

# Surveying the cuts: the impact on research jobs and budgets

*Nigel Goldie, chief executive of the SRA, reports on our recent survey*

Redundancies, cancelled contracts and uncertainty. These are the main themes emerging from the SRA's recent online survey about the impact of public sector cuts on the social research profession.

We asked people to tell us about the changes at their place of work or, if they were freelancers, what was happening to demand for their services. We had 53 respondents, 45 of whom were employed as social researchers, and the picture they painted was rather grim. Seven of the social researchers were currently under notice of redundancy and most were aware of cuts to research jobs and/or research budgets in their organisations.

Of the 13 who said they were self-employed/freelance researchers, several have had research contracts cancelled or postponed in the past six months and some had no current work. Most attributed this to public sector cuts, revealing how public sector-dependent much social research is. Respondents came from a variety of sectors, including social and market research businesses, central government, local government, charity/third sector, academic institutions and professional bodies.

The responses indicate that the social research function within organisations has been severely affected by redundancies: "40 research jobs are at risk out of about 130" and "the social research function employing 22 people (FTE) is being cut by 60-75%".

For self-employed/freelance researchers the end result is much the same: "my job isn't at risk as such, but I have no work at present and have had very little for the last six months. I've been self-employed for 12 years and have had quiet times before, but never like this".

Social research businesses are being forced to reduce work or close down: "we are a commercial research agency working almost exclusively in the public sector. In 2010/11 our revenue fell by 50% and all the signs

are this will fall even further in 2011/12 possibly to the point where the business is not viable."

We noted a serious development too. People told us the nature or quality of research is changing: "research is no longer considered a specialism; we are now competing against others without research specific skills for jobs that are research", and "specialist posts that were defined as social research have been moved into 'delivery' teams". There are serious concerns that the focus of research will change with "the most likely scenario [being that] research analysis and advice on behaviour change will survive/grow but innovative recent work on attitudes, policy evaluation, social impacts of policies and road safety research will be hit".

Funding streams are drying up: "some of our major clients are no longer tendering work, and opportunities to bid for work for central government in my area of expertise have dried up since March 2010" and "repeat business (the foundation of our company for the six years we've been trading) has evaporated". Or simply, "our clients have no money".

Many small research companies are facing immediate pressures: "I may have to close the company if I can't find some work soon" or "the 'big four' consultancy firms are increasingly chasing the same sort of sub £50k projects as us ... so it's become a battle of the logos". Competition is forcing down prices and reducing chances of winning contracts, with consequences such as "our day rates have more than halved".

Respondents said that the SRA could help by supporting the profession on a collective basis, and 'raise awareness of the importance of evidence based policy' (91.5%); 'lobby government to consider the long term impact of cuts to social research' (85%) and 'raise better awareness of the social researcher profession' (61%).

Certainly the SRA will continue to monitor cuts and changes and ask all members to be proactive in telling us through the website what is happening.

**The SRA is discussing how best it can support the profession. For a full report of the survey and update on SRA activity see [www.the-sra.org.uk](http://www.the-sra.org.uk)**



# Cracking the looking glass: the impact of cuts in social research

*Patten Smith, SRA chair, gives his quarterly update*

The front page carries a summary of the findings of our initial survey of SRA members about the impact of the government spending cuts on their working lives. This makes bleak reading: many have lost or are losing their jobs, are moving into other fields or are struggling with seriously depleted self-employment incomes. These troubles are likely to continue as the government continues to cut public expenditure. It is not a good time to have a career in social research.

Most social researchers, even those with reasonable job security, have good reason to worry about this. This shrinkage of our domain can be viewed, not only as a direct threat to livelihoods, but also as a devaluation of our craft. This is important. To most of us, the value of what we do is axiomatic - this is why we went into the profession in the first place - and the realisation that not everybody sees things this way can take us aback. We therefore need to remind ourselves, and to proclaim to others, why our work matters.

So why does social research matter? Although our answers may differ somewhat, most of us would agree that accurate social data is essential to our understanding of our society, and, therefore, to intelligent social policy development and monitoring. And because accurate social data does not emerge unbidden from the ether, we need skilled professionals to collect it - social researchers.

Of course, some social research exercises are more valuable than others, and I doubt that any of us would defend wholeheartedly every piece of social research. However, some cuts decisions are affecting work which is undeniably useful. Let me give an example I know about directly from my work. The Citizenship Survey, which has just completed its

last wave of fieldwork, collected data on volunteering, community cohesion and attitudes to race and inequality. From 1 to 30 November 2010, the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) conducted a technical consultation on its intention to stop future surveys. A glance at the 157 pages of individual responses to this, particularly those from other government departments, is instructive. For example:

**BIS:** the Citizenship Survey is the most significant source of evidence on Big Society issues

**DCMS:** The Citizenship Survey is best placed to measure and monitor all aspects of the Big Society agenda. It is inconsistent with the transparency agenda for this survey to stop at a point when results from it will be of optimum use

**DfE:** Stopping the Citizenship Survey would remove a valuable source of trend data on young people's participation in volunteering, their engagement with their local community. It takes away a useful data source that would have been part of the National Citizen Service strategy

**Defra:** The stopping of the Citizenship Survey would remove the most natural way for us to provide initial information on the Big Society, from a rural-urban perspective

**HM Treasury:** I believe it is the wrong decision to abolish the Citizenship Survey ... I consider this information useful for the public to help them judge whether structural reforms to promote Big Society and decentralisation are being achieved or not

**Home Office:** the Citizenship Survey is a very valuable resource to researchers in the Home Office focusing on the Big Society and the Equalities Agenda, areas where robust, reliable evidence is scarce

*...accurate social data is essential to our understanding of our society...*

It appears that the government has just removed one of the key means at its disposal of monitoring its flagship Big Society policies. I find this hard to fathom, and I'm sure many readers will be aware of parallel examples.

In James Joyce's *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus used a servant's cracked looking glass as a metaphor for pre-independence Irish art. To me, a looking glass is equally applicable as a metaphor for the role of social research, and it appears now to be receiving a sustained series of hammer blows.

## SRA 's work on commissioning

*How social research is conducted and commissioned have long been of concern and interest to the SRA as one aspect of its aim to "advance the conduct, development and application of social research". We published a revised edition of our good practice guide on Commissioning Social Research in 2002 and, since then, we have continued to promote its use and encourage better practice in commissioning more generally.*

We obtained funds in 2006 for a project to develop curriculum guidelines for training in research commissioning. The report of this work, by Janie Percy-Smith and Alison Darlow, is listed in the SRA's publications. More recently, a proposal to carry out a small empirical study of different ways of procuring social research in government was funded by the Nuffield Foundation. Carol Goldstone Associates has now completed this and the full report, *Different ways of procuring social research in government*, is available at [www.the-sra.org.uk](http://www.the-sra.org.uk). A shorter report with a focus on implications and recommendations will be published in June.

The EU published a consultation paper in February on the modernisation of EU public procurement policy. SRA member John Wicks, with the involvement of other members including Alan Hedges and Janet Lewis, responded to this document which is available at [www.the-sra.org.uk](http://www.the-sra.org.uk).

## SRA training

We are now booking for the following training courses in London. See page 4 for training in Edinburgh and Belfast.

Course	Date	Level
Survey research and data privacy	18 May	A*
Research with people with disabilities	26 May	I*
Introduction to research project management	8 June	I
Intro to QDA	14 June	I
Getting research into policy into practice	21 June	A
Advanced QDA	28-29 September	A
Essentials of survey research design	13 October	I
Consultancy skills for social researchers	27 October	I
Designing a qualitative study	9 November	I
In depth interviewing	10 November	I
Introduction to evaluations	24 November	I
Focus group	1 December	I
Ethics in social research	7 December	I

One-day courses: £250 for non members £175 for members

Two-day courses: £450 for non members £350 for members unless specified otherwise on website: [www.the-sra.org.uk/training.htm](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/training.htm)

\*A - Advanced course, I - Introductory course

## Social Care Research Ethics Committee: REC's first year

The appointing authority for the national Social Care Research Ethics Committee, the Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) recently published the annual report of the REC, which covers its first year. The report is being circulated to key stakeholders in social care research to provide an update of progress and issues encountered.

The report highlights that:

- The Committee is firmly established as an NRES Committee to review national studies in adult social care settings
- Social care researchers may find research involving the Mental Capacity Act and research involving Britain's diverse population challenging

The full report is available at: [http://bit.ly/screc\\_report](http://bit.ly/screc_report)

The Committee can now review research studies taking place in health settings, exclusively with NHS patients and staff, where social science methods are in use, and there is no change in clinical practice involved.

This extension of Social Care REC's remit will provide a comprehensive review for social science researchers and student researchers whose studies are situated in health settings or cross the health and social care divide. The Social Care REC's competence to take on ethical review of these studies is reinforced by NRES, and the review will be acceptable to NHS Trust R&D offices.

**You can find out more about applying to the Social Care REC at [www.screc.org.uk](http://www.screc.org.uk); or by e-mailing the coordinator on [screc@scie.org.uk](mailto:screc@scie.org.uk)**

## SRA Scotland

*Sarah Thomson and Julie Carr report*

The SRA Scotland summer programme includes:

### Courses

- Quantitative and qualitative courses (to be run by Dr Pamela Campanelli and Liz Spencer respectively) in May and June (see dates below)
- New 'Quality in Social Research' course to be run jointly by Liz Spencer and Dr Pamela Campanelli on 25 and 26 May

### Events/seminars

A range of seminars and events is currently underway. Please check the SRA Scotland web page for upcoming seminars. If you would like to suggest a seminar topic or would like to volunteer to run one, Carolanne MacDonald (cmaacdonald@audit-scotland.gov.uk) would be pleased to hear from you.

The Autumn programme of training courses is currently being developed so please check the SRA Scotland page regularly for updates and feel free to email (contacts below) with any suggestions.

The SRA Scotland committee looks forward to welcoming you at future events.

For more information see

[www.the-sra.org.uk/sra\\_scotland.htm](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/sra_scotland.htm) or contact:

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## SRA Ireland

*David Silke, chair of SRA Ireland, reports*

### SRA Ireland designing new training course on research and the media

Now, more than ever, it is important that the research we conduct is well and accurately reported in the media. Research output needs to get a good profile as one route to ensuring that its value is recognised, as well as increasing its likelihood of informing policy and practice.

With this in mind, and based on feedback from our training needs assessment, SRA Ire has begun designing a one-day training course on media skills for researchers which will cover both traditional media such as newspapers, TV and radio and the newer forms of communication such as Twitter and Facebook. We hope to run the course in early June – further details to follow.

SRA Ire will soon hold its first course in Belfast on systematic review. It will take place in Queens

University on 24/25 May – details on the website. At the time of going to print the course was almost full, so if you are interested in attending, please book as soon as possible.

Also, a reminder about our LinkedIn site for independent researchers called 'Social Research Association Ireland Independent Researchers'. We would like to encourage independent researchers to use the site as a networking and information tool and would welcome feedback on it and any other ways in which we could support independent researchers.

We continue to try to build our membership here on the island of Ireland, and particularly to welcome researchers from a mix of backgrounds, public and private sectors, academics, policy makers and independent consultants. If you would like more information about the branch, would like to suggest a training course or seminar topic that you think would be of interest or would like to get involved in planning an activity, please contact me.

**More information:**

[sra.ireland@gmail.com](mailto:sra.ireland@gmail.com)

### Dates for your diary

#### Location - Edinburgh:

11 May	Designing a qualitative study
12 May	Mastering the art of qualitative interviewing
13 May	Running effective focus groups
16 May	Getting started on qualitative data analysis
17 May	Interpreting and writing up your qualitative findings
25 & 26 May	NEW - Quality in social research
2 June	Mastering the art of questionnaire design
3 June	Implementing your survey effectively
6 June	Getting to grips with survey sampling
7 June	Understanding the basics of statistical analysis

#### Location - Belfast:

24 & 25 May	Systematic reviews: principles, methods and variation
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## **Solid Foundations or Shifting Sands: Evidence of Building the Big Society**

*SRA Summer Event - 5 July*

*Local Government Association, London*

This year's Summer Event focuses on what recent social research has to say about the essential features of a Big Society. The conference will cover evidence from studies conducted by leading social research agencies, academics and practitioners in local government.

Join us at this popular half-day event to hear Anna Coote from the New Economics Foundation introduce the topic; followed by other expert speakers on volunteering, civic engagement, public attitudes and citizen behaviour. Professor John Mohan from the ESRC's Third Sector Research Centre, Anna Pierce from IpsosMORI and Gareth Morell from NatCen will inform us of the latest research. And you can offer your comments and ideas in lively debate.

You will also have the opportunity to network with members of the social research community and other participants with an interest in Big Society in the comfortable surroundings of the LGA's conference suite and roof top garden at an early evening reception following the event.

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*Also coming later this year...*

## **Cathie Marsh Lecture 8 November**

Joint event with Royal Statistical Society  
at its offices near the Barbican in London



**Keep up to date with SRA across  
the UK at [www.the-sra.org.uk](http://www.the-sra.org.uk)**

## **Showcasing social research: putting our best research in the spotlight - 6th December**

SRA annual conference at the  
British Library, London

### **CALL FOR ABSTRACTS BY 6 JUNE**

*The SRA has over 1000 members, working in many sectors on a wide range of topics, and this is your chance to present your best work from 2011 to an audience with an interest in strong social research. At a time when the volume of research may be declining due to the economic climate, it's even more important to celebrate the high quality and standards that should still characterise the British and Irish social research community. Please send a 500-word abstract to [nigel.goldie@the-sra.org.uk](mailto:nigel.goldie@the-sra.org.uk) by 6 June. We will then build the themes for the conference around the range of topics and ideas that are presented. We want this to be a truly participative event, so take the chance to be shown amongst the best that the SRA has to offer.*



# A year of Understanding Society

*Chris Garrington, communications officer, Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of Essex describes the early findings of Understanding Society*

*It has been an eventful year for the specialist team at the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER) that manages Understanding Society, the world's largest household longitudinal study, a flagship of UK social science. The project, described by Patricia Broadfoot, chair of the project's governing board, as "nothing less than the creation of a living laboratory of British life", is one of the most comprehensive investigations ever conducted into the life of the nation.*

Commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), designed and managed by ISER's specialist team of survey experts, with fieldwork carried out by the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), the survey is following the lives of 40,000 households, interviewing 100,000 individuals of all ages, for at least the next 20 years. The information is being gathered every year in face-to-face interviews and made available to government departments, social policy units and academic researchers.

A book of early findings based on this initial analysis is available at <http://research.understandingsociety.org.uk/findings/early-findings>.

Milestones reached over the last twelve months include:

## Survey activity

Government refunding was secured so data collection up to and including Wave 5 is now in place. This year, the collection of the first longitudinal data began with the fieldwork for Waves 2 and 3, which commenced in January 2010 and January 2011 respectively. At the same time, analysis started on the findings from the first year of the first wave of data collection in 2009. Teams of researchers from ISER and the universities of Oxford, Surrey and Warwick were given access to the early data, (approximately 14,000 households).

## Data available

This interim data was made available to the wider science community in December 2010, via the Economic and Social Data Service. It is now available to researchers for greater in-depth analysis. ISER's ambition for Understanding Society is that the quality and richness of data attracts and encourages a broad spectrum of users; not only social scientists, but collaborations involving inter-disciplinary research teams, drawn from both the private and public sectors to address some of the most complex issues facing our society.

## Experiments

The Understanding Society team also opened up the Innovation Panel, which is used to test survey methodology, to the wider science community. The first annual open competition to suggest experiments to be carried on it was launched in March 2010. The next call for proposals for experiments on Wave 5 of the Innovation Panel is imminent.

## Bio-social measures

As a bio-social survey, Understanding Society will collect data to examine the interactions across individuals' behaviours, and family and social environments and their state of health. During 2010/11 the collection of bio-markers began with an estimated 25,000 to 30,000 adults providing data throughout Waves 2 and 3. This includes measures of height and weight, waist circumference, bio-electrical impedance, grip strength, blood pressure, pulse rate and lung function. Biological samples including whole blood, saliva, and dried blood spots, will be collected as well as cognitive ability/functioning measures.

These physical and cognitive measurements will supplement data about respondents collected using questionnaires, combined with data linked, subject to informed consent, from external sources such as health service records, providing a unique resource for inter-disciplinary research between the social and medical sciences.

## Early findings

Understanding Society: Early findings from the UK's Household Longitudinal Study, was published at the end of February and is available to download as a whole or as individual chapters from the Understanding Society website. Its first findings provide a picture of recession Britain, through the eyes of 14,000 households in 2009, a smaller sample than will be surveyed once the project hits its stride. Out of 34,503 individuals surveyed, 2,163 children aged between 10 and 15 gave interviews.

According to the data gathered so far, the UK's happiest couples are married but childless and less than five years into their relationship. Happiness with one's partner declines with the duration of the union and with a person's age. Marriages are happier than cohabiting unions, a trend that rises for better-educated people. In turn, children are happier with their family situation if their parents are happy. The happiest relationships are those less than five years in duration, between two people educated to degree level, who have no children and where the man is employed. The decline in happiness is steeper for women than men. Overall, older people are less happy in their relationships.

Among men, unemployment brings lower levels of happiness with their partner, although income appears to be unrelated to relationship happiness among men and is only mildly important for women. Of the young, 60% are "completely satisfied" with their family situation and 70% are "very satisfied" with their lives. The survey's authors observe that compared with their peers in other countries, children in the UK rank extremely low on life satisfaction. The research also concludes that neither material wealth nor poverty have a bearing on children's life satisfaction.

Not living with both natural parents has a greater negative impact on a young person's life satisfaction than their material situation. But children are more satisfied with their lives the fewer other children live in their household.

The research suggests that bullying begins in the home, with more than half of all siblings (54%) being involved in bullying, a higher rate than has been reported in the US, Israel or Italy. A third of all adolescents both bully their siblings and are the victims of bullying by their siblings. Fewer children in Wales

(40%) than in England, Scotland or Northern Ireland bully siblings.

Of adolescents, 12% reported being bullied at school and there are no differences between boys and girls in victimisation. Children from step families are bullied slightly more often. Bullying at school has a more detrimental effect on a child than bullying at home. But children who are bullied at school and at home are 14 times more likely to report severe behavioural problems, and 10 times more likely to be unhappy, than those not bullied at all.

The report unveils "surprisingly high levels of optimism among the unemployed" with almost two-thirds expecting their financial situation to improve in the next year. The most common single household income was £1,000 per month. About one household in six is in poverty, with poverty rates higher than average for pensioners and for families with children; 64% of households with more than four children and 47% of lone-parent households suffer poverty. The authors note that, in the longer term, the survey will show how far poverty in childhood is predictive of continued poverty among adults.

Neighbouring – a concept that contains elements of David Cameron's Big Society project, by asking questions about willingness to volunteer – produced interesting variations. The English score lowest and the Welsh highest. The Scottish have below-average scores on social expenditure, while the Northern Irish have the highest scores on trust, suggesting high levels of social cohesion, and the least interest in politics.

The survey also asks how well we sleep at night, because of its relevance to public health policy. One in 10 people reports taking sleeping medication on three or more nights a week and married people, the employed and self-employed report the best sleep.

A quarter of the population living in the most deprived areas of England are non-white, compared with 9% in the least deprived areas. The more highly educated a person is, the less likely they are to stop and talk to neighbours and their sense of community is lower. Sixty per cent believe, if things continue on their current course, we will soon experience a major environmental disaster, but only 50% are prepared to pay more for environmentally-friendly products.

We hope that more researchers will now begin to use the available data, and that the full first wave of data will be available towards the end of the year.

More information: [cgarr@essex.ac.uk](mailto:cgarr@essex.ac.uk)

# Census & society: why everyone counts

*Ian Cooke describes a free exhibition at the British Library which examines the development of the census in the UK and the value of social research*

The idea to hold an exhibition about the census came to life in a conversation between Jude England, head of social sciences at the British Library, and Jil Matheson, the national statistician. The British Library is well known for its historical and literary treasures, but perhaps less so for the vast amount of social research, and resources for social research, which it makes available. They agreed that the census presented a fantastic opportunity for the library to draw attention to this aspect of its collections, and to communicate the value of social research.

***To accompany the exhibition, we are running a programme of events, aimed at a mix of audiences. Details of these events are on the British Library's website***

The exhibition contains examples of census outputs from the reports of the first survey in 1801, up to geographic visualisations from 2001 data. We decided to organise the exhibition thematically, with sections on health, employment, families and migration, so that we could focus on areas in which the census has helped develop our understanding of social conditions and social change. In each section, we show examples of census outputs alongside reports, cartoons, recorded sound and film, and other creative works illustrating how lives have changed over the past 200 years.

The British Library collects government and academic research on population from around the world, including national censuses, and has done so for more than 150 years. One of the joys of researching this

exhibition has been discovering the imagination and sophistication in data visualisation, which has been used almost from the start of census reporting. From early on, statisticians grappled with the task of presenting complex data to an audience of non-specialists. At first, this audience comprised MPs, civil servants and local government, but very quickly the data became of interest to journalists, philanthropists and the general public. Items in the exhibition include an early example of a population density map of the UK, based on 1841 data. This map, almost one metre in height,

is surrounded by detailed analysis of the rates of change in population in industrial towns. The impact of the industrial revolution can also be seen in a map showing the distribution of trades and industries in Britain, as revealed by the 1851 census. The census reports from Ireland show experimentation with cartographic and tabular forms of data representation. The 19th century censuses of Ireland collected data not included in Britain at that time, such as education, general health and housing conditions. Our exhibition includes a map and table on housing conditions in Ireland in 1871. Both are striking for their use of colour, rare for a 19th century parliamentary paper.

We are also interested in public reactions to the census and the reports of the census. One section,

'representation and resistance', shows examples of creative responses to, and campaigns around, the census. From 1861, we include a short play called 'The Census!', and 'The numbering of the people', a sermon delivered at St Thomas church in Islington. The 1911 census was boycotted by women's suffrage groups, and our exhibition includes an issue of Votes for Women, and other press cuttings describing the boycott.

To accompany the exhibition, we are running a programme of events, aimed at a mix of audiences. Details of these events are on the British Library's website.

The events programme, and the exhibition itself, have benefited from collaboration between the British Library and census and social research experts. We have been fortunate to work with the UK Data Archive, the Academy of Social Sciences, Longview, the MRC National Survey of Health and Development and findmypast.co.uk, as well as colleagues at the Office of National Statistics.

**Census & Society: why everyone counts is a free exhibition at the British Library in London. It is open now, and will run until 19 June 2011.**

For more information visit [www.bl.uk/census](http://www.bl.uk/census)

BRITISH LIBRARY



# Beyond security barriers: sharing social science data ethically

By *Jason Naselli*, communication officer, UK Data Archive

With more research councils and public funders requiring researchers to share data, producing high quality and reusable data is higher on the agenda than ever before. In order for data to have its life extended, it needs to be well managed and documented. This is especially so in the social sciences, where concerns about ethical issues and confidentiality can discourage researchers from making their data as available as possible. Louise Corti (pictured), associate director and head of research data management support services at the UK Data Archive, says that there are simple steps researchers can take to provide ethical access to their data.

"It's very much good housekeeping and following best practice," says Corti, who also heads the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) Qualidata section for the archive. She emphasises forward planning on research basics, and adds, "Thinking about these matters upfront is vital, and even at the early stage of contact with your ethics committee." The archive itself provides templates of consent forms and other practical guidance on legal and ethical issues for researchers to help them develop forms of wording on consent and re-use.

Understanding researchers' concerns about ethical sharing, especially in qualitative research circles, she comments, "There is a definitely a cultural issue with qualitative research data being viewed as far more personal, than say survey research data. Qualitative researchers can build up a relationship with subjects which can exacerbate concerns about consent of use of their contributions." This underlines the importance of developing good data management standards to ensure ethical use. Mandates from ethics committees, calling for destruction of data after it has been collected or analysed, and barring further sharing is being overly cautious and restrictive, with the actual danger of disclosure in most cases quite low. There is often no legal basis for asking a researcher to destroy data, and it sits at odds with research funders' mandates to share data. She suggests that data management procedures which are understood, and supported by ethics committees and research support staff, can help deal with these conflicts.

Together with the SRA, Corti's team recently hosted a workshop 'managing and sharing social science research data: legal and ethical issues' at the British Library.

Part of an ongoing series of workshops funded by the Economic and Social Research Council's (ESRC) researcher development initiative (RDI), it focused on both the broad ethical issues of data sharing and practical steps to take.



Louise Corti

*"There have been some very public instances of carelessness with storing personal data. We want researchers to think far more carefully about how they are storing or transferring personal data"*

While Corti recognised the traditional criticisms of reusing qualitative data, such as failing to capture the personal feel of interviews, she said that failing to share usable data was just as big a problem, "particularly if you're going to spend a lot of money going to a population that's hard to reach, some data are better than no data.

Providing 'sufficient' research context is important if data is to be re-used. "Small things to reconstruct part of the picture can help. For example, having a thumbnail description of the interview setting, just a page, can be really helpful." This can always be edited from a cover sheet so that it does not contain personal information, like names and addresses.

On the practical side, she encouraged a strong focus on longer-life digital formats with appropriate storage and security procedures. "There have been some very public instances of carelessness with storing personal data. We want researchers to think far more carefully about how they are storing or transferring personal data."

The archive provides advice on how to encrypt data and use about password protection on computers or disks where there are data files stored.

The workshop series is part of a larger effort in 'evangelising' good data management. There are rarely negative consequences to sharing data, and recent evidence from Australia suggests that, for investigators who have published data from research projects, their publications are cited more often.

To this end, the UK Data Archive has made available best practice guidelines and exemplars to help researchers be more familiar with all of the options.

# Longview

*Tom Schuller, director, describes the organisation's work in promoting the value of longitudinal and life course research*

The core of Longview [www.longviewuk.com](http://www.longviewuk.com) has been its connection to large-scale cohort studies, but our range extends to all kinds of research in this field, qualitative and quantitative, building bridges between research communities and between research and policy. Our primary current activities are:

## • Making the political case

A major challenge is to make the case for the value of longitudinal studies (LS), publicly and privately. We have been pressing the case directly with David Willetts, Minister for Science, arguing especially for stronger mechanisms for making effective use of existing studies. Although the UK is a world leader in LS, it arguably doesn't make the fullest use of them, either across the research community or in policy applications. David Willetts himself recently announced a major investment of £33m in LS; the bulk of this is to go on a very large new cohort study, with some £5m devoted to improving capacity. A paper on the economic arguments for LS prepared for the minister is available on the Longview website.

## • Events

We are collaborating with the British Library and the UK Academy of Social Sciences on a series of events to be held at the British Library in spring and summer 2011. The series is designed in tandem with the BL's exhibition on the Census, and contains events which will appeal to the public and to intending or more experienced researchers. Secondly, we are planning a series of policy-relevant seminars designed to engage policy-makers fully, as distinct from transmitting results to them. The first two or three will be on aspects of ageing, one in collaboration with the Personal Social Services Research Unit at the London School of Economics. Thirdly, on June 13 Longview will host the annual Neville Butler Memorial Lecture to be given by David Willetts, on the theme 'Public Benefit from Science and Research'. Details and registration on the Longview website.

## • Data visualisation

A strand of work which has aroused considerable interest is the visualisation of data and results from longitudinal and lifecourse research. The goal here is to develop ways of dynamically representing, in accessible and interesting formats, studies which track populations and individuals over time. My sense, confirmed by a wide range of people with whom I have spoken on this, is that better and more imaginative visualisation techniques could play an enormously valuable role in improving communication at many different levels. This would include communication between researchers from different disciplines and methodologies. The Gapminder approach of Hans Roslin in Sweden is a fine example, though we need to develop a broader approach in order to cope with a wider range of research. The visualisation should be of results and interpretations as well as data.

## • Solving the problem of attrition

This three-year project funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council is in pursuit of the Longview aim of linking findings of methodological research directly to the improvement of survey practice. It is a two-stage project involving secondary analysis of response data from a number of major UK longitudinal surveys followed by a field experiment to test hypotheses about the causes of attrition based on the first stage findings. Interviewer experience, quality and continuity from one wave to the next were targeted. The project is now in a dissemination and reporting phase which is presented in a special issue of the journal, devoted to "attrition in US and UK health and ageing longitudinal studies".

In past years, Longview has been behind the launch of two initiatives: the Society for Longitudinal and Life Course Studies (see [http://bit.ly/longview\\_longstudies](http://bit.ly/longview_longstudies)) and the associated online journal, Longitudinal and Lifecourse Studies, which is now increasing in range and readership (see [http://bit.ly/longview\\_journal](http://bit.ly/longview_journal)).

We warmly welcome interest from SRA members in Longview activities and in the society.

# Social media in social research

*Dr Simon Haslam, FMR Research, reports on February's inaugural conference*

The SRA recently hosted the inaugural 'social media in social research' conference at the Nuffield Foundation in London. The event, co-sponsored by Sage Publications and FMR Research Ltd, attracted delegates from across various social research contexts.

## Papers and presentations

Andy Hudson, from the Centre for Advanced Spatial Analysis at UCL, opened by speaking on data via Twitter, linking web-based research techniques to broadcast media and the use of mobile Web 2.0 technology to build identities. SRA member and researcher, William Solesbury, focused on the use of social media for communicating research, drawing attention to a shift from disseminating findings to establishing dialogue.

Richard Mills, from the University of Lancaster, outlined his research into social news websites and Dr Helene Snee, from the University of Manchester, spoke about her work involving qualitative blog analysis. Both provided insight to the methodological considerations when using Web 2.0 based technologies in a research context and the type of outputs it is possible to generate.

In the final presentation, Dr Simon Haslam from FMR Research and the University of Strathclyde presented the results from the 2011 'social media in social research' survey of SRA members. The survey drew attention to four points which were thought to have an impact on how this field is taken forward. These were: clarifying what is meant by social media; recognising its impact on social research practice; exploring how to apply social media methods in a research context; and developing guidelines around the ethics in the use of social media in social research.

## Workshops

The workshop sessions focused on: 'how to sell social media in social research'; 'ethics'; and 'method exploration and practice'.

### • How to sell social media in social research

It was thought that our own lack of understanding, as researchers, of how social media work in a research context, gets in the way of being able to sell the idea. A mixed methodology approach was considered the best way forward as it enables the selling of social media on the back of something else and less risk for clients. There are also some commissioners who are more positive about social media, which is helpful for technique dissemination. There is also a distinction between whether we're suggesting social media as a research tool or a dissemination tool – the latter an easier step for many.

### • Ethics

There are different ethical structures relating to the media and to social research. We think the former are more liberal yet we are looking to the latter for guidance. There are new ethical perspectives

to consider, for example breaking down the concept of privacy and the emergence of concepts such as contextualised ethics. In some areas, (for example, health) there are voluntary codes and legal considerations. There are also jurisdiction issues, such as who owns the data, who sets the ethics codes and guidelines – and these ought to be considered in developing new codes.

### • Method exploration and practice

Some thought we should first try to identify what type of research we can do using social media. Linked to that, is looking at methodological differences and fitness for purpose of social media-based research techniques. The issue about verifying data via social media merits further discussion and people also thought there should be some basic criteria for social media-based social research.

## Next steps

- The SRA will stage the second UK social media in social research conference in February 2012
- The SRA invites people to join a social media in social research working group, to help progress the discussions and thoughts from the conference and set the trajectory for future work. Anybody interested should contact Nigel Goldie: [nigel.goldie@the-sra.org.uk](mailto:nigel.goldie@the-sra.org.uk)

**Copies of conference presentations are available at:**

[www.the-sra.org.uk/presentations.htm](http://www.the-sra.org.uk/presentations.htm)

**Conference attendee, Dr Nina Burrowes, offered this perspective on social media, on her blog: [http://bit.ly/nina\\_burrows](http://bit.ly/nina_burrows)**

# A new era for social research?

*Penny Young, chief executive, National Centre for Social Research says that we need for intelligent debate to understand the real potential of social science*

A year on from the general election – and it’s been tough for those of us on the supply side specialising in serious research for the public sector – as ministers have done of a version of ‘Honey, I shrunk the budgets’. Depressing? Maybe, but overall, there is much to cheer. We can see tangible signs that social science can make a tremendous contribution to the positive development of our society. We’ve got the wellbeing agenda: an ambitious attempt to create a coherent sense of what matters most in terms of our human experience, and to measure it. We’re seeing a high profile commitment to promoting social mobility, with an associated measurement framework underpinning it.

In David Willetts, we’ve got an important ministerial advocate, who says he values social science, and one who has actually used the great British cohort studies to make his own contribution to knowledge about society. And he’s put his money where his mouth is, most notably pulling off the funding for the 2012 birth cohort study.

So I’m optimistic about the potential role and perceived value of social research in this new era. But I’m increasingly worried that it’s

the relatively mundane things that might trip us up.

If the social research community is going to achieve the government’s ambitious agenda, we need the right tools. In particular, in a world of constrained research spend, we need a strategic approach to deciding what data should be collected and how.

What we’re actually seeing are some early signs of a lack of co-ordination. First, we saw the unceremonious cancellation of the citizenship survey, despite an intervention from the national statistician arguing that it could be a very valuable contribution to major initiatives such as the Big Society and the ‘wellbeing’ agenda. And then we saw a spat between the

*A powerful champion at the heart of government could ensure a strong vision for social science, matched by a strategic research programme*

chair of the UK Statistics Authority and the Secretary of State for Health over the NHS Information Centre’s withdrawal of crucial funding from the ONS ‘general lifestyle survey’.

Cuts are inevitable – that’s crystal clear – and may be quite justifiable. But a series of individually-taken departmental decisions? That smacks of potentially damaging fragmentation, intended or otherwise.

## So what can be done?

### A co-ordinated approach to decisions on the future of major surveys

The challenging budget settlements are hitting departments right now, and so we’ll see a stepping up of decisions about individual surveys. There simply must be co-ordination across government. We need a speedy project that: (a) identifies cross-

government information needs (b) considers where research evidence has wider value to users and the public and should properly be funded by government and (c) works out how to deliver these needs in a streamlined fashion using an efficient number of surveys or other data sources.

Without a coherent commissioning strategy, the taxpayer will be short changed and there’ll be a negative and lasting impact on the knowledge and evidence base.

### Strong leadership of social science within government

I think there’s a groundswell of opinion among key players within government recognising that all is not well. At his appearance before the Science and Technology Select Committee at the end of 2010, Sir John Beddington (the chief scientific adviser) acknowledged that one area where he ‘could do better’ was on social science – he noted that social science needs to be built up more in government. And more recently, the committee wanted to know “whether and when a Government Chief Social Scientist will be appointed to replace Professor Wiles”.

A powerful champion at the heart of government could ensure a strong vision for social science, matched by a strategic research programme. Decentralisation has its merits and is clearly the flavour of the day, but co-ordination and leadership matter too because they bring coherence and ensure that decisions are rooted in an understanding of the real potential of social science.

How will any of this happen? We need intelligent debate across commissioner and competitor lines so that the way social research is produced is fit for purpose.

See Penny’s blog at: [http://bit.ly/pennys\\_blog](http://bit.ly/pennys_blog)

## Doing Research with Refugees: Issues and Guidelines

Edited by Bogusia and Rhetta Moran, The Policy Press, 2006

*Reviewed by Siddig Elzailae, independent researcher*

Doing Research with Refugees is about refugee people as agents. Their participation in the research processes which inform the policies which shape their lives is viewed as crucial both to the research process and to subsequent social action.

This pioneering book is the outcome of a two-year Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded seminar series which ran from 2002 to 2004, carried out in collaboration with Refugees and Asylum Seekers Participatory Action Research (RAPAR). It includes the seminar presentations and guidelines for involving refugees in service development and research generally.

The presentations address three main themes: different ways of doing research 'with' refugees; the status of such research; and issues of gate keeping and presentation. They also describe projects, which involved refugees in different ways, and used various research methods including focus groups and interviews, rating scales and photographs. Together, they demonstrate the range of research possibilities and the benefits and challenges for policy developers and service providers.

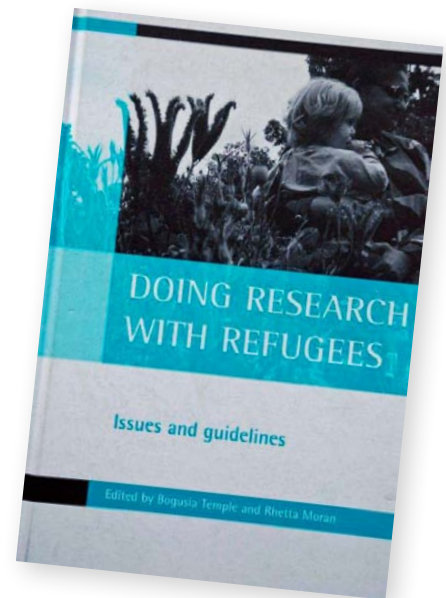
One conclusion which emerges is that research with refugees is not 'with' refugee communities at all. Refugees are employed because they have particular skills, e.g. language

abilities, or knowledge e.g. arranging access. They are rarely invited to take part in setting research questions, reviewing findings or writing reports. Some research projects employ community researchers solely as interpreters/translators.

There is a warning for researchers who rely on refugee community leaders to speak for 'their' communities. Many community researchers are chosen from community organisations, since this is the easiest way to recruit. However, there are questions about representation, accountability and who drives the research agenda. Representative sampling is argued as a way of making research more objective. But sampling is problematic in this area of research for two reasons. Firstly, there are no complete databases from which to sample. Secondly, many researchers do not wish to use quantitative definitions of representative samples.

The guidelines drawn from the seminar series were presented at the Home Office Integration Conference in 2004. They set out general points for engaging refugees in research.

In view of current hostility towards multiculturalism, I recommend this book to those interested in researching ethnic minority, including refugee, communities.



***In view of current hostility towards multiculturalism, I recommend this book to those interested in researching ethnic minority, including refugee, communities.***

## Designing and Managing Your Research Project Core Knowledge for Social and Health Researchers

David R. Thomas and  
Ian D. Hodges - Sage, 2010

## Qualitative Research Methods

Monique Hennink, Inge Hutter,  
and Ajay Bailey - Sage, 2011

*Reviewed by Dr Ron Iphofen  
AcSS, research consultant*

As I run training in research methods, I am always on the lookout for textbooks which cover the basics, appeal to novice researchers and also have some durability for the early stages of their research career. Both these books meet the first criterion but not the last. In any case, one still must ask of any new book - what is its 'added value'? - since there are so many good introductory texts in research methods already out there. Both of these books have the advantage of being based on workshops conducted by the authors over some years - hence the ideas and suggestions contained within have, in some sense, proven credentials.

Navigating Thomas and Hodges' work is straightforward in following the conventional sequencing of designing, managing and delivering a project proposal. They write in a fairly jargon-free style but can come across as a little 'wordy' at times, and overall, the layout is rather busy with boxes and bullets. Still, I am often told that's what students want these days, and

publishers certainly encourage it. The book is mostly about 'designing', a little about 'managing' but nothing on actually 'doing' the research. Fundamental assumptions about basic theoretical perspectives are not really addressed - so while the methodological variations between, say, an experimental design and a field study are clearly explained, the theoretical basis on which one would choose one design rather than another is sidestepped.

One major reservation worth mentioning is that the sample project proposal offered - rather as the culmination to the book - does not contain a literature review. Few such proposals would succeed as the authors themselves make clear earlier on. One could easily be distracted by the wide range of examples and suggestions on offer - clearly collected from application in a wide range of training workshops. So, this is definitely a book to work with and through in developing a viable proposal. It will meet the needs of its target market - reasonably 'advanced' novice researchers - in offering a comprehensive planning guide.

Hennink, Hutter, and Bailey's work is about actually 'doing' qualitative research. All the key topics are covered, and sensible 'warnings' offered to avoid some of the usual data collection and analysis traps of ethnographic work. This is definitely aimed more at undergraduate-level researchers and those who may be thinking about qualitative research for the first time, so it is a useful supplement to the many existing texts in this field. I found the syntax just slightly 'uneasy' and at times repetitive - perhaps because of being written in the authors' second language - and which might excuse the use of the term 'benefice' (a church office) instead of the correct 'beneficence' (being good)!

Nonetheless, the book is accessible,

comprehensive and well illustrated both textually and graphically. More importantly and necessarily, it stresses the importance of the theoretical stance taken and its influence upon methodology. Once again, it is well suited to its target market.

Both of these texts will now be added to my workshop reading lists.

## SPSS textbooks

*Reviewed by John Hall*

See John's latest reviews and more at <http://bit.ly/jhall>

The best book I ever recommended (bought in bulk and resold at cost) to students was *The SPSS Guide to Data Analysis* by Marija Norusis (various editions, 1987 - 1991). These are still the best for using SPSS syntax and for following the natural process and logic of survey analysis. Second-hand copies are like gold-dust. Check eBay and Amazon for rare copies. From *SPSS 13 for Windows* onwards, her books are totally different and use mainly the drop-down menus.

I did a bit of web-searching and discovered a plethora of available texts (and some good down-loadable tutorials) for learning and using SPSS. I've picked out the ones which seem to be aimed at (almost) beginners or which use data derived from questionnaire surveys or similar. Most of the books I have selected approach SPSS via the drop-down menus available from the graphic user interface (GUI). Few, if any, include the use of syntax (the SPSS language) except indirectly via the PASTE facility. Many are basically statistics texts in various fields (psychology, medicine, [social] statistics) and mainly cover descriptive and/or inferential statistics. Few deal with problem formulation, research design, data management, file design

or tabulation, specifically with data from questionnaire surveys (which was what SPSS was written and used for when it first came out in 1968). There may already be later editions of some of them.

**Alan Buckingham and Peter Saunders** *The survey methods workbook: from design to analysis* (Polity Press, 2004)

This is an interesting book, much of which is viewable on-line. It's the only one to cover the entire survey research process from a discussion of "postivism" through questionnaire design, sampling, data collection, data cleaning and data analysis from frequency counts to multivariate inferential statistics. There's a very detailed contents list with extensive explanations and examples of statistical techniques and the analysis is done using SPSS via the GUI. There's also an accompanying website which is unique in having both initial "dirty" and eventual "clean" data sets for the same survey (on smoking) but their use of SPSS is unsophisticated and disappointing (they use the default varnames, integer variables are left with two decimal places and none of the variable labels use question numbers from the questionnaire). Work on the site seems to have finished in 2004, but if you click on Login it takes you to an annotated list of very useful appendices with links which still function.

Apart from Buckingham and Saunders, none of the above start from absolute scratch with where data come from in the first place (including problem formulation and research design) and none approach SPSS from a syntax perspective. [See website for tutorials.]

**Jacqueline Collier** *Using SPSS Syntax: A Beginner's Guide* (Sage 2010)

This is really a handbook for people already familiar with the drop-down menus, but attempting to wean them over to syntax, which is far easier and quicker to use and has more facilities than those available via the menus. It's the only one to deal with dates.

**Julie Pallant** *SPSS Survival Manual: A Step by Step Guide to Data Analysis using SPSS for Windows* (3rd edition, Open University Press, 2007)

This is a deserved best-seller. It is very good on process, presentation and statistics, but is aimed at postgraduate psychologists desperately trying to write theses on their own or with inadequate supervision, and has virtually no syntax or tabulation. Swathes of SPSS facilities are completely missing. It needs to be used in conjunction with other texts. There is now a 4th edition (July, 2010)

**Eelko Huizingh** *Applied Statistics with SPSS* (Sage, 2007)

This is a much easier read, suitable for beginners and very easy to use.

**Paul R Kinnear and Colin D Gray** *PASW Statistics 17 Made Simple* (Psychology Press 2009)

This is a heavy duty statistics book by people who know their way round SPSS. It's comprehensive, detailed and the examples are mainly medical.

**Eric L Einspruch** *An Introductory Guide to SPSS for Windows* (Sage, 2005)

This is a nice little book for beginners and includes a fair bit of syntax (but only via PASTE).

**Andy Field** *Discovering Statistics Using SPSS* (3rd ed., Sage, 2009)

This is by far the best book combining statistics and SPSS.

**Darren George and Paul Mallery** *SPSS for Windows Step by Step: A Simple Study Guide and Reference, 17.0 Update* (10th edition, Pearson, 2009)

This has cursory statistical explanations, constantly referring to other texts, and has constant references to the SPSS manual. It also has irritating repetitions for every procedure of how to open SPSS. It's the only one to cover discriminant analysis, cluster analysis and multi-dimensional scaling.

**George Argyrous** *Statistics for Research with a Guide to SPSS* (Sage, 2005)

This has probably the most honest title, deals with much bigger, and real, data sets. Some of the most useful stuff is on a CD instead of in the book, and he's obviously been around SPSS a lot.

**Neil Salkind** *Statistics for People Who (Think They Hate) Statistics* (Sage, 2004)

This is very student friendly and beautifully written.

**Sarah Boslaugh** *An intermediate guide to SPSS programming: using syntax for data management* (Sage 2005)

After all the other SPSS books, it's like a breath of fresh air: clear and concise, nicely written and presented. The book is based on SPSS 11 so some of her syntax examples are by now rather dated, but her logic and method remain valid and relevant.

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If you would like a copy of any of the following, simply write a short review of about 300 words. In exchange, you get to keep the item. Contact SRA book review editor, Dr Simon Haslam: [simon@researching.co.uk](mailto:simon@researching.co.uk)

- Teaching Quantitative Methods (2011) Payne, Williams: SAGE
- The Sage Handbook of Innovation in Social Research Methods (2011) Williams, Vogt: SAGE
- The Peter Townsend Reader (2010) Walker, Gordon, Levitas, Phillimore, Phillipson, Salomon, Yeates: POLICY PRESS
- Making Sense of Statistical Methods in Social Research (2010) Yang: SAGE
- The Sociology of Intellectual Life (2009) Fuller: SAGE
- Doing Feminist Research in Political and Social Science (2010) Ackerly, True: PALGRAVE
- Evidence versus Policies; exploiting research in UK drug policy making (2011) Monaghan: POLICY PRESS



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## SRA NEWS PUBLICATION

SRA News is published quarterly in February, May, September and November. Copy dates for future issues are: 30 June (September issue); 30 September (November issue); 31 December (February issue); and 31 March (May issue).