The Politics of Social Research

The recent SRA annual conference gave us the chance to meet old friends, put names to faces and to forge some new relationships. The sessions themselves were highly stimulating and thanks go to Wendy Sykes, Karl Olsen, Andrew Phelps, Sarah Trimmer and Siân Llewellyn-Thomas who have provided a resume of each session.

Conducting and commissioning research in today's world

Sharon Witherspoon, Deputy Director of the Nuffield Foundation, and Ben Page, Head of MORI's Social Research Institute, opened the conference with a stimulating session on the relationship between researchers and research customers, especially in government organisations.

Policy customers are animated traditionally by concerns such as outcomes, efficiency and power that flavour the context in which much research is commissioned. Researchers on the other hand, are trained to stand guard over 'truth' and the quality of research that helps to inform the policy process. While these differences in orientation can create tensions between commissioners and researchers, Sharon argued that this was creative if managed well and necessary to a healthy policy-making environment. Researchers should continue to put the interests of longer-term, solid and in-depth social research first, resisting too close an identification with the inner world of policy customers. Although frustrating at times for research consumers, policy-making is better served

ultimately by such delineation of roles.

Ben Page, on the other hand, noted that too smug an adherence to the role of researcher without due attention to the interests, pressures and constraints of ministers (and those serving them) would lead to researchers being overlooked, ignored or passed over. Without 'going native' researchers can make more impact by learning to communicate better with policy customers in order to be invited earlier to a place higher up the table. Researchers need to understand policy makers and the way they work in order to find effective ways to engage with them.

We report on a selection of conference workshops below.

Ethics in social research

Ron Iphofen, University of Bangor stressed that we all face competing pressures as researchers and it is sometimes easy to forget the ethical issues. This year the SRA revisited its ethical guidelines to bring them up to date and the session was a valuable talk through these new guidelines. Ron highlighted many issues including, the need to develop user friendly guidelines, the notion of maintaining an ethical awareness that needs to be

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◆ Full report of SRA Conference	◆ News Round Up	◆ The SRA in Scotland	◆ ESRC Update	◆ Reviews	Next copy deadline: 31 March 2003	www.the-sra.org.uk

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For more information about the SRA visit the SRA website www.the-sra.org.uk

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SRA NEWS – next issue

Copy deadlines for the next issues of the newsletter are:

31 March: May issue
30 June: September issue
30 September: November issue
31 December: February issue

We welcome all contributions. Please send all copy to the Editorial Committee, c/o SRA Administration Office.

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report from the chair

Ceridwen Roberts

A review of last year

2003 is an important year for the SRA. We celebrate our 25th anniversary and this is a good time to take stock of where we are going as an organisation. Overall, 2002 was a year of consolidation and financial prudence and this has paid off. Full details of the annual accounts and the Chair's report on the year are available on **www.the-sra.org.uk**

The re-establishment of our own administrator means we have more day to day control over the running of the SRA's affairs. Suzanne Cohen has done a wonderful job in working with us to overhaul all aspects of the SRA's administration and office.

Plans for 2003

We will be aiming to work on several fronts. It is still important to scrutinise our own organisation and the three key issues identified for further work this year are – membership, the newsletter and the website. Membership is on an upward trend but we are still worried by the churn. Nick Smith is therefore devising an 'exit' questionnaire and we will be asking all those who have not renewed why and what they would have liked. He is also planning a membership survey so we can get an up to date feel of your interests and concerns.

Emails and the web have made us review the role of the newsletter. Should it be superseded or supplemented by electronic media? What sort of things should it cover? We are pressing ahead with the development of the web and you can expect to see it carry more information and have better links to relevant other sites.

Events and Training

Events and Training are two key activities for the SRA and we intend to increase the volume and diversify the nature of both of these. A new series of Evening Seminars are planned. The first one was a great success. Professor Heather Joshi and Kate Smith from the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at the Institute of Education talked about 'The Millennium Cohort'. Their detailed account of the size and scope of this new birth cohort- a sample of about 19,000 UK babies born between September 2000 and December 2001- was a riveting introduction. The next evening seminar will be in March.

Organising events is time consuming, so we will be investigating ways of working with fellow professional groupings to see what would be sensible to do jointly. If there are things you would like have events on or, better still, help organise do contact **juliet.whitworth@lga.gov.uk** More joint working is being considered by the Training Committee who want to increase the training activities in general and, in particular, training and development opportunities for mid career researchers too. Contact **tracey.budd@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk** if you have suggestions. We also hope to encourage SRA members to investigate the training opportunities which will be coming available under the new ESRC Research Methods Programme. Professor Angela Dale reviews this on pages 8 and 9.

The changing environment for social research

Much is happening in the wider social science and research world. There is concern about the growing call to set up ethics committees for social research and for all or most social research to be subject to their scrutiny. The Department of Health has been proactive and many other funders and professional organisations feel that a fuller consideration of all the issues is necessary before rules and procedures get set in stone.

On the university front the Select Committee on Science and Technology has issued its report on short-term contracts and has made it clear that universities must radically change their management practices for this group of research workers. This makes important reading for many contract researchers see www.parliament.uk/pa/cmselect/cmsctech. The government response is awaited.

The review of the RAE is underway and Sir Gareth Roberts's consultation document is expected in April or May. This is linked to the whole debate about higher education funding, the emergence of university league tables and research and teaching institutions. There are implications for the concentration of research as well as the relative value attached to the utilisation and dissemination of research and so we will be looking for your views on this.

Twenty fifth anniversary celebrations

We start the celebrations with a high level seminar launch of the Commissioning Social Research report. The Annual Conference on 3rd December which takes as its theme '***Improving the Quality of Social Research***' will provide the finale to the year. At the point of going to print not all the 25th anniversary events are finalised. We do however need some volunteers to help us plan these so if you have some ideas, time and, ideally, access to sponsorship monies do contact me **ceridwen.roberts@btopenworld.com**

Goodbye and welcome

The AGM saw several longstanding executive members retire. Carol Riddington, Neil Russell and Joanne Maher have, contributed enormously to the work of the SRA. Carol has been associated with us in one way or another since the 1980s so it really does feel an end of an era. However, we know they will all continue to be supportive members. And we wish them well. We are delighted to welcome Ann Bridgwood, Professor Susanne MacGregor, Siân Llewellyn-Thomas and Dr Peter Humphreys.

sra news round up

SRA TRAINING

19th March: Focus Groups
28th May: Commissioning and Managing Social Research
17th September: Qualitative Interviewing
18th November: Better Questionnaire Design: Theory and Practice

All training days will be held at the London Voluntary Resource Centre (356 Holloway Road, London, N7 6PA).

SRA EVENTS

27 March: Commissioning Social Research

This is a half-day seminar to formally launch the SRA's good practice guidelines for commissioning social research, which were published just before Christmas. The seminar will be targeted at an invited audience of key researchers and research commissioners, to discuss the issues that arise during commissioned projects.

11 July: Promoting Professional Standards in Social Research

The SRA Summer Event this year will focus on a number of issues to do with regulating and promoting professional standards in social research, including the work the SRA are involved in for a European Commission-funded project called 'Respect'. This half-day seminar will include a number of speakers from elsewhere in Europe, and finish with a drinks reception.

3 December: Improving the Quality of Social Research

Our annual conference and AGM this year will look at the issue of quality within social research. It's a one-day event, held at the London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London N7.

Further details on all SRA training and events from the SRA admin office or www.the-sra.org.uk

THE ESRC SURVEY LINK SCHEME

By Professor Martin Bulmer, University of Surrey

The Survey Link Scheme offers UK social researchers, social science academics and research students the opportunity to observe the data collection phase of one of the main British large-scale surveys.

Opportunities are spaced out during the year, and are arranged some way in advance. Most placements involve no more than two days of a participant's time, one day spent observing a briefing session followed by a day accompanying an interviewer in the field. In some cases briefing papers are sent in advance and only one day's field observation is involved. The field trip usually takes place in the region where the participant lives.

Participants are asked to write a brief report on their observations. Travel and subsistence expenses are in any case reimbursed. ESRC supported research students are particularly encouraged to apply for a placement. The scheme is supported by the ESRC Training Board. It was founded and directed for many years by Professor Aubrey McKennell, from whom I have taken over.

The Survey Link Scheme is run from the Department of Sociology at the University of Surrey, in association with the Question Bank. Details of most of these and other continuous surveys may be found in the Question Bank, at http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk. We would welcome suggestions for other surveys to include in the Survey Link Scheme.

To obtain an application form for a placement, please email the scheme administrator:
Amanda Eastell-Bleakley, ESRC Survey Link Scheme, Department of Sociology, University of Surrey, Guildford, Surrey, GU2 7XH
Tel/Fax: 01483 689457 (Tuesday to Thursday).
Email: a.eastell-bleakley@soc.surrey.ac.uk.

19TH BRITISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES

The National Centre for Social Research recently published its 19th Report of British Attitudes. It covers a broad range of topics from what people think about legalising cannabis to their attitudes to state spending on schools. The report is published by SAGE (wwwsagepub.co.uk), price £37.50. Further information from NatCen on 020 7250 1866 www.natcen.ac.uk

NEW REPORTS FROM JOSEPH ROWNTREE FOUNDATION

Recent reports, published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, form the basis for online discussion on the JRF website (www.jrf.org.uk). These include:

New roles for old: Local authority members and partnership working
Mick Wilkinson and Gary Craig
www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/details.asp?pubID=485
This engaging study examines partnership working in local government and, based on a survey of all local authorities in England and Wales, it maps practice and explores experience to give an insight into partnership working in policy initiatives including regeneration, public health, childcare, education and anti-poverty policy. *New roles for old* costs £13.95 (paperback) and was published on 15 November and launched on the same day at the Local Government Information Unit's annual conference.

Promoting change through research: The impact of research in local government
Jannie Percy-Smith with Tom Burden, Alison Darlow, Lynne Dowson, Murray Hawtin and Stella Ladi
www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/details.asp?pubID=467
This report examines how local authorities use research to develop policy and practice. It considers the way in which officers and members gain access to both in-house research and external sources and how key findings are disseminated throughout the authority. The paperback version of *Promoting change through research* costs £14.95.

Free PDF versions of both reports are available from the JRF website and paperback copies can be ordered

from the online bookshop. Please add £2.00 postage and packing per order. Postal orders should be sent, with payment or an official order form, to: York Publishing Services, 64 Hallfield Road, Layerthorpe, York YO31 7ZQ.

For further information contact: Jenni Laycock, Publications Officer, Joseph Rowntree Foundation, The Homestead, 40 Water End, York YO30 6WP
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www.jrf.org.uk

GOOD INTENTIONS – BUT *MORE* RESPONSIBILITIES AND NO EXTRA FUNDING

The response from the Social Services Research Group to the Department of Health's Research Governance Framework in Social Care

The Social Services Research Group (SSRG) supports the Department of Health's Research Governance (RGF) in Social Care (see www.doh.gov.uk/research/rd1/researchgovernance/researchgovindex.htm). In the context of best value and evidence-based practice, research in social care is increasingly important to bring about improvements in practice. SSRG wants to make sure that research activity is properly commissioned, has standards of conduct and reduces the possibility of exploitation and improper abuse of users of services. The SSRG therefore welcomes the main aim and general approach taken within the RGF document.

SSRG stands for good quality standards in research; for making research relevant and useful for users and social care staff and making sure money spent on research is wisely invested. The RGF requires agreement on the standards and ethics, bodies to regulate and oversee research, together with programmes to improve research practice. SSRG hopes that the Department of Health will introduce a regulatory approach that is effective, but which does not restrict the amount of research undertaken. It remains to be seen whether the implementation of RGF will stretch further overburdened local authorities with an additional responsibility to regulate research. A key question is whether RGF for social care is a 'Cinderella' service relative to Research and Development in the NHS.

Following extensive consultation with SSRG members, the details of which can be found on the SSRG website www.ssrg.org.uk, recommendations were set out in a 'position statement' and sent to Dr. Carolyn Davies at the Department of Health.

The Chair of SSRG, David Allan said, "We want the RGF to be implemented in social care because we believe it will enhance the quality and ethical standards of research in a practical and realistic way. However, we don't want an under-resourced framework, because this would exacerbate existing inequalities between research in health and social care.'

NEW SOCIAL STATISTICS RESEARCH CENTRE FOR THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

The University has opened its Social Statistics Research Centre, occupying a new building, funded by a grant from the government's Joint Infrastructure Fund.

The aims of the Social Statistics Research Centre are:
- To undertake research on statistical methods for the purpose of improving the quality and uses of statistics in the social sciences and government
- To undertake statistical research for the analysis and evaluation of social policy and to address issues in the social sciences and government
- To promote the use of statistics in the social sciences, policy settings and government through co-operation, interaction, training and the provision of other resources.

The facilities in the new building support these aims by providing:
- Powerful computing resources for the efficient analysis of very large datasets and the use of computer-intensive statistical methods
- A secure data laboratory enabling confidential datasets to be used under strict security arrangements
- Offices for research and computing staff and research students
- Office space for visitors, a seminar room and common room to promote interaction amongst researchers and between researchers and users of research
- Training accommodation, especially for short courses with hands-on computer-based sessions.

Two programmes of courses are currently offered, first, ESRC Centre for Applied Social Surveys and second, Professional Development in Official Statistics.

The CASS short course programme focus on quantitative methods, covering the whole survey process from design to data analysis. The courses are aimed particularly at academic social scientists, both postgraduate students and staff, but are also attended by people working with surveys in government and the private sector. The courses are delivered jointly by staff associated with the SSRC and by staff from the Survey Methods Centre at the National Centre for Social Research.

The Professional Development in Official Statistics courses have been developed jointly by the University of Southampton and the Office for National Statistics to cover the core skills and knowledge needed by professional government statisticians working in the UK and in other countries. The courses are open to anyone with suitable background, however. It is possible to \undertake assessed work for these courses and, as a result, to accumulate credits towards the qualification of MSc in Official Statistics at the University of Southampton.

CONTACT DETAILS FOR JOHN HALL
In the last issue, we carried a review by John Hall of the SPSS Survival Manual by Julie Pallant. John can be emailed on hallj@wanadoo.fr

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ongoing throughout the research process. Finding the balance between professional integrity and autonomy against ethical accountability and an awareness of our own ethical position.

The pressure is on us as individual researchers to 'behave' as there is no procedure for discipline within the SRA. With different issues across disciplines this can be difficult. An important reminder was that there is no one way of getting things right and that we always have to make a choice.

Sally Dench, Institute of Employment Studies fed information back on the RESPECT project which has been funded by the European Commission's Information Society Technologies (IST) Programme, to draw up professional and ethical guidelines for the conduct of socio-economic research. There are three areas receiving particular attention: cultural and national differences; online research and the new ethical issues it raises; conflict resolution. Further information about this important project can be found on their website www.respectproject.org

Publicising research

David Utting of The Joseph Rowntree Foundation led the discussion which focused on the basic questions of Why? What? Who? How? and When? in connection with publicising research. Issues discussed included:

• Instances when you may not want or need to publicise your research
• Being prepared to defend your methodology particularly if politicians/ the media or the wider public instinctively disagree with your findings
• Thought on who **needs** to know about your research balanced with avoiding assumptions such as 'The media would be bound to misrepresent it'
• The importance of producing a summary of the results to clarify your findings and engage a wider audience.

Further questions and discussion focused on issues such as the problem of time lag between conducting research and when results are publicised and the accessibility of research to researchers and a general wider audience. There was discussion on the best ways to disseminate results, and there was a general call for written good practice guidelines on this issue from the SRA.

Making research influential

The session on making research influential was led by Sue Duncan – Chief Government Social Researcher and Jannie Percy Smith – Leeds Metropolitan University. It covered two main themes, which are of key interest to all researchers. Firstly, how can we ensure that politicians and policy makers take notice of our research and secondly, what does past evidence tell us about maximising research evidence impact?

Sue Duncan the newly appointed Government Chief Social Researcher addressed making research influential in an evidence based policy era. There are three main reasons why the research policy relationship is complex. Firstly policy is formulated in a political environment. Secondly it is difficult for research to offer black or white results and finally there are tight political timetables. In response to this, researchers and policy analysts need to move away from impenetrable reports and political bias and offer answers before policy colleagues know they need them, use more systematic reviews, explore data linking and be prepared to interpret our data further while making professional judgements.

Professor Jannie Percy Smith presented findings from two research projects looking at the impact of research. The key findings were that generally the impact of research on policy is limited. Research conducted or commissioned in-house was more likely to have an impact but dissemination is patchy with customer service staff not having the access to the information they require. Overall research is more likely to have an impact when it is timely, comes from a trusted and authoritarian source, is unambiguous, offers clear implications for action and relates to current priorities.

A key message from both presentations was to build in plans for dissemination and ensuring impact early on in research design.

The Health of Social Science & Research

The last session of the day was addressed by David Walker (The Guardian and the Commission for the Social Sciences) and Janet Lewis (former Director of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation). David began by commenting on the difficulties of making a case for funding an area as methodologically diverse as the social sciences, and in naming the social benefit arising from social scientific and social research endeavour. He highlighted the gap in public understanding about the value of social science and research and stressed the importance of the role of the media in bridging this. He presented a rough analysis of research stories in the Guardian over a year and concluded that there is a deficit in the flow of information to the media. Reasons for this that should be of concern to the profession include too few generic experts, 'personalities' and institutions with 'push' and 'presence'.

Janet Lewis followed on with a personal analysis of the symptoms both of health and struggle in social research. On the positive side, she noted a growth of interest in social research and an increase in funding, for example in the wake of moves

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towards more evidence-based social policy and practice. Dissemination of research, she claimed, is better now than ever before and the Social Research Association is still flourishing! On the other hand, there is a need to re-sensitise researchers about questions of research ethics, to promote better commissioning of social research, and to address the continuing problem of short-term contracts for researchers working in academic settings. The Social Research Association has a significant role to play in addressing these and other issues, but needs to enhance its position and influence. She suggested that it may be time for SRA to re-consider its status, and take steps to become a more professional body.

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The SRA in Scotland

A busy year for the SRA in Scotland

The membership in Scotland has grown significantly in 2002 and now constitutes 15% of the overall SRA membership. This is due to the hard work of the volunteers in Scotland but also the continued support of our contributors and attendees throughout Scotland. Many thanks to all of you who have supported the SRA in Scotland in 2002.

We would like to build on this achievement in 2003 and are keen to hear from members in Scotland. What do you want from the SRA in Scotland?

What do we do?

SRA in Scotland holds evening seminars throughout the year. These tend to happen on a monthly basis and cover a wide range of topics, from research methods to social policy. In recent months, we have had speakers on a wide range of topics from Lifelong Learning to using theoretical approaches in health evaluation research. The seminars are held in Edinburgh and run from 6.30pm (6pm for tea and biscuits) until 8pm and adjourn to a local hostelry for lively debate. Come along and see us if you get the chance. Or if you'd like to host a seminar in another part of Scotland, please let us know.

We also run two or three training courses during the year on research methodology topics – most recently on Questionnaire Design. We are currently planning our training events in Scotland for 2003 and would be keen to hear what members would like to see scheduled this year. Sampling and data protection issues appear to be popular options – let us know your views.

Recent joint event

In November we organised a joint event with the Scottish Local Government Information Unit (SLGIU) on measuring quality of life and well-being. This event was over-subscribed to the extent that we re-ran the seminar

in December, attracting overall around 100 delegates from a wide range of sectors including health, housing and local government.

Forthcoming evening seminars

Early in the New Year, Frank Thomas from the GRO in Scotland will conduct an evening seminar to update the SRA in Scotland on the 2001 Census in Scotland. We will send an update of the evening seminar dates by email – let us know if we do not have your email address.

We are compiling our full schedule of evening seminars at the moment and still have some available slots during the year. If you are interested in giving a paper, please contact us. We are interested in papers on research methods and the research process and papers discussing research results and wider social policy.

2003 annual event

The 2003 Annual Event will be held in Edinburgh in late February, on the topic of dissemination – 'Where does all the research go? Making findings work'. The event will explore the following questions:
• Who should we be disseminating research findings to?
• How best can we reach these audiences/ what formats are best suited to getting our messages across?
• Where does the responsibility for dissemination lie?

Contact us

If you would like to know more about these events in Scotland, or have an idea for an evening seminar or a training event, please contact us.

Also, please let us know if you would like to become involved in the SRA in Scotland (we would love to have a few more helping hands!). Email Mandy Littlewood: mandy.littlewood@nfoeurope.com 0131 656 4038, or Kerstin Hinds: k.hinds@natcen.ac.uk 0131 557 5494.

ESRC Update – Background to the ESRC Research Methods Programme

By Professor Angela Dale

The Research Methods Programme forms part of a wider ESRC strategy to improve the standard of research methods across the UK social science community. The Programme also aims to ensure the development and promotion of cutting edge methods in both qualitative and quantitative research.

The Programme was developed in the light of increasing demand for high quality social and economic research, not only within the higher education sector but also in the private and voluntary sectors and across all levels of government. This requires an adequate number of people who are well trained and well skilled in social science methods, both qualitative and quantitative. The social science community also faces a challenge in effectively exploiting the new potentials for research design and data collection, for measurement and recording, for appropriate analysis of all forms of data, archiving, dissemination and effective presentation. There is a gap between cutting edge techniques and useful and useable applications. This Programme aims to reduce that gap.

The key objectives of the Programme are to:
- support substantively focused research that poses interesting or novel methodological issues;
- foster work that directly enhances methodological knowledge or improves and advances quantitative and qualitative methodological techniques;
- encourage and support the dissemination of good practice, including the enhancement of training programmes and training materials for the research community;
- establish Fellowships linked to research funded through this Programme or linked to existing centres of methodological excellence;
- promote cross-national initiatives involving substantively focused and methodologically innovative research.

Structure of the Research Methods Programme

In October 2001, ESRC called for outline applications to the Programme under a series of broad headings:

Generating, Storing and Retrieving Data
Research Design and Data Collection
Multi-media integration and retrieval
Data Mining

Quantitative and Qualitative Data Analysis
Longitudinal and Pathways Analysis
Network Analysis
Evidence Based Policy and Evaluation Methods
Mathematical Modelling and Simulation
Analysing Text, Discourse, Narrative and Visual Data
Integrating Multiple Methodologies
Enhancing Methodological Skills
Training Activities

The programme generated an enormous amount of interest in the research community. Over 300 outline applications were received, of which 63 were short-listed and 20 funded in the first instance with some further alpha rated proposals funded subsequently. These include training proposals, fellowships and substantive projects. A full list with details of the project or training activities is on the programme website: www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/projects.

The disciplinary spread is wide, including economics, anthropology, geography, sociology, health, demography, management. A number of projects will produce methodological innovation by cross-disciplinary working. Some projects are developing methods at the forefront of technology, e.g. analysis of media content; ethnography for the digital age; interactive methods of data collection on environmental knowledge, while others are exploring methodological issues with direct relevance to practice, e.g. survey measurement of incomes; using verbatim quotations in social research.

It should be stressed that training activities will not only be aimed at doctoral students, but also new researchers and researchers in mid career, across all sectors – not just in academia. Some activities emphasise cutting-edge methods whilst others are aimed at up-dating more basic skills. The second phase of the Programme has allocated £700K to further training activities and the call for these will go out in April 2003 with projects starting in January 2004.

Events organised under the programme

A continuous series of events is being organised within the programme. Some of these are being organised by Angela Dale as programme director whilst others are organised as dissemination and training events by the project teams. Details of events are available from the programme website as well as from the specific website of the funded projects.

A brief outline of the first three events is given below:

Consultation on training needs

Sixty people attended an all-day meeting on November 29th to debate future training needs. Papers from the meeting and a more detailed report are on the programme website. Key points were:

- Training needs to be ongoing for researchers at all levels – from graduate students through to senior researchers. It was emphasised that developments in methods require constant up dating. It is important that the trainers receive training to ensure that up-to-date skills are passed on to students – although this may not be easy to achieve.

- Training needs to be closely linked to substantive research questions.
- There needs to be recognition of research as a craft that needs to be learnt through practise. This may include a number of non-traditional types of training:

  Apprenticeship mode
  Mentoring to impart skills
  Shadowing or placements in research settings
  Use of case studies developed by 'real researchers' telling it like it is
  Expert consultancy to help develop research proposals

This, together with the need to tie training into substantive questions suggests considerable merit in linking with ESRC Research Programmes and projects.

- An archive of training materials would be of value to qualitative and quantitative research. This should include not just training materials but also case study evidence of effective research.
- Post-graduate training should capitalise on synergies with other institutions – whether through use of short courses at other universities or through development of consortia or regional centres.
- The lack of funding within academia for an individual's training requirements needs to be addressed.
- A range of methods of delivering training were identified in addition to those listed above. These included traditional short courses, master classes, trainers trained by experts.
- Training is needed at all levels from entry level to state-of-the-art.

These views will be used to inform the specification for phase 2 funding.

Combining data: using advanced technology to enhance social science resources

This meeting was held in Manchester on 18th December 2002 and brought together social scientists and computer scientists, across the academic and non-academic sectors. Speakers in the morning discussed the huge range of data sets now available and the opportunities that this afforded, with examples of data fusion and data linkage from government, academia and the commercial sector. In the afternoon speakers focussed on the scope for using e-science developments, particularly the grid, to facilitate combining and sharing data. An ESRC call for small demonstrator projects, along with all the papers from the meeting, is available from the programme website: www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/archive.

Mathematical modelling and simulations

This is a one-day meeting to be held at the University of Leeds in March 2003. The aims of the meeting are to:

- Identify the depth of UK capacity in mathematical modelling and simulations and the potential of these methods for answering some of the most urgent social science questions;
- Encourage cross-disciplinary research between mathematicians and social scientists; and

- Set out a research agenda for the future and identify training needs.

Sir Alan Wilson, Vice-Chancellor of Leeds University, will host the meeting. Further details are on the Methods programme website.

Researchers from all sectors are welcome to participate in events and training activities organised under the Research Methods Programme. To ensure you receive information please visit the programme web site: www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods and register your interest by completing a brief on-line form.

Books for review

If you would like a copy of any of the books/reports listed below all you have to do is write a short review of no more than 300 words. In return you get to keep the reviewed item.

Happy Families?: Atypical work and its influence on family life
Ivana La Valle, Sue Arthur, Christine Millward, James Scott with Marion Clayden
The Policy Press

Forging a new future: The experiences and expectations of people leaving paid work over 50
Helen Barnes, Jane Parry and Jane Lakey
The Policy Press

The Pivot Generation: Informal care and work after fifty
Ann Mooney and June Statham with Antonia Simon
The Policy Press

Past it at 40?: A grassroots view of ageism and discrimination in employment.
A report undertaken for Third Age Foundation by SMA Associates
The Policy Press

New roles for old: Local authority members and partnership working
Mick Wilkinson and Gary Craig
Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Children, Family And The State: Decision making and child-participation
Nigel Thomas
The Policy Press

Who Cares: Childminding in the 1990s
Ann Mooney, Abigail Knight, Peter Moss and Charlie Owen
Family Policy Studies Centre / Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Understanding Social Science: Philosophical Introduction to the social sciences (second edition)
Roger Trigg
Blackwell Publishing

NCVO Conference Report

8th Researching the Voluntary Sector Conference Nottingham, September 2002

The 2002 conference was held at the University of Nottingham campus, where 141 delegates met to discuss current research, the policy implications of research and the need for further development of research in the voluntary and community sector.

The daytime programme of the conference comprised paper presentations, workshops, posters and displays of information and research related software. The conference dinner, preceded by a drinks reception, provided delegates with an opportunity to socialise and network with their colleagues from all over the world in a relaxed atmosphere.

Stuart Etherington, Chief Executive Officer of NCVO, presented Eldin Fahmy, Sarah Cemlyn and David Gordon from the University of Bristol with this year's Campbell Adamson Memorial Prize for their paper 'Poverty, Neighbourhood Renewal and the Voluntary Sector in West Cornwall'. Based on interviews representing views across different sectors, at different organisational levels and in different localities, the study addressed the need to improve relationships with statutory agencies and to encourage community development, as well as obstacles to accessing regeneration funding and challenging images of community. The paper was specifically praised for showing a clear link between the research and its policy context.

The conference showed the broad spread of research activities taking place in and on behalf of the voluntary and community sector. The research philosophy issues brought up in the opening plenary stimulate discussion throughout the conference, sessions on research by community groups highlighted the realities of research carried out at grassroots level.

Paper presentations

The shape and role of the voluntary and community sector were discussed in a range of papers on changing relationships between government, at all levels of devolution, and the sector; on organisational structure and identity and on the culture and intrinsic values of organisations. In addition, there were sessions addressing a variety of methodological issues.

The research pages of NCVO's website (http://www.ncvo-vol.org.uk/main/about/info/research.html) contain information on all the work the research team is involved with. It also contains all papers presented at the 2001 and 2002 Researching the Voluntary Sector Conferences.

Call for papers

The 9th conference will be held on 2-3 September 2003, and we are now inviting paper proposals on all topics, for example user involvement and empowerment, the voluntary and community sector in a changing political climate, the role of the sector in building social capital, community capacity building, managing resources, organisational values and culture, research methodological issues, social marketing/fundraising, European/International working, changing shape of the sector, including traditionally excluded groups in research.

Format and timing of submissions

We are interested to receive papers on work in progress as well as completed projects. Submissions may be in the following formats:
- single entry papers, which will be grouped into sessions by the conference organisers
- session proposals, comprising several papers on a related topic
- workshops/panels, comprising interactive discussion led by one or more discussants/conveners
- poster displays, particularly suitable for work-in-progress

The following applies to submissions of all formats:

- Abstracts of 400-600 words should be received by NCVO by **17 February 2003**
- Authors will be notified of acceptance of their submissions by **10 March 2003**
- Papers of 2,000-2,500 words for all oral presentations are required by **19 May 2003**
- Abstracts and papers must be in Times New Roman, 11-point, single spaced
- At least one author of each paper and all involved in workshops/panels must book a delegate place by **19 May 2003**
- Submissions for full sessions and workshops/panels must include chairs/conveners.

Submissions that do not fulfil these requirements will not be considered for acceptance.

Further information

Contact Jayne Blackborow in the Research Team on 020 7520 2484, or email jayne.blackborow@ncvo-vol.org.uk

Doing Your Research Project: A guide for first-time researchers in education and social science

Judith Bell
Buckingham, Open University Press. (Third edition, 1999)

Reviewed by: Sarah Earthy, Department of Sociology, University of Surrey

Doing Your Research Project takes the novice researcher through each stage of a research project from initial planning to the final report. For those familiar with previous editions, the third edition includes new material on narrative enquiry, carrying out a literature review, the use of electronic search engines, the role of a supervisor, and ethical practice.

Despite the array of social research methods books, *Doing Your Research Project* continues to fill a niche. The material is specifically directed at first time researchers carrying out '100 hour' projects over a period of two or three months. The obvious audience is undergraduates and postgraduates embarking on research for a dissertation although might also include professionals who wish to carry out research alongside other activities. The examples used in the guide all come from research in education but the principles are easily transferred to other fields.

A key strength of the guide is the way in which Bell combines descriptions of good research practice with a pragmatic assessment of what is feasible in the time available. So, for example, she suggests that 'relatability' rather than generalisability might be a more appropriate goal for time-limited case studies. Other attractive features include the provision of checklists and use of reflexive accounts by first time researchers on issues such as insider research.

The guide has some inevitable weaknesses given the breadth of methods covered in only 230 pages. The term 'methodology' is used interchangeably with 'method' with little discussion of the role of theory in informing choice of method. There is also scarce coverage of how to interpret and present qualitative data. However, these criticisms aside, *Doing Your Research Project* remains an extremely useful and accessible overall guide for the novice/daunted researcher.

The Cultural Industries

David Hesmondhalgh (2002)
London: Sage (Paperback £17.99)
ISBN 0 7619 5453 8

Reviewed by Paul Allin, Office for National Statistics (previously head of statistics and social policy unit, Department for Culture, Media and Sport)

David Hesmondhalgh explains that he had three aims in writing this textbook: to measure change in the cultural industries, to evaluate it, and to explain it. His definition of the cultural industries is set out and explained in the book's introduction. This book mainly focuses on a list of 'industries that are centrally concerned with the industrial production and dissemination of texts'. These industries are (in alphabetical order): advertising and marketing; broadcasting; film industries; the internet industry; the music industry; print and electronic publishing; video and computer games.

Hesmondhalgh explores these cultural industries in ten clearly written chapters. Each chapter discusses a significant theme, such as industrial and organisational change, or internationalisation, across all the industries. Terms and key topics are well described, including in boxes within the text. The book draws on a wide range of sources and contains useful data on major companies (up to around the year 2000).

The author sets out to combine a political economy approach with material from the fields of cultural studies, sociology, communication studies and social theory. This provides a rich mix. It proves a good way of obtaining many useful insights to the workings of the cultural industries and to major policy concerns, such as the convergence of the different media used to disseminate 'texts'.

So does Hesmondhalgh meet his three aims? In many ways he does. It is difficult to fault the analyses and commentary in this comprehensive review of key entertainment industries. However, there are perhaps three areas in which the author may want to go further in subsequent editions of the book (and I suggest that it will anyway need updating as these industries seem to be changing rapidly).

First, Hesmondhalgh gives very little coverage to the 'creative industries'. Indeed, he rather dismisses the extension from the cultural industries, as he defines them, to the wider creative industries as only bringing in 'the more craft-based activities of jewellery making, fashion, furniture design and household objects and so on'. This does seem rather to miss the point of the creative industries, as they are described by the New Labour Government, and gives no reference to the policy papers and research material available for example on the DCMS website www.culture.gov.uk/creative/creative_industries.html).

In particular, the Creative Industries Mapping Documents of 1998 and 2001 would appear to be the kind of resource that should be signalled and commented on in Hesmondhalgh's book. However, I could find no reference to them, which is a curious omission. Individual creative industries are often featured in the business press and the Financial Times regularly reviews them. The creative industries, including design, are now seen as part of the powerhouse of the new economy. A critical appraisal of the evidence would form a valuable addition to Hesmondhalgh's already wide-ranging study.

A second area that could be built on in a subsequent edition is the extent to which there is a blurring of the boundaries between creative industries. I was prompted to think about this point after reading a piece by Robert Violette in the Nov/Dec 2002 issue of Tate magazine. Violette suggests that this is not necessarily an

sra reviews

innovation of our time, but goes on to say that 'categories - which divide as much as define - are less important now than ever before'. I would be very interested to read a future analysis by Hesmondhalgh on whether or not there is evidence for this within the creative industries.

Finally, as Hesmondhalgh explains, the 'culture industry' started out as a disparaging term in the middle of the 20th Century. He does not dwell on this, but again there are perhaps more messages to draw out on the implications of turning the culture industry into the entertainment and pleasure industries of the 21st Century. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W Adorno's seminal 1944 paper was subtitled 'enlightenment as mass deception'. Their view was that the power of culture – and the power of the cultural elite – was being weakened by its mass transmission.

Do we still accept that mass culture (the culture industry) leads to standardisation and mass production, so that the individual reader of the text is 'deprived of the opportunity to relate a wealth of sensory impressions to fundamental concepts' (as Trond Bergen wrote as recently as 1994)? With a literature such as the Journal of Consumer Culture now starting to appear, there are lots more questions to ask about how we consume culture (or not) as well as how we integrate culture into our consumption (for those who are not socially excluded).

David Lodge is among those who have posed a question that has always preoccupied the left: is the acquisition of culture dependent on the availability of money (either directly or as the means of acquiring cultural capital, including the knowledge and confidence with which to engage with cultural texts)? Can culture survive and indeed thrive in the face of - as the critics of the cultural industries might put it - remorseless populism?

This is not meant to sound like Oliver, just asking for more! Hesmondhalgh's book already raises and addresses many important and topical issues across the cultural industries. It should become a key text in this evolving and prominent aspect of contemporary economic and social life. Read it and reflect on the cultural industries all round us.

Guide to successful personal interviews and focus groups with older people.
Malcolm J. Fisk
University of Stirling Housing Policy Unit, Occasional Papers on Housing 13, £5, ISBN 1857691709, 2002

We have two reviews of this paper, each giving a slightly different perspective.

Reviewed by Rachael Gooberman-Hill, MRC Health Services Research Collaboration, Department of Social Medicine, University of Bristol

This occasional paper provides sensible guidance on some of the issues that arise when conducting interviews and focus groups with older people. If used as an adjunct to basic interviewing skills, it is a helpful resource for those who supervise or conduct social research with older people. Those who teach research techniques will find that the paper succinctly covers many of the pragmatic concerns that students tend to raise.

In the early sections, Fisk covers ageism, ethical considerations and inclusion. The paper encourages readers to query some commonly held ageist stereotypes and values, for instance of the 'the lonely little old woman or man'. This seems appropriate as the groundwork for successful, ethical and unbiased research. Therefore, the following discussion of ethical issues and inclusion is underpinned by an understanding of older people as a far from homogenous group. This said, the paper does suggest solutions for some of the common concerns that researchers may have: for instance, how to interview people with hearing impairment, and how to deal with aggression. Many of these relate equally to other sections of the population.

While this paper is more than a 'how to' manual, much of it does contain specific practical tips. Latter sections include: setting up interviews; negotiating with gatekeepers; elicitation of accurate material; how to ask questions; plus health and safety considerations. The paper also mentions the minutiae of social research such as personal appearance and how to address interviewees. These seemingly minor techniques and knowledge are often left unsaid but are actually important elements of the research process. So, their inclusion is welcome in order to provide guidance for new researchers and reassurance to more experienced ones.

If used in conjunction with the concise reference list, this paper should be of great use to those who conduct, teach, plan or supervise research with older people.

Reviewed by Helen Finch, an independent consultant and trainer in qualitative research methods, previously based at the National Centre for Social Research.

Being, it might be said, almost an older person myself, and one experienced over the years in interviewing older people, I was attracted to this publication. It sets out to consider 'circumstances affecting older people that warrant particular consideration' for researchers using personal interviews and focus groups. It also looks briefly at the respective roles of these methods in general, and the practicalities of setting them up. Personal interviews here encompass sessions of varying structure, though the emphasis appears to be more on survey or semi-structured interviews than those which might be termed in-depth.

The guide highlights the need to be on guard against ageist perspectives, and aware of obligations to older interviewees; it addresses specific challenges of access to

or communication with some older people, including the practicalities of conducting research in care homes, or of interviewing people with physical or sensory impairments; and it provides tips for the interviewer on making the right impression and on how to encourage frankness of response. 'Making the right impression' for example includes the importance of interviewers keeping to scheduled arrangements, of being prepared to take things at a slower pace, and to give more of themselves through friendly initial discussion to build rapport. All these issues and more are presented with an upbeat positive slant rather than as 'problems'.

The guide is brief (just 25 pages) and is rooted in research around housing policy and practice. Perhaps because of this context, focus groups are portrayed in a rather limited way. The role of focus groups and in-depth interviews in research studies with older people, exploring older people's health needs for example, or subjective social experiences on all manner of topics, holds considerably more scope than that outlined here. Yet this is a criticism of omission rather than inaccuracy. There is much of value here for all researchers working with older people, whatever their field of enquiry and whether qualitative or quantitative in approach.

Simulation for the Social Scientist
Nigel Gilbert and Klaus G. Troitzsch

Reviewed by Karl Olsen

As a newcomer to simulation theory, this book provided a comprehensive overview of current theories and practices. A high degree of mathematical knowledge is required to fully understand simulation theory, yet readers interested in the theory and practice of simulation will find this a useful tool.

Chapters One and Two introduce the advantages of simulation in the social sciences whilst making it clear that when using this method we need a strong theoretical basis and that even complicated models are unlikely to fully reproduce the behaviour of the social world. Chapter Three moves into the practical realm of simulation with examples of system dynamics and world models including the programmes to develop them. It is at this point that the book requires a high level of mathematical knowledge as it becomes necessarily complex. However for those who require further details, at the end of each chapter is a useful additional reading section. Chapter Four moves into micro analytical methodologies using taxes and transfer policies, while Chapter Five explores queuing models including the caveats of modelling human behaviour. Chapter Six discusses multilevel models and introduces us to MIMOSE software including problems with the design and their impact on models. Chapter Seven introduces cellular automata and how they can be used to model local interactions using LISP language (a brief guide is also provided for this). Chapter Eight provides information on developing complex multi agent models and Chapter Nine explains how we can incorporate learning and evolution into models.

Overall this book will provide the experienced

researcher with an overview of the advantages and disadvantages of simulation in the social sciences. For those who wish to develop models there is sufficient information to begin and directed reading to advance further. While it is important that researchers are aware of emerging techniques such as simulation this book requires a strong knowledge of mathematics and quantitative methodologies in order to fully understand the concepts.

Qualitative Data Analysis - Explorations with NVivo
By Graham R Gibbs in the Understanding Social Research Series
Editor: Alan Bryman, Open University Press, 2002

Reviewed by Pat McGinn, Development Consultant

This is an excellent text for both apprentice and more experienced researchers whose work requires them to analyse large amounts of qualitative data. All social researchers will have some familiarity with computer-aided quantitative data analysis software. Whether using the mighty SPSS or the humbler spreadsheet, desktop computers have enabled researchers to analyse volumes of numerical data with ease. Until recently, data analysis software for qualitative researchers has lagged far behind that available to our number-crunching cousins. Not any more. Following on from the NUD*IST programme, the Australian QSR firm launched NVivo in 1999. The software facilitates the researcher to code and relate the attributes of different pieces of data to emerging conceptual models. The package has a steep learning curve and this book provides a welcome route map to complement the reference guide, companion volume and instructional material that are packaged with the software. While the book refers to Version 1 of the package and Version 2 is on release, this should not dissuade readers.

The author's text is highly accessible and usefully contextualised. Following an introductory chapter on the philosophy of qualitative research, the writer explains in simple steps the use of the primary user-programme interface - the 'project pad'. Subsequent chapters deal with preparing your data for input, coding it, searching for data with particular combinations of codes, developing and exploring models. The book concludes with guidance on communicating the results of the analysis. A nice feature for students and their lecturers is the availability of the demonstration data the author uses throughout the volume for downloading from a website. This will enable students to follow the systematic guidance more easily. For those, like myself, involved in organisational research, Chapter 8 on different style of analysis is particularly instructive.

One of the features that I like about NVivo is that it keeps me 'close to the data' and, while allowing for the volume of data analysed to increase hugely, it helps to maintain attention to issues of quality of data, validity of concepts, reliability of coding and, ultimately, transparency of analysis. NVivo offers much to those who wish to apply qualitative analysis but want to move away from impressionistic and selective accounts of data. This book helps us to use the software effectively to achieve this.

Meetings, seminars, courses and conferences

TRAINING DAYS

- **19th March - Focus Groups**
- **28th May - Conducting and Managing Research**
- **17th September - Qualitative Interviewing**
- **18th November - Self Completion Questionnaires**

All training days will be held at the London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London, N7 6PA.

Any queries relating to the content of these days or about future SRA training events should be addressed to Joanne Maher, on 020 7533 5372, email joanne.maher@ons.gov.uk

Fees: members £65, non-members (includes membership of SRA for one year) £110, student/unwaged £16. To make a booking, either print out the specific booking form or print out and complete our standard booking form (at www.the-sra.org.uk) and send it with payment to the SRA or contact the SRA administrative office.

To make a booking for a training day or for the evening seminar contact the SRA administrative office on 020 8670 5460, fax: 020 7635 6014, email: admin@the-sra.org.uk.
www.the-sra.org.uk

EVENTS

Association for Survey Computing

- **17-19 September 2003: The Impact of Technology on the Survey Process**
at Warwick University – the fourth ASC International Conference.

Details: ASC Administrator: Diana Elder, ASC, PO Box 60, Chesham, Bucks HP5 3QH, UK
Tel and Fax: 0494 793033,
Email: Admin@asc.org.uk
www.asc.org.uk

University of Reading SSC Courses in Applied Statistics

- **24-26 February: Research Data Management**
- **17-18 March: Describing Data Simply**
- **31 March-1 April: A Review of Basic Statistics**
- **2-3 April: Understanding Analysis of Variance**
- **28-30 April: Practical Bayesian Data Analysis**
- **19-20 May: Investigating Relationships**

The Statistical Services Centre offers a wide variety of courses for a range of audiences.

Too numerous to list here in full (31 courses are in the current list to November 2003), there is likely to be something here for anybody feeling the need to improve their research skills. The aim is to provide the skills necessary for dealing with particular problems, with the emphasis on the practical application of statistics.

For more information contact: Statistical Services Centre, The University of Reading, tel: 0118 931 8689, fax: 0118 975 3169, email statistics@reading.ac.uk
www.rdg.ac.uk/ssc/

Lancaster University Centre for Applied Statistics in conjunction with Information Systems Services - Statistics Short Courses

- **26-27 February: Secondary Data Analysis**
- **3-5 March: SPSS for Windows I**
- **6-7 March: Applied Social Science Research II**
- **13-15 May: SPSS for Windows II**

For details of fees and other information, telephone 01524 593064, email: m.peckham@lancaster.ac.uk
www.cas.lancs.ac.uk/short_courses

CASS Courses

17-18 March 2003: Short Course: Web Survey Design
2-4 April: Survey Data Analysis III
at the University of Southampton
7-9 April: Survey Sampling
at the City University, London
8-9 May: Classifying and Scoring People in Surveys
at the University of York
27-29 May: Telephone Survey Design
at the Royal Statistical Society, London

A number of bursaries are available which reduce the fee payable - applicants must be full-time students, UK academic staff or ESRC-funded researchers.

For further information contact: Jane Schofield, Department of Social Statistics, University of Southampton, 023 8059 3048, email: cass@socsci.soton.ac.uk
www.socstats.soton.ac.uk/cass

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CCSR Short Course Programme

Level one courses

- **12 February, 26 February: Introduction to Data Analysis Part 1**

Level two courses

- **28 February: Logistic Regression**
- **19 March: Conceptualising Longitudinal Analysis**
- **20 March: Introduction to Longitudinal Analysis**
- **12 March: Data Management with STATA**

Level three courses

- **27-29 March: Design and Analysis of Complex Surveys**

Fees: one day courses £120, two-day courses £200, three-day courses £500 (reduced fees for those from educational institutions)
For more information please contact Nasira Asghar, tel: 0161 275 4736, email nasira.asghar@man.ac.uk
www.ccsr.ac.uk/courses/shortsumm2002.htm

University of Surrey Day Courses in Social Research

26 March: Research Management
with Roger Tarling

8-9 April: Qualitative Data Analysis, Methods and Software Tools
with Ann Lewins and Christina Silver

7 May: Attitudes and How to Measure Them
with Patrick Sturgis

14 May: Designing Samples for Surveys
with Sara Arber

All courses take place at the University of Surrey campus at Guildford.

One-day courses cost £120 each, inclusive of course materials and lunch. A reduced rate of £100* per course is available for those from educational institutions and registered charities. Standby places for full-time PhD students cost £20.

The course on qualitative data analysis, methods and software tools lasts two days and costs £200 (£180 for educational institutions and charities).

For further information please phone the University of Surrey at 01483 689458. Email: day.courses@soc.surrey.ac.uk www.soc.surrey.ac.uk/daycourses/

London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine University of London

- **Ageing Health and Wellbeing in Older Populations**
  7-11 April
  London

Multi-disciplinary course in ageing and its implications at both the population and individual level providing up to date research-based training on this important topic.

Fees: £575 excl accommodation and meals.

Further information: Deborah Curle, tel: 020 7927 2489; Deborah.curle@lstm.ac.uk

CONFERENCES

World Congress on Family Violence

- **2nd World Congress on Family Violence**
  21-26 June
  Prague

The biennial World Congress on Family Violence (WCFV) is Co-Sponsored by the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva Switzerland. The Congress Theme: Protecting Every Generation: sharing solutions that prevent child abuse, spouse/partner abuse (domestic violence), and elder abuse.

You can register online and submit abstract proposals online at: www.wcfv.org

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Institute of Education

- **2-day workshop on the National Child Development Study (NCDS) and the 1970 British Cohort Study (BCS70) for past and potential users Wednesday/Thursday 2/3 April 2003**
  A copy of the provisional programme is available via the CLS website www.cls.ioe.ac.uk/Cohort/ cohtwkshop1.html. To reserve a place for one or both days please complete and return the workshop booking form as soon as possible.

Further information:
Jackie Goossens, Centre for Longitudinal Studies, 20 Bedford Way, London WC1H 0AL Tel: 020 7612 6875

Association for Survey Computing

- **Survey and Statistical Computing 1V: The impact of technology on the survey process**
  17-19 September 2003
  Warwick University

Further details from Diana Elder admin@asc.org.uk; Tel/Fax: 01494 793033
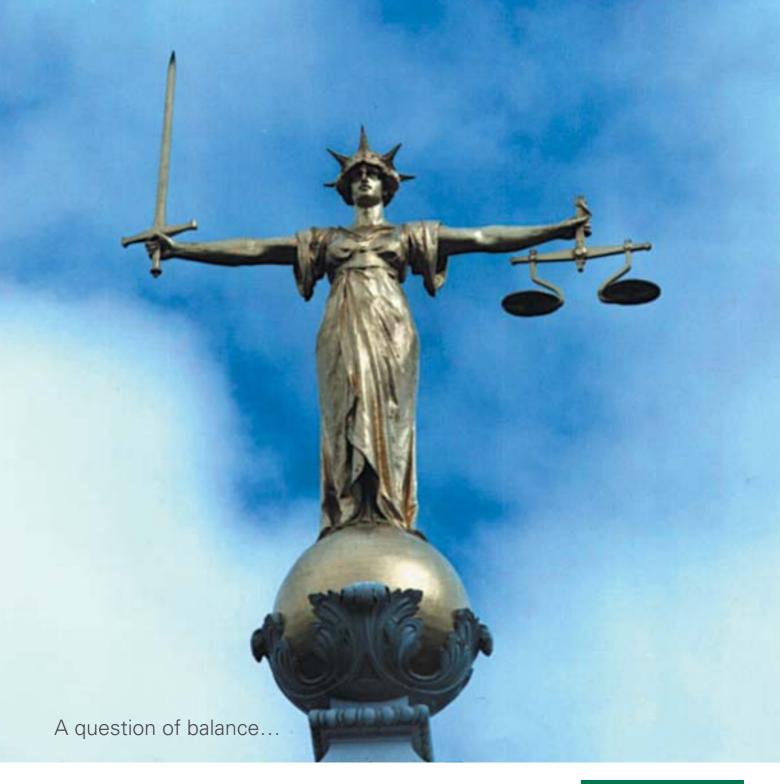

LARIA Annual Conference

- **New Data – New Research: The Importance for UK Local Government**
  28-30 April 2003
  Edinburgh Conference Centre, Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh. £275.

Further info www.laria.gov.uk