

What is Full Economic Costing?

One of the most significant and far-reaching reforms in research funding was announced by the DTI in January, and takes effect from September. This starts the implementation of the government commitment in the Science and Innovation Investment Framework 2001-14 to move close to 100% full economic costing (FEC) by the beginning of the next decade. [Anne Harrop](#), Director of Research, Joseph Rowntree Foundation explains.

The system for funding research is being reformed to ensure the long-term sustainability of university research. There is broad consensus across the research industry that the current system is not working well, and that reform is required. The key change is in the way research grants will be funded by Research Councils, for example the Economic and Social Research Council and government departments. Although other funders of research, such as charitable trusts and the private sector, are not required to follow suit, the reforms will impact on their commissioning and funding practices.

Current position

Funding for universities currently comes from the Funding Councils' research block grant funding (QR) which is to provide an underpinning research capability for Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) and from project grants from the Research Councils, charitable trusts and so on. The Funding Council allocation is to provide a base from which permanent academic staff can apply for project funding, and has commonly been used in combination with project funding from charities and elsewhere. Similarly, Research Councils have not had to pay for permanent

academic staff in projects they fund as this is covered by the block funding.

Over the years, the funding of HEIs has become acute, partly because there has been stagnation in Funding Council support combined with a generally poor understanding of the actual cost of research and a neglect of long-term infrastructure costs. The new arrangements, known as full economic costing, are a move to calculating the cost for a project based on the true costs of carrying out the work. A methodology known as TRAC

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(Transparent Approach to Costing) has been developed, and will be used by the Research Councils for future project costings. Under FEC, the cost of the research projects will include items such as the salaries of permanent academic staff, costs of pooled staff (e.g. personnel), estate costs, central computing facilities, library services and so on that were previously unknown or were not included under the current system.

New system from September

This system comes into effect for Research Councils in September. There are transitional arrangements such that Research Councils will pay 80% of the Full Economic Cost, increasing to 100% over the coming years. In addition, where equipment, infrastructure and survey costs exceed £50,000 on a grant, then the amount above this figure will be paid in full. Government departments will also be required to pay FEC. Thus, all researchers based in HEIs applying for research funding from a Research Council or university will need to apply according to the new funding system. More information is on the OST website (www.ost.gov.uk/research/dualsupport.htm), the ESRC website (www.esrc.ac.uk) in addition to internal support within universities. Importantly, Funding Council support (QR) has been maintained.

The position for researchers based in HEIs applying for research funding from other funders, such as charitable trusts and the private sector, is more complicated. The requirement on universities is to

recover, in aggregate, the full economic costs of activities. Thus, they need to know and understand the actual full economic cost of each project but they need to make a judgement on how much to charge for each project to funders other than a Research Council or government department recognising there is a distinction between cost and price.

It will take some time for the system to be fully implemented and the implications to play out

There are good reasons why universities may wish to charge less than the FEC on a project.

- First, the activity may be central to their strategic objectives and in a competitive market they may wish to increase their value for money by charging below the actual rate.
- Second, funders may not be willing to pay the FEC on projects.

Charitable trusts, for example, would not usually see the provision of central services as appropriate for their funds. The Association of Medical Research Charities has already issued a statement saying that their member charities will not normally meet the full economic costs of the research they are supporting (www.amrc.org.uk) and other charitable trusts are likely to issue guidance before FEC is implemented. Thus, university-based researchers should check with funders what their position is regarding FEC before applying. They may also need to consult their internal research administrators. As QR money is available, one source of 'balancing the books' for projects that are priced below cost is to utilise QR money. It is a matter for

universities to decide how much they charge for each project but their overarching obligation is to not make a loss on activities.

For researchers based outside HEIs it is prudent to check the guidance for funding for new proposals from the funder they are applying to. It is wise to do this even if they are not applying to a Research Council or government department as most funders are reviewing their funding criteria and exceptions, and systems may be changing. It may also be worth looking at the TRAC methodology that universities are using as this may influence how they calculate the price they charge.

Likely impact

It will take some time for the system to be fully implemented and the implications to play out. The cost of academic research will inevitably rise, and this may have consequences for competitiveness. Over time, the funding practices of other funders will also need to adapt to the changing funding environment meaning that less research may be commissioned as the costs rise. Combined with the concentration of research within a decreasing number of HEIs, the base of research in the UK could contract significantly. Whatever the consequences, the achievement of a sustainable funding regime of HEIs is a goal worth supporting.

Editorial

SRA Chair, *Ceridwen Roberts*, gives her quarterly report.

Over the summer, we tend to run fewer events and training workshops but this year we have been busy behind the scenes. The Summer Event and Special General Meeting set in train a number of activities.



Special general meeting

Members voted unanimously that the Executive take steps to register the SRA as a charity and company limited by guarantee. The SRA has developed to such an extent that it needs a legal status commensurate with its size and income. Incorporation will provide committee members with better legal protection, and most comparable professional bodies have already taken this step.

We will report on the implications of this at the AGM in December, and suggest any constitutional changes that may be necessary. So, members will have a chance to look at what is proposed. These proposals will not change the relationship between the Executive and members, and we will remain a member-led organisation.

The meeting also agreed a proposal to review our financial structure to identify how much income should come from membership subscriptions and how much from events and training courses. An office and more paid staff have increased our running costs, and at the same time we need to pay for some services that committee members can no longer provide on top of their day jobs. It is important to look at what members get for their money and

whether a flat fee structure is still appropriate. Fees will be considered alongside the aim of continuing to develop services to members. The recent Nuffield Foundation grant will help to fund the review that will report to the AGM.

Two small working parties have been set up to steer the change of legal status and manage the membership review and we would like your views on these proposals. We are circulating a questionnaire asking members what services you use and want. Please respond so we can better meet everyone's needs. Further information is on the website.

New SRA groups

SRA Scotland's great success has encouraged others to begin to set up groups. The Executive wants to encourage this as we can then provide events and training workshops more easily around the country. Members in Wales are meeting with a view to setting up SRA Wales this autumn, and SRA Ireland intends to launch after a series of informal meetings. In the South West, social researchers in Bath and Bristol are also talking to us about forming a network. There are some resources through the Nuffield grant to help start these initiatives, so contact the office if you would like to set up a group in your area.

Training

The report of the training review is summarised on page 6. Look at the proposals and tell us your views. We are holding a consultation seminar on 30 September. Cathy Sullivan, chair of training and Jane Ritchie, both of whom were on the working group will explain SRA thinking while Sue Duncan, Government Chief Social Researcher will talk about training in the Social Research group and Adrian Alsop, Director for Research, Development and Training at the ESRC will talk about the ESRC's Researcher Development Initiative.

We also hope to have the results of the SRA's bid to this initiative by then.

SRA office

New administrators, Jean and Gemma have overhauled our financial and membership systems over the summer to improve efficiency. We have recruited a new webmaster, Jon White. He is reviewing the website and will shortly be setting up a members' only section. Do tell us if there are things you would like to see on the website.

Annual conference

This promises to be a big event, so do put 7 December in your diary (see page 4 for details). Hope to see you there.

2005 Mark Abrams Prize: call for entries

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 (including an abstract of not more than 200 words) plus any tables or graphs. You can submit recently published or forthcoming work. If the former, it should not have been published earlier than 2005. There is no particular theme but preference will be given to theoretically-informed,

survey-based work concerned with the UK. Secondary analysis of survey data would be especially welcome. Judges will take due account of the age, experience and circumstances of authors, and reserve the right not to award a prize. Judges are:

Dominic Abrams, University of Kent
Martin Bulmer, Surrey University,
John Hall, formerly PNL, Janet Lewis, formerly JRF, Susanne MacGregor, LSHTM, Jean Martin, ONS, Nick Moon, NOP, Anthea Tinker, King's College London.

The prize is worth £250 and will be presented at the SRA annual conference on 7 December. Last year's winning entry is on the SRA website.

Send entries (six hard copies and one electronic version preferably in Word) together with brief biographical details of the author(s) and contact details by 30 September to: The Administrator, SRA Administrative Office, 175-185 Gray's Inn Road, London WC1X 8UP.

SRA ANNUAL CONFERENCE: NOW TAKING BOOKINGS!

Nuisance or Necessity? *The role of non-researchers in research*

This is the question for this year's SRA annual conference on 7 December.

Professor Peter Beresford from Brunel University will address the conference highlighting key issues and dilemmas associated with patient, public and service user involvement in research.

We have put together an impressive line up of workshop speakers:

- Fran Bennett from Oxford University will give an overview of participatory approaches to research and inquiry into poverty in the UK and Africa, and explore the potential and the pitfalls in trying to engage in them
- Nick Axford from Dartington Social Research Unit will discuss how best to manage the use of hard-hitting and potentially contentious findings in a context where there is high interest and commitment from all stakeholders – policy-makers, managers, practitioners, media,

residents, funders, drawing on his experiences in a deprived city suburb in Ireland

- Researchers from EPPI-Centre will look at their experience of facilitating participation of different kinds of non-researchers (secondary school pupils, advocates for and practitioners in gay men's health, policy makers) in three systematic reviews
- The Government Social Research Unit will describe the Analysis for Policy Project which explores how policy makers currently perceive social research; including how they gather the evidence they think they need to support policy and their understanding of different analytical disciplines.

The conference will take place at the Brunei Gallery, SOAS, University of London, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London, WC1H 0XG. To book your place email Jean Harrison at admin@the-sra.org.uk or call 020 7812 0634.

Diary

For the latest diary dates, why not subscribe to the SRA monthly e-bulletin at www.the-sra.org.uk

The SRA runs an extensive training and events programme. Details are at www.the-sra.org.uk or contact the SRA administrator.

SRA seeks members to stand for office

Elections for the SRA Executive and some officer posts to replace those retiring will take place at the AGM on 7 December. There will be a formal call by email to all members in mid-September. Think about standing or encouraging colleagues to do so.

Help needed

Charitable Status and Membership Working Parties

There are two vacancies, one on each working party. If you would like to help the SRA, either change its legal status or review its membership benefit package and fee structure please contact the office.

SRA IRELAND: Peter Humphries gives an update

Summer in Dublin

SRA Ireland members gathered on 15 July to take stock and plan ahead.

We have previously profiled the work of the Equality Authority, the National Children's Office, Comhairle and the Institute of Public Administration. Below, we feature the National Disability Authority and Insight Statistical Consulting.

National Disability Authority

The National Disability Authority (NDA) is the statutory agency advising the Irish government on disability policy and standards. It also has a statutory function for disability statistics and research. The NDA conducts in-house research, and commissions projects. In September 2006, following a pilot survey commissioned by the NDA, Ireland's first-ever National Disability

Survey will be conducted by the Central Statistics Office. Recent reports include: *Disability and Social Inclusion in Ireland* and *The experience of people with disabilities in accessing health services in Ireland*. For more information see www.nda.ie/

Insight Statistical Consulting (Ireland)

Insight Statistical Consulting, ISC is one of Ireland's leading providers of research and data analysis services. ISC works with high profile clients in both the public and private sector in Ireland and internationally. For over 15 years, ISC has helped organisations collect and understand information. Organisations that have used these services have reported faster, better-informed decision-making as a result. ISC was founded as a campus company of Trinity College

Dublin, and still retains a close association with the Department of Statistics.

Clients often use ISC for their particular expertise in study design, sampling and statistical analysis. The team has developed two training courses: 'Data analysis training using Data Desk' and 'Survey Design and Analysis'. ISC also distributes the exploratory data analysis software Data Desk and the survey design, data collection and analysis software Keypoint. For more information see www.insightsc.ie/

Looking ahead

Opportunities to network, organise training, raise the professional recognition and representation of social research in Ireland will grow as our membership grows. If you are interested in knowing more, and would like to help, do get in touch with me at phumphreys@ipa.ie

SRA SCOTLAND: Chris Nicol gives a round up of activities

Events

In April, Robert Williams from the Scottish Executive discussed developments in the geography and administrative data used to develop the 2004 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Responding to suggestions from the membership, we co-hosted a popular evening seminar with Strathclyde University Careers Service on careers in social research. The speakers were: Barbara Doig, Scottish Executive Chief Researcher, Simon Brauhnoltz, Director, MORI Scotland and Simon Anderson, Director, Scottish Centre for Social Research.

In May, we held our annual event which looked at how research, policy and practice have developed since the creation of the Scottish parliament six years ago. Speakers and panellists came from academia: Professors Pamela Munn, David McCrone, John Curtice and Charlie Jeffrey; the Scottish Executive: Luke Cavanagh; the Scottish Parliament: Stephen Herbert; and Office of National Statistics: Greg Philpotts. About 60 people attended, and many stayed on for the wine reception.

Training

In late spring/early summer we ran training on sampling, basic research

design and questionnaire design. Some of these will be repeated.

Future events

We will circulate the autumn programme by email. To be put on the email list contact Lindsay Adams, SRA Scotland at scotland@the-sra.org.uk

More information

For information about the SRA in Scotland and future events contact Lindsay Adams at scotland@the-sra.org.uk or Chris Nicol, Capital City Partnership, 0131 270 6030 chrisnicol@capitalcitypartnership.org

SRA Training: review and consultation

Consulting with members

A thorough review has been conducted of the SRA's training function, and proposals and recommendations were presented to the Executive in May. Members and stakeholders are asked to submit their views, particularly on:

- Principles for training
- Pricing of courses and fee basis for paying tutors
- New integrated delivery model
- Wider training role
- Content of courses

Send your views to Cathy Sullivan, Chair of the Training Committee c.sullivan@londonmet.ac.uk by 30 September.

The report is summarised below, and you can read it in full on the SRA website.

Consultation event

30th September 1.30–5pm

This seminar is to discuss future training options against the context of developments by other major players. The Government Social Research Unit will report on work on core competences for social research in government, and the ESRC will present recent developments in support for research practitioners and mid-career development. In-house training activities amongst larger research organisations will also be highlighted. The seminar is for providers of social research training, independent trainers, employers of researchers, and experienced practitioners interested in training issues, to consider SRA proposals, other key developments and exchange ideas and views on ways forward for professional training.

For further details and booking form, contact the SRA administrator admin@the-sra.org.uk or download details at www.the-sra.org.uk

Summary of Training Review

The review group looked strategically at the SRA's role in social research training, as a provider and an organisation concerned with quality in research education.

Context

The SRA aims to 'advance the conduct, development and application of social research'. It has a key interest in ensuring sound standards of research practice and in the availability of high quality training in social research methods. It pursues this by providing training in social research and through a wider developmental role in social research training.

The SRA has run training courses for many years on a range of topics. These are aimed at practicing researchers and fill perceived gaps in provision. SRA courses are generally well regarded and over-subscribed.

Despite their popularity, certain features warranted review, including format, organisation, pricing and frequency; level; and potential for new training for more senior researchers/managers.

The SRA Training Committee is responsible for organising an annual programme, typically 4-5 one-day courses. The number has been increasing, with 12 in the past year. The committee comprises volunteers from a range of research sectors. SRA Scotland oversees courses in Scotland, and has been reviewing its training, debating similar issues.

Current arrangements allow the SRA to provide inexpensive accessible training, and be responsive to members. However, they also limit provision. Reliance on voluntary contributors limits the frequency of courses and how far the committee can ensure that courses that are linked are developed systematically and run sequentially.

Developmental role

The SRA has a wide-ranging membership but many are practicing researchers. It thus plays an important role in national training and career development. The SRA is concerned that high quality social research training is limited. Although research methods are taught on undergraduate social science courses and at postgraduate level, 'in service' training is usually needed to prepare for 'live' research. Also there are many specialist issues that require formal tuition as researchers progress through their careers. However, there are few courses at more advanced level.

We considered how the SRA might play a wider role in helping to strengthen and extend research training available to social researchers. Currently, there is no single organisation with responsibility for the quality and availability of training for the profession. Given the diversity of the industry and the number of players, this is not surprising. But we believe that some centralised activity would be beneficial. We make initial suggestions requiring further discussion.

Key principles for SRA training

We concluded training should be based on the following key principles:

- Development of coherent **integrated training packages** for certain areas of social research that trainees can follow through progressively. This would ensure that linked courses are fully integrated and adopt consistent teaching methods and topic approach.
- **High quality training provision.** Courses have usually relied on experienced researchers from different sectors offering time to tutor on courses. While these arrangements ensure that delegates hear from individuals with high levels of expertise in their field, tutors are not always experienced at training. To maximise benefits, tutors should have good training skills and give development time to the training.
- **Meeting the demand.** SRA courses are generally highly regarded and demand tends to exceed supply. This has meant that even popular courses are only run once or, occasionally, twice a year. We believe the SRA should develop its role as training provider and run courses more frequently to meet demand.
- The SRA has a track record in being responsive to new and emerging issues, responding to member-led suggestions on training (e.g. data protection). We believe this **flexibility and responsiveness** should be retained.

We concluded that to meet some principles outlined, the SRA will have to adopt a more professional system, paying teaching staff on an agreed and equitable basis. However, it should continue to provide **relatively inexpensive and accessible training**, and teaching fees should be somewhat below 'market rates'.

Please see the report for full discussion of principles and key proposals.

Recommendations

SRA training

- Training programmes are identified under two main headings:
 - core courses provide fundamental training in research methods
 - specialist or contemporary courses deal with emerging or cross cutting issues, specific methodological subjects
 Both should continue.
- Certain key features of training provision should continue. These include:
 - accessibility through delivery of relatively inexpensive courses
 - responsiveness to members' training suggestions and newly emerging professional or methodological topics
- The model for SRA training should be revised to increase frequency of courses and provide more systematic linkage in training offered. We recommend:
 - development of integrated packages for core areas of research practice which trainees can follow through progressively
 - moving to a fee paid basis for teaching staff on an agreed and equitable basis
- Core courses should run relatively frequently to meet demand. Some can be developed into integrated packages. Others are best delivered as stand-alone. Suggestions for new provision are made.
- Specialist or contemporary courses may benefit from being run in partnership with organisations that have specific expertise. Suggested topics are given.
- More courses are needed at an advanced level aimed at senior researchers and those

with research management responsibilities. Should a funding proposal to the ESRC for such courses be unsuccessful they should be considered for delivery in other ways.

- Core courses should have a fee-paying basis for tutors. Fee levels should be sufficiently high to attract high quality training but set below full commercial levels to allow affordable provision for members. Some specialist courses will also be commissioned on a fee-paid basis, others might be run on a non-fee basis in partnership with other organisations. A suggested fee structure is given.
- Thought will need to be given to how the SRA might identify and select training providers. Suggestions for this are made.
- The pricing structure needs to ensure costs are covered and some contribution made to SRA funds. A pricing structure is suggested. The training committee should continue its key role in designing and orchestrating the training programme.

SRA's wider role

- The SRA could play a key role by leading a coalition of organisations with an interest in training for the social research profession, to develop and support a framework within which training is provided.
- Opportunities to develop advanced training for senior researchers /managers in partnership with industry specialists, other providers, professional associations should be encouraged.
- Further dialogue with the ESRC would be of value to encourage greater response to needs of the social science practitioner constituency.

SRA SUMMER EVENT

Who are 'Vulnerable' and Who are 'Hard To Reach'?



'Hard to reach' groups are only hard to reach because we rarely make sufficient effort to communicate on their terms and in their time. For services, 'hard to reach' can mean hard to cater for. These key messages, often articulated by user advisor groups, also have relevance for researchers. Over 100 people attended the SRA summer event on 5 July at the Local Government Association's headquarters in Smith Square, London to listen to a range of speakers who drew on their experience of social research to demonstrate the implications of taking these issues seriously.

Susanne MacGregor reports.

Colm Power summed it all up in his talk on Irish travellers when he concluded, "Travellers can be 'vulnerable' but it is policy makers who are 'hard to reach'". A central theme of the discussions was the gaps that exist between different sections of society, and the role research can play in helping to bridge these.

Before launching into any piece of research, it is crucial to be clear about the background concepts, and it is equally important to think carefully about how these concepts can be put into operation. The terms 'vulnerable' and 'hard to reach' are deliberately put in apostrophes to highlight the questionable assumptions which may sometimes inform their use.

Siobhán O'Regan and Darcy Hill of the Institute of Employment Studies focused on the concept of the 'vulnerable worker' and asked, "How would you define it and can

you measure it?" Their presentation also touched on what was another theme of the day – the politics surrounding much research on these issues. Campaigns by trade unions, Citizens' Advice Bureaux and the ILO have raised awareness of 'worker vulnerability' and public attention has been drawn to the conditions experienced by migrant workers through events like the Morecambe Bay tragedy and the film *Dirty Pretty Things*. There are different ways of defining worker vulnerability and these were reviewed.

Siobhán and Darcy then gave their own definition, which assesses the balance between 'risk' and 'capacity' to indicate the degree of vulnerability faced by an individual. They concluded, "The degree of an individual worker's vulnerability is determined by the balance between risk of adverse treatment at work and the capacity to protect oneself. Both aspects are linked

to an individual's personal and employment characteristics as well as to the regulatory framework." The next challenge is to put this concept into practice, and consider the features of appropriate survey research.

Maggie O'Neill of Loughborough University talked about 'working together to create change'. This considered the added value which can be derived from using participatory action research methodologies. While the IES discussion had aimed to arrive at a neutral definition of vulnerability (although drawing on a commitment to research on employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets and human resource planning and development), Maggie stressed her commitment to working with communities to create change. The aim of using a participatory action research (PAR) methodology is to give voice to marginalised

groups and allow them to influence policy. PAR is rooted in the principles of inclusion, participation, valuing all local voices, transformation and social change and in partnership working that is community driven and sustainable. Maggie thus introduced another theme for the day – the importance of working in partnership when in this field of research. Here the partners included local communities and arts organisations. Another key characteristic of such research is the use of innovative techniques such as creative consultation which can involve the use of visual and artistic activities, such as creating comics or videos. Such products can say more than words alone and reach a wider audience. Research is seen as inseparable from action and intervention – the aim is to raise awareness and challenge stereotypes. Maggie illustrated these issues by describing her research in Leicester and Charnwood with newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers.

It is important in this kind of research to pay attention to the question of what happens when the research project has come to an end. As one delegate commented, groups involved in action research must not be dropped like hot coals after the project has finished. This is why working with networks which will continue after the research ends is essential.

Colm Power of the University of Central Lancashire talked about his research with England's Irish Travellers, conducted in partnership with the Action Group for Irish Youth (AGIY). The full report *Room To Roam* (funded by a Community Fund award) is available from the SRA website. This study focused on how services impact on Irish Travellers. Colm described how in carrying out his research, he dealt with the question 'how do you engage with people, engage with them as

human beings and with respect?' He preferred to see his encounters as 'conversations' rather than as 'semi-structured in-depth interviews'. He hoped the report they had produced had had some impact and would be widely read, and he challenged the 'executive summary mentality' of policy makers who wanted results presented in their language and on their terms. If the idea of this kind of research is to give voice to groups generally unheard then it is essential that their voice comes through – that is, that what they say is faithfully reported in their own language. If they are really interested, policy-makers will take the time and trouble to read it in full.

Researchers are faced with many ethical and emotional issues as well as practical and political ones

In the panel discussion, Jenny Pearce of Middlesex University drew on her research with 'young people at risk of sexual exploitation' (a term that has replaced that of 'child prostitution' – another reference to the assumptions contained in the very concepts and languages we use). This research was also conducted in partnership – with NSPCC and other NGOs. She mentioned the fears researchers have about venturing into doing what can be seen as 'dangerous' research. Researchers are faced with many ethical and emotional issues as well as practical and political ones. Arts projects can help young people to express their views and experiences and drop-in centres can help in gaining access. Sunita Bhabra of the Policy Research Bureau talked about interviews with children and the problems of getting ethical approval for such research – it took 18 months before they were allowed

to access and find social service departments which would cooperate – and described the use of cartoons as one way to talk with children.

Discussion highlighted the importance of distinguishing between 'disadvantaged' and 'hard to reach'. Some thought there was a danger of contributing to stereotyping by using terms like 'vulnerable', for example by focusing research on the 'vulnerable worker' rather than the 'exploitative employer'. Whom we look at, as well as how we look, shapes our findings and conclusions. Why do we not pay more attention to the hard to reach policy makers and service providers and explain their behaviour rather than talking about the personal characteristics of certain groups – as though these characteristics are all we need to know to explain their 'marginality'?

The day focused largely on qualitative participatory research. Some doubting voices were heard. There may be some problems with this approach – at what point does this kind of activity cease to be research? Getting people to participate is sometimes seen as more important than the research itself. But Jenny Pearce reminded us that there can be a number of different outcomes from a piece of research and all can be valuable.

Chairing the panel, Ceridwen Roberts summed this up as the drip-drip-drip effect of research knowledge – it can be the steady accumulation of several pieces of research that makes a difference. The day's discussions reminded us that 'access' and 'dissemination' are key parts of the research process and, although time consuming, are essential aspects of good quality work.

See www.sra.org.uk for PowerPoint slides of presentations.
See page 4 for details of SRA annual conference.

A Community Approach to Research Funding

The National Lottery Charities Board's research grants programme primary objective was to support the organisation's mission to tackle disadvantage by supporting high quality research. It therefore clearly shared its key motive to fund high quality research with other research funders. Dr Jurgen Grotz describes the programme.

The distinguishing feature of the programme was its approach of 'voluntary sector led research'. This has come to mean funding research in which a voluntary sector organisation takes the leading role within the project from developing its aims to disseminating its results. The two key underlying principles for this approach are:

- A voluntary sector organisation involves the community it serves and the beneficiaries of the research in a manner that makes a difference to the way the research is undertaken
- The research is of a quality that is recognised and accepted by research peers.

The term voluntary sector led research appears to have first been used in this context in 2003, however, the story started to unfold well before that.

The National Lottery Charities Board (NLCB) was set up in 1994 and began operating in 1995. It was a new non-departmental public body with a statutory remit to give grants to meet the expenditure of charities and other eligible philanthropic and benevolent voluntary organisations. The first awards were made in October 1995, and one year later

the NLCB began to make grants to voluntary sector organisations for research under its Health, Disability and Care programme. In 1996, it awarded £8.6m to 56 medical and social research projects supported by charities and voluntary organisations. In 1998, the NLCB invited applications to its health and social research grants programme, and in 1999 awarded £24.6m. The aims of the programme had already been refined. 'Where possible we would like to see users and beneficiaries playing an active and informed role...' Building on the experiences from this closed funding round, the NLCB launched a continuous research grants programme, and since June 2001 has awarded £22.3m. Approximately £5m went to medical research, £14m to social research and the remaining £3.3m to mixed medical and social research projects. The aim had been further defined: 'all research must clearly demonstrate appropriate involvement of the people who will benefit from it' and a new key element had been added: 'research projects that do not have a satisfactory dissemination plan will not be funded'. Exceptionally, the NLCB committed itself to funding the dissemination.

There had been a shift in expectations from requesting charities to 'support' a project to 'leading the research project'. The voluntary sector organisation was placed firmly in the driving seat, however, with the obligation to involve its beneficiaries. The programme 'sought to give the voluntary sector a greater voice in determining which research is done, how it is carried out, how its findings are disseminated and potentially taken forward into policy development and practice.'

From its launch, the research grants programme engaged in a debate with both the voluntary sector and the research sector about this approach. Two national conferences and a series of workshops throughout the country helped to refine the approach and illustrate its distinguishing features. In addition to this, the management of projects totalling £47m provided ample evidence for problems as well as benefits of this approach. Over the years, key aims were added to the primary objective of the programme: to encourage the voluntary sector and its beneficiaries to become involved in research and to promote better partnerships between the sector and the research community.

The NCLB research grants programme is now closed. Its successor organisation The Big Lottery Fund has stated it will continue to fund research, and decisions on how this will be done are expected in due course. For details on new programme launches see www.biglotteryfund.org.uk/ programmes or phone the Big Advice Line on 0845 4102030.

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Commissioning and funding by Janet Lewis

Four meetings of the SRA commissioning and funding working group have been held over the last year and attendance has been good (23 at the meeting in June). Two strands of work are emerging: the first concerned with developing resources to assist people with the commissioning/procurement process; and the second with identifying good practice or standard procedures for some of the core activities involved in commissioning and carrying out research.

Resources

Two working groups have been set up to progress website development and training. A proposal has been developed for a website and funding is being sought. The aim is to provide a clear and reliable 'how to' resource geared to providing solutions and delivering advice on good commissioning practice. The training group has found that there are virtually no training courses on research commissioning in the UK and very little on research management. It is exploring ways of filling the gaps either by direct provision or encouraging others.

Standard procedures

Discussions in the group have revealed considerable variation across organisations and sectors about many aspects of research practice including longstanding issues of copyright, ownership of data and publication issues, and new additions like the impact of the Alcatel judgement. What is emerging is that it would be helpful to codify the current state of knowledge, with the ultimate aim of having a set of generally agreed procedures. In the meantime, documents on these issues and the process of procurement will be put on the website.

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EDITORIAL POLICY STATEMENT

SRA News will include any copy that may be of interest to its readers in the social research community. We will notify you if we are unable to include an item. Copy submitted for publication is accepted on the basis that it may be edited to ensure coherence within the publication. The views expressed by individual contributors do not necessarily reflect those of the SRA.

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RESEARCH BRIEFING : *If there is anything you would like to publicise on these pages please send details to the SRA admin office. You can also receive more frequent briefings as a member through our e-bulletin. See www.the-sra.org.uk for membership details.*

Ethnography for the digital age

An excellent website (www.cf.ac.uk/socsi/hyper/p02/index.html) has recently been produced by this recently-completed research methods programme project, the primary aim of which was to address the theoretical, methodological and empirical implications of undertaking qualitative research that exploited the full possibilities of contemporary digital technologies. In addition to synopses of key methodological issues, theoretical

framework and key findings, the site also contains links to examples of work on the project. The examples take the reader on the journey of conducting a digital ethnography from the early stages of data management and archiving to the final development of the analytical trails within the Ethnographic Hypermedia Environment.

Source: ESRC research methods programme

ESRC seminar series on qualitative longitudinal research

A series of three events being organised by Dr Bren Neale of the University of Leeds, in collaboration with RMP to explore qualitative longitudinal research with the themes of principles, practice and policy. The series will begin with an international seminar to be held on 30 September at the University of Leeds. A further event will take place in March 2006 and the final 'policy' event, which will be hosted by RMP, will be held in London in October 2006. For further information and a booking form see www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/events/QLseries.pdf

Source ESRC research methods programme

Evidence-informed policymaking –

Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice

This working paper looks at the factors that can help, or inhibit, outsiders in making a positive contribution to evidence-based policymaking.

**Source: Policy Hub
www.policyhub.gov.uk**

GSR conference

This year's GSR conference, 'Professional Skills for Government: Competencies to deliver high quality social science research', takes place in London on 3-5 October.

The aim of the conference is for government social researchers to discuss and examine the importance of high quality social science research in government. It will also consider the role and outcomes of the Professional Skills for Government programme in helping deliver high quality social research. The programme will be split between a mixture of plenary speakers and also parallel workshop sessions with presentations by GSR members across a range of government departments.

If you are interested in attending, contact your GSR head of profession, and then contact Jane Becker at the Home Office. Jane will also be happy to provide any further information on the conference (email: Jane.Becker@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk or telephone: 0207 035 0414).

Source: Government Social Research Bulletin

Gateway to Government Social Research

There is a new page on the GSR website where you can find links to the programmes of social science and economic research managed by government departments and the devolved administrations, and the research reports they produce. See www.gsr.gov.uk/resources/govt_research.asp

Source: Government Social Research Bulletin

Beyond Evidence-based Policy Making



*In the last (May) issue of SRA News, Chris Goulden asked what the next term of government had in store for social research. Here, Chief Government Social Researcher, **Sue Duncan**, outlines current thinking on the function of research in the policymaking process and the role and influence of government researchers themselves.*

Evidence-based policy making in government is often misunderstood, as is the function and value of social research in the process. Many of the critics of government's application of evidence-based policy making assume that 'research equals evidence', but you don't have to be a very sophisticated student of politics or social policy to see why it doesn't – and arguably why it shouldn't.

For example, the criticisms of 'government by focus group' which were common for a while were predicated on an assumption that politicians were absolving themselves of their responsibility to govern by 'seeking the views of the masses'.

Yes, some of that research was influential in shaping policy, but it certainly didn't dictate it. Indeed, research which informs policy rarely if ever points to a single and unequivocal course of action – it all depends what you are trying to achieve, how much money you have, which solution is publicly acceptable, your value system and whether you are worried about what effect your chosen solution will have on other areas. Research and analysis will only ever be one of the influences on policy.

The goal of government social researchers in such a scenario must be to do our best to ensure

the right research and analysis is there to inform policy, and to use research knowledge to anticipate problems and issues to which policy will need to respond. It isn't easy, and the relationship between research and policy is complex. Other factors aside, a lot of social science evidence doesn't provide the black and white answers that could potentially be so useful to policy – we can't always say what works, because human behaviour and social organisations are more complex than this.

That's fair enough, but less acceptable is that we don't always seem to be sure what the research tells us in broad areas of policy. I would argue that we are sometimes guilty of putting more effort into collecting data than into analysing its implications, and assessing how it challenges and develops our knowledge and understanding of an area. We are addressing this by developing skills in the techniques of systematic review, but we need to do more.

I want to see more government social researchers use their knowledge to offer their own interpretations of what data actually means for policy. Who, after all, is better placed? We must perform a challenge function – to say 'this won't work', when interpretation of evidence suggests

this is the case. Sometimes we need to tell people things they don't want to hear, which requires clear professional identity and strong communication skills. The processes associated with evidence-based policy making to date have tended to make us too cautious – compared to our statistician and economist colleagues in government, and we are still relative newcomers.

But I remain certain that our policy clients will like it more if we take a more active role in policy analysis, as much as they dislike it when we refuse to offer a view because the evidence is not 'pure'. Already there are signs of progress – in the good work being done by multi-disciplinary teams in various departments, for example, which thrives on the dismantling of professional boundaries. And the new Government Social Research Competency Framework makes explicit for the first time precisely those skills and behaviours necessary for the recalibration of our contribution. I am optimistic that if we can refashion ourselves in the ways I have suggested, we can hasten the birth of 'evidence inspired policy making' – a more realistic acknowledgment of the practical uses to which social research evidence can be put in the making of government policy in the future.

The Idea of Community, Social Policy and Self

Kevin Loughran

2003, Belfast: APJ Publications
ISBN 0954362306 – £11.50

Reviewed by Ayo Mansaray, Institute of Education, University of London

This book explores the various ways in which the idea of 'community' has been deployed. Loughran presents and criticises several popular notions of 'community' as a unitary whole, as a source of self identity, as locality, and as a metaphor for other ideas (e.g. in such phrases as 'accountable to the community').

The author argues that these particular conceptions of community do not accord with our social experiences, and as such are unhelpful and misleading. He points out that many social services and forms of care which are usually thought of as being 'in' or 'by' the 'community' are in fact highly individualised and provided by family members, usually women. Very often 'community' either adds nothing to our understanding of particular sets of social relationships or it obscures those relationships by rarefying 'community' as an object over and above the consciousness of individual agents. The author concludes that 'community' has limited applicability, and should be thought of as consciously maintained networks of association and interaction in dynamic social contexts.

There is, however, little discussion of how the discourses of community articulate with the newer and influential vocabularies of 'social capital'. Arguably, social capital does the work of 'community' in the New Labour policy agenda. The chapters are also unbalanced, the style is rather repetitive, and virtually every chapter and subheading revolves around a set of questions which soon becomes tiring as an expository device. In attempting to be comprehensive in his evaluation of the literature, I think that the author's voice is somewhat submerged. The book is based on the author's master's thesis, and whilst thought provoking in parts, with a wide range of literature examined, I do not think it works well as a book.

ITEMS FOR REVIEW

If you would like a copy of any of the following books or reports, simply write a short review of about 300 words. In exchange, you get to keep the item. Contact the SRA if you are interested. We also welcome unsolicited reviews of any other publications.

Handling Qualitative Data

Lyn Richards

2005, Sage Publications
ISBN 0-7619-4259-9 – £21.99

Reviewed by Anne Barton, Head of Health and Social Care, M·E·L Research

This book has been written to provide practical guidance on the handling of qualitative data, intended to fill the gap left by the plethora of books about generating and gathering qualitative data and those which discuss the merits of the discipline of qualitative research. Each chapter outlines one of the ten processes involved in qualitative data handling.

The aims and objectives of the book are clear and expressed in ways that make the reader feel empowered and excited to find out more. The book content is upfront in stating that it assumes that computer software for qualitative analysis is used by the reader. If it isn't, the content would be harder to apply 'on the ground'.

The book meets its objectives, by providing an easy to read and digestible account of handling qualitative data. Abstract ideas are conveyed as simply as possible. The pages are well laid out and there is a good combination of text and the visual. The book has been designed as a practical manual, rather than an academic discourse. A flow diagram in each chapter highlights linkages with other chapters, and each chapter contains website links, a fictionalised example of a research project and associated tasks, and suggested further reading. Key points are presented in grey, summary boxes.

The book is aimed at a broad cross section of researchers, both undergraduates and experienced researchers in a range of settings. A vast knowledge of methods is not required. However, the guidance is likely to be more relevant to, and adopted by, the academic sector, as opposed to commercial, consultancy research, for whom the book is likely to be a bit too purist in approach and inconsistent with the timescales of commercial research. I would therefore recommend this book to academic researchers of all levels.

The Sage handbook of qualitative research (3rd edition)

N. Denzin, and Y. Lincoln. 2005. Sage

The Ann Oakley Reader: gender, women and social science

A. Oakley. 2005. The Policy Press.

Active ageing in active communities: Volunteering and the transition to retirement

Justin Davis Smith and Pat Gray

2005, Policy Press with the Joseph Rowntree Foundation

ISBN 1 86134 585 2

£11.95 (free PDF at www.jrf.org.uk)

Reviewed by Dr Gary Kitchen, Get Heard Consultancy

This clearly presented report looks at the role of volunteering in the transition from work to retirement. The context for the study is intriguing. Participation in the labour force amongst men aged 60-64 declined to below 50% in 1999 from almost 83% in 1971. Yet surveys have suggested that the 50+ age groups are least likely to volunteer. So what role does volunteering play in the transition to retirement? The report uses 21 individual case studies with older volunteers, interviews with relevant organisations and a review of background literature to try to shed light on this question.

The claim to have 'allowed unprecedented insights into the lifeworlds of older people' is overstated. Nonetheless, the case studies are valuable in gently undermining the simplistic picture of volunteering as an intermediate stage between paid work and unproductive inactivity. Only a proportion of the volunteers were motivated by the 'trigger' of retirement. Even for those who fell into this category, it did not 'appear to be the first or primary feature of retirement patterns or identities'. For others, volunteering in retirement represented the latest instalment of volunteering activity carried out throughout their lives.

The report analyses the organisational issues involved in managing and supporting older volunteers, and makes several sensible recommendations on how volunteering levels might be improved amongst this age group. It will be useful to both voluntary and statutory organisations seeking to deepen their understanding of the needs of older volunteers.

The term 'volunteering' seems to be used throughout to designate disparate activities that 'involve' older people, from administration through to governance. The report shows some awareness that this may be problematic. I have come across instances in my work where it appears to be assumed that utilising service users in relatively subordinate roles as volunteers accountable to paid staff counts as 'user involvement'. The philosophy of user-involvement, however, has always emphasised having an impact on direction or decision-making, which may not entail volunteering at all. Some deeper investigation of these important tensions would be helpful.

One hundred years of poverty and policy

Howard Glennerster, John Hills,

David Piachaud, Jo Webb

2004, Joseph Rowntree Foundation

ISBN 1 85935 221 9

Price: £8.95 (free PDF at www.jrf.org.uk)

Reviewed by Bob Willis, Research Officer, Bilston Community Centre, Bilston

The declared purpose of this book is 'to understand the present in the light of the past, for the purposes of the future' as John Maynard Keynes put it. It contributes to a growing literature of critical analyses of policy responses to poverty. The authors take us from the landmark research studies of Charles Booth on East London in 1889 and Seebohm Rowntree's studies of York (1901, 1936, 1950), to analyses of the Family Expenditure Surveys in the 1960s, and beyond.

The early studies showed that poverty was due to factors outside the individual, such as the economic cycle, low wages, large families, and the stage in the life cycle (with poverty for labourers in childhood, early mid life, and old age). Rowntree devised his measure of 'primary poverty' – the basic nutritional requirements of a worker, derived from American studies on convicts, in response to those who saw poverty simply as moral failing. Later investigators such as Peter Townsend, came up with more generous measures, based on the need to participate in society. The most widely accepted poverty line is now 60% of median income. There are echoes of earlier distinctions between 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor today, with child poverty and poverty among pensioners targeted, while asylum seekers suffer benefit cuts.

British policy and practice are put into an international context. In 2000, of 15 industrialised countries, only the USA and Ireland had worse relative poverty rates than Britain and only the USA had a worse child poverty rate. This study is a readable resume of key research and policy initiatives. It is a useful source book for anyone interested in these issues.



Where to, Gov?

Travel and transport policy, already a hot topic for public debate, is set to catch fire as it rises up the government's agenda. There are key issues to be addressed as policy is formulated and monitored. For example, what are the public's attitudes to transport policies? How do they perceive the impact on the environment?

BMRB Social Research has considerable experience of conducting both quantitative and qualitative research covering a wide range of travel and transport-related issues, including:

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- *How difficult they would find it to change their travel behaviour*
- *Whether it would be acceptable for information to be held on where they had travelled, and their general views on satellite-based charging*

Of course, our expertise isn't restricted to travel and transport. If you'd like to know more about our experience and capabilities, please contact us now or visit our website.



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