

Commissioning Social Research: SRA takes action

By Janet Lewis, Former Research Director at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Experienced research commissioners recognise the excellence of the SRA's good practice guide, *Commissioning Social Research*. But examples of poor practice abound, so as well as promoting the guide, it would be timely for the SRA to tackle bad practice. On behalf of the SRA, I am exploring the possibility of organising a campaign for better research commissioning, and therefore improve the quality of research. So far, the response has been encouraging.

The SRA guide 'relates to projects originated mainly or entirely by research customers who identify a research need and then go out to buy services to meet it'. Our initiative should be broader than this. Other, more collaborative ways of funding research could be considered, as well as issues of good management of contracts once awarded. I would like us to aim for *intelligent commissioning* rather than the often formulaic process of *procurement*. This article is a first attempt to outline what we would like to do. I would be delighted to hear your comments and ideas.

A positive approach

The initiative needs to have a positive approach and to start by promoting the core principles of good commissioning as outlined in the guide. These cover the fundamental and the practical. We need:

- Clarity about the concerns and question(s) to be addressed by the research
- The research brief to focus more on the aims and objectives than the methods, and to include a statement about the budget
- Appropriate competition between research suppliers – direct or indirect – to suit the project
- To develop a constructive dialogue between buyer and supplier
- To maximise dialogue through an open and flexible approach

- To keep the final list of competitors short
- Adequate time for the commissioning process and the research
- Respect for the intellectual property rights of suppliers.

There is an additional element missing from the guide but an important first step: awareness of the extent to which the concerns/questions that have been identified are best addressed through exploratory research or whether they require something more structured and technical.

These points have already been accepted by many in the research community. The question we have to address is: *How do we get more commissioners and funders to follow these good practice steps?* The answer depends on whether they fail to follow them through ignorance, which can be remedied by education and training, or for other reasons. I suspect we need to assume both. There is general agreement that the environment for research commissioning has tightened up, under the umbrella of procurement. The difficulty with much *procurement* is that research is treated like other goods and services, and is seen as a commodity. This is not an appropriate model for achieving high quality applied research. We must make the case for research being a creative process that cannot be handled in the same way as other commodities.

Better education and training

The SRA has already organised a successful training day on Commissioning and Managing Research and more such days would be useful. But a range of training opportunities are needed for people with differing experience. One aim of the campaign would be to increase the availability of good training, probably by working in conjunction with other suppliers like the Civil Service College (now CMPS).

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www.the-sra.org.uk

Report from the chair

Ceridwen Roberts

This is a larger SRA News than usual, reflecting the increasing variety of activities that the Executive and SRA members are engaged in. As well as our traditional programme of training courses, seminars and conferences, we are developing our campaigning work in 2004 to improve standards of social research through a number of initiatives.



Campaigning to improve research commissioning

We are building on the excellent publication *Commissioning Social Research* by developing an initiative to encourage good practice. Dr Janet Lewis, who recently retired from her pivotal role as Director of Research at the Joseph Rowntree Foundation is taking the lead on this and we very much hope that SRA members will help to progress it. We want to know about your experiences of the commissioning process - examples of bad practice and information about very good commissioning would be helpful.

Janet is proposing a number of ways forward. Better training is clearly vital, and we are working to improve this. In June, the SRA is meeting with the LGA, LARIA and senior people in local government to discuss how we can improve training opportunities for commissioning and managing research in this sector. We are also discussing with ARCISS (which represents the major research centres and institutes, which are mostly 'soft money' funded) how we can work together on this initiative. Unless we take this forward, commissioning will not improve, and we will continue to see appalling examples of research purchasing with frustrations for both purchasers and providers.

Ethical issues

Interest in obtaining the revised SRA ethical guidelines is very strong with many people downloading copies from the SRA website. But we need to encourage the development of good practice here too, especially as funders become more explicit in their requirements and more ethical committees are established. Their terms of reference and working assumptions need careful scrutiny - what works for natural or medical sciences is not automatically applicable to the social sciences and may be unrealistically and unnecessarily restrictive.

Teasing out how to handle ethical dilemmas lends itself to interactive 'teaching' and group discussion. Some SRA members are developing a series of ethical training workshops to help other social researchers and possibly funders in this area. Further details in due course.

Developing guidelines for good practice in research dissemination

For far too long we have heard about bad practice in research dissemination. Funders complain that researchers do not do this well enough (to the right people, at the right time, in the right place). Researchers complain that dissemination activities require different skills; that they need training; that such work needs to be properly resourced as it is time expensive; as well as the key problem of who controls what is published and when and what is said in press and publicity. Several members have told us of press releases which bear little or no relation to their key findings and the difficulties they face in challenging these.

So, it is more than timely that our working group on this is starting. We know it will be a difficult job to produce a guide and hope to have this during 2005. At the same time, we are investigating running media training courses as this is an area of mid-career training which would be useful to many members. Negotiations are underway, and though these one-day courses will be more expensive than our usual courses they are excellent value for money and cheaper than the market provision. Watch for more announcements.

Seminars and conferences and the Mark Abrams Prize

December 1st is the date of the next annual conference and we continue our theme of promoting quality in social research. This year, we focus on *Improving the impact of social research* which engages with our growing work on improving dissemination and utilisation. The programme is being developed now and we have had a good response to our call for papers. At the conference, we hope to award our Mark Abrams Prize to the best submission of a piece of social research based on survey analysis. Further details of how to enter are on page 5 and on the SRA website. Do encourage colleagues and staff to submit recent work.

SRA as an organisation

Finally, there are many developments within the SRA office. We are looking at how to improve the newsletter; planning a membership drive among employers of social researchers; and beginning to grapple with the need to strengthen our office infrastructure. The days of managing on a shoestring with the minimum of paid help are drawing to a close. Executive members are realising that they can no longer run an efficient and responsive organisation with one overworked administrator and no proper office base. So, we are making plans to put the organisation on a stronger basis. This will take some time to effect but we intend to get there.

New insurance scheme for SRA members

The SRA has just launched an insurance scheme by negotiating an outstanding package with a leading broker. This offer is exclusively for SRA members, and will appeal particularly to self-employed researchers. The deal provides members with a one-stop shop for all their professional insurance needs.

The annual premium is only £550 plus 5% insurance premium tax, which provides the following range of benefits:

General contents	£5,000
Computer equipment (including £1,500 for laptops)	£5,000
Reinstatement of computer data	£10,000
Money	£2,000
Professional indemnity	£250,000
Employers liability	£10,000,000
Public and products liability	£2,000,000
Computer increased costs of working	£25,000
General increased costs of working	£25,000
Stock of prototypes	£1,000
Contents under care, custody or control	£500

This is based upon an annual turnover of less than £100,000. We can provide a quotation if your turnover is more.

The insurance is available as a package, rather than as individual components. You can spread payments across the year through interest free instalments.

Contact the SRA office for our leaflet, which explains how to apply. If you would like to discuss the scheme further please contact Nick Smith, SRA Membership Secretary at nick.smith@researchpartnership.org.uk or 01823 667999.

Working group on dissemination and utilisation good practice – progress to date

This is developing well. Several SRA members have agreed to help prepare a document identifying good practice and guidance. Everyone has identified this as a big task, and we do not want to duplicate work done elsewhere. So, the first step is to collect information about the range of policies and practices of the key funders and purchasers of social research, and then compare and contrast them. We are also looking to SRA members to provide written instances of good and bad practice.

Help us by sending documents to the SRA office which outline your organisation's policies or procedures and any examples where research was disseminated or used well or there were problems. Tell us what is confidential information.

Over the summer we will review and assess this material, and we are looking for a volunteer [ideally a retired experienced social researcher] who would be willing to work with the group to prepare initial papers and drafts. There will be an honorarium payment and expenses for this. If you are interested please contact us.

We will also be trying to find sponsorship or funding to develop the work and pay for the costs of preparing a document. More details about the group and the progress of its work including details of a consultative seminar we intend to hold in the Autumn are on the SRA website www.the-sra.org.uk

Mary Hickman and Ceridwen Roberts
SRA Executive

Encouraging the next generation – can you help?

We are often contacted by young or not so young graduates asking about career opportunities in social research. Our response tends to be ad-hoc and patchy. So, we want to improve the information and advice we give and also create a good section about this on our website. But we need someone to take this on. Can you help?

The task would particularly suit an experienced social researcher, possibly recently retired, willing to complete this as a project within a 6-9 month period. There would be office support and we would envisage the person working with the SRA Executive, senior employers and university departments providing social research courses. Web design skills are not needed.

For more information contact Suzanne Cohen at the SRA office.

Improving the impact of social research

The SRA Annual Conference will take place on Wednesday 1 December in London. It provides a timely opportunity for social researchers to debate how to improve the impact made by social research, through its organisation, practice and presentation and will address:

- Best practice in commissioning research that counts
- Conducting social research that makes a difference
- The politics of social research
- Action research
- Involving the 'user' or 'subject' in social research
- Partnership working
- Dissemination
- Evidence-informed policy
- Measuring the impact of social research.

For the latest on the programme and booking information see www.the-sra.org.uk



Ethnic Group Statistics: a guide for the collection and classification of ethnicity data

25 May at 5pm (tea from 4:30pm)

In January 2004, the Office for National Statistics produced *Ethnic group statistics - A guide for the collection and classification of ethnicity data*. The guidance offers a multi-faceted approach to the collection of ethnicity, religion and national identity data. At this joint SRA/RSS seminar, David Gardener (Office for National Statistics) will explain why this new approach has been adopted as well as giving examples of how the ethnicity guidance can be used in practice. John Curtice (University of Strathclyde) will examine how national identity has been measured in recent UK academic studies, and the degree to which measures suggest the profile of national identity has changed. He will consider what influence national identity has on people's attitudes towards the UK constitution, Europe and people from ethnic minority groups. The seminar will be chaired by Patten Smith (BMRB International) with Pam Smith (Centre for Racial Equality) as discussant.

The seminar is free, and at the Royal Statistical Society, 12 Errol Street, London, EC1 (see www.rss.org.uk for directions). No need to book.

Overwhelming demand for data protection seminars

SRA Scotland reports that there has been an overwhelming demand for their seminars on 'Understanding Data Protection in Research'. Clearly, this is a key issue for members and we hope to duplicate these in London for members in the south.

2004 Mark Abrams prize: call for entries

The SRA Executive is pleased to announce the 2004 competition for this prize, first awarded in 1986, to celebrate the 80th birthday of Dr Mark Abrams, the eminent British social scientist who died in 1994.

The prize is traditionally awarded for the piece of work which, in the opinion of the judges, best links survey research, social policy and social theory and as such, carries on the work of Dr Abrams.

Entries and nominations are open to social scientists of any age and nationality working in the UK. Entries, which should be original work, should be in English and not more than 6,000 words in length [plus any tables or graphs]. It is possible to submit recently published or forthcoming work. In the case of the former, this should not have been published earlier than 2004. No particular theme is set, but preference will be given to theoretically informed, empirical work concerned with the UK. Secondary analysis of survey data would be especially welcome. The panel of judges will take due account of the age, experience and circumstances of authors, and reserve the right not to award a prize.

The judges will include: Prof. Dominic Abrams [Kent] Jean Martin [ONS] Prof. Martin Bulmer [Surrey] Prof. Roger Jowell [City] Prof. John Hall [formerly PNL] Anne Harrop [JRF] and Nick Moon [NOP].

The prize, if awarded, is worth £250 and will be presented at the Annual Conference of the Social Research Association on 1st December 2004. Prize-winning entries may also, by agreement, be placed on the SRA website. Entries and nominations, together with brief biographical details of the author(s) should be sent to Suzanne Cohen at the SRA Admin Office, PO Box 33660, London N16 6WE by 1st October 2004. It would be very helpful if candidates could submit six copies of their entry, whether published or not, and email the admin office to advise them of the entry.

Further information about Dr Mark Abrams, previous winners and full details of how to enter are on the SRA website www.the-sra.org.uk

SRA in Ireland

by **Peter Humphreys (SRA Executive)**

Get involved

The SRA has a small but growing membership in Ireland. We work as professional researchers/research managers/consultants in a range of government departments, state agencies and commercial companies. While many of us are also active members of other organisations 'in our spare time', we think that the SRA has a unique contribution to make to the professional development of social research in Ireland.

Over the past few months, a number of us have met at lunchtimes to see what could be done to raise the profile of the SRA and improve the services to members in Ireland. We are convinced of the need for quality research training for researchers as well as events and opportunities to network (because research can be a very solitary activity). We also want to give social research a professional voice in formal consultation exercises in areas which affect our work, e.g. statistical developments. We plan to organise a conference later this year on *Good Practice in Commissioning Social Research*. Watch this space for more on this and other plans.

What we do

We plan to make this page a regular feature as it's a good opportunity to let the SRA membership as a whole know more about what members are up to here. A number of our members are based at the Equality Authority. So, for this first report we profile its work. In the next issue, we will profile another of the organisations in which our members work.

Equality Authority

The Equality Authority was established under the terms of the *Employment Equality Act, 1998* to combat discrimination and to promote equality of opportunity on nine specified grounds – gender, marital status, family status, sexual orientation, religion, age, disability, race and membership of the Traveller Community. The *Equal Status Act, 2000*, extended its mandate beyond the workplace to include the provision of goods, services and facilities. The equality legislation gives the Equality Authority the power to undertake or sponsor research to progress its functions. Further details of its current research programme and downloads of recent reports are available at www.equality.ie/research

Get in touch

We can only do as much as our day jobs permit! So, if you are interested in knowing more, and would like to help, do get in touch with me at pumphreys@ipa.ie. Future generations will be in your debt!

Let me know what you think ...

Contact: Dr Peter Humphreys
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Email: pumphreys@ipa.ie

SRA Scotland

By **Chris Nicol**

Seminars

We have organised two evening seminars. In the first, Andra Laird of George Street Research presented a paper on her work evaluating the Rough Sleepers Initiative. The Scottish Executive following devolution had adopted the UK government's target of ending the need to sleep rough and The Rough Sleepers Initiative (RSI) is the programme implemented to help meet this target. She highlighted the progress that has been made, the good practice to be seen in parts of Scotland and the fact that those who do sleep rough can often be denied the facilities available due to mental health and addiction issues.

Rachel Ormston (TNS Social Research) and Steve Stradling (TRI, Napier University) examined attitudes to road safety, in particular speeding – why people do it and how can they be stopped. Understanding people's decisions to speed and the factors that affect these decisions is crucial to informing action to tackle it. They looked at the findings from two recent studies: *The Speeding Driver – Who, how and why?* and *An Evaluation of Bikesafe Scotland*.

In February the SRA, along with Centre for Research into Families and Relationships, invited Professor David Rhind to talk about the findings of the Commission on the Social Sciences in Britain. This was well attended and gave us all a better understanding of the findings of the Commission.

Future seminars will focus on an evaluation of an anti-social behaviour initiative in Edinburgh and the methods used within the Scottish House Conditions Survey.

Annual Event

The 2004 SRA Scotland annual event was held in April, and focused on increasing understanding of how local initiatives and research can be used to inform national policies and programmes. It covered many different perspectives and initiatives from different policy areas including health, regeneration and early years.

Training

Our training events continue to be very popular. Due to demand, qualitative research training days held in December, were repeated in January and March, attended by over 140 people from many organisations.

See page 16 for details of SRA Scotland events.

For further information about all events and training in Scotland contact Lindsay Adams at scotland@the-sra.org.uk.

Contacts:

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Families and Children in Britain

By Stephen Morris, Principal Research Officer, Social Research Division of the Department for Work and Pensions

FACS or the Families and Children Study, is a large survey of around 7,500 families with dependent children carried out annually by the Department for Work and Pensions and the National Centre for Social Research. Technically speaking, FACS is a refreshed panel study. A group of families is followed over time, but at each wave of interviewing, the sample is topped up or refreshed with new families. These new members of the study ensure that the sample remains representative of all families. If we simply followed a fixed sample of families at each wave, they would get older and less like all families as time went by - refreshing the sample means that at each wave it provides a good cross-section picture of families across Great Britain.

FACS started life in 1999 as a survey of low-to-moderate-income couple families with children, as well as all lone parent families, known then as the Survey of Low Income Families (SOLIF). From Wave 3 onwards (2001), the coverage of the survey changed, and now a sample of all families regardless of their income are interviewed. To mark this change, the study became known as the Families and Children Study or FACS. Results from Wave 4 (2002) have recently been published¹ and Wave 5 (2003) fieldwork has just finished, with results to emerge towards the end of this year or the beginning of the next.

The study is designed to provide an evidence-base across a range of policy areas. FACS is sponsored by a number of Government departments, which reflects this wide interest: the Inland Revenue, Department for Education and Skills, Department for Transport, and Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The questionnaire covers a variety of topics including employment and childcare; income, benefits and tax credits; material deprivation; children's schooling and behaviour. For the first time at Wave 5, young people aged 11-15 completed a short questionnaire. The questionnaire incorporated a series of questions including what the young people did in their spare time; what they thought about the area in which they lived; their consumption of alcohol and cigarettes; and their schooling.

Turning now to some results, data from the 2002 cross-section (Barnes et al, 2004) presented an interesting picture of family life in Britain. Around 7,800 families were interviewed by the National Centre for Social Research between September 2002 and February 2003. These families contained approximately 13,700 children.

Many of the questions are addressed to the mother or 'mother figure'. Of these, one in ten described their health over the 12 months leading up to the interview as 'not good'. Tellingly, almost twice as many mothers in lone parent families said their health was 'not good'. In terms of their children, parents of 14 to 15 year olds reported that one in twenty had been in contact with the police in the last year, while 13 per cent were reported to have had problems with smoking, drinking or drugs.

Looking at findings which relate to the welfare to work policy agenda - 84 per cent of families had at least one adult in work of any hours per week. Only five per cent of couple families had no parent working any hours per week, whereas almost half (47 per cent) of lone parents were not working. Barriers to work most frequently identified by mothers who were not looking to return to work were: "Don't want to spend more time apart from my children", (45 per cent), "Own illness/disability" (14 per cent) and "Cannot afford childcare" (12 per cent).

Looking at income and benefits - 34 per cent of lone parent families had a total family income of less than £200 pounds per week, compared to only five per cent of couple families. A fifth of all families in 2002 were in receipt of Working Families' Tax Credit (WFTC).

An important concept in the Government's approach to poverty measurement is that of material deprivation. Being out of work had the strongest relationship with being materially deprived. Of lone parent families where the parent was not working or working less than 16 hours per week, FACS revealed that 24 per cent went without four or more of the consumer durables they were questioned about. And again, a quarter (26 per cent) of both lone parent and couple families with no one working or working less than 16 hours per week went without four or more leisure activities.

FACS clearly has a lot to offer as a cross-section survey. Its real uniqueness, however, comes from the fact that it is a panel study. Although the most recent published report (Barnes et al, 2004) focuses on cross-section results, previous reports have examined the circumstances of the FACS panel. Links to these and other FACS information and resources are on the FACS website at www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5/facs/

The Department for Work and Pensions is committed to getting more out of longitudinal data through exploiting the FACS panel as well as other longitudinal sources such as the BHPS. For this reason, the Families and Children Strategic Analysis Programme, or FACSAP, was set up last year. FACSAP is a framework agreement between the Department for Work and Pensions and eight leading academic and research organisations. It was set up to encourage more policy relevant secondary analysis of longitudinal studies. Research is currently underway on a range of different topics and results will start to be published in the second half of this year. All reports will be available on our website.

Finally, for those of you interested in getting your hands on the data, new releases of data files from Waves 1 to 4 of FACS will shortly be available through the University of Essex data archive.

For further information contact Stephen by emailing stephen.morris4@dwp.gsi.gov.uk

¹ Barnes, M., Willitts, M. with Anderson, T., Chaplin, J., Collins, D., Groben, S., Morris, S., Noble, J., Phillips, M. and Sneade, I. (2004) *Families and Children in Britain: Findings from the 2002 Families and Children Study (FACS)*, Department for Work and Pensions, Research Report 206, Leeds: Corporate Document Services.

Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study – an update

By Iain Bell, Data Services Unit, Department for Work and Pensions

The Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study links benefit and programme information held by DWP on its customers, with employment records from the Inland Revenue to provide a single system of databases containing information on every benefit claim, period of employment or period on New Deals since mid-1999. This is a major new system which significantly improves the ability of DWP to assess the effectiveness of its policies.

New data-sharing provisions introduced in the Employment Act 2002 have opened the way for DWP to receive more data on employment from the Inland Revenue and to use the information for more purposes. DWP and the Inland Revenue have been working together to enable this data sharing to take place and to develop safeguards for the initiative.

As described in a written statement to parliament on the 16th December 2003, The Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study will be used to:

- provide statistics, management information and research on the success of Jobcentre Plus in helping people into work and keeping them in work
- help to evaluate individual policies and their impact in the short, medium and long-term
- determine the family unit for pensioners to establish overall pensioner income from benefits
- aid in the investigation of fraud and
- provide us with the opportunity to improve the way we target clients through marketing initiatives.

The DWP has put in place the following safeguards to ensure we behave responsibly with the data within the Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study and can be seen to do so:

1) Restricting access

Only those with genuine business needs are allowed access to the data, and that access is kept to a minimum. All users will be asked to submit a business case.

2) Ethics Committee

An ethics committee has been established to consider proposals which have a significant ethical dimension. The head of data services in DWP will be responsible for day-to-day decision-making on access to the data. The ethics committee will monitor the decisions and will advise on those decisions which the head of data services has referred to the committee.

3) Quarterly publication of the uses

To ensure accountability to the public for all work on the data, an internet and paper-based list of uses (existing and new) will be published every three months.

4) Monitoring user activity

Users with unusual patterns of activity will be picked

up and monitored using specialist software. Illegal and unethical misuse of the data is breach of the terms and conditions of DWP employment and can result in disciplinary action and ultimately dismissal.

5) Monitoring the uses of data

DWP will monitor which records and data items are being used, and ensure that the Inland Revenue supplies only the minimum number of records and variables necessary for effective use for operational and analytical purposes. This review process will take place every year.

6) Public access rights

Individuals will be able to request a copy of the data held on them for operational purposes within the master index of the Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study.

7) Involvement of the information commissioner

DWP has consulted with the Information Commissioner's office on these safeguards, and will continue to do so. The Information Commissioner will audit the Study during 2004/5.

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Website as resource

A website could be an accessible resource for best practice containing a range of material including the SRA guide; perhaps some key principles of good procurement; examples of good (and perhaps bad) commissions; framework agreements and other documents thought to demonstrate good practice.

Panel of advisers

We will need a group to oversee the strategy. This could form the core of a panel of 'virtual advisers' on good commissioning practice drawn from experienced researchers and commissioners. The panel might meet once or twice to confirm the principles of good practice, and to agree the strategy for training, the website, and any other activities. The advisers would need to agree how they, individually or as a group, could promote better practice and take up poor practice. This could include approaching organisations known to be funding research and not doing it well, to offer advice and help, or taking up specific examples identified by SRA members. Or we might do it quite differently!

If you have ideas and/or would like to be involved, please contact me on: janet@jdlewis.freereserve.co.uk

For a copy of the SRA Guide to Commissioning Research contact the SRA Administrative Office.

Research Briefing

Inquiry on empirical research in law

An Inquiry has been set up, funded by the Nuffield Foundation, in response to growing concern within the academy and user community about a lack of capacity to undertake rigorous empirical research in law. The problem is particularly acute for empirical research in the areas of civil, family and administrative justice where historically there has been much less empirical research done and less capacity to undertake that work than in the criminal justice field. The Inquiry will:

- Provide factual information about current capacity
- Articulate the different aspects of the capacity problem
- Understand the causes of the problem
- Bring together major players to develop a shared understanding and identify possible joint action
- Identify possible solutions
- Recommend future action.

Other activities, include distribution of a consultation document. For further information and for a copy of this document see

www.ucl.ac.uk/laws/genn/empirical/index.shtml

Harmonised question set on social capital

The Social Capital Working Group, co-ordinated by the Office for National Statistics, has produced a harmonised set of questions for the measurement of social capital. The questions are based on the ONS framework for social capital analysis, which splits the concept into five dimensions. These are:

- Social participation
- Civic participation
- Social networks and social support
- Reciprocity and trust
- Views of the local area.

The questions have been designed to take no more than twenty minutes and have been included on the General Household Survey 2004. However, not all surveys have the capacity to run the full set and so a short set of core questions, covering each dimension, is also available. The main and core questions, a methodological report outlining their development and an annotated user guide are available at www.statistics.gov.uk/socialcapital/project.asp

In order to encourage maximum use, the questions are currently being revised to ensure they are appropriate for both telephone and postal surveys. More information on the website or email social.capital@ons.gov.uk

PhD study at the Bedford Group

The Bedford Group for Lifecourse and Statistical Studies (BG) brings together six centres that have been based at the Institute of Education for varying lengths of time. The centres share interests in the creation and analysis of longitudinal and multilevel data, which is applied to a wide range of topics in the education, social

and health sciences. Further information is available at www.ioe.ac.uk/bedfordgroup

BG offers PhD opportunities in the following :

- Education: economics, inequalities, management, policy, wider benefits of learning
- Family and society: caring, child development, delinquency and crime, economic demography, ethnic minorities, intergenerational relations, parenting, social exclusion, social inequalities, youth transitions
- Labour markets: employment over the lifecourse, equal opportunities, gender and employment
- Modelling: lifecourse simulation modelling, longitudinal and evaluation studies, multilevel modelling.

BG is also home to three internationally renowned longitudinal datasets (the 1958 National Child Development Study, the 1970 British Cohort Study and the 2000 Millennium Cohort Study) which provide a valuable resource for student research. PhD studentships are available in order to exploit existing and forthcoming data from the Birth Cohort Studies and other longitudinal datasets. Further details: www.ioe.ac.uk/bedfordgroup/students. If you have a good undergraduate or master's degree and a relevant research proposal for further study, please contact BG at phd@bg.ioe.ac.uk

Participatory approaches to research

A recent report published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and written by Fran Bennett with Moraene Roberts, gives an overview of 'participatory' approaches in the UK allowing more involvement and influence for people with experience of poverty.

The report, *From input to influence: Participatory approaches to research and enquiry into poverty* reviews the potential and pitfalls in participatory approaches to poverty research. Drawing on lessons from international development, as well as practice in the UK, it suggests the next steps needed to take such approaches further forward in Britain, including making the links with policy debates and decision-making. Part of the JRF's Contemporary Research Issues series, *From input to influence* connects with debates about research ethics and user involvement in research, and will be of interest to social policy researchers, anti-poverty activists and community development workers, as well as policy makers seeking ways to work together with people living in poverty.

PDF copies and a free summary are available online from www.jrf.org.uk/. Paperback copies, priced £15.95 plus postage and packing, can be bought online or direct from York Publishing Services, 64 Hallfield Road, Layerthorpe, York YO31 7ZQ, 01904 430033.

For other titles in the Contemporary Research Issues series see www.jrf.org.uk

Scottish Centre for Social Research Scotland

In February, NatCen merged its operations in Scotland with Scottish Health Feedback to become the Scottish Centre for Social Research (SCSR). Based in Edinburgh, the director is Simon Anderson. For further information see www.scotcen.org.uk

Research findings

New publications in this series from the Scottish Executive and the Centre for Research on Families and Relationships include:

Family formation and dissolution; trends and attitudes among the Scottish population: This research draws together existing Scottish data in trends in family formation and dissolution and has been undertaken as part of the government's commitment to evidence-based policy making in advance of the proposed family law reform in Scotland.

Child Contact Centres in Scotland: This research draws together the key results from two recent Scottish Executive funded research projects on Scottish Child Contact Centres.

Full details of all Scottish Executive social research at www.scotland.gov.uk/socialresearch

Centre for Educational Sociology – Special Briefings

Three new briefings in this series from CES at the University of Edinburgh draw on evidence from the Scottish School Leavers Survey:

- Destinations of Early Leavers
- Young People Not in Education, Employment or Training
- Participation in Science, Engineering and Technology

For further information see www.ed.ac.uk/ces

Pockets of poverty in UK

The Child Poverty Action Group recently published a report (*Poverty: the facts* (5th edition)) which concludes that, although some regions and countries in the UK are poorer than others, each contains diverse areas and cities with different poverty levels. The report also considers recent government initiatives and reports on their 'limited' success. The latest official figures show that child poverty is in decline in Britain and that the government hopes to reach its goal of reducing child poverty by a quarter in 2004/05. Despite this, and the report's recognition that policies to reduce deprivation are underway, more needs to be done for the areas and the population groups which have fallen furthest behind. For a summary of the report see www.cpag.org.uk

Source: Policy Hub

Childcare and early education

A report published by the National Audit Office (*Early years: progress in developing high quality childcare and early education accessible to all* (HC 268 2003-2004)) in February examines childcare and early education provision for children below compulsory school age in England. The report shows that nearly 100,000 new childcare places have been created for pre-school children since 1998 and the government is on course to meet its targets for the provision of free part-time early education for three- and four-year-olds. But more needs to be done to ensure that much of this new provision is sustainable. And, while considerable progress has been made in closing the gap in relative levels of provision between the poorest areas and others, there is still some way to go. For full details see www.nao.org.uk

Source: Policy Hub

Social research by children

An article on 24 March 2004 in Society Guardian (Youthful Outlook) examines a project at the Open University Children's Research Centre which aims to give children the skills to conduct their own social research. The centre believes that much information from existing research is presented through adult filters. The questions which children pose or the social policy research agenda which they want to set, are as illuminating as the answers they give.

The article can be viewed on <http://society.guardian.co.uk>

Is evidence-based government possible?

This was the title of a recent lecture given by Philip Davies of the Government Chief Social Researcher's Office at the Campbell Collaboration Colloquium in Washington D.C.

Evidence-based policy has become a major part of many governments' approach to policymaking and the machinery of government. The growing interest in, and practice of evidence-based government in a number of countries provided the inspiration for this lecture which addressed whether evidence-based policy and evidence-based government is possible, and whether it is more than a rhetorical device. In it, Davies defined evidence-based policy and considered factors other than evidence that influence policymaking and policy implementation. He also considered the types of evidence used by governments and the types of research that can contribute to that evidence. He went on to discuss some of the mechanisms that need to be in place for evidence-based government to occur and concluded that evidence-based government is possible and is well established in the UK. Davies argued that a broader conception of evidence is used by most governments than by some academics, and that a wide range of methods for gathering and appraising evidence for government is required.

For further information contact phil.davies@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk.

Current Developments in Social Science Research Ethics

William Solesbury, gives a brief summary of the joint ARCISS/SRA seminar held in January at the Policy Studies Institute. See also www.the-sra.org.uk

Debating ethical conduct

About 70 participants attended this seminar to discuss issues about ethical conduct. These issues have been increasingly hotly debated partly in response to malpractices in other fields of research and to new legislative provisions on data protection and human rights, but also in response to public concern about intrusive inquiry. The seminar was in three parts: a stocktaking of current practices in the research community; presentations on current initiatives to develop new codes, procedures or frameworks and discussion of issues of concern to practising researchers.

Taking stock of practice

The first speakers were *Sharon Witherspoon*, Nuffield Foundation and *Professor Anthea Tinker*, Kings College who have been working on a survey of university research ethics committees. Sharon explained the Nuffield Foundation's approach that it is important to develop a model for institutional responsibility, whilst avoiding over-bureaucratic, duplicate or inappropriate procedures, especially those based on the needs of other disciplines. It is in this context that Anthea Tinker has been commissioned by the foundation to survey the role, remit and conduct of existing university research ethics committees (RECs).

In the next session, Dr Seamus Hegarty, National Foundation for Educational Research, reported that his centre has a code of practice and guidelines addressing issues specific to NFER's work, mostly research on young people.

Jane Lewis of the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) reported three different approaches. First, initial responsibility for ethical scrutiny lay with the research team, involving the use of the SRA guidelines, training and supervision of staff, and monitoring of survey interviewers. Secondly, where appropriate or necessary, proposals would be submitted to Medical Research Ethics Committees (MRECs). But not only was this time consuming, the advice offered - commonly derived from medical practice - was often of dubious relevance, consistency or value. Thirdly, NatCen is developing a new procedure in which the initial internal team review would, where appropriate, be supplemented by independent, external review by experts in the field of the project.

Bruce Stafford, Centre for Research in Social Policy, Loughborough University, discussed his view that research ethics is essentially an aspect of quality assurance and, as such, an ongoing process throughout the research, though difficult to monitor and ensure compliance, especially with subcontractors.

Some current initiatives

Four current initiatives for addressing ethical issues in social science were presented. *Ron Iphofen* spoke about the recent revision of the SRA's Ethical Guidelines, originally published in 1984. See www.the-sra.org.uk

Sally Dench introduced the RESPECT project to develop a new European code for socio-economic research. The code will cover ethics, but also professional standards, data protection, intellectual property, competences and qualifications. See www.respect.org

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has been developing an ethical framework for its social research, a first among government departments, though the Chief Social Researcher's Office is now exploring the scope of a cross-departmental approach. *Karl Olsen* and *Jo Bacon* explained that ethics was important for DWP work, both because of the expansion of its research staff and the focus of much of its research on vulnerable people. Draft guidance was prepared in summer 2003 in the DWP Working Paper No 11, *Doing the Right Thing*, see www.dwp.gov.uk/asd/asd5

Professor Andrew Webster spoke about his current work for the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) on the development of a social sciences research ethics framework. Progress of the work can be tracked at www.york.ac.uk/res/ref

Group discussions

Participants divided into four groups to discuss issues that had arisen in the presentations.

Conclusions

In closing the seminar, Ceridwen Roberts of the SRA - who had co-chaired the seminar with Professor Jim Skea of ARCISS - drew some conclusions from the presentations and the discussions:

- Research ethics is important to the good standing of social research
- It should be approached as a path to be followed rather than a hurdle to be jumped
- In developing approaches, bureaucracy and duplication must be avoided
- Training and professional development had emerged as key areas for further action
- Above all, there is still much work on research ethics to be done.

ESRC Research Methods Festival

St Catherine's College, Oxford, 1-3 July

Professor Angela Dale, ESRC Research Methods Programme looks ahead to this three-day research event

The ESRC's Research Methods Festival challenges the perception that methods are boring. For three days in July researchers will come together to debate, discuss and update themselves on methods in social research. Topics range from digital ethnography to statistical modelling to informed consent. The festival will present cutting-edge developments as well as sessions that provide awareness raising for those who know they really ought to know! There are also plenty of opportunities to debate and disagree, whether across disciplines or across sectors. All this will be in the pleasant surroundings of St Catherine's College, Oxford - a Grade 1 listed building designed by Arne Jacobsen - with live jazz and an excellent dinner at the end of a midsummer's day.

More than 20 projects funded within the ESRC's flagship Methods Programme will be talking about their research and providing demonstrations. Topics will include social network analysis, the analysis of media content, methods to analyse an individual's changing attitudes over time, analysis of the complex processes involved in partnership and childbearing histories and the innovative use of surnames from historical registers to chart Irish migration in Britain in the last half of the nineteenth century.

Some projects will run interactive workshops, for example on involving users in the design and conduct of research and in the assessment of quality in qualitative research. A number of debates will be taking place, including one on the role of trials in policy assessment. This will focus on the recent report, *The Role of Pilots in Policy-Making*, commissioned by the Cabinet Office Strategy Unit and chaired by Roger Jowell. Causality forms the topic of another debate with exchanges between crosscutting disciplines as well as the different perspectives of policy makers and academics.

Several major themes run through the festival. One is international comparative analysis, with major sessions on Friday and Saturday. On Friday morning, the focus is on achieving comparability of data and in the afternoon, on methods of analysis. Major international speakers provide a disciplinary mix with all the opportunity that this offers for new methods and approaches. On Saturday, the international theme continues with two sessions on the collection and analysis of time use data with speakers from Australia, France and Germany, as well as the UK.

Another important theme is resources for research methods and ESRC's strategy for achieving this. On Thursday, this includes a major session on the role of research design, and just how important it is that proposed empirical research actually generates the

evidence needed to answer the research question posed. There will also be many opportunities to find out more about the resources funded by ESRC to promote good research practice. These include a drop-in session to gain help with statistical analysis, sessions on longitudinal data and analysis, the census of population and the wide range of data sources available for secondary analysis.

On Saturday, we focus on teaching and learning. This will be of interest to lecturers responsible for teaching good research methods to graduate students, and also graduate students who want to find out how to get published, improve their presentational skills, build their careers and, the most feared experience for all research students, how to survive their viva.

You can see the full programme at: www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/festival. If you would like to attend you need to go to this website and book online for each session. You can book for as little as one session or for all three days. There is a charge of £20 per day (£10 for PhD students), to include coffee, tea and a two-course lunch. You can book dinner on Thursday or Friday for an additional £20 per day. Before dinner on each day there will be an hour of live jazz to allow you to relax with a drink - outside if the weather is good or in the Junior Common Room if not. On Saturday, we have jazz before and after lunch.

There is no car parking. We strongly advise everyone to come by train. From the station the College is a 25-minute walk through the centre of Oxford or 10-minute taxi ride. If you need to come by car then we advise you to use one of the Park and Ride car parks outside the city centre.

'the festival challenges
the perception that
methods are boring'

Books/reports 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 can keep the reviewed item.

Evaluation of the Commission on Poverty, Participation and Power

Sarah del Tufo and Lucy Gaster

The Evaluation Trust/Joeeph Rowntree Foundation

Researching 'Race' and Ethnicity; Methods, Knowledge and Power

Yasmin Gunaratnam

Sage Publications Ltd

'Let's Move On': Black and Minority Ethnic older people's views on research findings

Jabeer Butt and Alex O'Neil

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Biographical Methods and Professional Practice: An international perspective

Edited by Prue Chamberlayne, Joanna Bornat and Ursula Apitzsch

The Policy Press

Qualitative Research in Sociology

Amir B. Marvasti

Sage Publications

New Approaches in Social Research

Carol Grbich

Sage Publications

Using Social Theory: Thinking through research

Michael Pryke, Gillian Rose and Sarah Whatmore

Sage Publications

Overcoming disadvantage: An agenda for the next 20 years

IPPR, Social Market Foundation, Policy Exchange, Scottish Council Foundation and Institute of Welsh Affairs

Introduction by Nicholas Timmins

Joseph Rowntree Foundation

Reviews

New Roles for Old: Local Authority Members and Partnership Working

Mick Wilkinson and Gary Craig

Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2002, 49pp, £13.95

ISBN 1 84263 109 8

Reviewed by Emily Gilbert, Voluntary Sector Officer, Somerset County Council

Since the election of the Labour Government in 1997, local government has increasingly been required to form partnerships in a wide range of policy areas, for example, health and social care or regeneration. This timely research explores the tension between the

traditional role of elected members (councillors) as community leaders and their new role as equal partners in the new broad-based governance. The research was commissioned by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, in collaboration with the Local Government Association and the Improvement and Development Agency (IdeA).

Wilkinson and Craig distributed questionnaires to all local authorities in England and Wales and carried out in-depth interviews in three case study areas with local authority members and officers, and a range of partner organisations. They explored the experiences of partnership working among elected members, what support they might need and how this might be provided.

The authors found that increasing central government insistence on partnership working left many elected members fearing that their democratic role is being diminished. The report highlights the positive and negative aspects of partnership working, but concludes, 'it is clearly time that executive members were granted the freedom of manoeuvre concomitant with their unique status as democratically elected representatives, with local knowledge and considerable abilities'. (p 40)

The authors make several recommendations to central government including slowing down the growing proliferation of partnerships, the need to resource partnership working and letting go of the tight reins on local government. The research also makes other recommendations relating to the need to ensure adequate training and support for elected members.

One of the outcomes of the research was a guidance note about elected members' role in partnerships, which was distributed to local authorities by the Local Government Association. The report will be useful reading for all local government members and officers involved in partnerships, as well as those interested more generally in the changing role of local government.

Qualitative Research Practice – A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers

Jane Ritchie and Jane Lewis (eds)

Sage Publications, London, 2003

ISBN 07619 7110 6

Reviewed by Jenny Carrino, Senior Research Officer, Department for Work and Pensions

This is an excellent 'how to' book for students and those new to research. It provides a good introduction to all aspects of the research process from the philosophy behind qualitative techniques to the writing up stage of the research process.

The chapters are structured in a way that makes the research process appear rather linear. However, this makes it easy to navigate through the subject areas and quickly locate topics of interest. The authors also provide an indication of the overlap and interdependence between the research 'stages' by referring the reader to relevant chapters.

The text is easy to read and engaging with the authors using varied examples to amplify what has been said in the commentary. The language is punchy and concise which makes the text easy to understand and follow. The chapters are well signposted with a brief outline of content at the start and a text box at the end that reviews the key points in the chapter.

The book covers a large range of topic areas, and although this means that little time can be spent in great detail on some issues, all the chapters raise and cover well the major issues pertinent to the topic being discussed. A strength of the book is that it makes the reader aware of key contemporary debates and, where there is limited scope for discussion, refers the reader to relevant further reading. I found the two chapters on qualitative analysis particularly engaging. I would definitely recommend this book as a starting point for those new to research.

Ethnography

Brewer, John D. (2000)
Buckingham: Open University Press (Paperback £17.99)

Biographical Research

Roberts, Brian (2002)
Buckingham: Open University Press (Paperback £16.99)

Unobtrusive Methods in Social Research

Raymond M. Lee (2000)
Buckingham: Open University (Paperback £17.99)

Reviewed by: Ron Iphofen, University of Wales, Bangor

All three of these books in Alan Bryman's OU series 'Understanding Social Research' are well worth a look. While the titles appear beguilingly introductory, the texts are certainly not. Parts of each of these texts would confuse the truly novice researcher. I would gauge them as useful for the fairly experienced researcher – postgraduate and above – that seeks a quick but comprehensive and lucid coverage of each of these fields.

I am supervising several health professionals working at Masters' level and above who need to understand the range of approaches available under the umbrella term of "Biographical Research" and for whom Brian Roberts' book will help give direction. This is a burgeoning field and Roberts links the classic and the modern via clarification of concerns over methodological and disciplinary issues. His explanation of the differences between oral history and life history, the place and uses of narrative analysis, together with a consideration of biographical research within the broader ethnographic approach will save my more experienced students some considerable time.

The same can be said of John Brewer's detailed and comprehensive coverage of the whole field of 'Ethnography'. He draws extensively on the difficult and tension-ridden literature, and explores the origins

and consequences of such tensions. Brewer tries to help resolve any confusion by taxonomising and labelling areas of disagreement as if they were truly discrete – more experienced researchers may find even more to disagree with by such a device! But the systematic ways in which design, data collection and analysis, case studies, and field notes are each addressed redeems the folly of trying to categorise unruly ethnographers.

It is a pity that methodological discussions in ethnographic texts still feel the need the 'excuse' the endeavour by contrasting this approach to the positivism of natural science. So, old arguments are here once again re-rehearsed. If that discourages PhD students from continually doing the same it will be worth it.

A major concern for me was that the illustrative examples draw overwhelmingly upon the author's own work. While they are informative and interesting, it narrows the benefit of the illustration.

My personal favourite of the three works is Raymond Lee's update of the seminal Webb et al.'s 'Unobtrusive Measures'. For the modern researcher who may not have covered Webb in their initial training it contextualises the original work, draws out its most salient points in outline and then offers useful summaries of most of the work done in the field since. Admittedly this is a disappointingly small field given the popularity of the original text and the influence it had on research methods thinking over four decades.

Lee's organisation of the field into 'found', 'captured' and 'retrieved' data follows the original but, necessarily, an extremely informative section on the internet – as one of the most obvious opportunities to conduct research unobtrusively – is added. New work and new approaches consequent on new technology (e.g. video analysis) or developing theory (as in semiology) is explained comprehensively and critiqued. Each chapter includes a short, annotated recommended reading list.

Lee leaves me full of admiration for the persistent barologists who sift the detritus of human life and draw some remarkable conclusions about how we live from what we discard; for the contemporary archaeological skills of the accretion graffitologist dedicated to hours recording the walls of carefully sampled WCs; and for the visual acuity of pupil dilation observers when a deal in jade is about to be struck. What is particularly stressed in this perspective is the revitalisation of the methodological imagination and the patience and persistence required to implement the idea. These are innovative approaches that you wish you had thought of, but, sadly, probably would not have pursued if you had! Which is why the original ideas only caught on as serious methodological strategies amongst a few dedicated researchers. But the new ways of working unobtrusively suggested here offer inspiration and, in many cases, practical triangulation approaches that could compensate for known deficiencies in many existing methods. This is a book all self-respecting social researchers should read.

dates for your diary

SRA TRAINING DAYS

LONDON

- **15 September: Introduction to Qualitative Analysis**
- **20 October: tbc**
- **18 November: Introduction to Cognitive Methods**

All London training days will be held at the London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, London, N7 6PA. For further details contact Suzanne Cohen at admin@the-sra.org.uk or see www.the-sra.org.uk

SRA EVENTS

EDINBURGH

- **2 June: Youth-focused Antisocial Behaviour Seminar**

For further details contact Lindsay Adams, SRA Scotland at scotland@the-sra.org.uk

LONDON

- **25 May: Ethnic Group Statistics: a guide for the collection and classification of ethnicity data. Joint seminar with the Royal Statistical Society**

(See page 5 for details)

Time: 5:00pm (tea from 4:30pm)
The seminar is free and at the Royal Statistical Society headquarters, 12 Errol Street, London, EC1 (see www.rss.org.uk for directions). No need to book.

- **28 June: Evening Seminar: Lone Parent Cohort and their Children 1991-2001**
- **21 July: Summer Event: Evaluating Area-based Initiatives**
- **17 September: The Impact of Social Science Research on Social Policy: A European Cross-National View**

This is the fifth in an ESRC-funded

series of seminars. It concentrates on the link between social science research and policy developments and looks at the ways in which academic researchers can ensure the knowledge they generate is relevant to policy users and wider society. Venue: London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. Further details at: www.xnat.org.uk

- **27 September: Evening Seminar: Time and How We Use It: the Time Use Survey**
- **18 October: Evening Seminar: Citizen Information Project: The UK Population Register**
- **16 November: Cathie Marsh Memorial Lecture**

SRA ANNUAL CONFERENCE

- **1 December: Improving the Impact of Social Research**

For latest news see www.the-sra.org.uk

SHORT COURSES AND SEMINARS

Association for Survey Computing

- **30 September: Mobile Computing** at Imperial College, London

The conference will explore the opportunities and limitations of the mobile mode of data collection. Contributions to the conference are invited.

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

CASS courses

- **9-11 June: Likelihood Methods for Social Surveys** University of Southampton

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
Tel: 023 8059 5376
Email: cass@socsci.soton.ac.uk
www.socstats.soton.ac.uk/cass

Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research

- **June 2: Statistical Modelling with Stata**
- **June 10-11 Introduction to Stata/Data Management with Stata**

Through funding awarded as part of the ESRC Research Methods Programme, the centre can offer a limited number of bursaries for its short courses to cover course fees and a contribution to travel and subsistence.

For more information contact: Margaret Martin
Tel: 0161 275 4589
Email: ccsr@man.ac.uk
www.ccsr.ac.uk/courses/external/2003-2004

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See also

SRA online

at

www.the-sra.org.uk

*

dates for your diary

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

- **June 24-25: Identification Problems in Social Sciences**

For details of fees and other courses:
Tel: 01524 593064
Email: m.peckham@lancaster.ac.uk
www.cas.lancs.ac.uk/short_courses

LGA/LARIA

- **9 June, London**
- **14 June, Crewe
Researching Rural Needs**

Two different (linked) events being run jointly by the local Government Association and the Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association. Further information: www.laria.gov.uk or www.lga.gov.uk

NATCEN

- **1-5 November: Design, conduct and analyse qualitative research using depth interviews**
- **30 November and 1 December: Design, conduct and analyse qualitative research using focus groups**

Further information: Lisa Pinckard
Tel: 0207 549 9540
Email: l.pinckard@natcen.ac.uk

University of Reading SSC
Courses in Applied Statistics

- **June 7-8: Multivariate Analysis**
- **June 9-11: Repeated Measurements Analysis**
- **September 27: Using Your Statistical Software Better**

- **September 28-29: Good Tables with Microsoft, Excel and more**

The Statistical Services Centre offers a wide variety of courses for a range of audiences. Only a selection is listed above. 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,
University of Reading
Tel: 0118 378 8689
Fax: 0118 975 3169
Email: statistics@reading.ac.uk
www.rdg.ac.uk/ssc/

CONFERENCES

- **1 September: Researching the Voluntary Sector**

NCVO/VSSN Conference at Sheffield Hallam University. 'New Researchers' session will be 1.45-5.15pm. The session will focus on emerging research themes and research methodologies.

For details of full conference see:
www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

If not registered for full event, you can attend new researchers session for free. But let NCVO know by 20 August.

Further details from
nicola.ponikiewski@volunteeringengland.org
Tel: 020 77520 8911

Stop Press

A New Journal – Call for Papers

The Policy Press in association with the ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice, Queen Mary University of London, is launching a new Journal – Evidence of Research, Debate and Practice – in January 2005.

Associates are invited to submit papers for inclusion in the journal to Ken Young (k.g.young@qmul.ac.uk) or Anette Boaz (a.l.boaz@qmul.ac.uk).

Full details of the new journal and notes for contributors are available on www.evidencenetwork.org

Are you running a course, seminar or conference?

If you are involved in (or know of) a training course, seminar or conference that other SRA members could attend, please contact the SRA admin office.

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

The SRA website is sponsored by Bostock Marketing Group (BMG) www.bostock.co.uk

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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