



# “Inclusive or intrusive?” report

Key findings

September 2024

# Why do organisations collect demographic data?

Those collecting demographic data from young people often do not explain why they are collecting it or how they plan to handle it

Young people are not clear or confident on why demographic data is collected, but often 'conform' or 'concede' to sharing it

Because of this, requests for demographic data can generate in young people a sense of apathy or irrelevance, as well as emotions such as boredom, fear, stress, and exasperation

Practitioners similarly feel ambiguity or confusion around purpose of demographic data collection, as well as the likely impact on young people

Both young people and practitioners often associate demographic data with requests or requirements from funders and, sometimes, marketing or advertising provision

Views on what is 'relevant' data varies, and sometimes intersects with medical or legal responsibilities (such as GDPR or the 2010 Equality Act)

# Does it matter which demographic data organisations collect, or what they do with it?

Demographic data categories have the potential to exacerbate existing stereotypes and reinforce deficit narratives - so they must be chosen carefully

Lack of clarity is exacerbated by inconsistent use of language in the sector by those driving demographic data collection

Data-driven insights can only be generated from reliable, meaningful (and often comparable) data.

However, in the current age, where demographic data relates to identity, categorisation can be difficult because of the fluidity and complexity of identities

Data collection can both have an impact on young people's identity forming (e.g. not being seen or recognised, feeling stigmatised, feeling pressure to have their identity 'figured out') and is directly influenced by the fact that young people are continually (re)forming their identities as they grow up

**NB. These insights apply to some but not all categories of data**

# Does it matter which demographic data organisations collect, or what they do with it?

Requests from those driving data collection can feel in tension with the best interests of young people

Practitioners feel discomfort and/or ill-equipped to facilitate demographic data collection. They identified that they would benefit from further explorations of the impact of the process on young people

The process of collecting demographic data requires time, consideration, relationship building, and specific support from practitioners to young people (e.g. in 'translating' language on forms, or facilitating supportive, trusting conversations about identity)

Practitioners are calling for training and support (e.g. in engaging creatively with sensitive subjects) so that they feel better equipped to have conversations with young people about both identity and demographic data language

Multiple barriers (e.g. lack of trust, irrelevant categories, and a 'one-size-fits-all' approach) also prevent young people and practitioners from engaging with demographic data collection

# What messages would young people like to give organisations who collect demographic data? How would they redesign the process?

## Young people shared mixed views

Some questioned whether they would want to redesign a process that they found irrelevant

Others identified that because the data could be used to support underrepresented communities, it would be worth consideration, but felt unable to envision what a new approach would look like

Some requested ongoing conversations about this topic and felt it was the first time that they had thought deeply about it

Some young people also wanted to convey the message that they cannot always tick boxes because as they are growing up and learning a lot about themselves - they need wider options if organisations want 'accuracy' in the data they collect, so that options are more likely to truly represent how young people identify

Young people found it a positive experience to be invited to use their voices to influence change on issues that affect them

# What messages would young people like to give organisations who collect demographic data? How would they redesign the process?

Some young people shared key messages for organisations who collect demographic data

1. There should be better communication and more transparency on context, purpose, and action

2. There should be improved process and methods by giving space for fluidity, increasing accessibility, and allowing time to reflect

3. Organisations should recognise that being asked for identity data can feel intrusive or uncomfortable

They also shared reflections on specific demographic categories including faith, sexuality, gender, nationality and ethnicity (these can be seen in the full report)

# What messages would practitioners like to give organisations who collect demographic data? How would they redesign the process?

Practitioners, who held a diverse range of roles within the sector, felt conflicted

For example, some felt that they were positioned between young people and the funders, and that current processes do not meet the needs or best interests of young people

Specifically, practitioners flagged concerns about current methods being used in a way to suit a predefined narrative about specific communities of young people, and a checklist or tokenistic approach

They also highlighted a need for training and more guidance, and to work with young people to establish what representation genuinely looks like within demographic data practices