



ESRC National Centre for Research Methods

**Assessment of the Training Needs in Research Methods in
the UK Professional Social Research Community**

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Executive Summary

One of the aims of NCRM's work is to assess the research methods training needs of the UK social science community in order to inform both NCRM and the ESRC in the strategic planning of their activities. Two assessments of training need have been conducted. The first focused primarily on the perspectives of methodologists, key academic stakeholders and representatives of learned societies (Beissel-Durrant and Lang, 2004) and the second on the academic sector (Wiles et al., 2005). The work being reported on here focuses on social researchers who work outside of academia.

Data were collected from three sources to investigate the training needs of professional researchers: an online survey; qualitative interviews and an analysis of job vacancies for social researchers. Data collection focused on the topics in which research methods training were perceived to be needed, the levels of training (i.e. introductory, intermediate or advanced) and the modes of training delivery. The online survey was distributed to all members of the Social Research Association (SRA). A total of 95 responses from researchers outside of academia were received, a response rate of 11%. The qualitative interviews were conducted by telephone with ten directors, training or research managers of organisations which employ social researchers in the independent, Government, charitable and market/opinion research sectors. Finally, an analysis of job advertisements for social research posts outside of academia was undertaken to complement the survey and interview data. This comprised a content analysis of job specifications for all posts for social researchers in non-academic settings advertised in *The Guardian* (Wednesday's 'Society Guardian') and the situations vacant page on the websites of the Social Research Association (SRA), Evaluation Society and Government Social Research over a six week period commencing on March 1st 2008 (n=62).

The findings indicated a need for training in the methods that are commonly used by researchers working in the applied or policy sectors: survey design and analysis; evaluation methods; meta analysis and synthesis; focus groups and collaborative research approaches, such as action research, participatory research and deliberative and consultative methods. Training needs in these topics were identified at the intermediate and advanced levels with advanced training identified particularly in survey and evaluation methodologies. The importance of researchers having methodological skills across the *range* of methods, and particularly in quantitative methods, was identified. PhD training was often regarded as unnecessary or insufficient in providing people with the requisite range of skills.

Research-related skills were identified as an important area of training need. Areas identified were in the interpretation, presentation and dissemination of research findings as well as general communication and influencing skills. At the senior level, skills and/or training needs were identified in research management, both of projects and people, as well as in relation to communication with clients and research commissioners.

The survey indicated that more experienced researchers are less likely to undertake training than junior researchers even though needs for training were identified for these groups. The interviews indicate that intensive in-house training programmes are provided specifically for junior staff in some of the large research organisations but

that training and development for senior staff is less established. This may be one explanation for the lower numbers of senior staff reporting undertaking training.

Research organisations appeared to be highly supportive of training although financial and time considerations place constraints on the support organisations are able to provide, particularly in the case of smaller research organisations. A preference for in-house or commissioned training was identified across organisations because of a concern about the quality of external training. The interviews indicated considerable support from employers for assessment to form part of external training courses and for the accreditation of training. However, the survey data found respondents' views on accreditation to be very mixed indicating there is not, as yet, wholesale support for this within the researcher community. Nevertheless, the issue of the quality of training was one that both survey respondents and interviewees viewed as important. There was considerable support from interviewees for proposals from GSRU for the professionalisation of social research.

In relation to the mode of delivery of external training, the importance of regional training is indicated. Short courses appeared to be most popular because of the importance of limiting disruption to work commitments but there was some support for longer periods of training distributed over several months. There was interest in the potential of on-line training to overcome the problems of geographical constraints, cost of travel and time constraints. There was some demand for academic and applied researchers to work together in providing training.

A comparison of findings from this assessment and the assessment of training needs among the academic research community (Wiles *et al.*, 2005) highlight some interesting similarities and differences in terms of training need, provision and delivery. Both assessments indicate the need for training in quantitative skills, the preference for short courses provided regionally and potential for on-line training. However, this assessment of professional social researchers has highlighted some specific differences. Regarding training needs, the needs for training in consultative approaches and in research-related skills such as communication, presentation and influencing skills as well as project-management skills are in contrast to those identified in the academic needs assessment, reflecting the different focus of work undertaken in this sector. The provision of organisational training and the commitment to the development of researchers working in this sector is also in contrast to the experience of academic researchers. The drive towards the professionalisation of social research may be a more pressing issue for social researchers in this sector than for academic researchers.

The report identifies a range of issues that warrant further exploration including: why senior researchers appear to be low users of training and what type of provision is appropriate for them; how co-ordination of training provision between academic and applied researchers can be best achieved; what models of training provision would provide support for freelance researchers or researchers working in small research organisations with limited training budgets; how a programme of on-line training might be developed and, to what extent professional social researchers (and indeed academic researchers) support the professionalisation agenda.

1. Introduction

The ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) was established in April 2004 to enhance the range and quality of research methods used by the social sciences community. One of the aims of the Centre's work is to assess the research methods training needs of the UK social science community in order to inform both the Centre and the ESRC in the strategic planning of their activities. Development of the evidence base on training needs requires consultation with individuals and groups within the social science community. These individuals and groups are:

1. Academics and academic researchers at professorial, senior and junior levels;
2. Post-graduate students
3. Established methodologists and those at the forefront of methodological innovation
4. key academic stakeholders
5. Representatives of learned societies
6. Government organisations involved in social science research
7. Commercial and voluntary sector social research organisations
8. Users of social science research and practitioners
9. Recruiters and employers of social scientists and research managers
10. Providers of training

Two assessments of training need have been conducted. The first focused primarily on the perspectives of methodologists, key academic stakeholders and representatives of learned societies on the training needs of the social science community (groups 3, 4, and 5 above) (Beissel-Durrant and Lang, 2004). The second, focused on training needs in the academic sector (groups 1, 2 and 9 above) (Wiles et al., 2005).

The work being reported on here focuses on social researchers who work outside of academia. These comprise groups 6 and 7 in the list above as well as researchers who work independently or as consultants. We refer to this grouping as 'professional social researchers' as opposed to 'social science researchers' or 'academic social researchers' to distinguish them from researchers working in academia. We recognise, however, that researchers in this category are a diverse group and that the differences among them may be at least as great as the differences between academic social researchers and professional social researchers.

We have used three strategies to investigate training needs of professional researchers: an online survey of SRA members; interviews with representatives of organisations which employ social researchers and an analysis of job advertisements. We used the SRA membership as the sampling frame for this study because it attracts its membership from a very wide range of organisations and backgrounds. Section 2 below reports on the survey, section 3 on the interviews and section 4 on the vacancies analysis. Section 5 discusses the findings in relation to the three sets of data and section 6 concludes by identifying the key issues emerging.

2. Online Survey

A questionnaire was designed to investigate various aspects of methodological training needs in the non-academic social science community. A copy of the questionnaire is given in Appendix 1. The aims included to find out required topics, levels and modes of delivery. The survey was administered online with email solicitation, and was a census of all SRA members. The mails were sent from SRA's

administrator. Responses were collected over a 5-week period to April 2008 and were fully anonymous. One reminder was sent after three weeks to all respondents to encourage responses. The questionnaire consisted of a mixture of closed and open response items. Results are reported in section 2 below. Response frequencies for the closed items are collated in tables. The free-response items have been both coded and analysed qualitatively, and we have quoted from them verbatim to illustrate respondents' views.

2.1. Sample Characteristics:

We first report on the personal and professional characteristics of the sample. We received 112 responses in total, which is an overall response rate of 11%. It is therefore important to consider how the sample composition compares with that of membership. In most cases it was not possible to check this because the required membership data does not exist, but this has been done for sector of employment (table 5 below). We did not find evidence there of possible non-response bias. 95 responses were received from people who held posts outside of academia. The figures reported are for these 95 respondents only.

2.2. Personal Characteristics of Respondents

78% of respondents were female, 22% male. Table 1 shows their age profile. All respondents were 20 or above, a slight majority were below 40 (55%):

	N	%
60-69	3	3
50-59	20	21
40-49	19	20
30-39	34	36
20-29	18	19

(one response missing)

Table 1: Age distribution of respondents

Table 2 shows the breakdown of respondents by region. London was the modal category followed by the South East and Scotland:

	N	%
London	41	43
South-East	15	16
Scotland	13	14
North-East	10	11
Wales	7	7
Midlands	6	6
South-West	1	1
North-West	1	1
Northern Ireland	1	1
East of England	0	0

Table 2: Respondents' Locations

2.3. Professional Characteristics of Respondents

Table 3 shows the occupational role of respondents. The bulk of the sample (58%) consists of relatively senior researchers:

	N	%
Senior Researcher	39	41
Head of Unit, Director or Professor	18	19
Junior Researcher	16	17
Freelance	11	12
Other	10	11
Not currently employed	1	1

Table 3: Respondents' Occupational Roles

Table 4 shows the length of time respondents have worked in social research. The respondents have generally had at least 6 years of experience; only 31% have less than this:

	N	%
Less than one year	4	4
1-2 years	9	9
3-5 years	17	18
6-10 years	26	27
11-15 years	14	15
16 years or more	25	26

Table 4: Respondents' Social Research Work Experience

Table 5 shows respondents' sector of employment. The largest categories are central government and charities / voluntary organisations:

	N	%
Central Government	17	15
Charity/Voluntary Organisation	17	15
Independent freelance consultant/researcher	11	10
Government Agency	10	9
Local Government	10	9
Market Research Company	8	7
Other Private/Commercial Company	7	6
Independent Institution	7	6
Other employer	3	3
NGO/NDPB	2	2
I am not currently employed	2	2
Health Service	1	1

Table 5: Respondents' Sector of Employment

In addition, 15 respondents (16%) were studying for a PhD or Masters degree, most of these (13/15) part-time. The full time PhD students classed themselves as independent freelance researchers.

Table 6 shows respondents' research activities. The most common research activity listed is applied social research, followed by evaluation. Relatively few respondents report undertaking market research.

	N	%
Applied Social Research	49	52
Evaluation	24	25
Other	14	15
Market Research	4	4
Academic Research	4	4

Table 6: Respondents' Research Activities

The most common activities listed under 'other' were various kinds of policy or public services analysis and action research. In addition to research activities, 63% of respondents were involved in research supervision or training.

Table 7 shows which types of research methods respondents use. A majority of respondents report using mixed methods in their work. Many respondents chose to tick both mixed methods and either qualitative or quantitative methods.

	N	%
Quantitative	34	36
Qualitative	32	34
Mixed methods	70	74
Other (please tell us the kinds of methods you use)	2	2

Table 7: Respondents' Research Methods

2.4. Training Needs by Topic

We first report on questions about specific training needs. Based upon the data reported in section 2.1, tables 8 and 9, present the frequencies with which topics were mentioned in open response questions, with each respondent naming up to 5 topics. The results are classified using a research methods typology developed by NCRM (Beissel-Durrant, 2004). This gives a convenient and useful structure to classify responses. As with all typologies, grouping of responses means that some individual areas are subsumed in larger broad topics (for example participative approaches, action research and deliberative and consultative approaches are categorised as 'collaborative approaches'). We have attempted to indicate where this grouping has resulted in particular topics being obscured. Additionally, some respondents identified topics that are not included in the current Research Methods Typology; these are indicated by an asterisk in the following tables.

2.4.1. Individual Research Training Needs

Respondents were asked about their personal training needs, and for the level of training they thought was required.

“In which areas of research methods and practice would it be most useful for you for training to be provided? Please specify up to 5 topics in the box below, in as much detail as possible, relating to any aspect of research methods or research practice on which you would like to receive training. For each area identified please specify whether the training need is at a basic, intermediate or advanced level.”

Method	Count	Level			
		Unspecified	Basic	Intermediate	Advanced
Frameworks for research and research design					
Collaborative approaches ¹	19	8	2	8	4
Meta-analysis and Synthesis ²	9	3	2	4	4
Evaluation research	7	4	1	3	1
Mixed methods	6	2	-	4	-
Data Collection					
Sampling	14	5	3	3	3
Focus Groups	11	6	3	1	2
Questionnaire design	9	2	2	3	5
Qualitative interviewing	5	1	-	3	1
Survey Design	5	4	-	1	-
Observation	3	-	2	-	1
Online Survey Design	3	3	-	-	-
Online methods/tools	3	3	-	-	-
*researching hard to reach groups	3	-	-	1	2
Administrative Data Methods	2	1	-	1	-
Survey interviewing	2	1	-	1	-
Data collection (general)	2	2	-	-	-
Data Handling and Analysis					
Qualitative approaches (general) ³	39	32	5	10	10
Quantitative approaches (general)	22	7	4	11	8
*Choosing Data Analysis Methods	9	5	3	-	1
Survey Analysis	5	4	-	1	-
Regression	5	2	-	2	1
*Reporting/Interpreting Results	4	4	-	-	-
Factor Analysis	3	3	-	-	-
Cluster Analysis	3	3	-	-	-
Bayesian Methods	2	-	1	1	-
Longitudinal	2	1	1	-	-
Descriptive Statistics	2	1	-	1	1
*Reporting/Interpreting Results (Quantitative)	2	2	-	-	-

Table 8: Perceived Personal Training Needs (continued below)

Notes

¹ Includes participative approaches, action research and deliberative and consultative approaches.

² Includes literature review and maintaining bibliographies

³ Includes CAQDAS

* Stars indicate topics which do not currently appear in the typology.

ICT Software and Simulation					
Software	4	1	1	1	1
Research Management and Application of Research					
Research & project management	11	7	-	2	2
Ethics	10	9	-	2	1
Research Skills, Communication and Disemination					
*Engaging with policy/making recommendations	9	4	-	5	1
Writing skills	5	3	-	2	1
Research skills communication and dissemination (general)	3	-	1	3	1
*proposal writing and costings	3	3	-	-	-
*Research commissioning	3	3	-	-	-

Table 8: Perceived Personal Training Needs

Note

* Stars indicate topics which do not currently appear in the typology.

Single respondents mentioned the following subject areas: randomised control trials and case studies, using online databases, stated preference techniques and visual methods, interpreting qualitative data, content analysis, measuring behavioural change, regression with attitudinal independent variables, item response theory, structural equation modelling, non-parametric statistics and GIS techniques, knowledge management and business skills for independent researchers.

2.4.2. Refresher Courses

In addition to the topics identified in table 8, one need emerged on a dimension that falls outside the scope of the typology. Eight respondents reported a desire for “refresher” courses that, whilst the content covered would be basic, would have a mode of delivery sensitive to the fact that the material has been covered before. It seems to be the case that researchers’ skills atrophy when specific methods are not used, but that introductory material is not seen as appropriate when they wish to re-activate them. One respondent, for example, commented:

‘It would be helpful to provide ‘refresher’ training sessions on various topics. For example, refresher training on sampling; statistical techniques, cluster and factor analysis. These would not be like the MRS introductory courses but more providing researchers who have become ‘rusty’ [with an opportunity] to brush up their skills’

Another commented:

‘[It] would be useful if there were regular statistical refresher courses available for trained researchers who are a bit ‘rusty’.

This view was also one identified by respondents who provided ‘additional comments’ to the questionnaire:

‘SRA courses have generally in the past been viewed as courses for beginners but training or refresher training for senior staff would in my view open up a new market. But it must be pitched at a more senior level’.

2.4.3. Respondents’ Comments

The data in the table above were collected using free-response items. Respondents were therefore able to provide additional comments on their recommendations that yield additional insights to the coded tables. The following issues appeared key in respondents’ views about their training needs: participative methods, including deliberative and consultative techniques; engaging with policy makers; research commissioning; resources to enable updating on new and innovative methodologies; research ethics and data protection; and, research related skills, such as project management and dissemination. The following comments from respondents illustrate some of these issues:

‘deliberative research... and consultative techniques, the difference between good and bad practice and how to make the exercise as robust as possible’.

‘A one or two day yearly update course on key areas of innovation in social research methods’

‘An introduction to the key qualitative research methods for commissioners of research. I am essentially a survey methodologist but work in Government so need to know what alternatives to suggest, while either not needing to do the commissioning myself or sometimes needing to commission them alongside my quant responsibilities’

‘Report writing and presentation with impact; what do today’s policy audience want and how can you connect with them?’

‘Immediately I need: Data Protection Act training. Also training to help me work out suitable research governance for a middling-sized research-active voluntary organisation - practical ethics. My understanding of ethical principles is clear, but need to work out what to do.’

2.4.4. General Research Training Needs in the Sector or Organisation

Respondents were also asked about training needs more generally, in their research sector or organisation, rather than their personal needs that is, and the level required.

“In which areas of research methods and practice do you perceive there to be the greatest training needs? Please specify up to 5 topics in the box below, in as much detail as possible, relating to any aspect of research methods or practice in which you feel there is a need for training within your organisation or area of research. For each area identified please specify whether you feel this need is for basic, intermediate or advanced-level training.”

Method	Count	Level:			
		Unspecified	Basic	Intermediate	Advanced
Frameworks for research and research design					
Collaborative approaches	8	5	1	3	2
Meta-analysis and Synthesis	7	3	4	4	2
Mixed methods	5	2	2	4	3
*Choosing methods	4	4	-	-	-
Frameworks (general)	3	1	1	2	-
Data Collection					
Sampling	8	4	3	2	1
Survey Design	8	5	3	3	1
Questionnaire design	7	4	3	-	-
Qualitative Interviewing	5	4	1	-	-
Focus Groups	5	4	1	-	1
*researching hard to reach/hidden groups	2	1	-	1	1
*working with children / young people	2	2	-	-	-
Data Quality and Data Management					
Data Quality and Data Management (general)	2	1	-	-	-
Data Handling and Analysis					
Quantitative approaches (general)	23	8	10	8	6
Qualitative approaches (general)	21	8	7	9	4
*Reporting / Interpreting Quantitative research”	6	6	-	-	-
Regression	5	4	1	1	-
*Reporting / Interpreting Qualitative research	4	4	-	-	-
*Reporting / interpreting results	4	2	2	1	-
Survey Analysis	2	1	1	-	-
Missing Data methods	2	2	-	-	-
GIS	2	2	-	-	-
*How to do stats in the real world	2	2	-	-	-

Table 9: Perceived Training Needs in Respondents’ Sector or Organisation (continued below)

Note

* Stars indicate topics which do not currently appear in the typology.

ICT, Software and Simulation					
Software	5	3	1	2	1
Research Management and Application of Research					
Research and project management	6	3	3	2	2
Ethics	2	1	1	1	1
Evidence based policy and practice	2	1	1	1	1
Research Skills, Communication and Disemination					
Writing skills	10	6	3	4	3
*Engaging with policy / making recommendations	2	2	-	-	-
*proposal writing and costings	2	2	-	-	-

Table 9: Perceived Training Needs in Respondents' Sector or Organisation

Single respondents mentioned the following subject areas: evaluation research, observation, online databases, experiments, visual methods, factor analysis, quasi-experiments, data reduction, choosing data analysis methods, quantitative skills for qualitative researchers, knowledge transfer, teaching and supervising skills, summarising complex findings, knowledge management, turning findings into action, proposal reviewing, research skills for policy colleagues and reason and argument.

2.4.5. Respondents' Comments

The following issues appeared key in respondents' comments about training needs within the social research community: the need for training at the basic level; the need for training in quantitative skills, especially data analysis and statistics; a lack of availability of affordable training; and the need for opportunities to update and develop skills. The following comments from respondents illustrate some of these issues:

'I think there is a general need for good quality research methods training courses that go beyond the basics, and keep researchers skill base up. I know a number of researchers in my organisation have good qualifications but ... we can become out of touch with developments in methodology. However, when we go to try to locate training opportunities we often find there is a gap between basic courses and advanced level courses. We have the basic knowledge but we need more intermediate level training which is pitched at the level of assisting and keeping up to date a practicing social researcher. I also think there is a need for more stats/ quantitative training, but more along the lines of how to do stats in the 'real world' rather than advanced level stuff that you need a PhD to understand'

'There is so much I don't know where to start. There is a need for basic research skills for new researchers, from development of a project, through to questionnaire design and project management. [In terms of] qualitative techniques, skills are needed in relation to choosing the right technique, how

to really do depth interviewing, how to run and manage focus groups, how to report on qualitative research. Questionnaire design is a big topic area for us: how to design questions from scratch, reusing questions from other questionnaires, using scales. Data analysis - how do you really report on data, what's really interesting about the data you've got and what isn't? Writing Skills - how to write a report, using plain English for questionnaire design and reporting (where appropriate). I own a company and admit it happens with us...our researchers are weak despite internal training and coaching. Our problem is that we can never attend training in London which is where all the courses are. It costs us £170 on the train, overnight accommodation, travelling time which is too much for us as a private 'small/medium company'

'These comments are based on my experience as a commissioner of research and evaluation. [The skills we need are:] 1). Analysis skills: too often we receive reports which simply describe the data in a great amount of detail, and which show little indication that analysis or synthesis has been carried out. 2). Writing skills: identifying and highlighting key findings. Often, one has to wade through a lot of detail to get to the findings which tell us what we need to know. Related to this is writing concisely. This is probably not within scope, but basic grammar and spelling are often very poor. 3). Knowing what weight to give to findings. Reports sometimes draw big conclusions from data which is not very robust or is based on very small sample sizes. 4). Triangulation; using more than one method and weighing up the outputs from these methods to assess the extent to which they confirm or contradict each other, and what this tells us. In particular, that it can often be useful to use a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods to get a broad overview and insight into what the data mean. 5). Sampling and response rates. Sometimes low response rates are unavoidable, but researchers are sometimes unaware of the potential implications of this for response bias.'

'I work as an independent researcher under contract to statutory and voluntary organisations and partnerships. There is an enormous lack of understanding of research methods and practice, from commissioning to ethics to absolute basics, e.g., what is an open or closed question or what is the difference between primary and secondary data? One of my local authority clients recently commissioned me to design and run a training course over seven half-days, to equip their managers with enough basic knowledge to commission and manage research'

Sections 2.5-2.8 below report on preferred mode of delivery, existing provision, access issues and accreditation.

2.5. Preferred Mode of Delivery and Format of Training Events

Respondents' preferences were elicited for different modes of delivery and formats of training event, shown in figure 1 below. The most useful types were specified as traditional training and capacity building events (a-c). The activities least commonly rated as useful were work placements.

“Which of the following types of training event would be most useful to you? Please select a response from the drop down list in relation to each type of event.”

- a. Skills based training course (e.g. training workshop)
- b. Seminar or presentations with discussion
- c. Masterclasses
- d. Work placements
- e. Online training
- f. Formal work-based support or mentoring

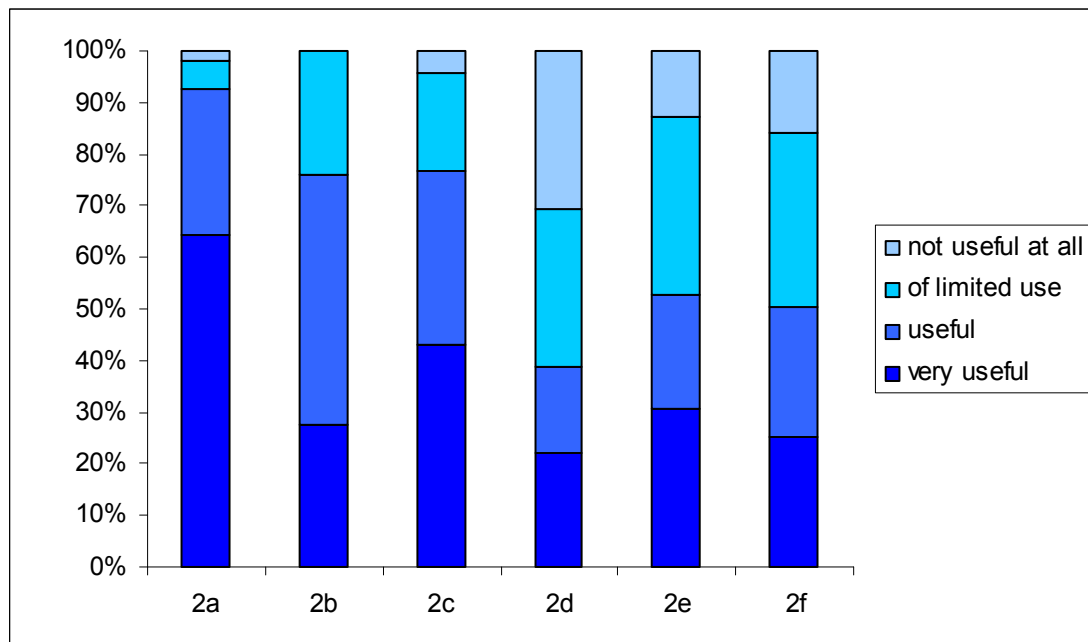


Figure 1: Preferred Delivery Mode

Respondents' preferences for different durations of training courses were also elicited, shown in figure 2 below. The most useful were courses deemed to be ½ to 4 days in length with one day courses the most useful. There were few respondents who rated courses of a week as useful and none rating longer courses as useful.

“What duration of training course would be most useful to you? Please select a response from the drop down list in relation to each option.”

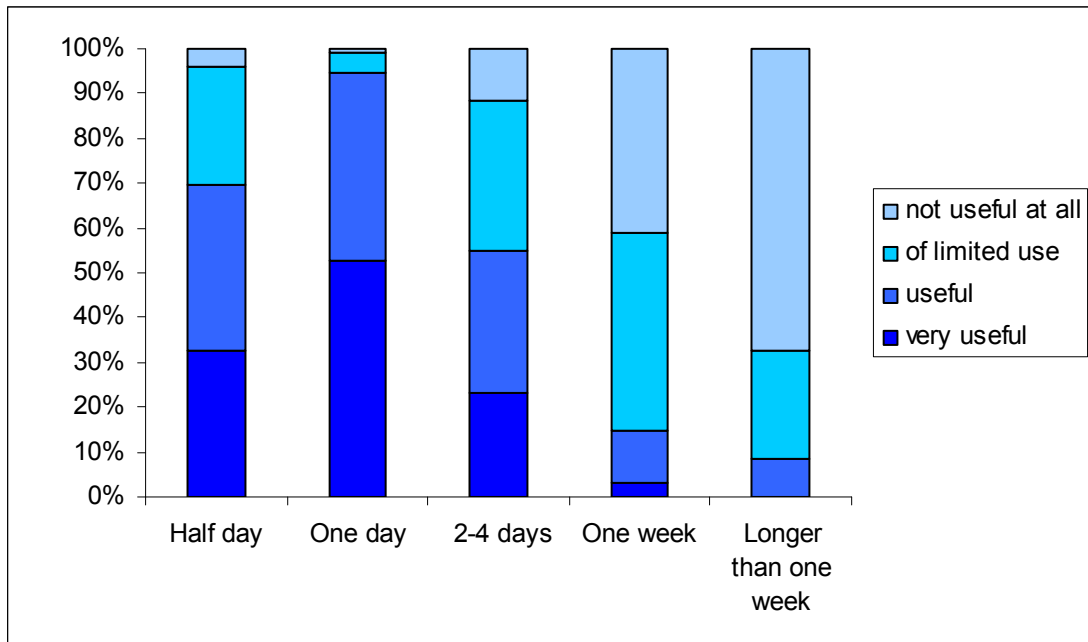


Figure 2: Preferred Course Length

Respondents were also asked about the preferred delivery of longer courses; responses are shown in table 10. Those who identified a need for such a course most commonly favoured a single period for delivery, but there was also considerable support for delivery in smaller periods over a longer time.

“If you selected options lasting more than one day as useful or very useful, over what period of time would you like courses to be delivered?”

	N	% (of 68)
One single block of time	29	43
Two blocks one week apart	14	21
Several blocks over a month or more	25	37

Table 10: Preferred Format of Longer Courses

2.6. Existing Provision

The sample were asked whether they had received training in the last two years in research methods or practice (table 11). Overall, a large majority of respondents had received such training. However, there seems to be a difference here between less and more experienced researchers, with the latter as likely as not to have undertaken no training in the last two years.

“Have you received any training in research methods or practice in the last two years? Please click one of the buttons below.”

	Overall		Less Experienced		More Experienced	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	67	71	48	86	19	49
No	28	29	8	14	20	51

note: more experienced researchers are defined as those with more than 10 years’ experience.

Table 11: Receipt of Training in the Last Two Years

We also asked which organisations provided this training (table 12). The most common course provider reported was the SRA, followed by a respondent’s employer, their university and the ESRC initiatives in that order.

“You said that you have received training in the last two years. Who provided this training? Please choose from the following training providers by clicking in the boxes below (please select as many as apply):”

	N	% (of 67)
Social Research Association (SRA)	31	46
My employing organisation	27	40
The University/college where I am studying	18	27
Other University courses	15	22
ESRC (NCRM, RDI)	14	21
Market Research Society (MRS)	4	6

Table 12: Organisations Providing Respondents’ Training

Respondents were asked how their employers supported research methods training (table 13). A majority of respondents report that employers provide time and a majority that they provide funding for course attendance; 73 (77%) reported that they provide both. A substantial proportion of employers also provide in-house training and identify training opportunities. Few employers, it seems, do not support training activities.

“In what ways (if at all) does your employer support your training needs in research methods? Please choose from the following ways by clicking in the boxes below (you may select as many as apply):”

	N	%
Providing time for course attendance	79	83
Providing funding for courses	75	79
In-house training	44	46
Identifying training opportunities	41	43
Other	9	9
Not applicable (e.g. freelance researcher)	9	9
<u>My employer does not support such training</u>	1	1

Table 13: Employers’ Support of Methods Training

2.7. Accessing Training Events

We asked researchers to outline their sources of information about forthcoming training events (table 14). The most commonly used sources of information appear to be websites and newsletters, followed by email lists.

“How do you find out about forthcoming training courses that you might be interested in? Please choose from the following sources of information by clicking in the boxes below (please select as many as apply):”

	N	%
Newsletters	71	75
Websites	66	69
Email lists (please tell us the list(s) used)	58	61
Colleagues	40	42
Own employer	37	39
Search engines (e.g. Google)	11	12

Table 14.i: Sources of Information for Training Events

Email lists specified by respondents were:

	N
Social Research Association (SRA)	39
Government Social Research Unit (GSRU)	5
UK Evaluation Society (UKES)	5
Market Research Society (MRS)	4
‘research networks’	4
Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)	3
National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM / RMP)	2
Join Information Systems Committee (JISC)	2
Royal Statistical Society (RSS)	2
Voluntary Sector Studies Network (VSSN)	2

Table 14.ii: Email Lists Used Publicising Training Events

Other email lists mentioned by single respondents were the British Society of Criminology (BSC), the British Psychological Society (BPS), the British Sociological Association (BSA), Courses in Applied Social Surveys (CASS), the Centre for Community Research (CCR), Independent Consultants Group (ICG), the Institute for Research and Innovation in Social Sciences (IRISS), the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA), the UK Linguistic Ethnography Forum (UKLEF), Medical Sociology (MedSoc), Natcen Learning, the National Centre for e-Social Science (NCeSS), the Social Policy Association (SPA), the Social Research Association Scotland, and Social Policy and Social Work (SWAP).

We also elicited which websites were consulted for this information (table 15). The most commonly used websites were the SRA and NCRM sites.

“If you said that you have found out about training events from websites, which websites have you accessed for information? Please choose from the following websites by clicking in the boxes below (please select as many as apply).”

	N	%
SRA	59	62
NCRM	21	22
RMP	6	6
Researcher Development Initiative (RDI)	6	6
MRS	5	5
Intute (formerly Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG))	4	4
Social Research Update	4	4
NatCen	4	4
HEIs	3	3
ESRC	2	2
RSS	2	2
Open Uni.	2	2

Table 15: Websites Used Publicising Training Events

Single respondents identified: Charities Evaluation Services, LARIA, the Office of National Statistics (ONS), the Policy Hub and Policy Studies Association (PSA).

We asked if respondents had been unable to access training; 48 respondents (51%) reported being unable to at least once. We also elicited reasons why respondents were unable to access training, which are shown in table 16 below. Very few respondents implicate the employer’s attitude as a barrier to training. The most common reasons given concerning individuals are financial and time considerations, and nearly one in four respondents had been unable to identify a suitable course at some time.

“You said there have been occasions when you have identified a methods-related training need and have been unable to access training. Why was this? Please choose from the following reasons by clicking in the boxes below (you may select as many as apply)”:

	N	% (of 48)
Financial considerations	27	56
Could not find suitable training	25	52
Lack of time	19	40
Unable to travel to attend training course	12	25
Other reasons	8	17
Employer unwilling for me to attend	3	6

Table 16: Reasons For Inability to Access Training

Respondents were asked about their attitudes towards regional provision (table 17). A large majority of respondents (95%) indicate that regional provision is either important or very important to them.

“How important to you is the availability of training courses within your own region? Please click one of the buttons below.”

	N	%
Very important	52	55
Important	38	40
Not important	5	5

Table 17: Importance of Regional Provision

The issue of access was also one raised by around one third of the 20 respondents who responded to the ‘additional comments’ question at the end of the questionnaire. Several respondents noted that the issue was not about providing training in the Region in which people lived but ease of access in terms of transport links and travel time. Difficulty in meeting the cost of training courses was also an issue repeatedly raised. This was identified as a particular issue for freelance researchers or researchers working for small research organisations with limited budgets. Consideration by NCRM of the ways in which it might support small and independent research organisations was highlighted. One respondent identified the answer to the problems of access and cost to be to develop high quality on-line training:

‘Some of the topics advertised by SRA are so interesting but tend to be in London. As a freelancer I cannot afford travel, course fees and subsistence. I realise that sometimes course fees are reduced but even then the cost is too high and the travel environmentally damaging. Online courses are an excellent idea as I have studied with the OU and their courses are excellent ... I’ve been in the SRA for a number of years and we have never been able to access any of the training for our researchers - as mentioned it’s too expensive to send people from Hull to London and/or Edinburgh. It would be brilliant to have cost effective, online training for new researchers - and old ones. This would solve the problem of travel and would allow us to have a structured programme in place’.

2.8. Accreditation

We asked for respondents’ views about accreditation (table 18). Opinion appears to be divided on this issue. Most respondents rated accreditation as either important or very important, but this is not a large majority, with nearly half of respondents rating it as unimportant (53% versus 47%). Survey respondents were also invited to comment on the issue of accreditation if they wished to do so; 26 people provided comments.

“How important would it be to you that training be formally accredited in some way (e.g. course credits, certified trainers)?”

	N	%
Very important	14	15
Important	36	38
Not important	45	47

Table 18: Importance of Accreditation

Comments can be categorised into four groups: those who viewed accreditation as important; those who viewed accreditation as an added extra; those for whom accreditation was not an issue; and one respondent who was against the notion of accreditation. The majority of comments related to accreditation being unimportant. A number of comments additionally identified the important issue as being the quality of the training provided rather than the issue of its accreditation.

Nine respondents commented that accreditation was not an issue for them. For some this related to their stage of career or the sector in which they worked where accredited training was not valued. Respondents with this view noted that the important issue was gaining the skills rather than a qualification or certificate:

'May possibly be valuable for those at an early career stage, but less so when an established researcher'

'Accreditation is not currently useful as I work in the civil service but may become so were I considering leaving'

'I am more concerned with developing the skills than getting the qualification'

A further five respondents noted that the important issue was the quality of the training provided rather than accreditation, for example:

'It's not important that they're accredited but it is important that I know that they're good'

Four respondents viewed accreditation as an 'added extra' of training but that this was not the central reason for attending the training. Accreditation was referred to as something 'nice to have' but not essential.

Six respondents viewed accreditation as important to assure employers, clients, other researchers and the broader social science community of the professional standing of individuals and the social research sector. This was identified as a particular issue for freelance researchers and 'user-researchers' who have not necessarily had academic research training. This has also been identified as an increasingly important issue for the Government social research sector. The following comments reflect these views:

'GSRU are currently considering this issue - and professional skills more broadly. In order for there to be shared standards and shared agreement as to the merit of development opportunities across the whole social science community, independent accreditation and validation of standards is essential'

'I believe this is very important in particular for the new breed of social researchers that user-researchers represent. They don't normally come from academia or have had formal academic research training. They learn "on the job", often as volunteers in the voluntary sector, often while unemployed or on long term illness and accreditation would be very valuable'

'I think accreditation is very important it helps other researchers to recognise your qualifications and this is even more important dealing with non-researchers in environments such as local government'

Finally, one respondent was against the notion of accreditation fearing that it would have a negative impact on the training process and might have a detrimental effect on the employment of researchers by excluding employment opportunities to those who had not attended particular courses.

2.9. Survey Results: Discussion

Of key interest are the topics that respondents identified when asked to specify training needs. From tables 8 and 9, many of the most frequently-cited topics are perhaps unsurprising, since they arise in connection with perhaps the most commonly-used methods: the design and analysis of surveys (in particular sampling methodology), questionnaire design, regression, focus groups and qualitative interviewing approaches. There are also some emergent themes. Evaluation methodology and associated skills are very evident, presumably as evaluation is a very intensive area of contemporary research activity, attributable in part to institutional requirements for accountability. Perhaps among the less routine methods to emerge as highly sought-after for training are collaborative research, which comprises action research, participatory research, deliberative and consultative methods. Training in meta-analysis and synthesis are also heavily cited needs. There is also a range of more advanced or specialist topics appearing in the tables particularly under data collection and analysis sections (the largest areas of the typology) but with markedly lower frequencies.

Also of interest is that training in the skills of reporting and interpretation of results is frequently identified, across both quantitative and qualitative methods, in addition to the acquisition of technical proficiencies. Writing skills, project management skills and research ethics are prominent too.

The differences are not striking between the kinds of needs participants identified for themselves and for their organisations or research areas more generally, shown in tables 8 and 9. However, the table below, comparing the levels of training specified, shows that respondents were relatively more likely to specify intermediate or advanced training for themselves and basic training for others. (The table adds up the number of times each level of training was specified in tables 8 and 9). This difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2(3)=13$, $p = 0.004$). Consistent with this, it is also noticeable that writing skills appear to feature more heavily in training deemed necessary for others, and that the need for *refresher* courses was mentioned primarily in regard to personal training needs. One interpretation is that these results reflect the predominance of more experienced researchers in the sample. Another possibility is that they reflect a self-serving bias. Both tables indicate a perceived need for training provision at all levels, though in both cases nearly half of respondents did not specify the levels of training required.

Level	self - table 8 (%)	organisation or area - table 9 (%)
unspecified	47	44
basic	11	22
intermediate	25	21
advanced	17	13

Table 19: Levels of Required Training Specified for Self and Others

Concerning existing provision and access issues, one notable feature of the results is that a large majority of respondents report that employers in the sector are supportive of training. The employing organisation is the second most common provider of training (table 12), is rarely identified as not supporting training (table 13), is often active in informing employees of training events (table 14) and is rarely cited as a reason why suitable training was not accessible (table 16). However, financial and time considerations (table 16) may implicate a respondent's employment situation to some extent.

The results in table 11 suggest that more experienced researchers are less likely to undertake training than more junior colleagues. This result is statistically significant ($\chi^2(1)=15$, $p < 0.001$). One factor might be that relatively junior researchers include many who have just finished a PhD but the result is robust to the exclusion of respondents who may have attended university during the last two years. Thus, if we drop those observations from table 11 with less than three years' experience in social research, 84% of less experienced researchers had undertaken training in the last two years. There are many possible explanations for this finding. For example, more senior researchers might not access training even where this would be desirable because they feel they are expected either to be knowledgeable already or to be able to train themselves. Alternatively they may indeed be less in need than more junior colleagues, or simply more busy.

Finally, respondents seem generally to prefer more traditional classroom-based, face-to-face formats of training (figure 1), though comments indicated that online training may be important in overcoming geographical barriers, including cost. This is consistent with the results on regional provision (table 17), where only a very small minority (5%) indicated that regional provision is unimportant, and comments indicated that for small or medium-sized businesses further from London it is often not economic to send people away for training. Short courses were the most popular (figure 2) though there seems to be some support for longer periods of training where this is distributed over several months (table 10).

3. Interview Study

Interviews were conducted with the Directors or Training Managers of organisations which employ social researchers in the independent, Government, charitable and market/opinion research sectors. Interviews were conducted by telephone (n=9) and online (n=1). A semi structured interview guide was used to explore participants' views and experiences in relation to i) the types of skills they look for in employing researchers, ii) the extent to which they experience difficulties in recruiting researchers with suitable skills iii) training provision iv) training needs. Telephone interviews lasted an average of 30 minutes and were audio recorded and transcribed.

The transcripts were analysed thematically in relation to the above issues. The interview schedule is given in Appendix 2.

3.1. Sample

Ten interviews were conducted with either the Directors or Training/Research Managers of organisations which employ social researchers. These individuals represented: research organisations in the private sector (n=4); Local Government (n=2); Government social research (n=1); non-Governmental organisations (NGO) (n=1); non-Governmental public body (n=1) and a charitable trust (n=1). These ranged from small to large organisations with the numbers of social research staff employed ranging from 8 to 1,000. The number of research staff employed does not necessarily relate to the size of the organisation, in that some large organisations, such as Local Government, employ small numbers of researchers relative to their overall numbers of employees. Each of the organisations employed social researchers across the range of levels from research assistant/ research officer to research director. Table 25 illustrates the sectors and the size of the organisations represented in this study.

ID	Sector	Interviewee	Number of social research staff employed
1	Government Social Research	Training Manager	1000 (across sites)
2	Local Government	Research Manager	15
3	Local Government	Team Leader	8
4	Non Governmental Public Body	Training Manager	110 (across 3 sites)
5	Private Sector	Associate Director	200*
6	Private Sector	Director of Research	150
7	Private Sector	HR Manager + Senior Researcher	74
8	Private Sector	Director	13
9	Charitable Trust	Director of Learning	151
10	Non Governmental Organisation (NGO)	Head of Research	12

Table 25: Organisations Represented in Interviews

Note: * this figure is obtained from the website of the organisation; figures for the other organisations were provided by interviewees.

3.2. Findings

3.2.1. Recruitment and Skills

The recruitment process varies across these organisations with the smaller independent, charitable and Local Government organisations recruiting as and when necessary, either when existing staff leave or as a result of new initiatives, and the larger organisations recruiting on a regular basis at specific points annually.

Interviewees from Government Social Research and the large, established research organisations (interviewees 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9) identified posts at the junior level to be over-subscribed and reported little difficulty in recruiting staff to these junior posts. These posts generally seek knowledge of research methods and an aptitude for research work. Particularly important for these posts is knowledge of a range of methods and ability to understand and interpret data. The recruitment process utilised

methods to assess these skills. While it was acknowledged that people might not come 'fully formed' in terms of necessary skills, little difficulty in recruiting people with appropriate skills was identified. The retention of staff in these organisations was also not identified as problematic. One of the reasons for this was viewed as the training programmes offered and the opportunities for advancement that working in these organisations presents:

'Because we are a big employer and people are relatively well paid compared to the academic sector we receive a lot of applications for posts ... on the whole we're quite happy with the people we're getting. That is not to say that people come in with all the skills we need ... people aren't coming fully formed, they're still needing training and development but that's not a huge issue for us because I think we've come to expect that'
(Government social research, interview 1).

'We would expect to bring people in with the basic social research professional skills, recognising that sometimes there are gaps and that people need to go on courses to fill those gaps and we are happy with that ...I think all of our researchers are aware that they really do get very good development with us which makes them highly employable elsewhere'
(Non Governmental Public Body, interview 4)

This was in contrast to the difficulties identified by the Director of a small independent social research organisation who noted that she experienced difficulties recruiting staff with research skills and retaining them once they are in post. Similar difficulties were identified in relation to the retention of junior staff in Local Government:

'the problem we have here is that we can't get sufficient research staff with sufficient qualifications or experience .. Graduates don't tend to stay in this area once they've graduated, unlike places like Leeds and Manchester which are very attractive if you want to stay in a Northern city and so it's quite difficult to recruit people of the calibre you need for research staff. ... We're a smallish company and graduates tend to come to us, get a year's experience and then go off somewhere else. Even though we have what we call a 'lift' programme where they know they can become senior research execs, the lure of going to London or a big company where they are going to be paid a fortune [is too great]'
(Private sector, interview 8)

'We've had no problems filling posts, what has been difficult is then providing the career grades to retain people and we've been very vulnerable to losing them – we train a lot of people [who end up in] Government [social research]'
(Local Government, interview 3).

Recruitment to senior level jobs was identified as more difficult by almost all interviewees, especially where the potential to promote in-house to these posts was problematic. Specific skill shortages were noted in relation to high level survey and evaluation skills, applied research skills; project management skills; interpretation, reporting and communication skills; and knowledge of substantive areas or policy.

The skills sought for these intermediate or senior level posts identified by interviewees were: understanding of a *range* of research approaches; knowledge of a substantive or policy area; project management; ability to assess research quality; ability to train others; high level survey and evaluation skills; high level interpretation, reporting and communication skills. A frequent comment was that applicants with PhDs were poorly equipped for intermediate and senior level posts in the non-academic sector. The following quotes illustrate some of these issues:

'We get a lot of PhD students applying who've got no applied experience at all. ... So there's a mismatch between the expectations of people coming out of higher education about what that tools them up to do in the applied world'
(Charitable Trust, interview 9)

'Senior staff with knowledge of a business area and research background and a record of getting business are hard to locate. A combination of these three things don't intersect for many people. The more junior the easier it gets really'
(Private Sector, interview 6)

'The challenge is getting the combination of really sound grounding and training in research methods so they know the range ... and also the background in the (substantive) area'
(NGO, interview 10)

'My real problem is recruiting people at the senior research level ... it's a skill set which is an unusual mix because we're wanting the detailed professional competence but you're also looking for the staff management and project management experience'
(Non Governmental Public Body, interview 4)

3.2.2. Training Provision

As indicated above, the large, established research organisations (interviews 1, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 9) have extensive training and development programmes for staff, particularly for junior level staff. Four of these organisations have graduate programmes for junior staff. All these organisations additionally reported having an institutional commitment to continuing professional development (CPD) for research staff across grades. Most of these organisations have in-house training (either with existing expertise in-house or commissioned with an external trainer) and this was generally preferred. Some of this training drew on existing expertise through peer support, one-to-one training, seminars and workshops. These organisations also commissioned specific training, either to take place in-house or at a specific institution (e.g., GSR's MSc in policy analysis at the Institute for Education). However, where individual staff members had specific training needs that could not be met internally, where budgets allowed and where an external course of suitable quality could be identified, these were used. Specific training providers identified were Courses in Applied Social Surveys (CASS), Royal Statistical Society (RSS) and Social Research Association (SRA). Identifying courses of appropriate quality and of relevance to the applied research community was identified as a challenge by several interviewees. Attendance at conferences, keeping up to date through journals, research bulletins and

networking activities were other activities identified as contributing to CPD. The following quotes are illustrative of these issues:

'We believe in training, we allocate funding towards it. ... People can't always get everything they want but actually largely people are getting the training that they need. So our first priority is to make sure that everyone has got the skills to do the job they're doing ... Everyone has a personal development plan ... we also ask people to keep a learning and development log book ... The expectation is that people will spend between 50-100 hours a year on learning and development, now that's not only training courses, it can be side-by-side desk training, it can be seminars, we have peer group support groups ..'
(Non-Governmental Public Organisation, interview 4).

'There's a growing recognition that people have to have ongoing professional development and need to be encouraged to do that ... It's a whole range of things and, as with academics, our researchers will write for journals, receive journals, methodological journals as well as ones in their substantive area, so they keep up to date in that way. They go along to conferences and tap into both the academic and practitioner conference networks. ... we also have internal and external seminar series .. if we are looking to innovate and use a new method we might send someone on a course but we'd be far more likely to try and partner up with another organisation'
(Charitable Trust, interview 9).

'Quality is an issue. I mean one of the reasons we developed our own courses in the first place was that there was a concern about the quality of courses outside of Government and then wasting 2 days and then not even getting anything out of it'
(Government Social Research, interview 1).

Three of the other research organisations were less well resourced but nevertheless had a similar approach to training and development, albeit on a smaller scale and with more limited budgets (interview 3, 8 and 10). The smaller independent research organisation noted that the limited training budget meant that people wanted and needed more training than they were able to provide. They identified considerable problems accessing appropriate training.

'We do mainly on the job training and internal courses ... we tend not to access external training partly because it's the actual cost of getting someone from here to London; going to London is minimum if £200 and lot of the training is done in London. ... Part of it is not knowing what is out there, we don't know what training is available apart from MRS and MRS isn't particularly suitable for social researchers'
(Private Sector, interview 8).

Only one interviewee (interview 2, Local Government) identified that they had limited needs for training:

'We tend to be quite specific. We do access some courses, some training out there that don't get provided in-house but as far as the research methods stuff

goes, most of the team are pretty well-skilled and don't have the need for other skills ... We keep an eye to the various training press and look at what's happening out there but we tend to have enough skills in the team'
(Local Government, interview 2).

3.2.3. Training Needs

The specific needs identified by interviewees are listed in Table 26 below. These are classified, where appropriate, using the Research Methods Typology (Beissel-Durrant, 2004).

Topic	Interviewee
Frameworks for Research and Research Design	
Meta analysis and synthesis	1, 3
Evaluation research	3, 5, 7
Collaborative approaches	3, 10
Theoretical basis of research methods	10
Updating and training in new methods	10
Data Collection	
Sampling	5, 3
Focus groups	2, 3, 8
Questionnaire Design	3, 5, 6, 8
Survey Design	2, 3, 6
Data Handling and Analysis	
Quantitative approaches (general)	1, 3, 8
Qualitative approaches (general)	3, 8
Policy analysis	7
Secondary analysis	3
Multivariate analysis	6
Survey analysis	3
Software	2
Interpretation	8, 9
Research Management	
Project management/ managing staff	4, 8
Managing clients	8
Research skills, Communication & Dissemination	
Communication and dissemination	2
Writing skills	8, 9
Influencing skills	2
Partnership working	2
Working across disciplines/understanding disciplines	1
Problem solving	1
Reflective practice	3

Table 26: Research Needs Identified by Interviewees

Nine of the ten interviewees identified staff training needs. One interviewee (interview 2) whilst not noting them for his staff team, identified training needs in relation to the Local Government sector. In terms of research design, data collection, data handling and analysis, needs were identified in the following areas: quantitative approaches, primarily survey design and analysis; qualitative approaches, primarily focus groups; evaluation; research synthesis; secondary analysis; policy analysis and interpretation of data. In terms of level, the needs for training in these types of skills were identified across the range of career levels, with junior researchers needing training in basic level skills and more senior staff needing training and development in more advanced approaches. The particular areas where training at a more advanced level was identified as necessary were in survey design and analysis, evaluation and in the interpretation of data, both qualitative and quantitative. The need for updating and training in innovative methods was also identified, though only by one interviewee.

The need for training in a very broad range of skills was identified by interviewees in Local Government and the small private sector organisation:

'I would say both quantitative and qualitative areas. I've already identified the need for action research and reflective practice. I'd say things like critical appraisal and the ability to do secondary analysis – we're looking to use evidence that's produced elsewhere and to interpret it, so the ability to interpret and appraise is important. Evaluation is a huge area of potential growth because we're having to get far better at collecting evidence about people's perceptions of service quality ... there is a real dearth of quantitative skills .. and survey design and survey analysis'

(Local Government, interview 3)

'I think the obvious ones, questionnaire design, how to run a focus group ... They need to know something about how to analyse data and interpretation, how you interpret and give the client what they need, which is insight and understanding'

(Private sector, interview 8).

Interviewees from the other organisations highlighted specific areas of need, such as survey design or evaluation, reflecting the specific focus of research in their organisation. The following quote is illustrative of comments made:

'Within any straightforward research project the bulk of the work is likely to be some form of evaluation, so that implies the bulk of our needs are in evaluation. Researchers have good research backgrounds and skills but not in evaluation or policy analysis ... There are certainly gaps in the ex-ante stuff, that is, in the assessment of options prior to policy interventions. ... They [the EU] demand a lot of work on theoretical analyses of policy options to assess the likely impact of policies'

(Private sector, interview 7).

Considerable training needs were identified across organisations in relation to research and management skills, such as: project management skills; working with clients and partners; presentation, reporting and influencing skills and working across

disciplines. Many of these skills were identified as necessary for senior researchers. The following quote is illustrative:

'skills like negotiation skills, how to present, how to influence decision makers, all those sorts of things. So it reflects what the role of research is now, it's not just providing data to people, it's very much about working with teams, working with senior management and helping them to understand what's going on and using our skills to influence decision making and making sure that decisions are grounded in research'

(Local Government, interview 2)

3.2.4. Training Delivery

All interviewees noted that training courses needed to be short in order to minimise the impact on the day-to-day work of researchers and the time pressures to complete projects to deadlines. Two days appeared to be the maximum amount of time interviewees viewed as manageable for training. One interviewee noted that single days delivered over an extended period in conjunction with telephone and email support between sessions, was useful in enabling individuals to develop in-depth skills but with minimum impact on current projects. Part-time modular MScs were also identified as appropriate.

In terms of location, the importance of locally-based courses was identified, especially for organisations situated a long distance from London. This related to the cost and inconvenience of travelling a long distance to events and the difficulties this presents for people with family commitments. On-line courses were viewed as one way to manage this difficulty and it was noted that the potential for these has been underdeveloped. Comments from two interviewees illustrate these points:

'I think the research councils need to be producing these sorts of training courses in Scotland because there are various barriers to people taking up these opportunities south of the border. ... I'd like to think people are less driven by place but in reality, particularly with experienced staff with families, they are not going to want to spend a lot of time away from home. Provision here in Scotland I think is absolutely crucial'

(Local Government, interview 3).

'Well in terms of where we are and the difficulty of accessing things in London, or anywhere else sometimes, if we could say to people 'look, there's this brilliant online training course here, it will teach you the academic theory around focus groups and also the practicalities of how to run one, you can do it online, you can have 2 hours a week to do that course over 10 weeks', then we would be really happy to set that time aside. And online training is the way of the World now isn't it and I think our younger staff would really welcome that'

(Private sector organisation, interview 8).

Issues relating to the relevance and quality of courses were also raised. It was noted that courses need to be made relevant to applied researchers as well as academic researchers. Courses organised by academics were criticised for their failure to make

their courses relevant to the wider research community. In order to achieve this, several interviewees identified the importance of academics collaborating with this wider community in the provision of training. The following quote illustrates the issues raised:

'I think an academic approach has great value but on a practical level it doesn't help when you are faced with how do you really get 12 pregnant women to attend a focus group .. when you've got your focus group transcript, what do you do with it? Thematic analysis, what does that really mean? ... There's a need for academic theory but we need the practical too'
(Private sector, interview 8).

The issue of the quality of courses and the difficulties in assessing quality was raised by four interviewees; these issues are outlined here but discussed further in the following section. These interviewees noted the importance of some form of accreditation so that the quality of courses could be evaluated and the possibility of accumulating credits from courses towards a qualification was noted. Another issue raised by these interviewees was the importance of course assessment so that trainees and their employers could ensure that staff had gained an appropriate level of skill:

'I think these things ought to be assessed at the end. You want some proof, it's no good just having attended a course'
(Private sector organisation, interview 4)

Two interviewees referred to research skills, such as questionnaire design and interpretation, as being craft skills that are learnt through practice, implying that training is not the only, or perhaps most appropriate, way of learning research skills. However, this issue did not form part of discussions with interviewees. A related point was raised by another interviewee who noted that researchers at senior levels need to have the opportunity to reflect on their experience and that learning at this level might be best achieved via peer group discussion rather than formal training courses:

'I think that there's a need for people who've gone beyond the novice level for ... more reflective, experiential learning. So people who have done research being given forums within which they can discuss their experience and look at how they can improve or change their practice. I think there's quite a lack of that for senior researchers, people who've been doing research for a long time'
(Charitable Trust, interview 9)

3.2.5. Improving Training and Skills across the Sector

Eight of the ten interviewees commented on ways in which the agenda for training and capacity building needs to develop in order to take into account the changing needs of social research. These interviews took place around the same time that the GSRU had held a meeting to explore the extent of interest across the social research community in taking forward the professionalisation of social research through agreed standards linked to qualifications and accredited training as well as continuing professional development. The meeting drew on the GSR competency framework (http://www.gsr.gov.uk/downloads/professional_development/cpd/gsr_competencies

[framework.pdf](#)). Six of the ten interviewees discussed these developments. These interviewees were all in agreement with the proposals and viewed this as an important step forward for the professionalisation of social research. It was noted by three interviewees that these developments might result in contracts for research being issued only to organisations signed up to the model; two interviewees viewed this as positive and one raised some concerns about this. Nevertheless, all six interviewees viewed the agenda as a positive one. The following quote is illustrative:

'The GSRU are fairly keen to look into and introduce [the competency framework]. I think certainly we, but I got the impression that the other organisations at the meeting as well, were quite keen on it. It's something that would take quite a bit of time and investment initially but would benefit everyone and would potentially pay off. I guess the ultimate aim would be that you would have proper professional qualifications recognised across the industry and then eventually you would have a situation in which clients would really only commission agencies that had a reasonable number of employees who have these qualifications ... and really I think that is the only way that you're going to get a proper framework for training set up'
(Private sector, interview 6).

An additional perceived need was for greater collaboration between the academic and more applied research communities. Three interviewees identified this as a particularly important issue. The perceived benefits were improved training, research practice and quality of evidence:

I suspect you need to get hold of practitioners to take part in the teaching. I say this as someone who does some teaching for [two universities] for their masters, but I hesitate because the academic's faults are lack of having done it, but the practitioner's fault is not having read enough so it's tricky. But there should be scope for getting the more academy style commercial world people like me teaching more and the more applied academy people to be raising their game.
(Private Sector, Interview 8)

'If things are going to change across the research community as a whole then there needs to be collaboration and partnership across the sector. Because I think we can learn from each other and I think there are things done in the academic sector we don't do and that would be useful cross-fertilisation'
(Charitable Trust, interview 9).

'We've got a huge amount of administrative data in important policy areas ... there are areas where we can provide very good opportunities and sources of evidence on issues which are burning social problems ... we could do with a lot more input from academics supported by research councils to investigate those through collaboration'
(Local Government, interview 3).

3.3. Interviews: Discussion

The large established and Government or Government-related organisations appear to have little difficulty recruiting staff with appropriate skills to junior positions. Such organisations have established training and development programmes for junior staff to enable them to progress to more senior positions within the organisation. Indeed, in Government and Government-related organisations there appears to be a preference for internal promotion to senior positions given that existing staff have been trained in the culture and practice of the organisation. The retention of staff in Government and Government-related organisations also seems relatively good. The larger research organisations also report little difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff at the junior level. This may be in contrast to small, independent research organisations and Local Government, especially those outside of London, where recruiting and retaining junior staff with appropriate skills or potential appear more difficult.

Recruitment to senior level posts appears more problematic indicating needs for training in higher level research skills. In particular skill shortages were identified in high level survey and evaluation skills and in the interpretation of data, both qualitative and quantitative. Training needs for senior researchers in project management, working with clients and in writing and influencing skills were also identified. At junior levels knowledge of, and skills in, a range of approaches were identified as training needs. Particularly prominent were skills in survey design and analysis, evaluation and focus groups. Communication and writing skills were also identified for both junior and senior researchers. These latter skills, along with influencing skills, are likely to be particularly important for researchers in the applied research sector. People post-PhD were identified as ill-equipped for work in this sector because of their perceived lack of applied research experience and limited knowledge across the *range* of methods skills.

In terms of training provision and training delivery, the larger research organisations appear to take training and development very seriously and provide considerable opportunities for staff. In these organisations the uptake of training and development opportunities is generally a requirement. In-house or commissioned training appear to be preferred in these organisations, although external training was used if budgets allowed and if managers were confident about the quality of training being provided. The more limited training budgets in smaller research organisations indicate researchers in these organisations may have considerably less opportunities for training in-house and have restricted access to external training.

The geographical location of external training appears important and was identified as a particular problem for organisations located outside London. Online training was identified as one solution to this difficulty. Short courses of up to two days duration were preferred by all interviewees in order to limit the impact on work commitments.

The quality of external courses was raised as an important issue, with training run by academics criticised for their failure to make courses relevant to applied researchers. The need for collaboration on training between academic and more applied researchers was identified. There was support for the accreditation of courses and for trainees to undertake course assessment to ensure skills had been learnt. There was also considerable support for proposals for the professionalisation of social research through agreed standards for qualifications and continuing professional development

4. Analysis of vacancies for social research posts

An analysis of job advertisements for social research posts outside of academia was undertaken to complement the survey and interview data. Its aim was to identify the research skills that employers of social researchers view as necessary for posts in social research in order to enable us to identify current key skills sought by employers as these may comprise areas of training need. The study comprised a content analysis of job specifications for all posts for social researchers in non-academic settings advertised in The Guardian (Wednesday's 'Society Guardian') and the situations vacant page on the websites of the Social Research Association (SRA), Evaluation Society and Government Social Research over a six week period commencing on March 1st 2008.

4.1. Grade, focus and location of posts

A total of 62 posts were advertised during this period. Of these almost half (n=29, 47%) were for research officer or research fellow posts. A further 29% (n=18) were for senior researchers and 22% (n=14) for research managers or directors. Only one post was for a research assistant. The majority of these posts were for organisations in the charitable (n=25, 40%) or independent sector (n=16, 26%). Of the rest, eleven were for central Government (GSR) or Government bodies (18%) and ten were for local authorities or Local Government (16%) (see Table 20).

	Research Assistant	Research Officer/Fellow	Senior Researcher	Research Manager/Director	Total (N)
Independent Institution	-	3	7	6	16
Charity	1	16	4	4	25
Local Authority/Local Government	-	5	4	1	10
Other	-	5	3	3	11
Public Sector					
Total	1	29	18	14	62

Table 20: Sector and Grade of Posts Advertised

Table 21 lists the focus of research in these posts. The majority were public/social policy, health, housing/community and children, youth or education.

Job area/Focus	N	%
Public/social policy	21	(34%)
Health	9	(15%)
Housing/community/community resources	8	(13%)
Children/youth/education	6	(10%)
International development/human rights	4	(6%)
Crime/police	3	(5%)
Programme/Service evaluation	2	(3%)
Varied/general	9	(15%)
Total	62	

Table 21: Job Area/Focus of Posts Advertised

4.2. Qualifications sought

Just over half of the posts specified either a first degree only (n=13, 21%) or first degree and post-graduate qualification (n=22, 35%) as essential or desirable criteria for posts. No posts specifically specified a PhD as necessary criteria. Three posts specified the need for evidence of continuous professional development and one sought researchers with a project management qualification.

4.3. Data collection and analysis skills

The majority of posts sought researchers with specific skills in qualitative and/or quantitative data collection and analysis (n=47, 76%). In the vast majority of cases where specific skills were identified these were sought in relation to quantitative skills (n=40, 65% of posts) rather than qualitative skills (n= 7, 11% of posts). Other analytic skills sought were service evaluation (n= 8, 13% of posts), policy analysis (n=4, 6% of posts) and systematic review (n=3, 5% of posts). Around half the posts sought researchers with knowledge and understanding of a range of methods (n=33, 53% of posts); 11 of these did not specify additional specific data collection or analytic skills. Tables 22, 23 and 24 set out the specific qualitative, quantitative and other analytic research skills sought by posts categorised by grade of post.

	Research Assistant	Research Officer	Senior Researcher	Research Manger/Director	Total
Interviews/focus groups	1	2	-	1	4 (6%)
Data analysis	-	2	1	1	4 (6%)

Table 22: Qualitative Skills Sought by Grade of Post Advertised*

*Seven posts (11% of all posts) sought skills in qualitative methods. The figures in relation to each skill relate to the number of posts identifying the specific skill. Posts typically identified more than one skill. Percentages relate to the % of all posts in which the specific skills were sought.

	Research Officer	Senior Researcher	Research Manger/Director	Total
Statistical software	10	8	6	24 (39%)
Statistics	11	7	3	21 (34%)
Survey skills	6	3	2	11 (18%)
Data management	3	3	3	9 (14%)
General quantitative skills	6	-	1	7 (11%)
Questionnaire design	4	1	1	6 (10%)
Use of data sets/official statistics	3	2	1	6 (10%)
Spatial Analysis	5	-	-	5 (8%)
Modelling	1	3	1	5 (8%)
Econometrics	3	-	-	3 (5%)

Table 23: Quantitative Skills Sought by Grade of Post Advertised*

Note: *Forty posts (65% of all posts) sought skills in quantitative methods. The figures in relation to each skill relate to the number of posts identifying the specific skill. Posts typically identified more than one skill. Percentages relate to % of all posts in which the specific skills were sought.

	Research Officer	Senior Researcher	Research Manger/Director	Total
Evaluation	1	3	4	8 (13%)
Spatial analysis	2	2	1	5 (8%)
Policy analysis	-	3	1	4 (6%)
Econometrics	1	1	1	3 (5%)
Systematic review	3	-	-	3 (5%)

Table 24: Other Analytic Research Skills by Grade of Post Advertised*

Note: *The figures in relation to each skill relate to the number of posts identifying the specific skill. Posts typically identified more than one skill. Percentages relate to % of all posts in which these skills were sought.

4.4. Research-related skills

Skills in communication and dissemination were sought in the majority of posts (n=53, 85% of posts). The specific skills sought related to oral and written communications skills and dissemination to varied audiences, including the public and policy makers. Skills engaging with networks (n=21, 34% of posts) and in effecting change through policy (n=15, 24% of posts) were also identified in these posts.

Project management skills were also sought in the majority of posts (n=39, 63% of posts). Specific project management skills included managing staff, providing leadership, working with customers and clients, managing multiple projects and managing budgets.

Other research related skills identified were general computing and IT skills (n=19, 31% of posts), ethics and data protection (n=11, 18% of posts), training and facilitation (n=6, 10% of posts) and event organisation (n=3, 5 % of posts)

As would be expected, personal qualities and attributes were also a common feature of job specifications. These included teamwork (n=41, 66% of posts), organisational skills (n=34, 55% of posts), initiative (n=31, 50% of posts) and interpersonal skills (n=11, 18% of posts).

4.5. Vacancies for Social Research Posts: Discussion

Within the period of analysis (which might not be typical), the content analysis of job vacancies for social research posts indicated that more posts in this sector seek researchers with skills in quantitative methods and a minority seek them with qualitative methods skills. However, broader knowledge and understanding across a range of methods also seems important, indicating to some degree, the need for researchers to have generalist knowledge. Communications skills appear to be widely sought, especially skills in engaging with and disseminating to varied audiences and influencing stakeholders or policy. Project management skills also appear an important feature of these posts. Few posts appear to be at the research assistant level but this may reflect the terms used in the sector whereby research officer posts are often first post positions for relatively inexperienced or new researchers. Interestingly, higher level academic qualifications, specifically a PhD, appear seldom to be specifically requested for posts in this sector.

5. General Discussion

This section draws out findings from the three sets of data in relation to training needs, training provision and training delivery.

5.1. Training Needs

The survey and interview data, and to some extent the vacancies analysis, indicate a need for training in the methods that are commonly used by researchers working in the applied or policy sectors: survey design and analysis; evaluation methods; meta analysis and synthesis; focus groups and collaborative research approaches such as action research, participatory research and deliberative and consultative methods. Training needs in these topics were identified at the intermediate and advanced levels with advanced training identified particularly in survey and evaluation methodologies. The vacancies analysis and interviews identify the importance of researchers having methodological skills across the *range* of methods, and particularly in quantitative methods. In this evidence, PhD training was often regarded as unnecessary or insufficient in providing people with the requisite range of skills.

A minority of survey respondents identified a need for refresher courses to update skills. This reflects the finding of previous research on training undertaken by NCRM (Wiles and Bardsley, 2007) that if skills are not used they atrophy. It may be that the expressed desire for refresher courses is a symptom of this 'use it or lose it' problem. This may be an issue for senior researchers in some organisations who find themselves in posts where they specialise in particular methodological approaches and are not able to maintain their skills in other approaches. The need for refresher courses was identified by only one interviewee as a training need in an organisational context. It may be that the need for refresher courses reflects researchers' interest in maintaining their skills levels across the board but are not necessarily perceived by employers as an essential requirement of their current posts (although having a range of skills did emerge as important in relation to appointing people to posts).

Research-related skills were identified as an important area in all three data sources. Skills in the interpretation, presentation and dissemination of research findings as well as general communication and influencing skills appeared particularly important across the range of researcher career levels, indicating these may be areas of training need. At the senior level, skills and/or training needs were identified in research management, both of projects and people, as well as in relation to communication with clients and research commissioners. These types of skills are specific to the applied context in which professional social researchers work.

The interviews demonstrated the differing training needs within the different types of organisations in the professional social research sector. Researchers working in Local Government, NGOs and small, independent research organisations are likely to have considerably higher needs for training, and more constraints on accessing it, than those working in large, established research organisations. Freelance researchers are another group who may have significant training needs; the small number of survey respondents in this category did not allow us to explore this issue.

5.2. Provision of training

The survey and interview data both indicate that research organisations are supportive of training although financial and time considerations place constraints on the support organisations are able to provide, particularly in the case of smaller research organisations. Large, established research organisations are key providers of training for their staff, are active in informing staff of training opportunities and provide opportunities for staff to access training. These organisations provide, and require staff to undertake, training and development. Smaller organisations, while apparently supportive of training, have relatively small training budgets and experience more time pressures that limit their ability to free up staff. A preference for in-house or commissioned training was identified across organisations because of a concern about the quality of external training.

The survey indicated that more experienced researchers are less likely to undertake training than junior researchers even though needs for training were identified for these groups. This finding is reflected in NCRM's evaluation of their training provision which found the majority of trainees on NCRM courses to be junior researchers even though training is provided in advanced and innovative techniques (Wiles and Bardsley, 2007). The interviews indicate that intensive in-house training programmes are provided specifically for junior staff in some of the large research

organisations but that training and development for senior staff is less established. This may be one explanation for the lower numbers of senior staff reporting undertaking training. However, there are other potential explanations such as lack of suitable courses for senior researchers or time limitations.

5.3. Delivery of training

In relation to external training, both the survey and interview data indicate the importance of regional training. This is a particular issue for smaller research organisations located outside of London because of the prohibitive costs of travel. Short courses appeared to be most popular because of the importance of limiting disruption to work commitments but there was some support for longer periods of training distributed over several months. There was interest in the potential of on-line training to overcome the problems of geographical constraints and cost of travel. On-line training was also identified as having the potential to alleviate time constraints if people were able to undertake training to their own timeframe. The interviews also indicated that courses and events provided by academic providers do not always meet the needs of researchers in the professional social research sectors and there was support for academics and applied researchers to work together in providing training.

The quality of external training was raised as an important issue. The interviews indicated considerable support from employers for assessment to form part of training courses and for the accreditation of training. However, the survey data found respondents' views on accreditation to be very mixed indicating there is not, as yet, wholesale support for this within the researcher community. Nevertheless, the issue of the quality of training was one that both survey respondents and interviewees viewed as important. There was considerable support from interviewees for proposals from GSRU for the professionalisation of social research.

6. Conclusions

This assessment was designed to identify training needs among the professional social research community through a survey of members of the Social Research Association, interviews with people with a responsibility or interest in training across a range of social research organisations and an analysis of job vacancies. In relation to the survey, we recognise that SRA membership is not necessarily representative of all research sectors outside of academia. Additionally, the high rate of non-response to the survey limited the extent to which we were able to compare findings across occupational roles or sectors of employment. The inclusion of interview data and the job vacancies analysis has provided useful additional data to complement the limited survey data. These data have identified specific training needs as well as views of training provision and delivery.

A comparison of findings from this assessment and the assessment of training needs among the academic research community (Wiles *et al.*, 2005) highlight some interesting similarities and differences in terms of training need, provision and delivery. These two assessments used a similar, but not identical, research design and some of the differences may be accounted for by this and the different period of time in which both assessments were conducted. Nevertheless, some interesting findings are of note.

Both assessments indicate the need for training in quantitative skills, the preference for short courses provided regionally and potential for on-line training. This assessment of professional social researchers has, however, highlighted some specific differences in comparison to the assessment of academic social science researchers. Regarding training needs, the needs for training in consultative approaches and in research-related skills such as communication, presentation and influencing skills as well as project-management skills are in contrast to those identified in the academic needs assessment, reflecting the different focus of work in this sector. The provision of organisational training and the commitment to the development of researchers working in this sector is also in marked contrast to the experience of academic researchers. The drive towards the professionalisation of social research may be a more pressing issue for social researchers in this sector than for academic researchers.

In conclusion, this report identifies a range of issues that warrant further exploration:

- There is a significant need for training in survey methods, evaluative and consultative approaches as well as in research-related skills such as communicating and influencing skills and project management.
- Senior researchers appear to be low users of training, what factors explain this? What type of provision would be appropriate for senior researchers? What are the experiences of other providers (such as the SRA) of courses or events geared specifically at senior researchers?
- There is potential for academic and applied researchers to work together to provide training for researchers across the academic and social research sectors. How is this best achieved?
- What models of training provision would provide support for researchers working in small research organisations with limited training budgets or for freelance researchers? Might mentoring schemes where experienced researchers from other organisations are matched to less experienced researchers be one way of improving skills for researchers in these organisations? The SRA and NatCen are currently piloting a mentoring scheme.
- There is a need for training provision at regional levels. How can this best be provided to meet the needs of researchers who work outside of London?
- There appears to be support for on-line training. Further development work is needed to explore how such training might be delivered and what topics are, and are not, appropriate for on-line delivery. Various providers have begun to develop on-line training (e.g., <http://www.cmm.bristol.ac.uk/learning-training/index.shtml>) but researchers may not be aware of what is available. Co-ordination and appropriate promotion of on-line training is necessary.
- To what extent do professional social researchers support the professionalisation agenda? Do academic researchers view this as relevant to them? Is there support for assessment and accreditation from training providers?
- PhD training appears often to be viewed as of limited relevance to providing researchers with skills appropriate for posts outside of academia. How might this be improved?

7. References

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire



National Centre For Research Methods

This questionnaire seeks your views on the types and format of research methods and research practice training for social researchers that you feel are needed, both by you personally and by the social research community more broadly. The questionnaire is anonymous. It should take 5-10 minutes to complete.

First we would like to ask you about YOUR training needs.

1. In which areas of research methods and practice would it be most useful for you for training to be provided? Please specify up to 5 topics in the box below, in as much detail as possible, relating to any aspect of research methods or research practice on which you would like to receive training. For each area identified please specify whether the training need is at a basic, intermediate or advanced level.

2. Which of the following types of training event would be most useful to you? Please select a response from the drop down list in relation to each type of event.

2a. Skills based training course (e.g. training workshop)

2b. Seminar or presentations with discussion

2c. Masterclasses

2d. Work placements

 ▼

2e. Online training

 ▼

2f. Formal work-based support or mentoring

 ▼

2. What duration of training course would be most useful to you? Please select a response from the drop down list in relation to each option.

3a. Half day

 ▼

3b. One day

 ▼

3c. 2-4 days

 ▼

3d. One week

 ▼

3e. Longer than one week

 ▼

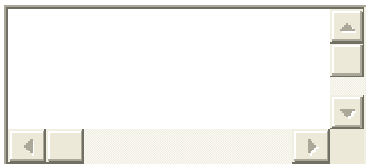
4. If you selected options lasting more than one day as useful or very useful, over what period of time would you like courses to be delivered? Please click one of the boxes below.

- One single block of time
- Two blocks one week apart
- Several blocks over a month or more
- Other (please tell us in which time periods you would like the course to be delivered) :

5. How important would it be to you that training be formally accredited in some way (e.g. course credits, certified trainers). Please click one of the buttons below.

- Very important
- Important
- Not important

6. If you would like to comment on the issue of accreditation please do so in the box below



7. Have you received any training in research methods or practice in the last two years? Please click one of the buttons below.

- Yes
- No

8. You said that you have received training in the last two years. Who provided this training? Please choose from the following training providers by clicking in the boxes below (please select as many as apply):

- My employing organisation
- Social Research Association (SRA)
- ESRC (e.g. National Centre for Research Methods, Researcher Development Initiative)
- Market Research Society (MRS)
- The University/college where I am studying
- Other University courses
- Other (please tell us which organisation provided the training) :

9. How do you find out about forthcoming training courses that you might be interested in? Please choose from the following sources of information by clicking in the boxes below (please select as many as apply):

- Websites
- Search engines (e.g. Google)
- Newsletters
- Own employer
- Colleagues
- Email lists (please tell us the list(s) used) :
- Other (please tell us how you find out about training courses) :

10. If you said that you have found out about training events from websites, which websites have you accessed for information? Please choose from the following websites by clicking in the boxes below (please select as many as apply).

- SRA
- National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM)
- Research Methods programme (RMP)
- Researcher Development Initiative (RDI)
- Intute (formerly the Social Science Information Gateway (SOSIG))
- Other websites (please tell us the website(s) you have accessed for this) :

11. Have there been occasions when you have identified a methods-related training need, but have not been able to access training? Please click one of the buttons below.

- Yes
- No

12. You said there have been occasions when you have identified a methods-related training need and have been unable to access training. Why was this? Please choose from the following reasons by clicking in the boxes below (you may select as many as apply):

- Employer unwilling for me to attend
- Lack of time
- Financial considerations
- Unable to travel to attend training course
- Could not find suitable training
- Other reasons (please tell us why you were not able to access training) :

13. How important to you is the availability of training courses within your own region? Please click one of the buttons below.

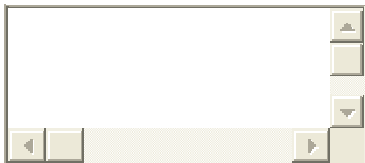
- Very important
- Important
- Not important

14. What do you consider to be your region? Please click one of the buttons below.

- London
- South-East
- South-West
- East of England
- Midlands
- North-West
- North-East
- Wales
- Scotland
- Northern Ireland

Now we would like to ask you about any views you might have on training needs more generally, that is, not what you personally need but what you feel is generally needed by people in the research area in which you work.

15. In which areas of research methods and practice do you perceive there to be the greatest training needs? Please specify up to 5 topics in the box below, in as much detail as possible, relating to any aspect of research methods or practice in which you feel there is a need for training within your organisation or area of research. For each area identified please specify whether you feel this need is for basic, intermediate or advanced-level training:



Now a few questions about yourself.

16. What year were you born? (e.g. 1974) Please enter the year in the box below in YYYY format.

17. Are you male or female? Please click a button below.

- Male
- Female

18. In what type of organisation do you currently work (or study)? Please click one of the buttons below.

- Central Government
- Government Agency
- NGO/NGDP
- Local Government
- Health Service
- Market Research Company
- Other Private/Commercial Company
- Charity/Voluntary Organisation
- Independent Institution
- University/College

- I am an independent freelance consultant/researcher
- Other employer (please tell us which kind of organisation you work for) :
- I am not currently employed

**19. How long have you been working in social research?
Please click one of the buttons below.**

- Less than one year
- 1-2 years
- 3-5 years
- 6-10 years
- 11-15 years
- 16 years or more

20. What is your current position (i.e. job title)? Please click the button which best describes your current position.

- Junior Researcher (e.g. Research Assistant, Research Officer, Research Executive, Research Fellow, Lecturer)
- Senior Researcher (e.g. Senior Research Officer, Senior Research Executive, Principal Researcher, Project Manager, Senior Lecturer, Reader)
- Head of Unit, Director or Professor
- Student
- Freelance
- Other (please tell us your current position) :
- I am not currently employed

21. How would you describe the research activity that you or your organisation undertakes? Please click the button which most applies to you or your organisation.

- Evaluation
- Market Research
- Applied Social Research
- Academic Research
- Other (please tell us which kind of research is undertaken) :

22. In what ways (if at all) does your employer support your training needs in research methods? Please choose from the following ways by clicking in the boxes below (you may select as many as apply):

- In-house training
- Identifying training opportunities
- Providing funding for courses
- Providing time for course attendance
- Other (please tell us how they support your research methods training) :
- My employer does not support training in research methods
- Not applicable (e.g. freelance researcher)

23. What types of research methods do you generally use? Please click one of the boxes below.

- Quantitative
- Qualitative
- Mixed methods
- Other (please tell us the kinds of methods you use) :

24. Are you currently studying for a PhD (or equivalent) or a Masters degree? Please click one of the buttons below.

- Yes
- No

25. You said you are currently studying for a PhD or Masters degree, is this full time or part time? Please click one of the buttons below.

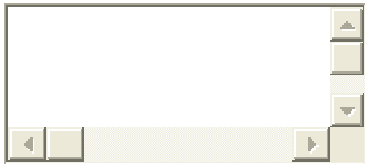
- Full-time
- Part-time

26. Are you currently involved in research supervision or the training of researchers? Please click one of the buttons below.

Yes

No

27. Please add any comments you would like to make about any of the topics addressed in this questionnaire or any aspect of research methods training in the box below

A rectangular text input box with a light beige background and a thin border. On the right side, there is a vertical scroll bar with a small handle. The box is currently empty.

Appendix 2. Interview Schedule

Context of research activity

What types of research activity do researchers undertake within your organisation?

How many research staff work here? (in relation to different grades – junior researcher and senior researchers)? What work do they typically do? Do you have mix of permanent and temporary research posts [i.e. contract researchers]?

Skills prior to appointment

How often are new research staff appointed?

What previous training or skills [in research methods] do you expect research staff recruited to specific grades/roles to have? Do you use specific competency criteria in relation to appointments to specific grades?

What are the main skills in research methods you look for when appointing staff to conduct research within your organisation? (in relation to different grades or types of posts)

Do you have any difficulties in appointing staff with appropriate research skills to the different grades of posts?

Updating/training for research staff in post

How do research staff here keep up to date with new ways of undertaking research?

Do research staff in post undertake training in research methods? Who provides it? Do you provide in-house training? [examples]

Do you feel there is adequate training provision in relation to research methods? Are there occasions when you have identified training needs for staff and not been able to *access* suitable training?

What would be your preferred format for training? (length of time, venue, style of provision)

Training needs (more generally)

In what areas of research methods do you feel that training or development is most needed for social researchers?

Whose role do you feel it is to address methods training in the social research community? [Should lack of skills be addressed at an earlier stage - e.g., school, undergraduate, postgraduate etc]?

How might training for social researchers be improved?

Finally

Any other issues you would like to raise in relation to training in research or in research methods?