

Interview Transcript

Shaping Tomorrow: Youth Jury / NextGen Research

Interviewer: Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk)

Interviewee: Professor Matt Ryan, University of Southampton

Duration: 44 minutes

Subject: Participedia case entry on the Shaping Tomorrow Youth Jury initiative

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [0:00]

Okay. I think it should be good now. I'm going to interview you today, and I'm just going to ask you a few questions about the Shaping Tomorrow call to action.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [0:20]

Could you introduce yourself and explain your role in the Youth Jury NextGen Research manifesto?

Matt Ryan [0:26]

Yeah, sure. So, my name is Matt Ryan. I'm a professor of politics at the university. If you start with that project, I suppose the background to the NextGen thing is that I was working on a variety of projects or trying to work with some colleagues in health sciences.

Matt Ryan [0:53]

Chief among them is Mary Barker. I think she wanted to work with me because I was doing work on citizen science and she was interested in using citizen science in some of her projects. We applied for a bunch of projects that didn't get funded, and we eventually got one funded through the National Institute of Health Research, which was called MOTH. I can't even remember what it stood for.

Matt Ryan [1:20]

It was something like motivating... but all the work that Mary does is always trying to involve young people, usually in improving their health, because she's a big believer in how empowering young people can improve their health outcomes. So along with Kath Woods-Townsend, who's also a professor in Medicine and Health Sciences, they have run a programme for many years.

Matt Ryan [1:43]

It was started up by Keith Godfrey and a few of them, originally called LifeLab. The idea behind LifeLab was essentially that within the setup of the General Hospital there's a facility where they recreate it's an educational facility where they recreate some of the labs, or what you might see in the hospital.

Matt Ryan [2:12]

And they allow young people of lots of different ages, secondary school students essentially, but some of them are even younger. They bring them in, and they teach them various things about the hospital and how it works, and about medicine and different aspects of health sciences.

Matt Ryan [2:36]

So they tend to have a good network in schools, where they recruit people who are generally interested in medical careers and want to be doctors or midwives or whatever. They were putting them on these courses, and the whole point of the course was to teach them about that.

Matt Ryan [2:53]

And then they started thinking, well, actually, we should teach young people to be researchers. So they basically took people from school, and this is where NextGen comes from. It was originally called something else, but NextGen is essentially a programme that Kath and Mary have worked on with various others.

Matt Ryan [3:11]

What that did, which I wasn't involved with originally, was basically train young people to do health research taught them how to do qualitative research, quantitative research, designing a research question, the kind of stuff you've probably done in your research methods modules.

Matt Ryan [3:26]

So the idea was they did a programme on that. But I think they were a little annoyed that the students would do this really good research for their level at least, and they'd get access to people who maybe they weren't normally getting access to, because obviously, young people will talk to young people in a way that they won't talk to adults, and they're maybe a bit more forthcoming on issues of social research.

Matt Ryan [3:51]

So they were a bit annoyed that they never got any kind of policy outcomes, and nobody took any notice of it. And Mary had a contact with the Integrated Care Board, Integrated Care Partnership for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, which is the health strategy body for this area these days.

Matt Ryan [4:13]

She wanted to get them on board, and there were soundings that they were interested in listening to young people they've always said they wanted young people more involved in health policy making. So I think what she was interested in me for was, obviously, being in a politics department, I know a little bit about policy making.

Matt Ryan [4:28]

That's my background. And she invited me into that project to come up with some way of trying to link these two things together. I can't remember where the discussions went or what we were originally thinking something a bit more like a citizens' jury or something like that. But effectively...

Matt Ryan [4:45]

Because I had funding from my UKRI grant, which is called Rebuilding Democracy, we combined some of that funding with the funding from NIHR for MOTH. And we came up with a programme where we'd basically extend the LifeLab NextGen training, which was normally about a 12-week training programme on doing research.

Matt Ryan [5:12]

We'd add some more weeks of training. They'd come once a week, basically, and we paid them to do it. So we interviewed them and paid them to do the work, because they're kind of doing work, it's like a work experience for them to do the research, but they're also learning. And we added policy elements to that, and elements around democratic rights.

Matt Ryan [5:31]

So they learn a bit more of the politics discipline as it applies in this instance. And then we added in a three-day session at the end where we took inspiration from the citizens' assemblies that we run, and got them to think about how they could write recommendations up from their research.

Matt Ryan [5:55]

It was a bit more policy-impact focused, and we then engaged them with policymakers, who we selected from the local authorities and the Integrated Care Board, the Integrated Care Partnership. So they spent the day with them, working on refining recommendations, getting feedback, and holding the policymakers to account a bit on the issues they were interested in.

Matt Ryan [6:16]

And then they wrote up a report. After that we had a few more sessions with them and gave them training on public speaking. So we were always trying to build their capacity to new levels. Then there was a big assembly of all the Integrated Care partners, which they have every year that happened about a year and a half ago, where they presented their research to a wider group of policymakers and discussed it with them.

Matt Ryan [6:43]

So that was kind of the... and we've been trying to track the implementation of some of their recommendations since then. NextGen has gone on to be commissioned in the same way from various other authorities, like the Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) in Southampton.

Matt Ryan [7:03]

Southampton City Council commissioned them to do another version of it for the Youth Voice policy. So we're on the third or fourth iteration now of that particular method of trying to engage young people, and there have been some adaptations as we've gone along.

Matt Ryan [7:27]

But yeah, that's the bones of the story of where this thing came from and what it is about. So there are two or three main researchers involved, probably four main professors from different disciplines who converged on a model for trying to empower young people's impact on policy.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [7:54]

Thank you for answering. I feel like you answered a few of my questions already. So you said that they were paid for it, and they got an experience out of it as well? Why was this process developed in Southampton? Is there something significant about Southampton, or not really?

Matt Ryan [8:12]

Only because the academics who developed it are in Southampton. So we have connections in the local area, which obviously helped us along. And it meant that we also had connections with the schools that we recruited from. One of the big discussions for us was how we could make it as inclusive as possible because obviously the likelihood of you signing up is going to depend on whether you hear about it.

Matt Ryan [8:47]

And that depends on what school you're in and who's going to push it strongly. So that was one of the questions we tried to deal with. We still got a fairly diverse group of young people, there were 15 or 16 young people we recruited for that particular iteration, and we've gone with similar numbers since.

Matt Ryan [9:08]

There might have been more in the most recent version, but it depends on the funding you have and the commissioning for it. I used some money from my UKRI project to pay for aspects of it, and other aspects of salaries were paid for by NIHR funding, and there might have been some other contributors as well.

Matt Ryan [9:30]

There was some money that Mary had that she contributed from other grant funding she had as well. So yeah, the main reason it was in Southampton was that we had the funding to do it. We had some flexible funding, and we were trying to fulfil our funding mandates, saying we would do this kind of action, experimental research.

Matt Ryan [9:55]

In this area, around these things, doing interdisciplinary stuff we had proposals to do this kind of work. We obviously adapted them as we went through the project, but yeah, that was probably the main reason it was in Southampton.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [10:09]

Yeah, thank you. Would the process have looked different if it were in another region, or would it be more or less the same?

Matt Ryan [10:17]

There's no reason why it wouldn't transfer anywhere else, and I've seen similar types of programmes since we've been aware of this work and started to try to publish it.

Matt Ryan [10:28]

We're obviously also clued in with other co-production processes, so to some extent, some of these things are very similar in different places. We've definitely seen examples in the north of the country, or in London, that have looked a little bit like what we've done.

Matt Ryan [10:46]

So I think it could happen anywhere. We certainly think it's a model that you could apply in any place. There's no reason it would need to work in Southampton, like anything, it depends on what level of abstraction you go to. You can think about how it could move around: the principles of what we're doing and the materials of what we're doing could be present anywhere.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [11:07]

Yeah, I agree. And what demographic information was collected from the 15 young researchers? Did the group reflect the wider population of young people in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight?

Matt Ryan [11:31]

Yeah. So we didn't have anyone from the Isle of Wight in the end, I don't think. It was mostly people who were closer to Southampton-based people from Winchester for that one. So the answer to the second question, did it reflect the population? Well, no, obviously, because there were only 16 people.

Matt Ryan [11:50]

But was it diverse? Yes. Could it have been more diverse? Yes. These weren't just high-achieving students, but there were some pretty exceptional people, at least in this case they were relatively ambitious, I would say.

Matt Ryan [12:13]

Not all of them, but there were definitely some among them that were relatively ambitious. I'm probably not the best person to ask anyway, because that was my first time engaging with young people as a specific population in this kind of work. The people who have done more of that assured me that it was pretty diverse; we did have people from very poor parts of the city.

Matt Ryan [12:37]

So it's not like we just had, and there was a lot of different ethnicities involved. The gender balance was very female, so there weren't many males involved. In subsequent iterations of this, because the programme has been growing in popularity...

Matt Ryan [13:07]

The policymakers have really bought into it in the last two years. We've done this again a couple of times, and we've got much higher numbers of applications. There's been a conscious effort to try to do a kind of quota sample at least where we get people with very different experiences.

Matt Ryan [13:26]

The city council commissioned us recently to do another version of this, where they really set out a bunch of expectations for example, people who are homeschooled, people with learning disabilities,

people with special educational needs. So we've done subsequent versions of this where it's probably clearer that those recruited into the second, third or fourth iterations since I've become involved are even more diverse.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [14:06]

On quite a lot of their profiles, I saw they were interested in health maybe they wanted to study it in the future. Was that on purpose, or did it just happen by coincidence? Was it intentional?

Matt Ryan [14:09]

Yeah, I think in the first instance it wasn't intended, but it was because the networks that LifeLab had that's where LifeLab were going to advertise, and they had their networks there. I think that's why that happened.

Matt Ryan [14:34]

They kind of said to us, oh no, they won't all just be interested in health. But when we did the interviews, they mostly were. Some of them really were going, oh, I'm in this because I want to get a career in health, which is fine. I didn't mind too much. It was a little bit... we had discussed it, my team was very much of the opinion...

Matt Ryan [14:55]

We had a discussion about the inclusion, and I think one place where we had to give a little bit was that they already thought what they were doing was quite inclusive, and we pushed them a bit more on that. We would probably have recruited differently if we'd had it gone our way.

Matt Ryan [15:19]

But I'm kind of glad we didn't overthink the recruitment, because we did get a good, diverse group of young people. The way we justify that to ourselves is that we know that young people anyway are an underrepresented group in themselves.

Matt Ryan [15:41]

So I still felt that just getting 16 young people to engage in such a long programme outside of school time, even if they were paid, was a pretty good democratic improvement on what you would normally have in terms of young people's voice in the city.

Matt Ryan [16:14]

So yeah, basically the first iteration, which was the first main one of this project, I think the response was very high. We do have demographic information on the participants. I actually don't even know whether we... but it's very hard to make any assertions about how representative any group of 16 people is of a population of, you know, 1.5 million people or whatever is in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight.

Matt Ryan [16:33]

Well, that's 1.5 million, I don't know how many young people, probably a few hundred thousand. So that's one thing. The other you can probably get that demographic information if you write to one of the RAs, or it might be in some of the publications.

Matt Ryan [16:53]

But yeah, you're right about their profiles. They definitely were [health-focused]. But when we subsequently did one on youth voice, it wasn't really health folks at all. They still used those networks, so there was still more of a health focus, and even the most recent one is the Health Determinants Research one.

Matt Ryan [16:57]

But in later, more recent ones, we really went into the youth-worker places to get people from much poorer areas of the city, even more so in more recent iterations. So it's pretty inclusive in the sense that we go to places where people are probably less likely to be represented in other ways.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [17:34]

And they all received training on the topics, and they were educated on it? Because I was just thinking if it was, let's say, half people who wanted to pursue something in the healthcare service later on, and the other half were just completely random, would the outcomes be different? Maybe they'd integrate, speak with each other; maybe the outcome would be the same. I don't know.

Matt Ryan [17:55]

Yeah. We've often thought about... so there are two parts to your question. One is about whether they got the same training. They did all get the same training. It's not training on health.

Matt Ryan [18:12]

We're not training them on aspects of health, or science, or medicine, or biology; the training is how to do scientific research, like more or less social-scientific research really. So it's kind of a mix of health sciences and social science-type training. There are some specific things about the policies they're working on.

Matt Ryan [18:39]

So we got people in from the Integrated Care Board, for example, to explain health policy a little bit, and the situation in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. So it's a very interdisciplinary space that they're getting. But they're getting research methods training primarily how to do research.

Matt Ryan [18:59]

Selecting topics, all that kind of thing. Then, in terms of what you were saying about whether it would be different, obviously one research design we could have thought about was to run a trial where we had a control group, where we could look at the difference between the people we selected and the people we didn't, and see whether they had different outcomes.

Matt Ryan [19:19]

We've thought about that in various ways. Obviously that costs more money, and it's harder to keep in touch with the people that you haven't selected, because they have less motivation to respond to you and answer your questions. So for now, we're relying on assumptions and data that's already there about how much young people engage anyway.

Matt Ryan [19:38]

And then comparing them to the groups that we're working with. I haven't talked to Kath in a while, but I think there are plans to try to, at some point, demonstrate the value of the programme in a more scientific way. Part of that is just numbers, because now we've probably done this with somewhere between 100 and 200 people overall.

Matt Ryan [20:00]

If we stay with them, we can look at their outcomes we can look at the difference between their outcomes and the general population, or other people who could form a kind of pseudo-control group. But we don't have that right now, really.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [20:17]

That's alright. When they were all coming up with ideas, there were adults around academics, NHS staff and decision-makers. Did that influence how the participants thought? Did they self-censor, because they felt like they were children and there were adults around anything like that?

Matt Ryan [20:38]

Yeah, so I think that is often the issue, isn't it? All of those problems come up. I think it's unrealistic to say they weren't influenced by the adults and the researchers around them. They probably were, in the sense that these people are quite knowledgeable, even on the topics they're looking into.

Matt Ryan [21:00]

So the adults did probably help them in various ways. But what we did differently a lot of the time when people try to engage young people, they bring them into spaces that are very adult-type spaces, or expect them to behave like adults. And they definitely do self-censor.

Matt Ryan [21:26]

So what we did was we really built their capacity and their trust in us by bringing them on a 12-, 16-, 19-week programme with all these events. What we really did differently from a lot of other participatory initiatives I've seen is that, over time, we built trust with them.

Matt Ryan [21:44]

So they might be quite quiet in the beginning some of them, or they might be disruptive in various ways. But over time, because they could see we were giving them skills, preparing them, giving them chances to have their say on various things, and giving them a lot of time to think through what they were hearing, that meant that they opened up.

Matt Ryan [22:10]

And when we brought them to meet the policymakers, we really built them up in a way that they were empowered and felt, because they'd done a research project. This is the beauty of this thing: when they've done a research project, produced research, and been helped to articulate the recommendations coming from it, and they've practised it...

Matt Ryan [22:31]

When they then go to see policymakers, they're a lot less deferential, and they're a lot more confident in how they can actually behave in front of adults with expertise. And the adults with expertise respond to that, because they immediately see, okay, there's something more interesting here than someone that's just spouting off, or doesn't seem interested. So we created a nice relationship, because we'd spent a lot of time incubating them and getting them ready to talk to policymakers. They were quite ready to have that interaction when they did. So you see a change over time.

Matt Ryan [23:08]

A lot of participatory processes don't spend enough time doing that. They do a little bit of that preparation work, but not enough. That means people are still generally very deferential to the adult experts in the room. So in their case, yeah, definitely.

Matt Ryan [23:29]

It's hard to say they weren't influenced. And you obviously wanted them to be influenced in some way what we don't want to do is tell them what to think. So I don't think we were telling them what to think. We weren't going in with ideas about what we thought young people should be doing.

Matt Ryan [23:43]

They came up with the topics they wanted to investigate. Obviously we helped them a bit in making those things realistic, but the issues they came up with are issues that I wouldn't have expected. And they clearly were interested in their own [concerns].

Matt Ryan [24:02]

Yeah. So I don't think in any way we modified what they were saying or thinking.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [24:09]

I don't think you can tell 15-year-olds what to think. They're in that weird age of puberty and they do what they want to do. So even if you tried, I think they'd just stick to what they were thinking anyway.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [24:23]

Were there certain participants who would dominate more than others? Was there anything like that? 'Dominant' is probably the wrong word I don't think anyone was going to be dominant.

Matt Ryan [24:25]

There were certainly different kinds of personalities, obviously, and there were, like you do find with young people at that age some of them can be extremely shy and quiet.

Matt Ryan [24:45]

We are very well trained in deliberative techniques. What would generally happen with these there were two facilitators who were the lead facilitators, and then on every table there'd be an adult facilitating. Even in breaks and so on, we'd spend a lot of time trying to encourage people who maybe weren't speaking, to feel confident to speak if they wanted to.

Matt Ryan [25:14]

Most people would, and you'd give people turns to get involved. People weren't really dominant. The young people were quite respectful of one another. A lot of them made friends through the process. One of the things we probably had to do a bit was to keep people who were getting quite friendly apart more, because then they'd have their own dynamic that they'd want.

Matt Ryan [25:33]

So there was a bit of manipulating the tables so that everyone would be able to speak you wouldn't have two people getting really giddy, for example. They could do that during the breaks or whatever, but we wanted to make sure that in the time they were discussing their research projects, or learning about things, or deliberating about policy recommendations, we used all the techniques you'd normally expect from deliberative facilitation: equal opportunities for speaking time, listening, et cetera.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [26:16]

How did the training affect the quality of the young people's recommendations? Do you think it had a big effect?

Matt Ryan [26:19]

Yeah, definitely. Of all the projects I've done, this is one where I've seen the most easy response from policymakers, and I think they're genuinely quite amazed at the quality of the stuff that the young people are coming up with.

Matt Ryan [26:40]

Part of that, the real insight, I would say, is that young people genuinely think things are important that older people don't realise are important. Some examples from the project would be stuff like culturally sensitive meals in schools, or stuff around vaping addiction and the siting of vape shops near schools.

Matt Ryan [27:13]

Older people might have a notion about these, but they were probably much more worried about them. Another one was gyms that young women could feel capable of using, or how they taught reproductive health, and whether it was appropriate. So it was a lot of things that I think people would have a notion about, but they wouldn't really know the real problems, and they wouldn't get that..

Matt Ryan [27:38]

...that quality of data where they got to hear the voices of a variety of young people answering surveys or interviews in the way they would to other young people. So that's one thing that helps. Then, because they have a little bit of training in what makes research robust...

Matt Ryan [27:59]

...and how to think about policy recommendations, and where policymakers are coming from they're able to talk about it in ways that are more impressive, and don't feel like they just don't

understand why things are the way they are. So some of those things might seem obvious, but they're never quite...

Matt Ryan [28:26]

...in my experience, brought to bear. So when the policymakers got to talk to them, they were much more enthused by what they were saying in a way that they wouldn't be by, say, having a youth parliament where you just had either the kind of high achievers that normally come to these things, or people who just have a lot of opinions as teenagers saying what they think. There was a little bit more behind it.

Matt Ryan [28:50]

A more structured environment, aimed at the specific things they were interested in. So it brought together young people's insights that government or policymakers can't get, but also brought them in a way that they were able to recognise this was a valuable version of that stuff, and not just complaints or something like that.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [29:17]

Yeah, that's really good. And at which stage of the process do you think the participants had the most control?

Matt Ryan [29:38]

I would guess at the kind of co-production assembly. We really made a big effort to make sure they were the ones cross-examining the policymakers, and that they were always given the signal that they were the ones in charge and leading the process. So even the assembly we did after that where they talked to even more policymakers...

Matt Ryan [30:01]

They were very much the people on the stage, presenting and organising things. Obviously we gave them support to organise, but in theory they were organising the agenda, the setup, and presenting their research. So at all times it felt like they were the ones writing the recommendations, and they were being assisted by policymakers.

Matt Ryan [30:29]

So it was, in theory, proper co-production. That was the idea we were going for. They had the most control later in the process, because they felt more empowered. Early on there was a bit more of a teaching/learning dynamic.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [30:45]

And how transparent is the process to the wider public?

Matt Ryan [30:49]

Do you mean visible, or transparent?

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [30:52]

Transparent visible, yeah. Like, what do the public get to know about this process? How will this affect the wider public?

Matt Ryan [31:01]

So I think, in terms of being transparent in the sense that if anyone asks us what happened, we tell them. Yeah. And there's enough... we will be [open] in the process. Obviously it's a slow process trying to publish work about this. At the time we did it, the Integrated Care Board, I think, put stuff on the website. We have reports, we've put them out there they're available for anyone who wants to read them.

Matt Ryan [31:31]

We've tried to advertise this as best we can, and the city council and other actors like the Integrated Care Board have done that too. Their chief execs and the city council leader, for example, have come to these things they've engaged with them, they really like them.

Matt Ryan [31:52]

They can see the value. The issue with a lot of these things, in terms of visibility, is that they're not going to make the front page of the newspaper. So how many people know that this happens, and what they know about it that's always more of an issue.

Matt Ryan [32:12]

Obviously word of mouth travels, and the people who've been involved themselves get something from it. So we have an alumni of people who've been through the process now, who tell other people about it. Overall it's got decent visibility. In the university, the people who run the civic policy which is about trying to have influence in our local area, they're really part of these programmes, and they try to show off about it as much as they can.

Matt Ryan [32:41]

But yeah like most participatory processes, it's not front-page news. It's mostly academics and the university.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [32:50]

Looking back, what do you think was the most important democratic achievement of the Youth Jury?

Matt Ryan [32:55]

I think for me it was the insight into the fact that more long-term capacity building with vulnerable populations gets you a lot more when you put them in front of policymakers you have to put in a bit more than just having an ephemeral encounter.

Matt Ryan [33:14]

Like, you turn up and you just learn a bit from a few PowerPoint presentations about some topic, and then they ask people about it which is what happens in some kinds of assemblies, juries and things like that. Whereas here, what we really did was say: we're going to give people an engagement long-term, which really teaches them how to do research about the things they care about, and then put them in a structured environment in front of policymakers.

Matt Ryan [33:42]

Maybe it's not rocket science, but I don't know that many other examples of it. And I think it's about how we can well, the question is, how can you do that in a more budget-friendly way? Because we obviously spent quite a bit of time and money on it, especially in terms of personnel costs.

Matt Ryan [34:04]

But yeah, that's the main insight for me in terms of democratic stuff.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [34:10]

Out of interest, how much did it cost? If I can ask how much was paid out?

Matt Ryan [34:15]

Yeah, you can ask, but it's very hard to give you a clear answer. In terms of consumables, we had a budget I can't remember, it was probably around £40,000 for the basic budget to pay for stuff we wouldn't have otherwise done.

Matt Ryan [34:33]

It's a bit more than that, though, because there was extra stuff we tagged on that cost probably another few thousand pounds. But what really makes it expensive is the cost of staff involved. So, depending on how you counted all the support staff, that's probably another £100,000.

Matt Ryan [34:46]

Right. And that's not a ridiculous amount, but depending on how you categorise it, this is a problem with costing any project of this sort. You can cost it in various different ways. We put in a lot of our own time, research time and administrative time, to supplement and cover this project.

Matt Ryan [35:01]

We might have been doing something similar anyway, if we weren't doing that so it's more difficult to say that it was a cost in terms of bottom line. But we did employ two people specifically for this project at least part-time, both part-time.

Matt Ryan [35:20]

And then there were other people already employed, doing a bunch of projects, who were lending some of their time to this as well.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [35:55]

What was the biggest limitation, and if this process were to be done again, what would you change to improve inclusion, judgement, control, transparency, efficiency, or transferability? Sorry about the long question.

Matt Ryan [36:00]

No, no. In terms of inclusion a big limit is having the baseline that you can choose from. Ideally you'd want as many people as possible that you could reach out to, all having an equal opportunity to be selected.

Matt Ryan [36:30]

Because the programme before had very much a 'we are interviewing for an opportunity to become a researcher' type model, they had a model for interviewing, which I'm not really sure is the right model. The interview isn't really checking on people's competence; it's checking that they have the kind of [attitude] to fit in and not be disruptive, essentially. It's a kind of due diligence process.

Matt Ryan [36:50]

It's not trying to select the best young person, in the sense that it was trying to make sure there was a good range of people. We had people from various different backgrounds with various different challenges in their lives. But there's always a bias if you use that kind of selection process, over one that's a bit more random.

Matt Ryan [37:15]

We could improve there, definitely. What they've gone to is more of a quota sampling model, which is fine. That's what eventually really happens with all participation to some extent, right? You're trying to select the people who come forward, or you go to more areas that are disadvantaged, and try to bump up your sample from there, or something like that.

Matt Ryan [37:41]

So that's one way we could definitely improve it. The other thing I'd be keen to improve and I'm not sure if my colleagues would agree with me on this but I think we need to make it cheaper. The way to do that, essentially, is to do a version of it that isn't pick-and-span.

Matt Ryan [38:00]

Right? So we went for the best possible we've spent lots of time on this. Maybe if you didn't spend as much time and as much cost on it, it wouldn't be as good. But there might be versions of it that are pretty good, and cost a lot less. So it's about getting that sweet spot and figuring out what the continuity model is.

Matt Ryan [38:28]

So now we're thinking about: can we train people to train young people? Can we do this in a way where it's not reliant on us? Because you've got four really experienced professors involved, and they know a lot of stuff about a lot of stuff, along with various postdoctoral researchers and students and other people we brought in from different backgrounds.

Matt Ryan [38:51]

So the question is, how can you do it in a more sustainable way? That would be my [concern]. There were times where someone had to step in to MC or facilitate the sessions, or whatever. So it would be a question of how you can do this with maybe fewer staff costs that would be what I'd want to know.

Matt Ryan [39:10]

And have a control group as well, like what you talked about earlier, to have a proper control, so that we could really robustly infer what the value of the engagement was.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [39:19]

I mean, I'm sure you could do it just with people volunteering, because it's for a good cause. It's very interesting. There are a lot of people who would be interested in doing this.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [39:27]

And then you'd just have the costs of the people that would be training, like yourself, and the academics. But in terms of participants, I think a lot of young students are looking for experiences like that, and they'd say, why not? Like, I want to do it. So I think on the volunteering thing...

Matt Ryan [39:45]

Obviously we had various sessions where people came in with different expertise from No Limits, for example, which is a youth-work organisation supporting young people in the city. They came in voluntarily, gave their time and so on, but it's kind of part of the role.

Matt Ryan [40:03]

I do a lot of stuff voluntarily, but I get paid a good wage by the university. So there's a blurred line when you're in a professional job like this, where you do things that are voluntary or not. So that's why I was saying you could cost it one way and say it costs X, but in terms of the actual money spent, it would cost a lot less.

Matt Ryan [40:21]

In terms of the young people participating I agree with what you're saying, in one sense. My colleagues and I are very keen on paying people a living wage for doing the work. There are a couple of advantages to that. It obviously makes them feel better about what they're doing it creates that buy-in, because they feel like they're doing a worthwhile activity. It's not just something they're giving their time for. And it probably means that some people, who wouldn't otherwise do it because they're not from a richer background, do have an incentive to do it.

Matt Ryan [41:01]

So I do think you could definitely do it on a more voluntary-led way, but there might be some negatives to doing that as well.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [41:21]

No, I agree with you. Actually, now thinking about it, I didn't think some people might really need that money and the experience. And I mean, who doesn't like to get paid? I'd love to do something like that and get paid.

Matt Ryan [41:24]

Yeah. To be honest with you, the thing is, that's not actually that big a cost. I mean, it's money, but compared to some of those organisations and what they spend money on, paying the young people...

Matt Ryan [41:37]

...is probably, like, a day of my time. Probably 10 days of my time is probably the entire cost for 16 young people for the whole programme. So you have to think about it in that sense. I can't

remember exactly, but it was something like £14,000 or £15,000 to pay for all the time of all the young people in the whole thing.

Matt Ryan [41:54]

So they all had about a thousand pounds from it. They would have worked we paid them for the two hours every week. I think they had two hours of in-person time, and one hour of homework every week, for 16 weeks. So that's what, 36 hours?

Matt Ryan [42:23]

And they were probably paid, I can't remember the exact number, probably £10 or £11, I can't remember what the money was. It's an hourly wage for 16-year-olds, so I can't remember exactly. It'll be somewhere if you want to look it up probably in the report. We can find out if you really want to.

Matt Ryan [42:41]

So that adds up. And then we paid them for the days they were there. So they're getting about probably not a thousand pounds some of them did. We really strictly didn't pay them if they didn't do the work, so if they didn't turn up if they weren't paid.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [42:57]

Oh really?

Matt Ryan [43:03]

Yeah, it wasn't like, oh, you know, if they didn't turn up, they didn't do it, they didn't get paid. So there was an essence of: this is a job, you've got to take it seriously, you've got to do the work. Some of them might miss sessions, some of them were a bit disorganised, or came from difficult backgrounds. A lot of the people involved in the LifeLab programme come from a school background.

Matt Ryan [43:29]

They work a lot with people from those backgrounds; they're ex-teachers, so they really understand how you interact with young people and parents, and all that. The safeguarding was really important. That was the whole world I didn't know, so I had to learn it quite quickly safeguarding rules around young people, and all that.

Matt Ryan [43:46]

Making sure that they're complying with all those kinds of issues DBS checks, all that kind of stuff. They kind of understand that world as well, and they get those communications. So it was very much a collaboration where you had to understand those different things.

Mikaela Kostadinova (mk9g23@soton.ac.uk) [44:07]

Yeah. Thank you so much for today. I think that's about it for my questions. You did manage to answer quite a lot of my questions indirectly, from other questions. So yeah, this is going to be really useful. Would you like me to send you the recording afterwards? Are you okay with me using the transcript?

Matt Ryan [44:27]

Yeah, you don't need to send me anything. Look, it's very helpful for me if this gets written up on the Participedia site which I assume is ultimately the aim here. So just do that, and if you want me to check anything, that's fine. Okay, perfect. Thank you so much. I'm looking forward to seeing it.