

National Centre for Research Methods Report

## Assessing the impact of NCRM's Training and Capacity Building Activities 2014-2016

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## Executive Summary

The remit of the ESRC-funded National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) is to increase the quality and range of methodological approaches used by UK social scientists. To achieve this, it delivers a comprehensive training and capacity building programme in advanced research methods across the UK, comprising a wide range of face-to-face short courses and online learning resources. Courses are organised and delivered by the three NCRM collaborative partners: the Universities of Southampton, Manchester, and Edinburgh. To ensure that the NCRM training programme meets emerging training needs, the selection of course topics is informed by regular training needs assessments and close liaison with key training stakeholders.

To gauge the impact of these face-to-face training activities, NCRM has conducted regular training impact assessments for research, publications, funding applications and teaching. This training impact assessment covers the NCRM's face-to-face capacity building activities between January 2014 and December 2016 and was conducted via an online survey of registrants. Key results are as follows.

The vast majority of training participants (94%) reported benefitting from having attended the training event. Important benefits included increased knowledge about research methods (65%) and an opportunity for clarification and reflection (67%). Furthermore, 65% had used the methods covered at the event, 19% had used what they had learned in a conference paper and 14% in a publication in a peer-reviewed journal, over 10% had used or were in the process of using the training in the production of their thesis, 9% were still using the training in an ongoing project, and some had published in reports (internal or external), done work for non-academic organisations or reported findings to government. A smaller proportion of respondents (8%) had used the method in a research proposal, a number of which had been successful. Of those who had found the course a benefit, 87% reported it had 'greatly' or 'significantly' taught them something new about advanced methods and 82% said that it had helped them clarify the relevance of the methods to the research they do. Benefits also go beyond an increase in knowledge and skills including being more confident as a researcher (65%), having increased motivation/enthusiasm for their research and increases in the quality of the research they do (61%). 53% reported being able to take on work that was more demanding, helping with career progression.

Training participants emphasised in particular the usefulness of face-to-face teaching allowing for personal interaction, contacts with tutors and effective networking opportunities. Amongst those that stated they had benefitted from the event, a large proportion (50%) indicated that the course had introduced them to colleagues they now collaborate with, underlining an additional important benefit of face-to-face courses and complementing online learning.

The most frequent reason mentioned for attending NCRM training was that of broadening methods (61%), which suggests that a significant proportion of the capacity building was not just on how to use a method, but also understanding what it is, what it does and when it is appropriate to use. These broader aims are perhaps more difficult to track in relation to impact, but are nonetheless an essential part of developing researchers' methods understanding and widening their future research opportunities.

Since impact is a long-term process it takes time between attending a course and the actual impact becoming measurable. Given that the time that had elapsed since the event varies from 3 years to just a few months, we would expect the impacts to continue to increase as time goes on.

## 1. Introduction

The ESRC-funded National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) has the remit of increasing the quality and range of methodological approaches used by UK social scientists. This is fulfilled through a comprehensive programme of training and capacity building and through its research programme. This assessment focusses on the impact of NCRM's face-to-face short course programme in advanced research methods, which is part of the wider training and capacity building programme. The aim of this training is to provide researchers at any stage in their career with the knowledge, methods, and skills needed to undertake research into the economic and social questions that impact on society.

Since its foundation in 2004 until October 2014, the NCRM hub, based at the University of Southampton, was responsible for organising training activities in advanced research methods. Since the start of the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of NCRM in October 2014, the training programme has undergone significant development. Responsibility for the programme of training is now shared by three collaborating universities of Southampton, Edinburgh, and Manchester. Each year, NCRM offers a programme of face-to-face training (1, 2 or 3 day courses), run courses across the UK (including England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland).

Since 2014, NCRM has significantly expanded the range of courses offered with more than 45 days of training a year, delivered primarily in the three locations of the Centre and in associated venues, which comprise the London School of Economics, Cardiff University and Queen's University Belfast. Courses also focus on the methods addressed by the Centre's affiliated research projects and interests but also from needs identified in regularly conducted training needs assessments (Wiles et al., 2005; Wiles et al., 2008; Moley & Wiles, 2011a; Moley et al., 2013; Durrant et al., 2015) and via regular discussions and exchange with key training stakeholders.

Based on these periodic assessments, course topics are carefully selected to meet emerging training needs and to deliver short courses in advanced, cutting-edge methodology, which are complemented by courses at the intermediate and introductory level to advanced methods. All courses are delivered by experts in their fields.

NCRM courses are assessed very favourably, with 98% of course participants saying that the courses are interesting and very well delivered. (95% (strongly) agree or strongly agree that the event was well structured, 95% (strongly) agree that the course material was useful, and 98% say that the speaker's knowledge was very good or good).

In addition to face-to-face training, NCRM has started to develop online learning resources (<https://www.ncrm.ac.uk/resources/online/>) the first set of which were released in July 2016. These are designed specifically for online training using purposely created video tutorials and supporting materials. The NCRM website also houses the ReStore repository which contains online resources from past ESRC-funded projects which have ended (<http://www.restore.ac.uk/>). Furthermore, the NCRM website hosts a substantial and wide-ranging collection of material to help support researchers learn about research methods including publications, videos of events and lectures as well as podcast recordings.

To gauge the impact of NCRM training activities, a series of impact assessment exercises have been undertaken over the years, particularly with regards to research, publications, funding applications and teaching (Wiles, 2007; Wiles & Bardsley, 2008; Bardsley, 2010; Moley & Wiles, 2011b; Moley 2013). This current impact assessment covers the NCRM's face-to-face capacity building activities between January 2014 and December 2016.

## Aims of the training impact assessment

This report focuses on NCRM training participants' assessments of whether and how they have benefitted from and used the knowledge and skills gained from NCRM face-to-face training courses and events. As well as gauging more general benefits to the learner, in terms of their research skills, specific forms of impact are assessed in relation to research outputs and publications, funding applications, teaching/supervision of students and consultancy work.

## 2. Methods and data

The impact assessment comprises an online survey of registered participants for NCRM's face-to-face training events of those events that took place between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014 and the end of December 2016 (see Appendix 1 for questionnaire and Appendix 2 for invitation email).

The sampling frame comprised the 932 registered participants who had attended NCRM organised courses from January 2014 to the end of 2016. Some attendees were registered on more than one course (with a maximum of four) and these people were only sent one email relating to one randomly selected course to avoid overburdening participants. This resulted in 836 invitations in total. Of these 95 'bounced back' due to email accounts being closed (e.g. PhD students and post-docs moving institution or role). In total, 741 people received the invitation. Of these 226 clicked on the link (30%) with 203 completing the questionnaire (27.6%) and 23 breaking off before the end of the questionnaire. Three people responded that while they had been registered they had not actually attended the course. This resulted in 200 respondents who fully completed the survey and who attended the course they were registered for. Comparisons of the characteristics of the responding sample and the full set of registrants shows that the sample is representative.

A total of 56 NCRM training events took place during the two-year period (excluding annual lectures and the Research Methods Festival), amounting to 92 days of training. Durations of courses varied with 26 one-day events, 24 two-day events and 6 three-day events. Learners from 52 of the 56 events took part in the survey.

### Profile of Respondents

Two thirds of learners within our sample were female (67%) and one third male (33%). This is very similar to the registration figures of 66% female, 31% male (3% unknown). Almost half of respondents were in the 26-35 age group (age recorded as of 01/01/2017 and not at the time of the course).

**Table 1: Ages of attendees at NCRM training events**

| Age Group        | Count | Percentage |
|------------------|-------|------------|
| <b>18-25</b>     | 6     | 3%         |
| <b>26-35</b>     | 98    | 49%        |
| <b>36-45</b>     | 51    | 26%        |
| <b>46-55</b>     | 29    | 16%        |
| <b>56-65</b>     | 12    | 6%         |
| <b>66+</b>       | 0     | 0%         |
| <b>No answer</b> | 4     | 2%         |
| <b>Total</b>     | 200   | 100%       |

Respondents' sector of employment or study at the time they attended an NCRM event is shown in Table 2 below. As in previous years, by far the largest sector was University or College (84%). The survey respondents are a good representation of the user population, with a slightly lower % being from University or College (N/A is used for categories not given in the registration process).

**Table 2: Sectors of employment or study of attendees at NCRM training events**

| Sector of Employment               | Count | Percentage | <i>Percentage of all registrants</i> |
|------------------------------------|-------|------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>University or College</b>       | 167   | 84%        | 88%                                  |
| <b>Government</b>                  | 10    | 5%         | 4%                                   |
| <b>Research Institute</b>          | 7     | 4%         | 4%                                   |
| <b>Public Sector</b>               | 4     | 2%         | N/A                                  |
| <b>Private Sector</b>              | 4     | 2%         | 2%                                   |
| <b>Charity or Voluntary Sector</b> | 3     | 2%         | 1%                                   |
| <b>Freelance</b>                   | 2     | 1%         | N/A                                  |
| <b>Other</b>                       | 3     | 2%         | 1%                                   |
| <b>Total</b>                       | 200   | 100%       | 100%                                 |

Respondents' career stages at the time of attending the training event are shown in Table 3, below. Nearly four fifths of respondents are Postgraduate students and junior researchers, with relatively few being senior researchers. In the user population, the proportions of more senior researchers are similar to that of the survey respondents, but there is a significantly higher percentage of postgraduate students but a smaller percentage of junior researchers. This difference could relate to changes of email address once PGRs have completed their programme and so more likely to be missing from our sample.

**Table 3: Career stages of attendees at NCRM training events**

|   | Count | Percentage | <i>Percentage of all registrants</i> |
|---|-------|------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Postgraduate Student</b>   | 88    | 44         | 57                                   |
| <b>Junior Researcher (e.g. Research Officer, Research Fellow, Lecturer)</b> | 70    | 35         | 24                                   |
| <b>Senior Researcher (e.g. Senior Research Officer, Senior Lecturer)</b>    | 18    | 9          | 9                                    |
| <b>Professor / Reader / Head of Unit / Director</b>                         | 7     | 4          | 3                                    |
| <b>Other</b>  | 17    | 9          | 7                                    |
| <b>Total</b>  | 200   | 100        | 100                                  |

The 'other' job roles included statistician/ statistics consultant (3%); a manager or officer for research, policy, impact or evaluation (4%) and freelance/consultancy work or a mix of roles (2%). These 'other' roles mainly reflect non-academic roles which have an explicit research-related element.

The disciplines to which respondents felt the greatest affiliation are shown in Table 4. Social Sciences predominate followed by Medical Sciences and Arts and Humanities. The survey data is quite representative of the user population, with responses from across the fields of study. Social Sciences are underrepresented in the survey however, although some of this could be differing use of the 'other' category.

**Table 4: Fields of Study of attendees at NCRM training events**

|  | Count | Percentage | <i>Percentage<br/>in User<br/>population</i> |
|--|-------|------------|--|
| <b>Social Sciences</b>   | 158   | 79%        | 87%  |
| <b>Medical Sciences</b>  | 17    | 9%         | 7%   |
| <b>Arts and Humanities</b>   | 7     | 4%         | 3%   |
| <b>Biological Sciences</b>   | 2     | 1%         | 1%   |
| <b>Engineering and Physical Sciences<br/>(includes Astronomy and Particle<br/>Physics)</b> | 2     | 1%         | <1%  |
| <b>Environmental Science</b>   | 2     | 1%         | 2%   |
| <b>Other</b>   | 12    | 6%         | <1%  |
| <b>Total</b>   | 200   | 100%       |  |

Of the 6% 'other' disciplines, the most frequent (2%) were health related areas, followed by statistics (2%) (Social Statistics is a Social Science discipline, but respondents may not have known this, or felt that the type they specialise in was within Social Science).

The 158 respondents who indicated their field of study was within Social Science were asked which discipline they felt most affiliation with. Sociology, Economics and Education were the best represented disciplines, followed by Human Geography and Psychology. Compared with the previous impact assessment (Moley 2013), Psychology is somewhat less well represented in the impact assessment (from 17% to 9%) and Human Geography is somewhat more (from 3% to 9%).

There are some small variations in the user population compared with the survey respondents in relation to the spread of Social Science disciplines, with Sociology under-represented and Economics slightly over-represented.

The UK regional profile of respondents is shown in Table 6. Ten respondents (5%) were not living in the UK when they attended the training event. Of these, eight were from EU countries and two are unknown. The survey does include representation from all of the UK regions, although in relation to the user population, the survey generally over-represents the South and under-represents the North and Scotland.

**Table 5: The Social Science discipline of attendees at NCRM training events**

|  | Count | Percentage | <i>Percentage in User population</i> |
|--|-------|------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Sociology</b>                                   | 21    | 13%        | 18%                                  |
| <b>Economics</b>                                   | 20    | 13%        | 10%                                  |
| <b>Education</b>                                   | 17    | 11%        | 10%                                  |
| <b>Human Geography</b>                             | 14    | 9%         | 6%                                   |
| <b>Psychology</b>                                  | 14    | 9%         | 11%                                  |
| <b>Political Science and International Studies</b> | 12    | 8%         | 5%                                   |
| <b>Management and Business Studies</b>             | 10    | 6%         | 9%                                   |
| <b>Statistics, Methods and Computing</b>           | 9     | 6%         | 8%                                   |
| <b>Social Policy</b>                               | 8     | 5%         | 8%                                   |
| <b>Demography</b>                                  | 7     | 4%         | 3%                                   |
| <b>Social Work</b>                                 | 5     | 3%         | 3%                                   |
| <b>Science and Technology Studies</b>              | 4     | 3%         | 2%                                   |
| <b>Economic and Social History</b>                 | 1     | <1%        | 1%                                   |
| <b>Linguistics</b>                                 | 1     | <1%        | 1%                                   |
| <b>Social Anthropology</b>                         | 1     | <1%        | 2%                                   |
| <b>Socio-Legal Studies</b>                         | 1     | <1%        | 1%                                   |
| <b>Area Studies</b>                                | 0     | 0%         | <1%                                  |
| <b>Environmental Planning</b>                      | 0     | 0%         | 1%                                   |
| <b>Other</b>                                       | 13    | 8%         | <1%                                  |
| <b>Total</b>                                       | 158   | 100%       |                                      |

**Table 6: The regional profile of attendees at NCRM training events**

|                                 | Count | Percentage | <i>Percentage in User population</i> |
|---------------------------------|-------|------------|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Greater London</b>           | 40    | 20%        | 18%                                  |
| <b>South East</b>               | 32    | 16%        | 14%                                  |
| <b>Scotland</b>                 | 24    | 12%        | 15%                                  |
| <b>Wales</b>                    | 15    | 8%         | 4.5%                                 |
| <b>North West</b>               | 13    | 7%         | 11%                                  |
| <b>South West</b>               | 12    | 6%         | 8%                                   |
| <b>West Midlands</b>            | 11    | 6%         |                                      |
| <b>Yorkshire and the Humber</b> | 11    | 6%         | 9%                                   |
| <b>East Midlands</b>            | 10    | 5%         |                                      |
| <b>East of England</b>          | 9     | 5%         | 3%                                   |
| <b>North East</b>               | 7     | 4%         | 7%                                   |
| <b>Northern Ireland</b>         | 6     | 3%         | 3%                                   |
| <b>Non-UK</b>                   | 10    | 5%         | 8%                                   |
| <b>Total</b>                    | 200   | 100%       | 100%                                 |

### 3. Results

#### Why did researchers attend NCRM Training Events?

Participants were asked to give their reasons for attending the event. They could select more than one option from the list. Ten respondents provided other reasons for attending the training. Two of these referred to wanting to learn a specific software, three to wanting motivation or inspiration and one to learning new skills to support their teaching rather than research.

**Table 7: Reasons for attending NCRM training events**

|  | Count | Percentage |
|--|-------|------------|
| <b>To broaden my methods skills and knowledge base</b>   | 122   | 61%        |
| <b>To learn methods necessary to conduct a specific research task</b>  | 103   | 52%        |
| <b>To find out about a particular research method and how I might use it in future research</b>                    | 96    | 48%        |
| <b>To gain methodological resources such as reading lists, other documents and links that I use or plan to use</b> | 74    | 37%        |
| <b>To learn about developments in a particular area of research methods</b>  | 73    | 37%        |
| <b>To assess the feasibility of using a particular method for a specific research task</b>                         | 60    | 30%        |
| <b>Other</b>   | 10    | 5%         |

n=200

#### Benefits from attending NCRM Training Events

Respondents were asked if they thought they had benefitted from attending the event. The vast majority (94%) reported that they had benefitted from attending the event, with 7% reporting that they had not.

Those who responded that they had benefitted from attending the event were asked to provide further details by indicating the extent to which they had benefitted from each of seven potential benefits, shown in table 8.

Nineteen respondents also listed additional ways in which the training benefitted them. These included increased knowledge of a specific technique or type or software, but also broadened methods knowledge. Other benefits of training were that it 'opened doors' to new potential research areas and changed their attitude to their research overall and not only regarding a specific method. For example, one respondent reported:

"The notion of 'missing data' gives you a slightly different way to think through all aspects of your research design and practice. It was more about an attitude to research than a specific method."

**Table 8: Extent to which attendees benefit from NCRM training events**

|  | Greatly   | Significantly | Moderately | Slightly  | Not at all | N/A       |
|--|-----------|---------------|------------|-----------|------------|-----------|
| <b>Increased ability to do research</b>                                | 28<br>15% | 48<br>26%     | 68<br>36%  | 26<br>14% | 9<br>5%    | 8<br>4%   |
| <b>Increased knowledge about research methods</b>                      | 44<br>24% | 77<br>41%     | 50<br>27%  | 11<br>6%  | 2<br>1%    | 3<br>2%   |
| <b>Provided an opportunity for clarification and reflection</b>        | 46<br>25% | 79<br>42%     | 41<br>22%  | 14<br>7%  | 3<br>2%    | 4<br>2%   |
| <b>Enabled engagement with course tutors/ event leaders</b>            | 51<br>27% | 50<br>27%     | 46<br>25%  | 27<br>14% | 6<br>3%    | 7<br>4%   |
| <b>Provided networking opportunities with other participants</b>       | 27<br>14% | 38<br>20%     | 44<br>24%  | 50<br>27% | 26<br>14%  | 2<br>1%   |
| <b>Served as an input to teaching and supervision responsibilities</b> | 14<br>7%  | 23<br>12%     | 25<br>13%  | 32<br>17% | 44<br>24%  | 49<br>26% |
| <b>Provided useful references and other resources</b>                  | 44<br>24% | 68<br>36%     | 53<br>28%  | 17<br>9%  | 4<br>2%    | 1<br>1%   |

n= 187; Percentages indicate row totals

**Table 9: Reasons given for not benefitting from NCRM training events**

|   | Count | Percentage |
|---|-------|------------|
| <b>The content was too basic</b>  | 7     | 54%        |
| <b>The event was of poor quality</b>  | 7     | 54%        |
| <b>It is too soon after the event to tell what the benefits might be</b>                    | 2     | 15%        |
| <b>There was insufficient post-event support</b>  | 2     | 15%        |
| <b>It has become apparent that the methods covered are not suited to my research</b>        | 2     | 15%        |
| <b>There has been no opportunity to pursue issues/topics from the course in my research</b> | 1     | 8%         |
| <b>The content was too advanced</b>   | 0     | 0%         |
| <b>Other</b>  | 1     | 8%         |

n=13

Finally, participants felt the course was of practical benefit in terms of helping them with their fieldwork. This was particularly so of qualitative methods events (for example ethnography and diary methods).

The 13 respondents who stated that they had not benefitted from attending the training event were asked to indicate why this was. The most common reasons given were that the content was too basic or the event was of poor quality but some responses included here were that potential benefits were not yet apparent, and learning that a method is not appropriate for a researcher's project can still be considered a useful outcome.

The 'other' reason stated for benefiting from the event was that there was not enough theory covered.

### Using the Methods Covered at the Event

Those participants who had stated they had benefitted from the event (n=187) were asked if they had used the methods covered in it. 121 (65%) stated that they had, and 66 (36%) stated that they had not used the methods.

Participants who reported having used the research were asked how they had used them (more than one option could be selected).

**Table 10: Uses made of learning from NCRM training events**

|                                       | Count | Percentage |
|---------------------------------------|-------|------------|
| <b>In my research</b>                 | 103   | 85%        |
| <b>In teaching</b>                    | 20    | 17%        |
| <b>In a research proposal</b>         | 15    | 12%        |
| <b>In the supervision of students</b> | 13    | 11%        |
| <b>In consultancy work</b>            | 7     | 6%         |
| <b>Other</b>                          | 9     | 7%         |

n=121

Three that gave an 'other' use of the methods covered at the event referred to supporting the impact of their organisation's work, three used the training in their jobs which were not directly research (such as survey designers) and one used it for an ethics application.

In order to find out more about how the methods training had been used, further details were sought regarding how they had been used in research, research proposals and consultancy work.

The 103 participants who responded that they had used the method in their research were asked for further details relating to the impact of that research. More than one option could be selected.

**Table 11: Uses of learning related to attendees research**

|  | Count | Percentage |
|--|-------|------------|
| <b>The research findings were presented at a conference or an event</b>            | 37    | 36%        |
| <b>The research was submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal</b>       | 28    | 27%        |
| <b>The research findings are detailed in an internal report</b>                    | 18    | 17%        |
| <b>The research was commissioned by a non-academic organisation</b>                | 10    | 10%        |
| <b>The research findings are detailed in a report that is in the public domain</b> | 9     | 9%         |
| <b>The research was published in a peer-reviewed journal</b>                       | 7     | 7%         |
| <b>The research findings were presented to government</b>                          | 6     | 6%         |
| <b>Other</b>   | 41    | 40%        |

n=103

There were 41 'other' uses stated over half of which (n=21, 20%) referred to using the training in an ongoing or completed PhD thesis and a further 17 were still using the training in ongoing research or a current project. Some stated that they intended to submit a paper to a peer-reviewed journal or to a conference in future.

The 15 respondents who stated they had used the method in a research proposal were asked for further details on both the type of funding body applied to and also the outcome. More than one option could be selected.

**Table 12: Uses of learning related to research proposals**

|  | Count | Percentage |
|--|-------|------------|
| <b>The proposal was submitted to a research council</b>          | 5     | 33%        |
| <b>The proposal was submitted to a government body</b>           | 3     | 20%        |
| <b>The proposal was submitted to a trust or charity</b>          | 0     | 0%         |
| <b>The proposal was submitted to Framework Programme 7 (FP7)</b> | 0     | 0%         |
| <b>Other</b>   | 7     | 47%        |

n=15

Of the 'other' seven research proposals, four related to PhD applicants and two to internal University funding. Of the 15 who had submitted proposals, seven had been granted funding, five had not been granted funding, and three did not yet know.

Seven participants had stated that they had used the methods in consultancy work. Four of these were for Third sector/charity work; two for a commercial company; one for Government work; one for EU/UN institutions and one for a non-profit think tank.

### Usefulness and Impact of the Event

All 200 respondents were asked how useful they had found the event in their research and/or teaching. 73.5% found the event either very or quite useful and only a small number (3.5%) reported it was not at all useful.

**Table 13: Usefulness of NCRM training events**

|                          | Count | Percentage |
|--------------------------|-------|------------|
| <b>Very useful</b>       | 79    | 40%        |
| <b>Quite useful</b>      | 68    | 34%        |
| <b>Somewhat useful</b>   | 46    | 23%        |
| <b>Not at all useful</b> | 7     | 4%         |

n=200

Participants who had earlier stated they had benefitted from the event were then given a range of statements about the impact the event had had on them and their research.

**Table 14: Impact of NCRM training events on the attendee**

|   | Greatly   | Significantly | Moderately | Slightly    | Not at all |
|---|-----------|---------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| <b>It taught me something new about advanced research methods</b>             | 67<br>36% | 95<br>51%     | 20<br>11%  | 4<br>2%     | 1<br>1%    |
| <b>It helped me clarify the relevance of the methods to the research I do</b> | 59<br>32% | 94<br>50%     | 25<br>13%  | 9<br>5%     | 0<br>0%    |
| <b>It has made me more confident as a researcher</b>                          | 41<br>22% | 81<br>43%     | 56<br>30%  | 8<br>4%     | 1<br>1%    |
| <b>It increased my motivation/enthusiasm for my research</b>                  | 41<br>22% | 88<br>47%     | 48<br>26%  | 9<br>5%     | 1<br>1%    |
| <b>It has improved the quality of the research that I do</b>                  | 40<br>21% | 75<br>40%     | 63<br>34%  | 8<br>4%     | 1<br>1%    |
| <b>It has allowed me to take on work that is more demanding</b>               | 26<br>14% | 54<br>39%     | 78<br>42%  | 27<br>14%   | 2<br>1%    |
| <b>It introduced me to colleagues who I now collaborate with</b>              | 9<br>5%   | 23<br>12%     | 61<br>33%  | 72<br>38.5% | 22<br>12%  |

n=187

### 3. Summary and Discussion

The gender and age profile of NCRM attendees have remained largely stable over the years, with the majority being female and the ages reflecting that most are post-graduates (44%) and Junior Researchers (35%). NCRM's main audience continues to be those in the academic sector, working at a University or College and most of these consider themselves to be Social Scientists.

However, over 12% of respondents were not working at a College or University or within a Research Institute, with NCRM training continuing to attract those from governmental, private, public and charity settings. While Sociology, Economics and Education are the most common disciplines within Social Sciences, they together make up 37% of respondents and so do not dominate. Changes within the disciplinary background of attendees (for example Psychology being less well represented in this assessment) is likely due to the changing mix of NCRM courses offered, some of which relate to NCRM/ESRC commissioned research projects and so reflect the interests of those projects.

Responses to the question on the reasons for attending NCRM training favour the more generalised reasons of broadening methods (61%), echoing previous assessments (Moley 2013) which suggested that a significant proportion of capacity building was not just how to use a method, but also understanding what it is, what it does and when it is appropriate to use. These broader aims are perhaps more difficult to track in relation to impact, but are non-the-less an essential part of developing researchers' methods understanding and widening their future research opportunities. A significant proportion were more task focused, wishing to learn a method to apply to an already specified research purpose (52%). The smallest proportion emphasises that they wished to assess the feasibility of using a particular method for a specific research task, but this was still 30% of respondents.

NCRM has been aware of this need for learners to understand if a method is likely to be appropriate, often before they invest time and resources to attend an event, and continue to address this need with our online resources and 'What is...' podcasts and sessions at the Research Methods Festival.

In line with the previous impact assessment (Moley 2013), over 94% of respondents reported gaining a benefit from having attended the event. About 74% found the event either very or quite useful and only a very small number (3.5%) reported it was not useful. When asked more specific questions about the benefits the three most reported as 'great' or 'significant' benefit were: increased knowledge about research methods (65%), an opportunity for clarification and reflection (67%) and enabled engagement with course tutors/event leaders. While the first of these is directly related to learning about a particular method, the second two also relate to the mode of the training. The face-to-face delivery allows participants to interact with their tutors and other course participants and allows also time away from their daily activities to reflect on the method, both of which can be more difficult using distance learning and online modes of training. Amongst those that stated they had benefitted from the event a large proportion (50%) indicated that the course had introduced them to colleagues they now collaborate with, underlining an additional important benefit of face-to-face courses.

While the vast majority of respondents reported benefitting from the event, of these 65% had used the methods covered at the event (representing 60.5% of the total). Given the time that had elapsed since the event varies from 3 years to just a few months, this is a very positive finding. In relation to measurable research outputs almost a fifth (19% of the total respondents) had used what they had learned in a conference paper, 14% had submitted for a publication in a peer-reviewed journal (4% had been published so far). Over 10% had or were in the process of using the training in the production of their thesis and 9% were still using the training in an ongoing project, some had published in reports (internal or external), done work for non-academic organisations or reported findings to government. A smaller proportion of respondents had used the method in a research proposal, with 8% reporting having done so and 7 of these having been accepted (3 did not yet know). This lower response may be partly reflected in that PhD students and junior researchers are less likely to be applying for funding than more senior researchers but respondents were overwhelmingly from these two former groups. It should also be stressed that impact is a long-term process and it takes time between attending a course and the actual impact becoming visible.

The majority of respondents found the event either very or quite useful (74%). Of those who had found the course a benefit, 87% reported it had 'greatly' or 'significantly' taught them something new about advanced methods and 82% it had helped them clarify the relevance of the methods to the research they do. It was not only knowledge and skills that were found to be useful though, there were also personal benefits including being more confident as a researcher (65%), having increased motivation/enthusiasm for their research and increased

the quality of the research they do (61%). In relation to potential career progression, 53% reported being able to take on work that was more demanding.

#### 4. Conclusions

This training impact assessment analysed the impact with regard to research, publications, funding applications and teaching that NCRM short courses during the period January 2014 to December 2016 have had. The results clearly show that impact of NCRM short courses has been wide ranging. Course participants have benefitted in many different ways. The vast majority (94%) reported that they gained benefits from attending the courses. Of these the majority (65%) had used the methods covered at the event, in particular for preparing a conference paper, for a paper for a peer-reviewed journal, in the production of their thesis, in an ongoing research project with the view of publication at a later date, and in reports, for consultancy and working with non-academics, in their teaching and for writing research proposals.

Benefits are also going beyond the increase of knowledge and skills but also comprise personal benefits including being more confident as a researcher, being more enthusiastic about the research and in increasing the quality of the research they do. Some indications are found that attendance of short courses also helps with career progression. The results also underline in particular the usefulness of face-to-face teaching allowing for personal interaction, contacts with tutors and effective networking opportunities that lead to further research collaborations, clearly complementing the benefits of online learning resources.

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Appendix 1:  
Survey on the Impact of NCRM's Training and Capacity Building Programme  
2014-16

Welcome to the survey on the  
Impact of the National Centre for Research Method's  
Training and Capacity Building Programme  
2014-16.

There are 21 questions in this survey

## Online Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by the ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM). The study is looking at the impact of research methods training events organized by NCRM and you have been invited because you attended one such event: {EVENT\_TITLE} on {EVENT\_START\_DATE}. This event was organized by NCRM's {NCRM\_IDENTIFIER} at ({HOST\_INSTITUTION}).

This study will take approximately 10 minutes of your time. You will be asked to complete an online questionnaire about why you registered for the event, whether you feel you benefited from it, what use (if any) you made from it and whether you feel your ability to do research improved as a result. The questionnaire also asks for some information about you, what type of work you did back then and what type of institution you were based at, as well as some general demographic information (e.g., age, gender, academic discipline etc.).

Your decision to participate in this study or not is completely voluntary and you have the right to terminate your participation at any time without penalty. If you do not wish to complete this questionnaire please click the button below marked 'EXIT – I do not give consent' to ensure you do not receive further reminders in future.

Information supplied by you when you registered for the online course was used to contact you to invite you to participate in this study. This information will be kept confidential. Responses to this questionnaire are stored anonymously, with no link being kept between your contact information and your responses. The questionnaire itself does not request enough information to identify individual respondents.

The data collected will be used to produce a report that will be made available on NCRM's website. In this report numerical data will be averaged and reported in aggregate and any quotations will be reported anonymously, with any identifying information removed.

There are no costs associated with the completion of this questionnaire and all who participate will have the opportunity at the end to enter a FREE prize draw for £50 worth of [to be decided] Vouchers. The deadline for receipt of responses is **[To be decided]**.

If you have questions about this project, you may contact Dr Rebekah Luff at NCRM R.Luff@soton.ac.uk. If you have questions about your rights as a participant in this research, or if you feel that you have been placed at risk, you may contact the Chair of the Ethics Committee, School of Social Sciences, University of Southampton, Highfield Campus, Southampton SO17 1BJ United Kingdom Tel: +44 (0)23 8059 9393

Please feel free to print a copy of this consent form for your records.

I have read and understand the above consent form, I certify that I am 18 years old or older and, by clicking the NEXT button to begin the online questionnaire, I indicate my willingness to voluntarily take part in the study.

NEXT

EXIT – I do not give consent

## Event Information

Our records show that you attended the following event, organised by NCRM

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>Title:</b>        | <b>{EVENT_TITLE}</b>                          |
| <b>Start date:</b>   | <b>{EVENT_START_DATE}</b>                     |
| <b>Duration:</b>     | <b>{EVENT_DURATION_DAYS}</b>                  |
| <b>Organised by:</b> | <b>{NCRM_IDENTIFIER} ({HOST_INSTITUTION})</b> |
| <b>Venue:</b>        | <b>{EVENT_VENUE}</b>                          |

### 1. Can you please confirm that you attended this particular event?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes, I attended this event at {EVENT\_VENUE} on {EVENT\_START\_DATE}.
- Yes, I attended this event, but as an organiser / presenter
- No, I registered for this event but did not attend.
- Other (please write in the space below)

### Respondents only see the remaining questions if the following conditions are met:

° Answer was 'Yes, I attended this event at {...} on {...}' for Question '1' (*Can you please confirm that you attended this particular event?*)

### Reasons for attending

2. What were your reasons for attending the event? Please choose from the following reasons by clicking in the boxes below (you may choose more than one reason) \*

Please choose **all** that apply:

- To learn methods necessary to conduct a specific research task
- To assess the feasibility of using a particular method for a specific research task
- To gain methodological resources such as reading lists, other documents and links that I use or plan to use
- To learn about developments in a particular area of research methods

- To find out about a particular research method and how I might use it in future Research
- To broaden my methods skills and knowledge base
- Other (please write in the space below)

### Benefits of attending

3. Do you think you have benefited from attending the event?

Please choose **only one** of the following:

Yes

No

4. You said that you have benefited from attending the event. How much have you benefited in the following ways? \*

**Respondents only see this question if the following conditions are met:**

° Answer was 'Yes' for Question '3' (*Do you think the course has benefited you?*)

Please choose the appropriate response for each item:

|   | Greatly               | Significantly         | Moderately            | Slightly              | Not at all            | Not appropriate       |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Increased ability to do research                                | <input type="radio"/> |
| Increased knowledge about research methods                      | <input type="radio"/> |
| Provided an opportunity for clarification and reflection        | <input type="radio"/> |
| Enabled engagement with course tutors / event leaders           | <input type="radio"/> |
| Provided networking opportunities with other participants       | <input type="radio"/> |
| Served as an input to teaching and supervision responsibilities | <input type="radio"/> |
| Provided useful references and other resources                  | <input type="radio"/> |

5. If the above options are not sufficient, please tell us how you benefited, in the box below

**Respondents only see this question if the following conditions are met:**

° Answer was 'Yes' for Question '3' (*Do you think the course has benefited you?*)

Please write your answer here:

6. You said that you do not think you benefited from attending this event. Why was this? \*  
Please choose from the following reasons by clicking in the boxes below (you may choose more than one reason):

**Respondents only see this question if the following conditions are met:**

° Answer was 'No' for Question '3' (*Do you think the course has benefited you?*)

Please choose **all** that apply:

- It is too soon after the event to tell what the benefits might be
- There was insufficient post-event support
- The content was too advanced
- The content was too basic
- The event was of poor quality
- There has been no opportunity to pursue issues/topics from the course in my research
- It has become apparent that the methods covered are not suited to my research
- Other (please write in the space below)

## Methods

7. Since attending the event, have you used the methods covered in it? \*

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes  
 No

8. You said that you have used the methods covered by the event. How have you used them? Please choose from the following ways by clicking in the boxes below (you may choose more than one way) \*

**Respondents only see this question if the following conditions are met:**

° Answer was 'Yes' for Question '7' (*Since attending the event, have you used the methods covered in it?*)

Please choose **all** that apply:

- In my research  
 In a research proposal  
 In teaching  
 In supervision of students  
 In consultancy work  
 Other (please write in the space below)

9. You said that you have used the methods covered by the event 'In my research'. Which of the following apply to this research? \*

**Respondents only see this question if the following conditions are met:**

° Answer was 'In a research project' for Question '7' (*You said that you have used the methods covered by the event. How have you used them?*)

Please choose **all** that apply:

- The research was submitted for publication in a peer-reviewed journal  
 The research was published in a peer-reviewed journal  
 The research findings are detailed in an internal report  
 The research findings are detailed in a report that is in the public domain

- The research findings were presented at a conference or an event
- The research findings were presented to government
- The research was commissioned by a non-academic organisation
- Other (please write in the space below)

10. You said that you have used the methods covered by the event 'In a research proposal'. Which of the following apply to this research proposal? \*

**Respondents only see this question if the following conditions are met:**

° Answer was 'In a research proposal' for Question '7' (*You said that you have used the methods covered by the event. How have you used them?*)

Please choose **all** that apply:

- The proposal was submitted to a research council
- The proposal was submitted to a trust or charity
- The proposal was submitted to a government body
- The proposal was submitted to Framework Programme 7 (FP7)
- The proposal was submitted to an 'Other' funder (please name them)

11. Has this proposal been granted funding? \*

**Respondents only see this question if the following conditions are met:**

° Answer was 'In a research proposal' for Question '7' (*You said that you have used the methods covered by the event. How have you used them?*)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Yes
- No
- I don't know

## Impact

12. Overall, how useful would you say this course has been to you in your research and/or teaching? \*

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Very useful
- Quite useful
- Somewhat useful
- Not at all useful

13. What impact has the event had on you and your research?

Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following. \*

|  | Strongly Agree        | Agree                 | Neither Agree nor Disagree | Disagree              | Strongly Disagree     |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| It taught me something new about advanced research methods             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| It helped me clarify the relevance of the methods to the research I do | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| It has made me more confident as a researcher                          | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| It increased my motivation/enthusiasm for my research                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| It has improved the quality of the research that I do                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| It has allowed me to take on work that is more demanding               | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| It introduced me to colleagues who I now collaborate with.             | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/>      | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

## Personal Details

### Details

14. In which type of organisation were you working (or studying) when you attended the event? Please select the option below which most accurately describes your organisation at that time. \*

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> University or College                   | <input type="radio"/> Private Sector              |
| <input type="radio"/> Research Institute                      | <input type="radio"/> Charity or Voluntary Sector |
| <input type="radio"/> Government                              | <input type="radio"/> Freelance                   |
| <input type="radio"/> Public Sector                           |   |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please write in the space below) |   |

15. What was your job when you attended the event? Please select the answer which best describes that post. \*

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Postgraduate Student
- Junior Researcher (e.g. Research Officer, Research Fellow, Lecturer)
- Senior Researcher (e.g. Senior Research Officer, Senior Lecturer)
- Professor / Reader / Head of Unit / Director
- Other (please write in the space below)

16. In which region were you living when you attended this event? (*that is, your usual address at the time, not where you may have stayed overnight in order to attend the event*). \*

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> East Midlands                           | <input type="radio"/> West Midlands                 |
| <input type="radio"/> East of England                         | <input type="radio"/> Yorkshire and the Humber      |
| <input type="radio"/> Greater London                          | <input type="radio"/> Wales                         |
| <input type="radio"/> North East                              | <input type="radio"/> Scotland                      |
| <input type="radio"/> North West                              | <input type="radio"/> Northern Ireland              |
| <input type="radio"/> South East                              | <input type="radio"/> I do not know / I am not sure |
| <input type="radio"/> South West                              |   |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please write in the space below) |   |

17. You have indicated that you do not know in which region you were living when you attended this event. Please tell us in your own words where you were living (e.g., the name of a city or town). \*

**Respondents only see this question if the following conditions are met:**

° Answer was ' I do not know / I am not sure' for Question '14' (*In which region were you living when you attended this event?*)

(Please write in the space below)

18. In which year were you born?

(Please enter the year in the YYYY format in the box below). \*

Please write your answer here: \_\_\_\_\_

19. Are you Male or Female? \*

Please choose **only one** of the following:

Male

Female

20. When did you complete your first Degree?

(Please enter the year in YYYY format in the box below or 0000 if not appropriate). \*

Please write your answer here: \_\_\_\_\_

21. When did you complete your postgraduate studies?

(Please enter the year in YYYY format in the box below or 0000 if not appropriate). \*

Please write your answer here: \_\_\_\_\_

22. With which of the following disciplines do you feel the greatest affiliation? \*

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Social Sciences
- Arts and Humanities
- Biological Sciences
- Engineering and Physical Sciences (includes Astronomy and Particle Physics)
- Environmental Science
- Medical Sciences
- Other

23. You have indicated that you are a social scientist.

According to the ESRC classification of social science disciplines, with which of the following do you feel the greatest affiliation? \*

**Respondents only see this question if the following conditions are met:**

° Answer was 'Social Sciences' for Question '22' (*With which of the following disciplines do you feel the greatest affiliation?*)

Please choose **only one** of the following:

- Area Studies (AS)
- Demography (DEM)
- Economic and Social History (ESH)
- Economics (ECON)
- Education (EDUC)
- Environmental Planning (PLAN)
- Human Geography (GEOG)
- Linguistics (LING)
- Management and Business Studies (MBS)
- Political Science and International Studies (POL)
- Psychology (PSY)
- Social Anthropology (ANTH)
- Social Policy (SOP)
- Social Work (SW)
- Socio-Legal Studies (SLS)
- Sociology (SOC)
- Science and Technology Studies (STS)
- Statistics, Methods and Computing (SMC)
- Other (please write in the space below)

**PRESERVING YOUR ANONYMITY**

**Upon submitting your responses your email address will be automatically removed from the data set and stored separately in an anonymised form to preserve your anonymity.**

You have reached the end of the questionnaire.

Please click 'SUBMIT' to finish.

SUBMIT

---

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*Upon submission respondents are redirected to this page.*



That concludes our survey on the impact of NCRM training.

**Thank you for taking the time to participate.**

To show our appreciation we are holding a free prize draw for **£50** worth of [\[TBC\] Vouchers](#).

If you would like to enter our free prize draw please [follow this link](#)

[Click here to view the free prize draw rules](#) (see below)

- To be eligible for entry into the free prize draw and to stand a chance of winning £50 worth of [TBC] vouchers, you must be a resident of the United Kingdom and over 16 years old.
- No payment is required by you, either for your participation in this survey or for the postage and packaging of the Prize.
- Participation in the free prize draw is limited to respondents to this survey and is via web access only.
- Entries into the free prize draw are limited to one per respondent.
- Responses to the survey may be submitted until **TBC**.
- The draw will take place at **TBC**.
- The first entry drawn via random selection, from all completed entries with a valid e-mail address, shall be declared the winner.
- All decisions are final and no further correspondence will be entered into.
- The winner will be notified via e-mail within a reasonable time after the draw and shall be required to provide a physical address for delivery of the Prize within 30 days of receipt of the winning notification.
- Failure to notify us of the address for delivery will render the entry null and void and the Prize will be forfeited.
- For the purposes of the Data Protection Act 1988 the data controller is the University of Southampton and any inquiries may be addressed to [r.luff@soton.ac.uk](mailto:r.luff@soton.ac.uk)
- The National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) will not disclose your data to any third parties except with your consent or as required by law.
- All personal details will only be used for the purposes of conducting the free prize draw and/or for delivery of the Prize and will be destroyed thereafter.

## Appendix 2: Invitation email

: {FIRSTNAME} {LASTNAME},

The ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) is currently assessing the impact of our training events and would be very grateful if you would share your views with us, regarding one of these events.

I understand that you attended the following event, which was organised by NCRM.

**Title:** {ATTRIBUTE\_3}  
**Start date:** {ATTRIBUTE\_4}  
**Duration:** {ATTRIBUTE\_6}  
**Organised by:** {ATTRIBUTE\_1} ({ATTRIBUTE\_2})  
**Venue:** {ATTRIBUTE\_7}

*NOTE: {ATTRIBUTE\_1} ({ATTRIBUTE\_2}) is part of The National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM)*

To share your views with us please complete our on-line questionnaire, which takes around **10 minutes** and can be accessed via this link: {SURVEYURL}

I hope you can spare the time to complete our questionnaire as your responses will be extremely useful in helping us evaluate the impact of our work and will inform our planning for future events.

The deadline for receipt of responses is [ ].

Further details about this research project can be found here.

<http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/TCB/ImpactofNCRMTraining.php>

Thank you for taking the time to read this email. We hope that you will be willing to participate.

Yours sincerely,  
 Professor Patrick Sturgis, on behalf of NCRM and ESRC  
 University of Southampton  
 National Centre for Research Methods  
<http://www.ncrm.ac.uk>  
 email: [info@ncrm.ac.uk](mailto:info@ncrm.ac.uk)