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## Director's Corner

*Chris Skinner, Director*



Survey methodology is fundamental to much social science research and its interdisciplinary character is now well-established. I have enjoyed being a member of the editorial board for the Wiley Series in Survey Methodology, which developed

from a section of Wiley's Series in Probability and Statistics into a full series, representing disciplines across the social sciences. The 2004 Wiley text on Survey Methodology by Robert Groves and colleagues provides an excellent overview of this field. A significant boost to UK activities in this area will come with ESRC's new Survey Design and Measurement Initiative, which is to support six projects in survey methodology, with non-response, survey measurement and mixed mode surveys as prominent topics (see the ESRC website for details). International cooperation is a key driver of developments in survey methodology and NCRM was pleased to sponsor two international meetings in September: a three-day International Workshop on Household Survey Nonresponse, jointly sponsored with ONS and NatCen, and a one-day workshop in Envisioning the Survey Interview of the Future linked to the Association of Survey Computing 2007 international conference.

For some opportunities to learn more about survey methods in the coming academic year, see the latest programme of Courses in Applied Social Surveys [www.s3ri.soton.ac.uk/cass](http://www.s3ri.soton.ac.uk/cass), although beware the high demand - three courses are already booked up - or consider experiencing professional survey research first-hand through the ESRC Survey Link Scheme

<http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sls.htm>. For some coming international events, see e.g.

<http://esra.sqp.nl/esra/> the website of the new European Survey Research Association and [www.gesis.org/en/research/ECCS/CSDI/](http://www.gesis.org/en/research/ECCS/CSDI/) for a major conference on comparative survey methods in Berlin in June 2008.

## Viewpoint

*Debra Hiom, Service Manager, Intute: Social Sciences*



The Internet has become embedded into everyday life for many parts of the population and therefore offers an invaluable research medium for social scientists through the use of online questionnaires, interviews, virtual ethnographies, etc.

Some useful training materials exist to help introduce these new methods to students: Exploring Online Research Methods is an ESRC-funded training package built by the University of Leicester and designed to support postgraduate students and researchers. The package focuses specifically on the potentials and problems of these methods and provides a self-supporting Web based resource to enhance understanding of both the theoretical and practical aspects of online research methods including questionnaires and virtual synchronous and asynchronous interviews. The project has recently been expanded to include a series of face-to-face training workshops as well as a 15 credit M-level module in advanced online methods.

When teaching research methods to undergraduates a simpler starting point might be the Internet for Social Research Methods tutorial which is part of the Intute: Virtual Training Suite. The tutorial has recently been completely updated and revised by Louise Corti, Associate Director of the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) at the UK Data Archive. The Internet for Social Research Methods aims to help students to develop more fundamental Internet research and information skills. Students can use the tutorial for self directed, independent learning to: tour the best of the Web for social research methods, discover how to search the Web effectively, judge which websites are worth using for coursework and read success stories to inspire effective use of the Internet.

The Intute service and associated data are freely available for use in the academic community. Details of these training materials and many more Web based research methods resources can be found from the Research Tools and Methods section of Intute: Social Sciences at [www.intute.ac.uk/socialsciences/researchtools](http://www.intute.ac.uk/socialsciences/researchtools). If you would like more information please contact Debra Hiom [d.hiom@bristol.ac.uk](mailto:d.hiom@bristol.ac.uk).

ESRC National Centre for

**Research  
RM**ethods

[www.ncrm.ac.uk](http://www.ncrm.ac.uk)

### Call for ESRC training bursaries

The next call for the ESRC training bursaries for training in research methods will be out on Monday 5 November 2007.

The call will be advertised on the front page of the NCRM website [www.ncrm.ac.uk](http://www.ncrm.ac.uk).

## Focus on the Hub

### Third ESRC Research Methods Festival 2008

The third ESRC Research Methods Festival 2008 will take place between Monday 30 June and Thursday 3 July. It will be held, once again, at St Catherine's College, Oxford, and the format of the 2004 and 2006 festivals will be followed, with the objective of promoting knowledge of and debate about key issues in research methods across the social sciences. The festival is designed to meet the needs of social scientists working in government, social and market research sectors as well as universities, and across the range of social science disciplines. It aims to attract researchers at all career stages, from research students to senior research managers, who may have specialist interests in quantitative, qualitative and/or mixed methods.

At any one time over the four days there will be up to ten different sessions running. These will range from introductory 'What Is?' presentations, setting out what is distinctive about particular methodologies, to more advanced reports on developments at the cutting edge of methodological innovation. Many of these presentations will draw on current projects that have been funded to promote advances in research and/or training and capacity-building, including ESRC-funded projects undertaken as part of the Research Methods Programme, the hub and nodes of the National Centre for Research Methods, the National Centre for e-Social Science, the Researcher Development Initiative, and various more specialist Programmes. There will also be the opportunity for research students to present posters relating to their work. One innovation for 2008 will be the delivery of more formal lectures by distinguished international speakers, who include Professors Kathy Charmaz, Charles Ragin, and Bob Groves, all of whom will also contribute to other parts of the festival programme. These contributions will include some 'masterclasses', although the general ethos of the festival is one of an exchange of ideas between those present. This spirit of interaction and debate between people who do not normally meet with such a wide range of others to discuss research methods extends beyond the formal programme of sessions into the informal spaces of the festival, for which St Catherine's College provides a conducive environment.

The organization of the festival has been passed on from Angela Dale and her Research Methods Programme team who ran the 2004 and 2006 festivals to the National Centre for Research Methods hub team based at the University of Southampton, where Graham Crow and his team have been busy putting together the programme for 2008. They have been advised on this by a festival programme committee on which the different sectors of the social science research methods community are represented. The detailed programme will be posted on the NCRM website at the start of January 2008, when bookings for presenters will commence, prior to open bookings for other delegates which will commence at the start of March. Places will be limited, and so people wishing to attend are advised to book promptly. Enquiries about the festival can be directed to Graham Crow, email [G.P.Crow@soton.ac.uk](mailto:G.P.Crow@soton.ac.uk)

### Guardian Bad Science columnist Ben Goldacre at NCRM summer school - 12th Sept, University of Southampton

Dr Ben Goldacre, better known as the Guardian's Bad Science columnist gave a talk 'Seducing Vipers: Understanding & befriending evil' in the National Centre for Research Methods summer school at the University of Southampton Social Science Graduate Centre. Ben Goldacre is a medical doctor and a science journalist and earlier this year he received the Royal Statistical Society's first Award for Statistical Excellence in Journalism.

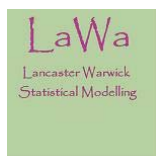
Ben focused in his talk on how science is often parodied in the media on purpose or out of ignorance. The lay audience rely on the media to translate and interpret research results, but most often journalists are not concerned by the methods behind the science. That is why they are not capable of or interested in valid scientific critique. According to Dr Goldacre, the media are on a look-out for stories of miracle cures and health scares and the medical industry is only more than willing to engage in media-savvy disease mongering. Science does not fit into the fast paced media format because science makes small discoveries that are debatable rather than ultimate truths. Ben Goldacre urged researchers to avoid speaking through journalists and to write their own text for the press to improve the quality of science reporting in the media.

Ben Goldacre's talk is available online at the NCRM website [www.ncrm.ac.uk](http://www.ncrm.ac.uk).

## Focus on the Nodes

### News from Lancaster-Warwick node

*Brian Francis, Lancaster University*



The Lancaster- Warwick node focuses on statistical modelling methodology, through training social scientists in statistical modelling ideas, through developing methodology relevant to modern social science and in applying this methodology to substantive disciplines. We have had an extremely busy year, and the forthcoming year will be even more busy. We have welcomed Ruth Keen as the node administrator, and Heather Turner has joined the Warwick part of the node as a statistical researcher.

Our short course programme now consists of eight courses. The range of courses offered is wide, from courses in the qualitative software ATLAS-TI, through to more specialist courses in event history modelling and structural equation modelling. New to this year was a course in Longitudinal Data Analysis, which was extremely popular. One important change for 2008 is that we will start to move into our new Lancaster short courses centre, a new building with space and light which will offer exceptional facilities for training. This will also give us the capacity to train larger numbers of people. Courses are filling up fast so please book soon.



Research has not been neglected. At Lancaster, we have developed new methodologies for detecting patterns of criminal behaviour through administrative statistics; are developing new approaches for analysing ranked data and extending these methods to examine longitudinal data; and developing graphical modelling approaches to the modelling of child development. At Warwick, the new *gnm* R package written by Heather Turner and David Firth won the prestigious John M Chambers Statistical Software Award in 2007 (American Statistical Association) and promising results are emerging for the use of pairwise likelihood techniques in dealing with complex random effects structures. We are keen to disseminate results widely and papers have been accepted in a wide mix of journals including Journal of the Royal Statistical Society—Series A, British Journal of Criminology, Journal of Scandinavian Studies in Criminology and Crime Prevention, Crime and Delinquency, Statistical Modelling, Developmental Science, Journal of Mathematical Social Sciences – with submissions to many others. We are visiting and presenting at national and international conferences – statistical, sociological, criminological and psychological – to publicise these developments and to build international contacts – our web page has lots more detail.

Research workshops held have been extremely successful. In April 2007, we held a joint workshop between the node and the University of California Los Angeles social scientists on new methodologies for analysing mixed qualitative and quantitative social science data. For 2008, we are planning a series of dissemination workshops involving international keynote speakers – the first – on “Recent methodologies for criminal career data” will be held on the 24 January 2008 at the Royal Statistical Society; the second – a workshop on Composite Likelihood Methods - will be held at Warwick on the 15-17 April 2008. More details can be found on our website [www.maths.lancs.ac.uk/ncrm/](http://www.maths.lancs.ac.uk/ncrm/)

## Other News

### **Linguistic Ethnography and Sociocultural Psychology in conversation: a workshop on educational dialogue and classroom interaction**

16th February 2008 at The Open University, Milton Keynes



How should we make sense of classroom discourse? Thirty years of research have produced a broad range of methodological approaches and corresponding interpretations.

Some researchers have focused on how teachers and pupils interact around academic content, discussing for example the relative merits of “procedural display”, scaffolding or dialogue. Others have attended to processes of social identification and power relations, producing accounts, for example, of cultural reproduction, labelling, resistance and “third spaces”. Different sets of methods of data selection and analysis have been brought to bear on these two largely distinct sets of questions, and rarely have both been brought together in the same study. This workshop seeks to bring these diverse perspectives on classroom discourse – in particular, Sociocultural Psychology and Linguistic Ethnography – into cross-disciplinary

conversation. It aims to use the contrast of various methods for studying discourse data as an opportunity to probe affordances and limitations, and to investigate possibilities for integration and/or borrowing. Speakers and discussants include Professor Kris Guttierrez (University of California at Los Angeles), Professor Neil Mercer (University of Cambridge) and Professor Ben Rampton (King’s College London).

Data analysis will be at the centre of the workshop, and participants will be provided with opportunities to immerse themselves in classroom discourse data, review analytic techniques, and come to terms with competing interpretations. Data will primarily focus on the issue of educational dialogue, which has become a particularly timely issue in both research and policy.

For more information, see [www.rdi-elc.org.uk](http://www.rdi-elc.org.uk) or contact [rdi-elc@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:rdi-elc@kcl.ac.uk). The workshop is part of the ESRC-sponsored Ethnography, Language and Communication Researcher Development Initiative together with the Open University.

## Spotlight on Resources

### **Focus on Resources: The UK Data Archive**



**UK Data Archive**

2007 is the fortieth anniversary of the UK Data Archive at the University of Essex. Originally established as the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) Data Bank,

funding commenced on 1 October 1967 which makes this edition of NCRM Methods/News even closer to the ‘real’ anniversary than the reception held to mark the event at the House of Commons in June this year.

Through various name changes, the archive has emerged as a key resource for UK social scientists which hosts major data collections and studies such as the British Household Panel Survey and Millenium Cohort Study in addition to acting as the repository for new datasets generated by all ESRC-funded research projects. Reflecting the major initiatives and funding streams which generate major social science datasets, the archive offers many different services: for example, it is a partner in the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) and leads on the ESDS Qualidata initiative, hosts the History Data Service and Rural Economy and Land Use Programme Data Support Service and provides the registration service and Portal to the ESRC Census Programme. The archive’s holdings span quantitative, qualitative, multimedia and non-digital collections. Many of the 5,000 computer-readable datasets are directly downloadable, while others can be requested for delivery on CD.

Key to contemporary data discovery and dissemination is the catalogue and metadata structure which facilitates online search and data retrieval from the archive’s collections. The main website at [www.data-archive.ac.uk](http://www.data-archive.ac.uk) includes the searchable catalogue and information about the major studies. Researchers will also find guidance on the creation and deposition of datasets and advice on ethical and legal issues. Metadata and study descriptions are freely accessible but

access to the datasets requires registration through an Athens ID or the equivalent authentication system applicable to your own institution. A telephone and email helpdesk is available to assist users with questions about accessing and using data and using the most popular data handling and analysis software.

Readers interested to learn more about the history of the UK Data Archive should read 'Across the decades: 40 years of data archiving' at [www.data-archive.ac.uk/about/ukda40.asp](http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/about/ukda40.asp).

## Spotlight on Events

### **NCRM Summer School, 10-13 September 2007, Southampton**

*Jenny Woodman, Kathryn Oliver, Elaine Barnett-Page, and Amelia Hempel-Jorgensen from Methods for Research Synthesis (IOE)*

There were four colleagues from the MRS node who attended the 2007 NCRM summer school. Although each of us benefited most from different elements of the course, three aspects stood out as particularly useful for all of us.

First, we took home broader knowledge of research methods from working in small groups which were deliberately heterogeneous in terms of research methods. Those with largely quantitative research experience took home ideas about ways in which qualitative data could add to and compliment numerical data. Even where research experience and focus overlapped, we learnt new skills – one experienced qualitative researcher took home new methods for gathering qualitative data which have directly impacted on her current qualitative work. The chance to explore the opportunities afforded by e-social science was also exciting, as it gives rise to many new ways of accessing and combining multimedia data sets and of innovative (and perhaps not yet invented?!) methods of analysis in comparing and contrasting them. This is something that we may still have to get our heads around but is certainly the future!

Secondly, we felt the overall objective of the

Summer School this year - which was to help build skills in putting together a credible ESRC-style funding proposal - was immensely practical and something that all of us will have to do (again) in the future. We gained insights into the process from an internal perspective by having first hand experience of the challenges involved in putting together a multi-disciplinary proposal. We each came away understanding that as much thought had to be put into the make-up of the collaborative team as the research content itself. We are certainly going to be aware of potential danger areas when we come to do one for real – even if the solutions are not always obvious! Critically appraising strengths and weaknesses of example research proposals and looking at real reviewers' comments not only showed how important it is to critically appraise your own proposal with reviewers' eyes but how important presentation and clarity is to time-starved reviewers.

Lastly, we had excellent sessions about marketing and communicating research work. It was reassuring to know that funders such as the ESRC have resources available to anticipate and help manage any (critical) media reaction. Ben Goldacre gave an extremely entertaining talk which built on the idea that, with a few tactics, we can make sure our work is high profile and fairly represented in the press. We saw how communication strategies could be built into funding proposals and take place throughout the project, rather than being tacked on the end. We heard that communication and research fed into each other and, for example, dissemination could double up as an opportunity for data collection.

The week was intense but very rewarding – we all needed and enjoyed our trip to the coast and pub dinner. We'd like to say a big thank you to everyone who obviously put so much work into the course.



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