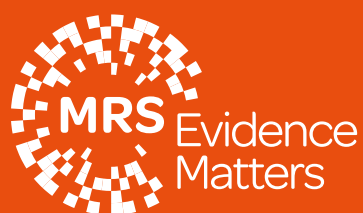


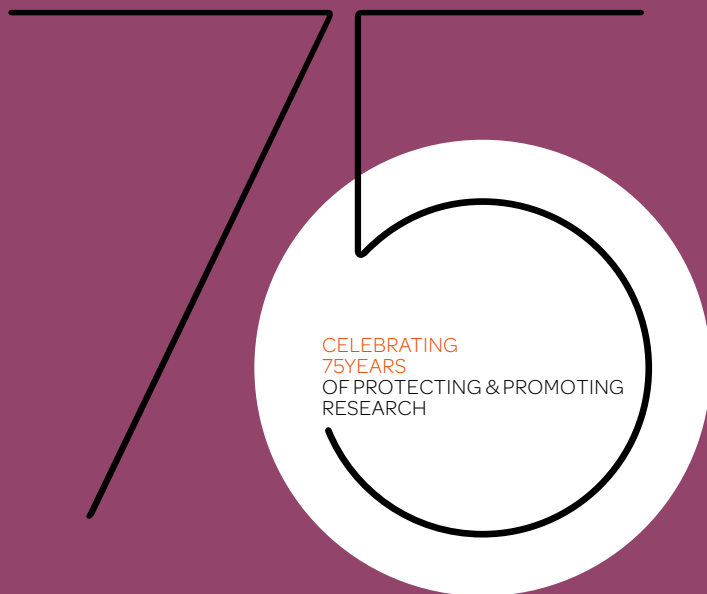
A large, stylized number '75' is rendered in black outlines against an orange background. The '7' is formed by a horizontal line at the top left and a diagonal line extending downwards to the right. The '5' is formed by a horizontal line at the top right, a vertical line extending downwards, and a curved line at the bottom that forms a semi-circle. A large white circle is positioned behind the '5', containing the celebratory text.

CELEBRATING  
75 YEARS  
OF PROTECTING & PROMOTING  
RESEARCH

# MRS Standards Review 2020/21



The world's leading association for the research, insight and data analytics sector, MRS was **established in 1946**. Since then MRS has championed the value of evidence to government and business, and now serves more than **700 Company Partners**, and more than **4000 individual members** in over **50 countries**.



---

# Contents

## Standards and policy

- 1 An overview of activities
- 3 What is the role of an association?
- 5 The sector in numbers
- 6 In seven themes
- 9 AQR/MRS Recruiter Accreditation Scheme

This Standards Review is an extract from the full [MRS Annual Review 2020/21](#) which you can [download here](#).

---

# Standards and policy

## An overview of activities

### The MRS Code of Conduct is the basis of the self-regulation framework for the research sector.

The MRS Code of Conduct works with the relevant legal framework via the UK's Data Protection Act 2018, the UK GDPR and the Privacy and Electronic Communications Regulations 2003 to ensure research and data collection and analysis is carried out in a professional and ethical manner. The MRS Market Research Standards Board (MRSB) continued to pro-actively review the self-regulatory framework to ensure it remained fit for purpose and that data protection advice and guidance provided to members was robust.

Although disciplinary matters/cases remained at modest levels, during this period some complex complaints were received which required an above average time to investigate.

On the educational side, the MRS Standards and Policy team worked hard to **prepare and advise members**, particularly in view of the constantly evolving Covid-19 pandemic. The Covid-19 guidance, extensive FAQs and advice about the UK government's schemes were regularly updated throughout the year, in line with the latest government advice.

---

Supplementing the advice, the Standards and Policy team liaised, at times on a daily basis, with a wide range of UK government departments.

In addition, a full suite of Covid-19 guidance was published, and updated as government guidance evolved, in a dedicated area of the MRS website, which included:

- ▲ Undertaking safe face-to-face data collection
- ▲ Undertaking safe face-to-face mystery shopping
- ▲ Facilities used for face-to-face data collection
- ▲ Face-to-face data collection guidance interpreting Scotland's protection level system

Supplementing the advice, the Standards and Policy team liaised, at times on a daily basis, with a wide range of UK government

departments and officials in the Cabinet Office, BEIS, DTI, DCMS, ICO and CCS to ensure that the research sector's concerns as a result of Covid-19 were understood and reflected in government guidance and the schemes introduced to support businesses and workers as a result of Covid-19.

Other information published by MRS throughout the period included a new suite of guidance on essential safeguards. Four new documents were issued during 2020/21:

- ▲ Dealing with Discriminatory Comments
- ▲ Bullying and Harassment
- ▲ Whistleblowing
- ▲ Mental Health

The team also used video conferencing to deliver up-to-date, relevant and targeted content covering a wide range of topics including:

- ▲ Design and delivery of introductory and intermediate/advanced data privacy in research training courses

- ▲ Four quarterly Standards and policy webinars
- ▲ Webinars on how to undertake risk assessments, Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIA) and data breach reporting
- ▲ Delivery of 22 individually tailored standards briefings for Company Partners.

In readiness for the launch of the AQR/MRS Recruiter Accreditation Scheme (RAS) two standards documents, the MRS Regulations for the Buying of Qualitative

Research Recruitment Services and MRS Qualitative Research Recruitment – Legal Requirements and Best Practice Regulations for Recruiters, were updated.

The demand for Codeline services increased this year in line with member concerns about the implications for the sector during the pandemic. Overall, the number of written queries increased from 575 in 2019–20 to 633 during 2020–2021. Members of the team also provided telephone advice where requested, although in line with the approach taken in previous years,

the volume of telephone queries is not recorded in the statistics.

As well as advice on Covid-19, members also sought specific advice on data protection issues, the distinction between research and non-research exercises such as marketing, and how to deal with participants who reveal mental health issues during the data collection process. There continues to be greater complexity in the level of advice sought, with multiple queries in a single contact.

---

“We have chosen a record breaking number of **Honorary Fellows** this year to reflect how MRS has come in 75 years as well as the truly world-leading status of the UK’s market and social research sector. These brilliant individuals have all championed the value of evidence in some way and the breadth of their disciplines demonstrates the far-reaching value and impact of our sector, both nationally and internationally.”

**Jane Frost CBE**  
CEO of MRS  
Read more **here**

---

# Standards and policy

## What is the role of an association?

**Debrah Harding, Managing Director of MRS looks at how the pandemic helped define the true value of an association in today's world.**

What is the point of an association in modern society? This is a question that I am sometimes asked, and was a question I reminded myself about at the beginning of the pandemic. The answer - that associations protect, promote and connect their memberships and customers with each other, with business, government and society - has never been more important than over the last year.

When the crisis really began to bite in March 2020 it was an uncertain time. None of us knew what it would mean for us as citizens, for businesses, or for our country. What we did know was that everyone was pulling in their resources, sitting tight and watching and waiting. Which if you are running a business is a very, very scary place to be. Early on, MRS made a very clear decision that whatever happened, it was going to do everything possible to keep the research and insight sector active and flourishing.

We decided to take the financial hit and not access the UK government's furlough scheme. Instead we retained all our staff and dug in for the long haul. Never was this more true than with the Standards and Policy team.

Members and Company Partners were justifiably eager to know and understand what lockdown

meant for the sector. In order to make sure that we delivered the best we could for our stakeholders, the Standards and Policy team focused on two key areas: the practice of research, particularly face-to-face activities; and the research business and how this could benefit from the various government Covid-19 schemes.

For the practice of research it was all about how face-to-face data collection could resume under Covid-19 safe working conditions. Working closely with the government, particularly the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS), MRS was able to shape and draft guidance enabling some face-to-face data collection

to resume from May 2020. As a result, since the beginning of the Covid-19 crisis, face-to-face data collection activities were only paused for two months in most of the UK.

While not all activities could resume, such as in-home data collection, the MRS guidance enabled data collection to resume in a modified way on the doorstep, in street, in store, in transit and in venues.

For the research businesses, the Standards and Policy team focused on the raft of government initiatives and schemes and what these meant for research, and how practitioners and businesses could access and leverage the funding available. We focused on

---

“We are proud to become the first international MRS Company Partner. As we look to drive curiosity and deep human understanding across our global organisation, MRS provides our teams with access to powerful resources and growth opportunities regardless of where they may be physically working from.”

**James Sallows**

Head of Capability and Transformation, GSK Consumer Healthcare  
Read more [here](#)

five key areas: the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (the ‘furlough’ scheme), the Self-Employment Income Support (SEISS) Scheme, the Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme (CBILS), the Bounce Back Scheme and the rates relief available via local authorities. Initially, we focused on interpreting these schemes and providing advice via FAQs.

The next stage was to get the schemes changed to ensure they could apply to as many within the research sector as possible. We were particularly concerned about workers such as recruiters and interviewers, and SME businesses.

The biggest and most significant success was having the furlough scheme extended beyond employees to cover workers, enabling workers such as interviewers to benefit from the scheme.

We had mixed success with the rates relief, convincing some local authorities to give relief while others resolutely would not budge.

To amplify our messaging and activities we harnessed our networks both within the wider marketing and advertising sector, via MRS membership of the Advertising Association, plus our connections with business networks such as the CBI and the Federation of Small Business. We also joined forces to undertake joint representation with other professional associations which had similar challenges to us, for example with the scope of the SEISS scheme.

The important point was that every day we kept pushing our

“The research industry listens to British citizens and relays their attitudes, opinions and behaviours to those in power – government. Now, more than ever, **we need to understand** all segments of British society in order to ensure that as a society we emerge well from this crisis.”

**Letter from Jane Frost to the Chancellor of the Exchequer**  
chief executive of The Research Society  
Read more [here](#)

---

**Meet the MRS Standards and Policy Team**



**Debrah Harding**  
Managing Director



**Julie Corney**  
Standards & Compliance Manager



**Camilla Ravazzolo**  
Data & Privacy Counsel

messaging, reminding government about the needs of our sector, the pressures it was facing, and why research was important and could not be ignored.

I am incredibly proud of the Standards and Policy team’s achievements over the last year. We made a difference – we did our job – we kept the sector protected, promoted and connected. Could we have achieved more? Of course, that is always the case. But, I hope we reinforced the point about why associations exist and why they are important. The team however, could not have done this without incredible support from the staff within MRS, and also from the sector at large.

Time and time again we were asking ‘critical friends’ to review draft guidance, give practical insight, tell us what worked for them and provide market intelligence for policy papers. Without you, we could not have done our job to the same degree. So thank you. The job is not done, Covid-19 still exists, and now we have to get on with the challenges to come.

# Standards and policy

## The sector in numbers



282

queries seeking guidance on how Covid-19 impacted the sector



8

New guidance documents

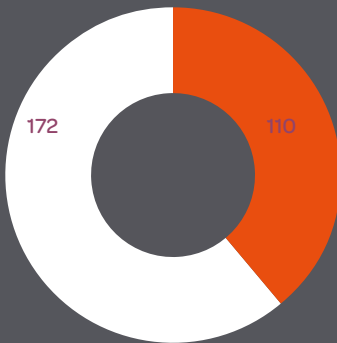


12

rounds of guidance updates

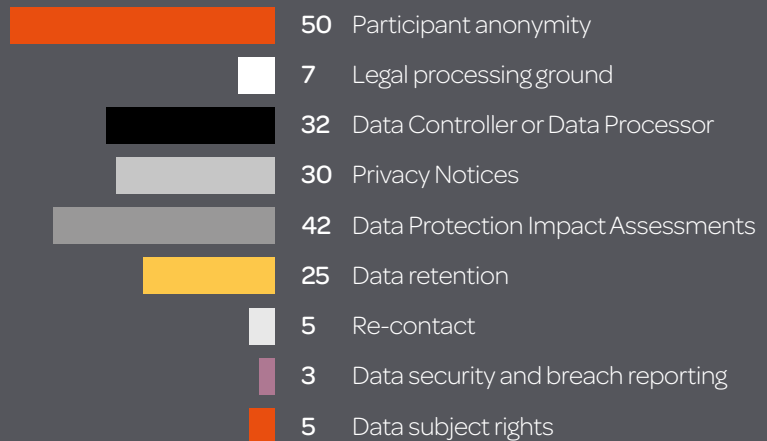
# 633 Codeline total\*

Covid-19 related queries  
282 comprising of:



- Furlough/job retention scheme
- Data collection activity

CoviData Protection  
199 comprising of:



Disciplinary cases



2

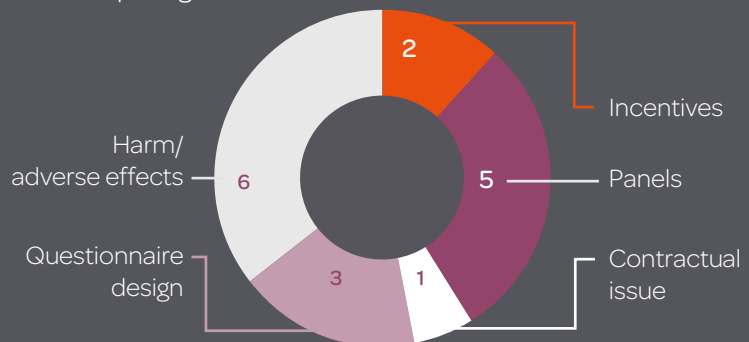
Company Partner



0

Individual member

Complaints resolved by the standards department\*  
17 comprising of:



\*email enquiries only 11 company partner cases, 6 individual cases



---

# Standards and policy

## In seven themes

### Protecting face-to-face research and its participants.

As the full implications of the pandemic and repeated lockdowns hit, it became clear that there were some long-term consequences that could severely affect the future of face-to-face research and data collection. In order to curtail these and protect the face-to-face sector MRS undertook exhaustive discussions with the UK Government, particularly BEIS and DCMS.

This resulted in the publication of the June 2020 MRS policy paper, ***Covid-19 Lockdown: The Long-term Potential Impact on the UK's Face to Face Research Sector*** which highlighted the potential threats to face-to-face research. These included the quality of representative research; the increase in social demographic inequalities by excluding segments of society that only take part in research via face-to-face methods; and the need to protect thousands of jobs within the face-to-face supply-chain including interviewers, viewing facility and participant recruiters, plus qualitative researchers.

MRS also undertook a campaign to promote the rights of participants and workers (particularly interviewers) aged 70 years and older who were being disenfranchised by the government's approach of classifying all individuals in this

age group as clinically vulnerable, irrespective of health status. The MRS policy paper, ***The over 70s and the Covid-19 lockdown easing: Why a change of government policy is needed***, resulted in a change of approach to enable the over 70s to undertake face-to-face data collection and for individuals in this age group to be face-to-face participants.

---

#### Safeguarding participants and practitioners

The importance of safeguarding has been brought into sharp focus during the Covid-19 pandemic. The widespread and negative economic consequences, along with uprooted everyday life and enforced social isolation, may be reasons why an increased number of participants have mentioned mental health issues during professional activities conducted by members and Company Partners.

Protecting wellbeing by taking all reasonable precautions to prevent harm or adverse effects is an integral part of the MRS Code and guidelines. However, true safeguarding goes deeper than this. Preventing harm is of course important but it is also key to have measures in place to guard against any potential harm occurring in the first place.

With that in mind, during 2020/21 MRS introduced a new series of bite-sized guidance called ***Essential Safeguards***, to address issues that may cause harm or adverse effects to participants, practitioners and the broader community. Topics covered to date include dealing with discriminatory comments, bullying and harassment, whistleblowing and how to help participants who reveal mental health issues during data collection activities.

MRS is committed to highlighting safeguarding issues for adults and children involved in data collection activities and this will be reflected in future additions to the 'Essential Safeguards' series and in upcoming full guidance documents.

---

#### Procurement

As buying patterns changed as a result of the pandemic, it was important that those involved in procurement understood what was and was not possible, particularly with face-to-face data collection methods.

Prior to Covid-19 the UK public sector was the second biggest buyer of research services. To protect this during the pandemic, MRS worked closely with the government's procurement arm, the Crown Commercial Services

---

MRS is **leading discussions** with government and regulators on the implications for research, insight and data, and is seeking balanced solutions to ensuring that the sector can continue to flourish.

(CCS), to ensure that it was supporting research suppliers who were supplying services to the public sector and to encourage research to continue to be procured. Activities included:

- ▲ Rebalancing the payment terms and conditions for research suppliers, including being offered the option to be paid a bigger % 'up front' to assist with supplier cash flow.
- ▲ Encouraging ethical procurement practices, ensuring that quality remains the key consideration and not over emphasising price.
- ▲ Promoting and recommending the MRS' Code and associated guidance, including the MRS face- to-face data collection guidance which complemented the government's safe working approach.
- ▲ Encouraging government department clients to commission more research, to re-start any projects put on hold as a result of Covid-19 and to publish details of their research and insight plans for the months ahead to enable suppliers to manage and plan their resources.

As a result of MRS lobbying, these activities were put into action by CCS, protecting the research suppliers as much as possible during one of the most difficult and challenging periods that the research sector has ever experienced.

---

#### **Data protection and GDPR**

The legislative framework of privacy and data protection is the topic that never sleeps, not even for a pandemic. The UK is beginning to shape its regulatory future by publishing strategies and action plans on the opportunities and challenges of this hyper-digital world, weighing the priorities and potential trade-offs of data in a deliberate and evidence-based way, and, above all, to drive growth in the UK economy and to power its recovery from the pandemic.

From the UK National Data Strategy to the government's Plan for Digital Regulation, MRS is leading discussions with government and regulators on the implications for research, insight and data, and is seeking balanced solutions to ensuring that the sector can continue to flourish as data protection and GDPR evolves.

The MRS stance remains that it is essential that the UK's data protection values and data

protection regime is comparable with that of the EU. Ethics, pragmatism and business practicality must be balanced in order for data privacy legislation to be successful.

MRS is currently discussing with the ICO a UK Research and Insight GDPR Code of Conduct that identifies and addresses data protection issues specific to the research sector.

To support its members and Company Partners, MRS keeps close ties with other relevant membership associations and interest groups. Collective actions have been undertaken with, among others, the Advertising Association (AA), Direct Marketing Association (DMA), and the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Data Analytics (a cross-party group established by Daniel Zeichner MP to connect Parliament with business, academia and civil society to promote better policy making on big data and data analytics).

---

#### **Brexit**

MRS has been, and still is, keeping its firm position at the forefront of the Brexit discussion. The 2020/21 period was a crucial period for Brexit as the December 2020 deadline loomed and MRS was

---

## Standards and policy: In seven themes

---

To support MRS members and Company Partners, MRS created the **Brexit Hub** which provides practical guidance on a wide number of issues.

continuously engaging with key government departments and the ICO determining the implications of Brexit and the Withdrawal Agreement for the research and insight sector. In particular, on the issues relating to international transfers of data during the transition period, adequacy decision arrangements and implications of the UK and EU standard contractual clauses regimes.

MRS continues to closely follow and monitor regulatory, legislative and policy developments during the post-Brexit period, including government plans to strengthen the UK's international standing with the potentially significant revision and re-discussion of current competition regulations, and with the establishment of new trade agreements with new partners.

To support MRS members and Company Partners, MRS created the MRS Brexit Hub which provided practical guidance on a wide number of issues including international data transfers, appointment of EU representatives, immigration and standard contractual clauses. MRS regularly updated on the latest Brexit developments via the quarterly *Stay up to date and within the rules* webinars and the joint MRS/BEIS webinar hosted in December 2020 presenting the impact of Brexit on the sector and providing advice on how it would translate in practice.

---

### International standards

The global research business is underpinned by national standards of privacy and data protection regulation. As a member of both organisations, MRS works closely with the European Federation of Associations of Market Research Organisations (EFAMRO), and the Global Research Business Network (GRBN). MRS is also a key ally of EphMRA, the European Pharmaceutical Market Research Association.

EFAMRO's role is to promote the interests and needs of the sector, and to make sure that voices are heard, and pleas accepted. Since 2009 MRS has undertaken all standards and policy activities on behalf of the Federation. In this context we have engaged with the European Data Protection Board (EDPB) and the European Commission during 2020/21 regarding the concepts of data processors and data controllers, the definition of scientific research and data subjects' rights.

EFAMRO continues to work with ESOMAR on the drafting of a transnational GDPR Research Code. The objective is to adopt a pan-European binding sector specific text to help the research sector to maximise the opportunities of the GDPR more effectively.

MRS and EFAMRO continue to work with EphMRA as their point of reference for standards updates. We carried out extensive work updating EphMRA's Code of Conduct during 2020/21 and provided Codeline support in its interpretation and compliance; analysing national legislation from around the world and its practical implication for the sector; and drafting additional guidance, ethics and support material.

Aside from policy and standards, MRS has successfully linked EFAMRO and GRBN in international discussions on the state of the sector during the pandemic. We organised two EFAMRO Open Days that gathered participants from around the world, debating the efforts undertaken by associations to help their members and boost their resilience, growing membership and increasing revenues in these difficult times.

MRS has worked with GRBN in identifying three main initiatives for 2021/22: inter-regional online discussion events for association leaders; diversity and inclusivity; and trust.

# Standards and policy

## AQR/MRS Recruiter Accreditation Scheme

A long cherished project which came to fruition in 2020/21 was the launch of the *AQR/MRS Recruiter Accreditation Scheme (RAS)* in September 2020.

**M**RS strived to get this scheme launched to support recruiters who were suffering as a result of the curtailing of many face-to-face research projects due to Covid-19.

The scheme was designed to provide recognition for professional and competent recruiters and address quality concerns about some recruitment practices.

The ethos of RAS is one of continuous improvement, with recruiters re-accredited every three years.



By introducing RAS the following benefits were achieved:

- ▶ **Accredited recruiters demonstrated understanding of standards** including all of the key aspects of qualitative recruitment including the legal and ethical requirements.
- ▶ **Buyers of recruitment services reduced their risks when buying recruitment services** by enabling procurement from regulated recruitment suppliers who have demonstrated competence to key issues such as GDPR.
- ▶ **Users and buyers of recruitment services demonstrated their accountability and due diligence** by procuring from accredited recruiters who have demonstrated competence via an independently assessed qualification.

- ▶ **Recruiters demonstrated their competence and improved long-term recruitment quality** as the RAS standards become more widely understood and used – particularly in evolving areas such as using social media tools for recruitment.

The ethos of RAS is one of continuous improvement, with recruiters re-accredited every three years. As part of this process, the RAS materials will be updated in 2021/22 to address changes (such as with data protection post Brexit) and new topics will be introduced including recruiting seldom heard participants and how to undertake inclusive recruitment, and ensuring that recruiters are being trained and assessed to evolving RAS requirements.