

GREAT EXPECTATIONS: the Social Sciences in Britain

Professor Susanne MacGregor, Institute of Social and Health Research, School of Health and Social Sciences, Middlesex University discusses the Report of the Commission on Social Sciences.

Why Great Expectations? David Rhind, the Chair of the Commission, says that the title was chosen because many people have high hopes for what social science can contribute in the 21st century.

David Blunkett's speech to the ESRC Annual Conference in February 2000 is quoted: 'Social Science should be at the heart of policy-making. We need a revolution in relations between government and the social research community – we need social scientists to help determine what works and why, and what type of policy initiatives are likely to be most effective. And we need better ways of ensuring that those who need such information can get it quickly and easily'. The report concludes that these high hopes are justified – UK social science is second only to that in the USA in its quality and volume, but in order to have more impact, the social science community will have to improve its game. A key message is that social research is not as influential as it might be: there are many myths and huge areas of ignorance, partly because social scientists do not communicate well with the media and with other users of research evidence, especially politicians and civil servants.

In his speech at the launch event, Secretary of State for Education, Charles Clarke, commended

the report because it identifies ways in which the dialogue between research and policy-makers can be improved. He also agreed with its emphasis on the need for more and better multi-disciplinary

research. In key policy areas like drug misuse, a cross-departmental and multi-disciplinary approach is necessary, he said. He also agreed with the conclusion that research should become more international. We need to understand and know more about how different countries address social issues.

Another finding of the report, singled out for special mention by Clarke, is its observation that 'think-tanks' (in which independent research centres seem to be included) now play a key role in social research. The fact that think-tanks have become so influential must be, he thought, a rebuke to universities. Social science departments should model themselves more on the think-

tanks and, in particular, be more aware of the need to try to influence the media - because the media shape public opinion. Clarke singled out the Institute for Fiscal Studies as an example of a body that has been able to influence the public debate by being media-friendly (while, one might add,

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Commission on the Social Sciences
March 2003

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Committee

Chair

Ceridwen Roberts

Dept. of Social Policy and Social Work
University of Oxford
Barnett House
32 Wellington Square
Oxford OX1 2ER
Tel: 01865 289324
Email: ceridwen.roberts@btopenworld.com
ceridwen.roberts@socres.ox.ac.uk

Vice-Chair

Ann Bridgwood

Arts Council England
14 Great Peter Street
London
SW1P 3NQ
Tel: 020 7973 6837
Fax: 020 7973 6449
Email: ann.bridgwood@artscouncil.org.uk

Secretary

Mark Wardman

Public Services Research Directorate
The Audit Commission
1 Vincent Square,
London SW1P 2PN
Tel: 020 7396 1345
Fax: 020 7396 1304
Email: m-wardman@audit-
commission.gov.uk

Treasurer

Post Vacant

Public Affairs

Post Vacant

Training

Tracey Budd

Head of Offending Surveys and Research
Offender Research and Analysis Programme
Room 846
Home Office
50 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AT
Tel: 020 7273 2355
Fax: 020 7273 4491
Email: tracey.budd@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Events

Juliet Whitworth

Local Government Association
Local Government House
Smith Square
SW1P 3HZ
Tel: 020 7664 3287
Fax: 020 7664 3004
Email: juliet.whitworth@lga.gov.uk

Membership

Nick Smith

The Research Partnership
13 Oldway Park
Wellington
Somerset
TA21 8EB
Tel: 01823 667999
Fax: 01823 669882
Mobile: 07976 723430
Email: nick.smith@researchpartnership.org.uk

SRA News Editorial Committee

Post Vacant

SRA Scotland

Kerstin Hinds

National Centre for Social Research
Chisholm House
1 Surgeon Square
High School Yards
Edinburgh EH1 1LZ
Tel: 0131 557 5494
Email: k.hinds@natcen.ac.uk

Ordinary Members

Wendy Russell Barter

Principal Research Officer
Local & Regional Government Research Unit
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Tel: 020 7944 4124
Fax: 020 7944 5183
Email: wendy.russell_barter@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

Dr. Peter Humphreys

Director of Research
Institute of Public Administration
Vergemount Hall
Clonskeagh
Dublin 6, Ireland
Tel: 00353 1 240 3755
Fax: 00353 1 269 8644
Email: phumphreys@ipa.ie

Professor Susanne MacGregor

Institute of Social and Health Research
School of Health and Social Sciences
Middlesex University
Queensway
Enfield EN3 4SF
Tel: 020 8362 6173
Fax: 020 8362 5440
Email: s.macgregor@mdx.ac.uk

Dr Simon Maxwell

Research and Development Division
Neighbourhood Renewal Unit
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Zone 6/G6
Eland House
Bressenden Place
London SW1E 5DU
Tel: 020 7944 8368
Fax: 020 7944 8319
Email: Simon.Maxwell@odpm.gsi.gov.uk

Siân Llewellyn-Thomas

Associate Director
Social Division
Taylor Nelson Sofres
Westgate
London W5 1UA
Tel: 020 8967 4288
Fax: 020 8967 4330
Email: sian.llewellyn-thomas@tnsofres.com

Mark Dunn

Employer's Organisation
Layden House
76-86 Turnmill Street
London
EC1M 5LG
Tel: 020 7296 6830
Fax: 020 7296 6666
Email: mark.dunn@lg-employers.gov.uk

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SRA NEWS – next issue

Copy deadlines for the next issues of the newsletter are:

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

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

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Professor Janet Walker

Director
Newcastle Centre for Family Studies
18 Windsor Terrace
University of Newcastle
Newcastle Upon Tyne
NE1 7RU
Tel: 0191 222 7644
Fax: 0191 222 7871

Administration Office

Suzanne Cohen
Administrator
Social Research Association (SRA)
PO Box 33660
London N16 6WE
Tel: 020 8880 5684
Fax: 020 8880 5684
Email: admin@the-sra.org.uk

SRA News Editor

Shirley Henderson
c/o SRA Administration
PO Box 33660
London N16 6WE
Tel: 020 8880 5684
Fax: 020 8880 5684
Email: admin@the-sra.org.uk

Ceridwen Roberts

Are the social sciences and social research in a healthy state?

The recently published report of the Commission on the Social Sciences, *Great Expectations; the social sciences in Britain*, is an important benchmark assessing the health and role of social science in the UK today. It's a dense read but repays close scrutiny as it not only sets out some of the key facts and figures about the burgeoning of social science activity in the universities and government but also has some hard-hitting recommendations. And crucially, it's about improving the quality, visibility and application of social science based research. This concerns all of us in social research.



On first look there might appear to be little about many of the sectors SRA members are drawn from. As Susanne McGregor rightly remarks in her review of the launch, the report focuses on the university sector and therefore the academic production of social science research and teaching. Much good and bad research done in independent research centres, non-profit making organisations, public sector agencies and the social arm of the commercial sector gets very limited consideration. However, the report reviews all of these, if briefly. Members working in the NHS, local government and the voluntary sector should all read the chapter on 'Social science in practice'. And those members working in the devolved or regional administrations will find the report's analysis of both the demand for 'regionally-orientated research work, mostly of an applied nature' and the failure of the academics to meet this very interesting. The report's concern about the below average quality of social science in HEIs in these areas is also worrying.

SRA concerns

It is impossible to do justice to the many ideas and recommendations. But there are several themes which reflect SRA concerns. The report begins with examples of ways in which social sciences contribute to society's well being and reminds us that unlike the physical sciences we still have to prove that we are useful. While the indications are that the message is getting through, the report is clear that the research community has a long way to go in tackling this 'deficit of understanding and awareness about the social sciences'. It needs to improve dissemination to practitioners, policy makers and the public and the report argues for much more effort to be directed here and the emergence of intermediaries.

What is missing in the report is more about how this activity should be funded. SRA members living on soft money, delivering tightly priced contractual research and or highly pressurised to meet RAE targets are not well placed to do this. The Commission is quite right to argue that RAE criteria need to change but this is only one factor.

There is a powerful criticism of bad procurement practices by government and agencies, which make the SRA's recent publication *Commissioning Social Research- a guide to good practice*, very timely. There are mixed messages about the volume and quality of social science education and training with much emphasis on undergraduate and postgraduate courses and numbers but almost nothing about career development for social scientists more generally. This is a serious gap. It is all the more paradoxical because the report worries about the cottage industry nature of much social science research and laments the limited nature of multidisciplinary and international research but does not address the management and leadership skills managing large complex projects requires.

The growing importance of the charitable sector as a funder or purchaser of research is revealed. This is an area where SRA members have a lot to offer as they, more than many academics, are used to doing contract research, working in partnerships and undertaking evaluation projects and so the recommendation that this is a fruitful field of research is particularly apposite.

One of the most striking sections of the report deals with the issue of *who speaks for the Social Sciences?* at a high level. We have no equivalent of the Royal Society which so powerfully publicly represents the interests of the physical sciences. The Commission therefore recommends that the principle of a single channel for social science advice is accepted by government and adequate funding put in place (the Royal Society gets about £20 million a year from the Government). And it argues that the two representative bodies, the British Academy and the Academy (ALSISS) should be encouraged to work closer together to generate a spokesperson-like role.

There is much in this report to debate and consider as well as act on. Professor David Rhind, the chair of the Commission will be speaking about it and discussing its recommendations at an SRA evening seminar on 30 June. Do come along and put your points to him.

SRA Review Day

The SRA executive is taking part in a full review of all the SRA activities. We are calling on the help of past Executive and senior SRA members from all sectors of the profession to challenge our thinking and help us set realistically ambitious goals to develop the SRA over the next few years. We are very conscious that there is much to do to build on the first 25 years of the SRA. Social Research has expanded enormously and the SRA now needs to do the same. So watch this space.

Summer Event

If the Commission is urging more of us to do international research then knowing more about the different research traditions, standards and procedures across Europe becomes important. This is the theme of our Summer Event when several of our partners from the EC project RESPECT will compare policies and practices across different EC countries on issues like the ethics of research, intellectual property rights and training and professional issues. Come along and take part in what promises to be a lively and interesting day.

The SRA Looks Ahead

At the SRA AGM in January, chair Ceridwen Roberts reported that it had been a challenging year for the SRA but that efforts spent on consolidating the organisation and concentrating on establishing a firm financial and administrative infrastructure had paid off. An interesting and varied programme of seminars and training attracted a wide range of participants. The SRA also published two well-received publications – the revised Ethical Guidelines and the second edition of the Commissioning Social Research Guidelines. The AGM elected the following new members to the Executive:

Vice Chair: Ann Bridgwood, Director of Research, Arts Council England

Ann taught social science in further education for 13 years. After completing her Doctorate in Social Anthropology, she worked as an educational researcher, first at the National Foundation for Educational Research and then at the University of North London. She moved to the Office for National Statistics in 1991, where she led research projects on health, prisoners and adult literacy. She joined the Arts Council England in 2000 to establish a new research department, which is responsible for developing and implementing programmes of research and evaluation. She tutors for the Open University Social Science foundation course.

Ordinary Members:

Dr Peter Humphreys, Director of Research, Institute of Public Administration, Dublin

Dr Humphreys is a graduate of the University of Liverpool and holds a Masters Degree in Contemporary European Studies from the University of Reading and a Doctorate from University College, London. He is a Fellow of the Royal Statistical Society. He has over 25 years' professional research and management experience at local, regional, national and international levels. From 1989-1997 he was National Director of Research and Statistics at the Equal Opportunities Commission. He is a member of the Government's Quality Customers Service Working Group, the Committee for Public Management Research, the Strategic Planning Society, the Public Management and Policy Association and Excellence Ireland. He is a member of the National Disability Authority's Standards Advisory Committee and the Equality Authority's Research Forum.

Professor Susanne MacGregor, Professor of Social Policy and Director of Research and Post-Graduate Studies in the School of Health and Social Sciences at Middlesex University

Prior to joining Middlesex, Susanne was a Professor at Goldsmith's College and before that a Reader at Birkbeck College, University of London. She was Chair of the RAE2001 Social Policy and Administration and Social Work Panel. Her research and publications are mainly in the areas of poverty and social exclusion, urban problems and policies, substance misuse and community studies. She has a developing interest in global social policy. She is currently Programme Co-ordinator for the Department of Health's £2.4m Drugs

Misuse Research Initiative funded under its Policy Research Programme.

Siân Llewellyn-Thomas, Associate Director of TNS Social

Siân has nine years social research experience and has been a member of the SRA since joining at university (BSc in Applied Social Science/Social Research from the University of North London). She is also a member of the Market Research Society and the Association for Qualitative Research. Her research career began at Haringey Health Authority as a student placement as part of her degree course. She returned to conduct some ad-hoc projects before moving to Public Participation, Consultation and Research (PPCR Associates) specialising in providing research and training services to local authorities, housing associations and voluntary organisations. In 1998, she joined the Social Division of Taylor Nelson Sofres and now conducts social research for a wide variety of public sector clients.

For a copy of the SRA AGM minutes, please contact the SRA administrative office.

Keeping Track

Check out Keeping Track, a guide to longitudinal resources at www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/projects/ldr4ss/index.php. This website developed jointly by the Institute of Economic and Social Research and the UK's Office for National Statistics, provide an up-to-date guide to major longitudinal sources of data.

London Research Focus Group

The LRFG has recently completed research for the London Borough of Ealing developing neighbourhood profiles of three areas, which are part of the borough's targets for renewal. The three profile reports include a demographic, social, economic and environment profile of each neighbourhood, which will include ethnicity, refugee status, disability, income etc. The research also examined resident's perceptions and expectations in areas affecting their quality of life (health, housing, crime, unemployment and the local environment etc. A video was produced with the assistance of young people in the neighbourhoods.

For more information and a copy of the report and video contact: Bill Smith-Bowers London Research Focus Group, University of Westminster, 020 7911 5000 x3259 w.j.smithbowers@wmin.ac.uk www.wmin.ac.uk/lrfg/

CASS Question Bank

The CASS Question Bank (<http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk>) helps users obtain standardised measures of human beings by providing information on major survey topics and access to quantitative social survey questionnaires. The website reproduces instruments used to conduct important, large-scale, quantitative social surveys in the

United Kingdom. Its topics section contains methodological commentary and other technical material relating to survey questions and survey measurement. The broader aim is the improvement of social measurement in UK social science research.

News from CeLSIUS

CeLSIUS (Centre for Longitudinal Study Information and User Support) was established as the new user support service early last year and its website at www.celsius.lshtm.ac.uk has full details about current and past research on the LS support service and dataset developments. The website contains two online training modules about using the LS, 'Ethnicity' and 'Defining a Study Population', with more in development; a searchable list of publications; an online version of the data dictionary; and a newsletter.

The centre reports that linkage of 2001 Census data is going well and should be fully completed by the summer of 2004 (and test versions of the new data will be available earlier). Once these data are included, the LS will have information spanning a 40-year period. The 2001 Census also includes data which will provide new opportunities for research including, for example, two questions on health (and as one is the same as that

included in 1991, the potential to look at health transitions), questions on caregiving, religion and ethnicity (again for the second time) and improved and more detailed information on educational qualifications and intra-household relationships.

For contact information or to subscribe to the mailing list go to www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/ls-support.html.

Is the Minimum Wage Good for Training?

Has the introduction of the National Minimum Wage led to less training for British workers? Not according to new research from the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER). In fact, the study by Mark Bryan and Professors Wiji Arulampalam and Alison Booth suggests that the minimum wage may even have enhanced the training prospects of affected workers by up to ten percentage points.

Further information from: Institute for Social and Economic Research iser@essex.ac.uk
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GREAT EXPECTATIONS

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retaining professional integrity and a reputation for expert knowledge).

The Commission uses the term social research to refer to all research carried out within social science rather than as a subject in its own right. As noted earlier, think-tanks receive plaudits and universities are advised to learn lessons from them. The report says that some social scientists working in these organisations have had experience of universities and left because they were weary of the constraints of the university environment. Some criticised the quality of university-based research proposals and projects as amateurish, especially with regard to methodology and ability to write to the point for a general audience. The report comments that 'in the area of social research a surprising [why surprising?] amount of the creativity in research methods seems to come from the commercial research sector or from work by US academics' (p72).

One problem I have with this report is that, although it aims to be about the health of social science, it is largely about the health of the universities. The report is myopic in assuming that social science is and should be mainly conducted in universities. So confusions appear in its assessment of the health and influence of social science. It is true that British universities are pretty sickly and, of course, a healthy democracy must have independent bases for critical thought. And it may be that academics are hopeless at communication – although I have some reservations about the report's evidence-base for this. To demonstrate my point: - the report bemoans the fact that PhD graduates are not being retained in universities but are moving into jobs in government, think-tanks, development agencies and the commercial sector. This may be a problem for universities but it is not necessarily a problem for social science. Indeed it could be seen as a sign of the widening influence of social science that its ideas and methods are permeating society at large. Similarly, the report points out that there are half a million students annually studying social science subjects in universities. What better way to influence society than to influence the ideas and knowledge of generations of students who, when employed and as citizens, will be able to understand and interpret information in the light of this? By this measure, social science is having an increasing impact on society, a better measure perhaps than the number of mentions individual academics get in newspaper articles.

The report might equally well have been entitled 'Exploding the Myths'. It is itself a good piece of research, collating information from a variety of sources to provide a picture of the current shape of social science in Britain. The report makes 60 recommendations, 12 to government, nine to funding councils, six to universities, 15 to the ESRC, four to the Academy of Social Sciences, 11 to others and three to individual social scientists.

Recommendations which might interest SRA members include one that government should be more

transparent about its commissioning of research and another that a special programme should be set up to educate journalists and editors in the protocols and methods of social inquiry. Individual social scientists are advised to have their own websites and everyone enjoined to pay more attention to PR. The large amounts of dissemination in which social researchers are already involved do not get much mention – feedback to participants, talks to groups and conferences, briefing papers at local and regional levels – these are rather overlooked. There is strength however in acknowledging the role of intermediaries in liaising between policy and research. But here too the report seems to minimise the way in which this is already being done in a number of ways, for example by social scientists who conduct or manage research in government departments.

The idea for a Commission on the Social Sciences was the brainchild of the Academy of Learned Societies in the Social Sciences and the report may be found on its website at www.the-academy.org.uk/. The investigation was supported by funds from the Department of Education and Skills, HEFCE and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. It provides a lively and detailed overview of the state of social science in Britain.

Note: Professor David Rhind, who chaired the Commission, will be talking about the national review of the social sciences in more detail at a forthcoming SRA evening seminar. This will take place in London on 30 June, and is free to members. See the SRA events section on page 7 for more details.

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News please contact

Suzanne Cohen on

020 8880 5684 or

admin@the-sra.org.uk

SRA PROGRAMME FOR 2003

The SRA is offering a full programme of events for 2003 including seminars, training and discussion. These are a good opportunity to meet with others in your field and to share experience, knowledge, information and skills. Full details of all events are on www.the-sra.org or from the SRA administration office.

SEMINARS

21 May: Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles in Britain

There have been major changes in British family life in recent decades, including important shifts in people's sexual attitudes and behaviour. Kaye Wellings from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine will discuss key methodological issues and recent analyses from the most recent National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles in Britain (2000).

This evening seminar will take place at The Nuffield Foundation, Founders Room, 28 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3JS. It will start promptly at 5:00pm, followed by drinks at a local bar at 6.30pm.

19 June: Social Experiments: Research or Evaluation?

Joint event with the UK Evaluation Society. This will take place (10.30am-4pm to be confirmed) at the London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London, N7 6PA.

30 June: Great Expectations – The Social Sciences in Britain

The report of the national review of the social sciences was published on 25 March 2003. We are delighted to welcome the Chair of the Commission for Social Sciences, Professor David Rhind, to talk in some detail to us about the current strengths of the social sciences in Britain - which have an annual turnover of £2.8 billion in universities alone, 20% of which is for research - and areas of concern, as well as recommendations for key research 'players'. This evening seminar will also take place at the Nuffield Foundation, from 5:00pm till 6:30pm.

EVENTS

11 July: Summer Event: 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 is 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. The event will be held at the Local Government Association, Local Government House, Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ. 1 pm start.

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. This is a one-day event, at the London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London N7. 10.30 am start.

Further details:

A number of other evening seminars will also take place this year. Keep an eye on the next issues of the newsletter and other mailings for details.

Evening seminars are free to SRA members. A small charge of £5 is payable by non-members. There is no need to book, just turn up.

For further details of SRA events please contact the SRA administration office, the SRA website www.the-sra.org.uk or Juliet Whitworth: juliet.whitworth@lga.gov.uk

TRAINING DAYS

17 September: Qualitative Interviewing: an introduction

16 October: Conducting Focus Groups: an introduction

23 October: Commissioning and Managing Social Research

18 November: Better Questionnaire Design: Theory and Practice

Further details:

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

Further information about the content of the training days are on the SRA website www.the-sra.org.uk. You can also contact Tracey Budd, chair of the Training Committee, tracey.budd@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk.

Fees and booking:

- ◆ Members - £85
- ◆ Non-members - £130 (includes membership of SRA for a year)
- ◆ Students/unwaged - £20

To make a booking print out the standard booking form on the SRA website and send it, along with the payment, to the SRA Administration Office (see details on page 2). Non-members must send a completed membership form at the same time. If you require an invoice please contact the SRA Administration Office to arrange this (admin@the-sra.org.uk).

See page 8 for details of events and training run by the SRA in Scotland.

Mandy Littlewood gives an update

The Census in Scotland

On 10th March, Frank Thomas from the General Register Office of Scotland (GROS) updated us on recent developments on the 2001 Scottish Census data.

Norman Jamieson, Research and Information Manager at City Development in The City of Edinburgh Council, gave a user perspective on the 2001 Census. He outlined how the council plans to disseminate, analyse and interpret Census data to inform local policy and planning, as well as giving a flavour of the findings so far. In particular, Edinburgh is more comparable, in terms of population and household characteristics, to Aberdeen, Oxford and York than Glasgow. Also, while 60% of households in Edinburgh have a car, only 20% of households in Edinburgh have a child, which has possible implications for the city's education and transport policies.

The Census will be used by the council for community planning, structure plans and local plans as well as for service development strategies in areas such as housing, transport, local economic development, leisure services and community care services. The council has plans to disseminate the findings by the web, the council intranet and on data CDs as well as developing mapping-based analysis using GIS.

Copies of the presentation slides produced by Frank and Norman can be found on the website at: www.the-sra.org.uk/index2.htm. More information about the Scottish Census is available at www.gro-scotland.gov.uk or from Garnett Compton on 0131 314 4298 (garnett.compton@gro-scotland.gsi.gov.uk). More information about Edinburgh's Census 2001 can be found at www.edinburgh.gov.uk.

The 4th Annual Event

The SRA in Scotland held its 4th Annual Event in March with participants charged with the task of considering 'Where does all the research go?'

The main aim of the afternoon's discussion was to explore how we can make social research findings work, who social researchers should be disseminating research findings to and how they can best reach these audiences.

Cathy Sharp from Research for Real, formerly Research Manager with Communities Scotland, chaired the event, with the afternoon's speakers offering different perspectives on how to effectively disseminating social research findings. Participants heard from Morag Alexander, Convenor of the Scottish Social Services Council, Bill Feinstein from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) Neighbourhood Renewal Unit and Paolo Vestri, Director of the Scottish Local Government Information Unit. Suzanne Fitzpatrick, a lecturer from the Department of Urban Studies at the University of Glasgow and a member of the Scottish Executive's Homelessness Monitoring Group, also joined the speakers for a panel discussion.

The speakers identified a number of key challenges for social researchers including:

- The need to take great care to ensure that dissemination materials and formats are suitable for the audience in question.
- The recognition that social research users face difficulties in trying to access some of the 'grey' literature such as small-scale studies conducted with a particular purpose for a particular organisation.
- In line with the move towards more 'action' based research methods, speakers identified a role for specialists and key partners or users of research to act as sounding boards for findings at an interim stage during the research process.
- There are significant benefits to be gained from maintaining control over dissemination to ensure that the research 'message' is delivered in the way it is intended.
- Speakers and participants alike agreed the need to develop a sound evidence base within local government and other agencies to ensure that findings can have more impact.

The ODPM's Renewal Net is a fascinating example of how an attempt has been made to respond to the need for a robust evidence

base (through better measurement, evaluation, validation and dissemination) while also encouraging the spread of knowledge and good practice in neighbourhood renewal. See www.renewal.net for details.

Future Events

Evening seminars

In June, Connie Smith from SPICE (Scottish Parliament Information Centre) and Sue Morris, Senior Lecturer in Public Policy, Aberdeen Business School, the Robert Gordon University will address the topic 'Information, communication, participation - Holyrood the early years'. Their seminar will examine the extent to which the parliament has encouraged greater public participation during its first four years.

On 29th October, Susan McVie and Paul Bradshaw of the Centre for Law and Society at Edinburgh University will present an evening seminar on the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime, a major longitudinal study of adolescent development and offending in Scotland's capital city.

Both seminars will be held in the Friends' Meeting House, Victoria Terrace, Edinburgh at 6.30pm (Refreshments available from 6pm).

Forthcoming training event

We will be conducting a training course on sampling methods in June (date to be confirmed). The course will give an introduction to sampling examining sampling methods, sampling error and bias and the practicalities of random probability and quota sampling, with practical exercises on drawing samples. The training day will be taught by Steven Hope, Director of NFO Social Research and Cristos Byron, statistician from the National Centre for Social Research's Survey Methods Centre. We are also planning to run an event this summer to mark the first Scottish data release from the Millennium Cohort Study.

New Recruits and Fond Farewells

At our recent Annual Event, we found some new volunteers to join the SRA committee in Scotland. A warm welcome to Mark Diffley, an Associate Director from MORI Scotland, Stephanie Taylor, Research and Policy Officer at the Advocacy Safeguards Agency and Yvonne Somers of George Street Research.

We would also like to extend our thanks to Morag Brown from the Scottish Consumer Council, who is leaving the committee after a number of years service. Thanks for all the hard work you put in, Morag and look forward to seeing you at the SRA events in future.

Coming Next Issue

There will be a report on research ethics, from on a joint meeting with the Edinburgh Group of the Royal Statistical Society, held in April. The event looked at ethics from the perspective of clinical trials, ethics in practice and research ethics in the social sciences.

Call for Speakers

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. The seminars are held in Edinburgh and run from 6.30pm (6pm for tea and biscuits) until around 8pm. If you'd like to host a seminar as part of our evening seminar series, in Edinburgh or in another part of Scotland, please let us know.

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. Email Mandy Littlewood – mandy.littlewood@nfoeurope.com and 0131 656 4038, or Kerstin Hinds – k.hinds@natcen.ac.uk and 0131 557 5494.

Ethics in Social Research

Caroline Glendinning, SPA and Linda McKie, BSA report on the joint BSA/SPA conference held in Manchester, in November

As part of the on-going collaboration between the BSA and the Social Policy Association, a joint conference on research ethics was held in Manchester in November. Speakers included Professor Jan Pahl, University of Kent; Dr Janet Lewis (until recently Research Director of the Joseph Rowntree Foundation); and Professor Joan Orme, Chair of the Joint University Council Social Work Education Committee (JUCSWEC). Participants also included members of the SRA.

The starting point for the conference was the proposed development by the Department of Health (DH) of a Research Governance Framework for social care research, to complement the Research Governance Framework that has been developed for clinical research in the wake of the Alder Hey Children's Hospital scandal (see www.doh.gov.uk/research/rd2/nhsrandd/researchgovernance.htm). However, the boundaries of the Framework for social care research are still far from clear; there is ambiguity about whether it should include research involving statutory social services, all social care-related research, or non-clinical health services research. For Jan Pahl, who is working with the DH to develop the social care Research Governance Framework, the conference formed part of a wider process of consultation with the social science community.

In her plenary presentation, Jan identified several key ethical issues in social care research. These include:

- Obtaining (on-going) informed consent
- Protecting the dignity, safety and well-being of research participants (not just preventing 'harm')
- Respecting the privacy of individuals and groups throughout the research process
- The imbalance of power between researchers and their subjects
- Protecting the welfare of research staff, particularly while doing fieldwork.

Jan outlined a number of options for social care research governance that are currently being considered:

- Establishing specialist research ethics committees for social care research, overseen by a central specialist social care ethics committee
- Expanding the remit of existing NHS LRECs to include social care research
- Developing alternative systems for obtaining ethical approval for social care research, for example within universities, within social services departments or through partnerships between the two.

Both Janet Lewis and other conference participants described the widespread difficulties experienced by social science researchers in dealing with existing NHS local and multi-centre research ethics committees (LRECs and MRECs). These problems arise because many members of LRECs and MRECs know little about social science research and often stray into scrutinizing

research designs and methodologies as aspects of research ethics; the most common reasons for proposals in the social care field being refused ethics committee approval seem to be criticisms of the proposed methodology. Encounters between social researchers and LRECs often reveal a lack of consensus between LRECs; and an emphasis on protecting staff and institutions rather than promoting the rights of research subjects. It was widely agreed that the important issue was how best to encourage discussion and debate about the promotion and conduct of high quality ethical research, rather than the development of formal governance and accountability structures.

The establishment of a national, cross-disciplinary body was called for, that is separate from both government and research funders. This should primarily have an advisory and supportive remit, promoting education.

In the concluding plenary session, Professor Joan Orme described the social work code of research ethics, to which social workers must now subscribe as a condition of their professional registration. This code emphasises the moral responsibility on researchers to think through the possible consequences and impact of any research on its participants; and draws attention to the potential tensions between promoting the wellbeing of the individual and that of the group.

The SPA has not developed its own Code of research ethics and generally directs anyone requiring guidance to the Codes developed by the BSA and SRA. This conference report is fuller than most, because the conference highlighted a number of major issues shared by many social researchers. These include the importance of an educational and supportive framework, rather than one which is defensive and regulatory, for safeguarding high quality ethical social research; and the need for the ethical implications of research to be considered at all stages of the research process, rather than simply as a one-off, initial action of obtaining approval. Many of the moral and ethical issues that social researchers encounter are difficult to anticipate or to accommodate within a formulaic, regulatory framework. We hope that the issues raised by the conference can form part of an on-going dialogue with the other social science organisations that participated and would welcome comments and contributions.

For further information:

- J Lewis (2002) Research and development in social care; governance and good practice, *Research Policy and Planning*, 20, 1: 3-10.
- BSA statement on ethical practice: www.britsoc.co.uk
- SRA ethical guidelines: www.the-sra.org.uk

Youth, Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour

At the end of March, the second in the SRA's series of evening seminars took place, supported by the Nuffield Foundation. With anti-social behaviour high on the government's agenda at present, Professor David Smith from Edinburgh University gave a very timely talk about the Edinburgh Study of Youth Transitions and Crime, to a full house of over 40 researchers.

Professor Smith explained how this longitudinal study of young people and communities was funded initially by the ESRC, and is currently supported by the Scottish Executive and the Nuffield Foundation. The study follows a single year group of 4,380 young people who started secondary schools in the City of Edinburgh from 1998, and is now in its fifth sweep. One of the aims of the study is to understand why some young people become involved in crime, and why most stop but a small number go onto more serious crime. It also aims to explain gender differences in offending and seeks to understand the influence of social and neighbourhood context.

As well as looking at individual young people's experiences and life stories, the study is also interested in the neighbourhoods and communities where young people live and go to school, and how these areas influence young people's lives.

Professor Smith gave some results from the study, which has shown a strong link between victimisation and offending, and this correlation is maintained over time. A link also exists between harassment by adults and delinquency. Evidence from the study suggests that members of delinquent groups are more likely to commit crimes against each other and the same individual may be victim and offender within a single sequence of interactions. Delinquent activities such as being out late at night and a reluctance to call for help can make youths vulnerable, and a risk-taking personality leads to both victimisation and to offending. Interestingly, amongst young people, the introduction of factors such as social class, deprivation or poor neighbourhood do not strengthen the links between delinquency and offending.

Questions from delegates after the seminar focussed on many of the methodological issues involved in such a study, plus the ethical and funding challenges: Professor Smith is currently seeking funding for future sweeps of the survey, as well as for analysis of the existing data. For further information about the work, check the Edinburgh study's website at www.law.ed.ac.uk/cls/esytc.

The next SRA evening seminar takes place at the Nuffield Foundation on 21 May, when Kaye Wellings from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine will discuss key methodological issues and present analysis from the most recent National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles in Britain. See page 7 for further details.

If you would like a copy of any of the publications 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.

Qualitative Research Practice

Edited by Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis of the National Centre for Social Research
Sage February 2003

Social Research; Theory, Methods and Techniques

Piergiorgio Corbetta, Universita Degli Studi di Bologna
Sage April 2003

The Well-Being of Children in the UK

Edited by Jonathan Bradshaw
Save the Children September 2002

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

Children, Family And The State: decision-making and child participation

Nigel Thomas
The Policy Press

Attitudes to Inheritance: An exploratory study

Ruth Hancock, Savita Katbamna, Graham Martin, Harriet Clarke and Rachel Stuchbury
Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Employment transitions of older workers: the role of flexible employment in maintaining labour market participation and promoting job quality

Stephen Lissenburgh and Deborah Smeaton
The Policy Press & Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Monitoring poverty and social exclusion 2002

Guy Palmer, Mohibur Rahman and Peter Kenway
Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Evaluation of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power

Sarah del Tufo and Lucy Gaster
The Evaluation Trust/Joseph Rowntree Foundation

New roles for old: local authority members and partnership working

Mick Wilkinson and Gary Craig
Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Devolution in Scotland: the impact on local government

Michael Bennett, John Fairley and Mark McAteer
Joseph Rowntree Foundation

The Idea of Community, Social Policy & Self

Kevin Loughran
APJ Publications

How to Get a PhD: a handbook for students and their supervisors

Estelle M Phillips and Derek S Pugh
Buckingham: Open University Press, 3rd edition 2000,
£16.99 (pb)
ISBN 0-335-20550-X

How to Write a Thesis

Rowena Murray
Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002, £16.99h (pb)
ISBN 0-335-20718-9

Reviewed by Professor Martin Bulmer, Postgraduate Research Director in the Department of Sociology, University of Surrey

What is the place of the student handbook? Many professional social researchers rely mainly upon cumulative experience or collegial expertise in the practice of their craft, only resorting to reference manuals for detailed points on the intricacies of matters such as sampling, scaling or data processing. In the academic world, handbooks are sometimes likened to recipe books, with the attendant implied belittling of such compendia. Nevertheless these are considerably more than recipe books, and both can be recommended to those tackling a PhD.

How to Get a PhD, here published in its third edition, first appeared in 1987. It is intended as a handbook and survival manual for PhD students, providing a comprehensive overview of the process of becoming and surviving study for the PhD. It is a book about study skills and personal survival rather than dealing with research methods.

Early chapters describe what is involved in becoming a postgraduate research student, getting into the system and the nature of the PhD qualification. Successive chapters then discuss how to tackle PhD research, how not to get a PhD, the form of the PhD thesis, the PhD process and how to manage your supervisor. The concluding chapters deal with the formal processes, how to supervise and examine, the institutional context, and "how to survive in a predominantly British, white, male, full-time educational environment". Estelle Phillips, the senior author, is an experienced consultant and trainer in this area, and the text flows easily in a tone suitable for students in any discipline.

The third edition differs in only minor ways from its two predecessors, but this remains the best general British introduction to working on the PhD. It renders the process and the qualification much less mysterious. It is well worth consulting by anyone considering the PhD as a route to take, either part-time combined with employment, or full time as a route into academia. A few issues such as student finance and the question of the value of the PhD do not get much attention, but these are minor cavils. Together with Sara Delamont et al, *Supervising the PhD: a guide to success* (Open University Press, 1997), one can get a good idea about all phases of the PhD process.

How to Write a Thesis can be read with profit by anyone

who writes professionally, whether proposals, reports, monographs or a thesis. It is oriented to someone writing a PhD thesis, but has a lot to say about writing in general. It deals with the process of writing rather than detailed content, and is applicable regardless of discipline, though oriented to a 'literary' rather than a 'laboratory results' format of reporting. Chapter titles include: Starting to write, Seeking structure, the First milestone, Becoming a serial writer, Creating closure.

Some of this may seem rather remote for some SRA members. Doing a PhD is a task which only some undertake. Nevertheless, there may be convergences between the British PhD and professional social research as the revamped ESRC postgraduate training guidelines bite. In time, even more PhDs may be found working in professional social research outside the academic world, whether or not they use the title 'Dr.'

The Gender Dimension of Social Change: The contribution of dynamic research to the study of women's life courses

Edited by Elisabetta Ruspini and Angela Dale
The Policy Press, 2002, 324 pages, £35 (hb)
ISBN 1-86134-332-9

Reviewed by Elvira Doghem-Rashid, Mintel International Group Ltd

This is an insightful collection of papers on the impact and influence social change has had on women's lives in recent history. At first glance, much of the information and trends examined seem obvious: more women in higher education, more women in work, women delaying childbirth etc. Where this volume adds value is in its examination of these trends in the wider context of social policy (such as equal opportunity policies) and welfare provision, and its impact on women in terms of gender inequalities.

Primarily an academic text, this is never going to be awarded the Plain English Campaign Crystal Mark, but as if to compensate for the formal writing style and generous sprinkling of academic references, each chapter is easily digestible and can be read as stand alone text. Nevertheless, I would recommend the whole book as a worthwhile read for anyone conducting research among women, quantitative or qualitative, as it will no doubt help give greater depth to the analysis and understanding of respondents, and give researchers a more solid framework within which to present findings.

For those in the public policy arena, this work also carries the added bonus of a European perspective on how women's lives have been affected by education, employment, marriage and divorce. Also examined are the gender wage differentials in both Britain and Japan, as well as the effects of different modes of work on women's lives, such as self-employment (among television workers) in Britain and fixed-term contracts and unemployment in Germany.

With all the data and insight that is crammed into this surprisingly slim volume, I am sure it will become a staple feature on many a student social scientists' reading list for years to come, although it would be a shame if it did not reach a wider research audience.

continued from page 11

Qualitative Research Methods

Edited by Darin Weinberg
Blackwell Publishers, Oxford 2002, 352pp, £18.99
(pb)
ISBN 0-631-21762-2

Reviewed by: Constantinos N Phellas, Senior Lecturer, Department of Sociology, South Bank University, London

Qualitative Research Methods is a valuable and informative collection of readings for students undertaking any kind of social science inquiry.

The book consists of five parts, each of which includes three or four essays respectively. Part I ('Legacy of Qualitative Research Methods') discusses what qualitative research is and its historical emergence, the strategies of qualitative research and its substantive use in the fields of sociology and anthropology.

Part II ('Qualitative Interviewing', 'Life history, and Narrative Analysis', 'Observational Fieldwork', 'Conversation and Discourse Analysis', and 'Research Using Artifacts as Primary Sources') discusses the various strategies of qualitative research and their various challenges and opportunities.

The first chapter (written by the editor himself) gives an overview of the various qualitative research methods and is very informative and thoroughly argued. Weinberg discusses with clarity and passion the scientific legitimacy of qualitative research methods and he invites us to show great 'sensitivity to the worlds we seek to understand with an equally vigilant sensitivity to the worlds for which we seek to understand'.

The collection of essays that follow in each part is quite a feat and the authors excel in making this an easy informative read without losing quality or content. Through a lively writing style, that wisely mixes everyday life experiences and scientific language, the authors succeed in giving the flavour of qualitative research.

Particularly interesting are the chapters on observational fieldwork and research using artefacts as primary sources.

In summary, the reader of this book will gain an excellent theoretical base for the qualitative research and also a practical application of the various methods. I will be including the text as a recommended supplement to essential reading for undergraduate students taking my course in research methods.

What Works Locally?

Key lesson on local employment policies

Mike Campbell and Pamela Meadows
Rowntree Foundation, 2001, £10.95 (pb)
ISBN 1-84263-004-0

Reviewed by: Bob Willis, Community Play and Youth, Wolverhampton City Council

This report makes a strong case for the development of coherent local employment policies. These policies would involve a multi agency approach, drawing on research evidence of what works and what does not. They would be based on the particular needs of local areas, and of social groups and individuals within them. They would use proactive, outreach approaches to reach the groups in greatest need. They would measure progress instead of trying to hit arbitrary targets.

Instead what we have at the moment is a mishmash of separate initiatives: European Employment Strategy, Structural Funds and Social Funds, New Deal, Learning Skills Councils and Connexions, Regional Development Agencies, Economic Strategy Employment Zones, Job Action Teams, and New Commitment to Regeneration, New Deal for Communities and National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal, to name just some of them. The Manor and Castle Development Trust in Sheffield receives funding from 27 separate sources!

Many projects have a requirement to consult and involve local communities. In my experience, the large number of schemes means that this is often done in a superficial way, with the same community organisations being involved in several forums, while other sections of the community, particularly the unemployed, are not consulted at all.

This is a useful report. I just wish there had been more space to explore more of the inconsistencies in current approaches.

For example, the European Social Fund has as one of its programme objectives for the period 2002-06 'improving the position of women in the labour market'. This does not take into account higher levels of unemployment among men (as measured in Labour Force Surveys and the Census). It seems that policy makers cannot hold two ideas at the same time-men suffer higher levels of unemployment, women in employment suffer disadvantage.

Contemporary research issues

Making the Most of It: economic evaluation in the social welfare field

Tom Sefton, Sarah Byford, David McDaid, John Hills and Martin Knapp
YPS, 2002, £15.95 (pb)
ISBN 1-84263-070-9

Reviewed by: Carolyn Czoski-Murray, Research Fellow, University of Sheffield, School of Health and Related Research

This is an excellent publication that deals with complex issues in a clear and understandable manner and would be of use to both new and experienced researchers. It begins with the authors' introduction to the importance of undertaking an economic evaluation as part of the overall evaluation of a programme or intervention. Since an economic evaluation will take account of both the outcomes and costs it therefore plays an important role in promoting rational decision-making in the allocation of project funds.

Chapter two gives a particularly useful resume of what constitutes an economic evaluation and more importantly does not. The authors outline the 'building blocks' that are central to undertaking any good quality evaluation need to be in place before an economic evaluation is possible. For instance, complex social welfare programmes do not immediately lend themselves to evaluation by the accepted RCT 'gold standard'. Furthermore, the ethical considerations would make this type of study design inappropriate for some interventions and the time scale for conducting a standard RCT also make it an unsuitable choice.

In chapters four and five the issues around the difficulties confronting researchers are discussed and some possible alternative approaches are set out in a clear and understandable way.

In the remaining chapters the authors make extensive use of case studies to illustrate what can be achieved. The projects that have been successful in evaluating a complex intervention and also those that were less so are discussed as are the research methods used in these studies, such as the role in economic evaluation of qualitative designs. They highlight the importance of choosing the right outcomes to measure and the importance of timing the follow up.

Promoting Change Through Research: the impact of research in local government

Janie Percy-Smith and others
Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002, £14.95 (pb)
ISBN 1-84263-088-1

Reviewed by: William Solesbury, Associate Director UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy & Practice, Queen Mary University of London

For researchers whose ambitions run beyond the advancement of knowledge, research impact is as important as research method. Yet how research gets used has been studied far less than how research gets done. This report is a welcome addition to this slim literature on research utilisation.

As the report notes, research in local government had a heyday in the wake of the 1970s reorganisation of local government, then went into decline in the succeeding decades. In 1998, the then Local Government Management Board (later incorporated into the Improvement and Development Agency) commissioned a survey from the Policy Research Institute which revealed not just low capacity but also low appreciation of the potential role of research. This report - from the same team but funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation - analyses not how research is undertaken in local authorities but how its findings are used - or not. Its approach was through a postal survey of all local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales (which achieved a 56% response rate) and six case studies of individual local authorities.

The main findings of the project are reported in three sections concerned with:

- the structure and organisation of research - the decentralised model is dominant with additional central research units in some cases; who does research and how varies greatly even within one authority, but most attempt some coordination for work priorities and sharing of information
- accessing and disseminating research - research relevant to local authorities may come from external or internal sources (this latter undertaken in-house or commissioned) but its availability is rather hit and miss, though knowledge management systems are addressing this in some authorities
- utilisation and impact of research - research emerges as a less significant influence on local authority policy than local politics, needs, issues and priorities or indeed central government prescriptions; its impact is more evident in small scale service changes than in major policy shifts.

These sections provide a valuable account of the reality of research in local government.

In discussion of these findings, the authors draw on ideas around at present about evidence based policy making. Much of the rhetoric used in these debates is overblown. But there are reasons to believe that the contribution of research - as one source of evidence for more inclusive policymaking - is getting wider recognition. This is explicit in the 'modernisation' of central government. In the comparable agenda for local government it is more implicit in the expectation that local authorities will be more responsive, participative, innovative and committed to quality.

The report concludes with a challenging checklist of actions - for local authorities in the closer integration of research into their thinking and practice; for local government organisations in providing guidance and support, including training, for local authority research and policy staff; for the producers of research in improving their engagement with their consumers. The report forbears to recommend actions for central government, though it does note the tension between an emphasis on local authority policy being informed by (locally relevant) evidence on the one hand and central prescriptions (which may or may not be informed by evidence) on the other. Is performance management the enemy of evidence-based policy?

SRA TRAINING DAYS

- **17 September: Qualitative Interviewing: an introduction**
- **16 October: Conducting Focus Groups: an introduction**
- **23 October: Commissioning and Managing Social Research**
- **18 November: Better Questionnaire Design: Theory and Practice**

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

Fees are members £85, non-members (includes membership of SRA for one year) £130, student/unwaged £20. 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.

If you have any queries about these or future SRA training events please contact Tracey Budd on tracey.budd@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

SRA EVENTS

- **21 May: Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles in Britain**
at the Nuffield Foundation, Founders Room, 28 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3JS at 5pm.
- **19 June: Social Experiments: Research or Evaluation?**
Joint event with the UK Evaluation Society at the London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre (see above) 10am-4pm (time to be confirmed).
- **30 June: Great Expectations – The Social Sciences in Britain**
at the Nuffield Foundation (see above) at 5pm.
- **11 July: Summer Event: Promoting Professional Standards in Social Research**
at Local Government Association, Local Government House, Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ at 1pm.

SRA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

- **3 December: Improving the Quality of Social Research**
at the London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre (see above) at 10.30am.

Further details on all SRA events and training: SRA Admin Office:
Tel/Fax: 020 8880 5684
Email: admin@the-sra.org.uk
www.the-sra.org.uk

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:
Tel and Fax: 0494 793033,
Email: admin@asc.org.uk
www.asc.org.uk

University of Lisbon Joint International Summer School

- **23-30 July: Classification and Data Mining in Business, Industry and Applied Research Methodological and Computational Issues**

at the University of Lisbon, Lisbon, Portugal.

For more information see:
<http://lead.paginas.sapo.pt/JISS-2003.htm>

The Market Research Society Census and Geodemographics Group

- **2nd July: The 2001 Census How to benefit from the new free census data**

at The Society of Chemical Industry, Belgrave Square, London SW1

Further details and booking information available at www.mrs.org.uk/events.

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- **27-29 May: Telephone Survey Design**
at the Royal Statistical Society, London

Because of ESRC support, 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 on the CASS courses 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

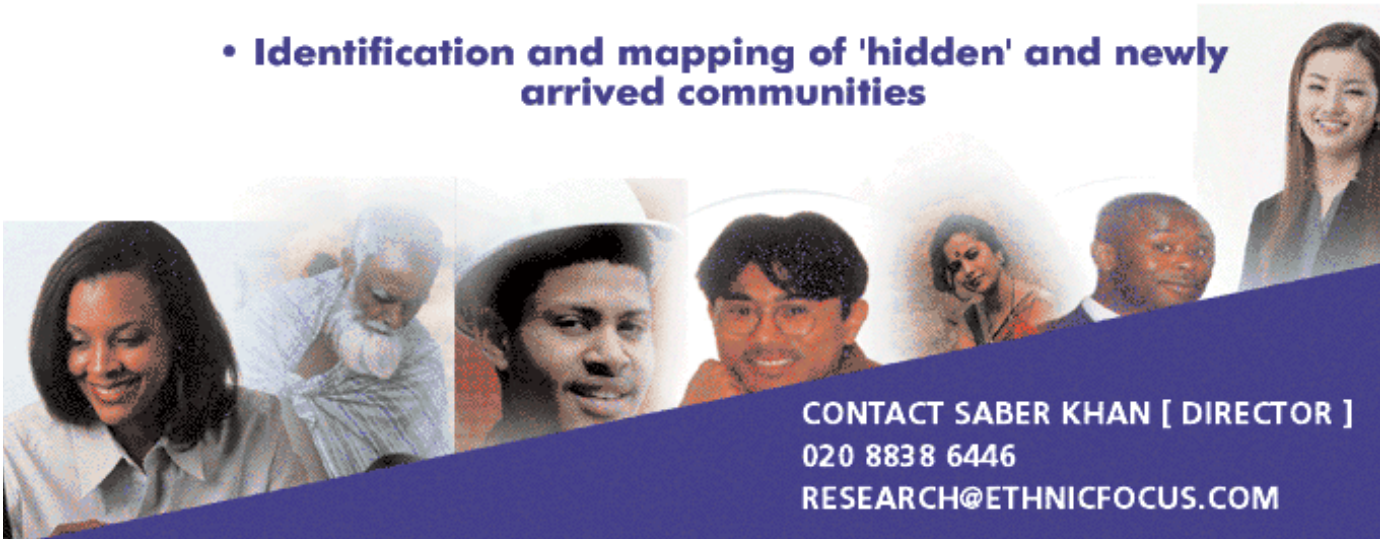
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Sue Brooker
BMRB Social Research
Hadley House
79-81 Uxbridge Road
Ealing, London W5 5SU
www.bmr.co.uk

Telephone
+44 (0)20 8433 4405

Facsimile
+44 (0)20 8840 8032

Email
social.research@bmr.co.uk