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Example of Researcher Process Notes

Following team conference call I am using the guidelines we established to produce an enahnced copy and an enhanced and anonymised copy of each interview. Also logging all changes/potential changes on anonymisation tracking grid.

Initially, on anonymisation tracking grid, I was logging every change as it occurred regardless of how often that was but have now agreed with team to log any particular change only the first time it occurs on any given page – this is saving a lot of time. Have not used find and replace as way of changing names, places etc., but will use as final check (when interviews are enhanced/enhanced and anonymised) to be sure that key names don't appear anywhere.

Have noticed it's hard to get any idea of average time to enhance and anonymise one set of interviews. Sam and Su for instance have very different styles. Su uses names of people and places almost continuously – Then I said to Sarah 'Sarah, where's Paul?' and Sarah says, 'Su, Paul's over there', so Sarah says to Paul etc. This means far more changes to be made. For example, while Sam (in ff1) only names people on two occasions, Su names people 94 times in the same number of pages. Not such a problem now that we're logging changes once per page.

Also noticed that Su was taking so much longer because within an interview of similar length she produces three times as many pages of text, presumably because she speaks more quickly, maybe because her interviews actually are longer. Whereas Sam's interviews are between 20 and 25 pages long, Su's FF3 which I am working on now, runs to 65 pages. Have now started on Emer and working more quickly because her speaking style is clear and articulate.

Wondered about adding punctuation as I went through cleaning process. Transcripts are sometimes a bit 'stream of consciousness' with very few full stops. Listening to digitisation with a transcript in front of you makes it easier to punctuate than it would have been for transcriber. This wasn't something we discussed as team so have only added the odd comma or full stop if a passage was very unclear without and I could tell by listening to digitisation that the sense of a sentence was misleading without it.

In retrospect I think we should have talked more about adding 'emotional clues' eg (laughs), (whispers), (nervously) etc in brackets in text. In original transcript only laughter is mentioned but sometimes an interviewee says something and the text alone doesn't convey the way it is said. Decided that as we hadn't discussed this much and time is so tight, I wouldn't add emotional clues – probably too subjective anyway.

Good news – it has been possible to fill in a lot of the gaps in transcripts (especially Su's) while enhancing so only few remain.

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Very difficult to know which aspects of someone's story will turn out to be important over time and therefore which things to change in anonymised copy from the off. Anonymisation process is not as I had imagined. I had expected that by changing names, place names and key personal details we would be able to protect identities. In fact there is so much detail about so many different aspects of each young person's life that they would be recognisable to anyone that knew them regardless of these changes. Initially I was worrying about far fetched possibilities, for instance that someone who had crossed paths with Sam at University and subsequently gone into research would recognise him despite the fact that university/locations etc have been changed. The truth is you can't approach it like this or it would be impossible to anonymise and preserve the real individual. To anonymise interviews to the extent that no-one would recognise the young people would mean turning them into different young people.

I've had to get my head around seeing anonymisation in another way and work on the basis that access will be restricted in such a way that whether they would be recognisable to 'anyone' is not a useful starting point. I think I was also approaching it as a journalist, knowing that other journalists are often asked to track people down or find case studies - at a time when real life case studies provide the bulk of magazine and newspaper feature sections content, not to mention TV. I would say that a journalist would not be able to find Sam based on anonymised interviews but would be able to find Su.