

**ESRC National Centre for Research Methods
Consultation Exercise Report**

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Introduction

The ESRC's new National Centre for Research Methods is to have a distributed structure, consisting of a co-ordinating 'hub' together with a series of sub-centres or 'nodes'. The commissioning of the Centre is staggered. The hub commissioning process took place in 2003, and the node commissioning is to take place in 2004. Between the commissioning of the hub and nodes, the ESRC asked the hub to undertake a short consultation exercise with the aims of providing intelligence about the overall shape of the Centre's research and training programme, and informing both the commissioning of the Centre's nodes and the broader strategic direction of the Centre. This report summarises the conduct and findings of this consultation exercise.

The commissioning of the Centre's hub is now complete and is to be hosted by a team at the University of Southampton consisting of Chris Skinner, Sue Heath, Jackie Powell, David Martin and Grainne Conole. This is the team which has had responsibility for managing the consultation exercise, which took place over the months of December 2003 and January 2004, with staffing by the authors of this report. Since ESRC's decision to award the hub to the University of Southampton was only announced at the end of November 2003, this exercise had to follow a very tight timetable and this limited the kinds of consultation which were possible.

The consultation was conducted by means of:

- an online questionnaire;
- letters to learned societies and non-academic organizations;
- two workshops;
- interviews with associate members of the Centre at the University of Southampton.

Participation was invited, and received, from a wide range of users and practitioners of social science research, including established methodologists; those at the forefront of methodological innovation and resource provision; academic researchers at all stages of their careers (including postgraduate students); commercial and voluntary sector social research organisations; government departments.

This report contains the findings of this consultation exercise in summary and more detailed form. The findings are organised under three headings: research, training and capacity building, and organization of the Centre. Appendices containing further information follow the main body of the report.

1. Methods and Respondents

In conducting the consultation exercise we used two main methods: an online questionnaire and participant workshops. These were supplemented by interviews with Hub Associate Members.

1.1. Online Questionnaire

i. Questionnaire organization and invitations to contribute

The questionnaire was organized into four sections: Learning about Methods; Methodological Innovation and Research; Research Methods Training; Background. The questions asked, of which there were 45 in total, were variously multiple-choice, open-ended and Likert-scale.

Responses to the questionnaire were sought from as wide a range of potential contributors as possible, and direct and indirect invitations to complete the questionnaire were distributed via a number of channels. Emails were sent to those named in relation to ESRC-recognized 1+3 or +3 training outlets (n = 751), asking the recipients to contribute as well as to distribute the invitation to their colleagues and other contacts. A similar email was sent to e-mail lists (the Census-UK and Allstat lists), and was distributed, via Angela Dale, to those on the ESRC Research Methods Programme e-mailing list.

A different email was sent to heads of government departments to whose work social science research is relevant (n = 43), and to learned societies and similar organizations (n = 47). Recipients of these emails were invited to submit responses by email in which they could present their views as they saw fit, though also invited to complete the questionnaire and to encourage their staff/members to do the same.

ii. Responses received

Responses by email were received from or on behalf of the following learned societies and other organizations:

Arts Council of England (ACE)

British Association for Slavonic and East European Studies (BASEES)

British Educational Research Association (BERA)
British Psychological Society (BPS)
British Society of Criminology (BSC)
British Sociological Association (BSA)
Centre for Quantitative Social Science (CQSS)
Demographics User Group (DUG)
Local Authorities Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA)
Political Studies Association (PSA)
Royal Economic Society (RES)
Royal Geographical Society/Institute of British Geographers (RGS/IBG)
Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI)
Social Research in the Scottish Executive
Socio-Legal Studies Association (SLSA)
University Association for Contemporary European Studies (UACES)
Welsh Assembly Research & Evaluation Advice & Co-ordination Team

Email responses were also received from a small number of other individuals and groups who did not feel that the questionnaire enabled them to address the issues raised as fully as they would like to. One telephone interview was also conducted, for similar reasons.

293 responses to the questionnaire were received. The 'Background' section of the questionnaire posed questions about the respondent. Overall, the responses seem to represent a fair cross-section of the target population, though they were predominantly from members of the academic community.

These responses may be summarized as follows: A greater proportion of respondents were male (57 per cent) than female (43 per cent). (Missing data are ignored here and in the following comments.) Most of the respondents (80 per cent) were between 30 and 60 years old, with around the same number in each ten-year category; of the others, around 12 per cent were younger than 30 and about 6 per cent older than 60. Responses about current position were categorized as students, junior, senior or of professorial level. Based on this, we found that the modal group was senior, with 33 per cent of respondents; junior and professorial groups accounted for 27 per cent and

26 per cent of respondents, respectively. 13 per cent of respondents reported that they were full-time students, and 8 per cent part-time students. Of note is the result of a cross-tabulation of gender and seniority, which indicated that a disproportionately large number of higher-ranked respondents were men (68 per cent of professors and 62 per cent of senior staff) while the majority of lower-ranked respondents were women (55 per cent of junior staff and 58 per cent of students).

88 per cent of respondents reported that they worked in a university (71 per cent in a pre-1992 university and 17 per cent in a university founded after 1992). 4 per cent of respondents worked in a government department, 3 per cent in a research institute and a small proportion in each of colleges and public- and voluntary-sector organisations, or as freelancers. 91 per cent of respondents had a postgraduate qualification, and 68 per cent had a doctorate. There was a wide range of responses to the question of how long respondents had been working as researchers. Although it was most common for researchers to have completed their more recent period of formal training within the past five years (30 per cent of respondents fell in this category), one-quarter of respondents reported that it was more than 20 years since they completed any such training.

Asked to categorize themselves in terms of the academic discipline with which they felt the greatest affiliation (from a list of the disciplines with the ESRC regards as falling under its remit), the most common responses were sociology and psychology. Responses to this question are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Responses by respondent disciplinary affiliation

Discipline	Frequency	Percentage
Sociology	62	21.2
Psychology	35	11.9
Social Work and Social Policy	24	8.2
Human Geography	20	6.8
Business and Management	19	6.5
Education	19	6.5
Statistics	19	6.5
Politics and IR	18	6.1
Economics	13	4.4
Science and Technology	9	3.1
Socio-Legal Studies	7	2.4
Health	7	2.4
Linguistics	6	2.0
Other	7	2.4
Missing	28	9.6
<i>Total</i>	<i>293</i>	<i>100.0</i>

1.2. Consultation Workshops

Two participant workshops were held, one in London (on the 13th of January, 2004) and one in Edinburgh (on the 15th of January, 2004). Twenty-five individuals were invited to each, and in each case the invitations were split between those from academic and those from non-academic backgrounds. Invitees who could not be present were asked to propose someone else to attend in their stead. Final attendance at the London workshop was 20 (including 4 from Southampton) and at Edinburgh was 15 (also including 4 from Southampton). A list of workshop participants is given in the Appendix.

Both workshops focused on three topics: the Centre's research programme; the Centre's programme of training and capacity building; the organisation of the Centre and its engagement with users. A list of workshop participants and a summary of the main points discussed are provided in Appendix A of this report

1.3. Interviews with Hub Associate Members

We conducted interviews with a number of the Hub's Associate Members. These Associate Members are all part of the University of Southampton academic community and had been involved, in an advisory role, with the original bid to host the Hub. Their presence, at that stage, was important in broadening the range of substantive and methodological knowledge available to those making the bid, as well as being representative, in a wider sense, of the disciplinary range of social-scientific expertise present at Southampton. In this consultation something similar was sought: again, an effort was made to ensure that we were drawing on viewpoints from a suitably wide range of disciplines, to complement and extend the existing knowledge of those working directly on the consultation exercise.

Four interviews were conducted, one with a single respondent and three with two respondents. In each case two interviewers (Gabriele Beissel-Durrant and Iain Lang) were present. Respondents were drawn from the following disciplines: Management; Linguistic Studies and Applied Language Research; Education; Primary Medical Care and Public Health Medicine. Each interview lasted approximately an hour and took a form similar to that of the consultation workshops. A summary of the main points raised in the course of these interviews is contained in Appendix B of this report.

2. Research

A key objective of the new Centre is to advance methodological understanding and practice. This will involve the development of a research agenda that facilitates methodological innovation in research methods of all types, and an initial aim of the Hub will be to determine the Centre's future research strategy. This section summarises the main outcomes of the consultation exercise with respect to current and future methodological innovation and research, as well as views on the Centre's research programme and longer-term strategy. Specific research topics were addressed by the online questionnaire and by interviews with associate members, while the Centre's longer-term strategy and more general aspects of the research agenda were primarily addressed by the workshop consultations.

2.1. Recent Methodological Innovations and Developments

An understanding of the current status of social-science research in the UK is an important basis for the investigation of any future developments and needs in research methods and for informing the research agenda of the Centre. The following summarises responses to two questions about recent methodological innovations and developments from the online questionnaire. The questions were:

“Within your own research area, please identify any recent methodological innovations or developments which you consider to be significant.”

“Within your discipline more broadly, please identify any recent methodological innovations or developments, which you consider to be significant.”

Many responses emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary research as well as the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Some answers were discipline specific: for example, corpus analysis was only mentioned by researchers within linguistics, whereas other methods, such as interviewing, focus groups, questionnaire design and complex data analysis were mentioned by researchers from multiple disciplines.

A large number of respondents referred to a variety of modelling techniques as being the most important recent innovations or developments. Amongst the methods most frequently mentioned were longitudinal and panel data analysis, multilevel and structural equation modelling, multiple regression analysis, time series, multivariate data analysis, and social network analysis. References to hazard and survival techniques, event history analysis, latent class analysis, and path analysis were mentioned less frequently.

A variety of other quantitative methods and techniques were mentioned, such as Bayesian methods, neural methods, bootstrap methods, Monte Carlo models, analysis of large quantitative data sets, methods dealing with complex survey design, and simulation methods. These quantitative techniques were mostly referred to by researchers within statistics and economics. However, each of these methods was only mentioned a few times and was not necessarily included in many responses. In addition, a variety of spatial data analysis methods was listed, such as Bayesian spatial data analysis, Geographical Information Systems (GIS) and geographically weighted regression. These methods were mainly referred to by researchers within geography and area studies but were also mentioned by researchers in fields such as economics and demography.

A wide range of qualitative methods emerged as important. The most common of these were discourse analysis, narrative methods, observational data analysis and case-study methods. A few respondents referred to action research, analysis of composite data and corpus linguistics; in addition, a small number of answers emphasised the importance of grid technology.

Amongst both qualitative and quantitative researchers a large proportion of respondents referred to methods of data collection and related issues of data quality. Very frequently mentioned were, for example, interviewing techniques (face-to-face, computer assisted, web-based and telephone-based), focus groups, audio and video technology and data analysis, and questionnaire design, in particular web-based questionnaires. It was also obvious from the answers that there is an increasing

demand for computer-assisted and internet-based technologies and that the use of such tools requires the development of new data-analysis techniques.

Some reference was made to computer software packages such as STATA, and to qualitative data-analysis software. Other references included evidence-based practice and meta-analysis; however, these reflect specific approaches rather than methods.

2.2. Methods that Should be Prioritised by the NCRM

Alongside establishing some current developments in social-science research methods, another main focus of the consultation was on which methods should be prioritised and/ or promoted by the NCRM. The main aim of this part of the consultation was to establish future needs and likely developments in research methods and to inform the development of the Centre's research agenda. The subsequent discussion is mainly based on the following three questions from the online questionnaire:

“Which methods would you like to see promoted by the National Research Methods Centre within its programme of research?”

“Please identify any additional methodological issues or problems you think should be prioritised by the Centre's research programme.”

“Please identify any methodological challenges which you think will be important for your research agenda over the next decade.”

Common to many responses to these questions was a recognition of the importance of quantitative methods (including basic quantitative training), of (high quality) qualitative methods, of the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods, and of interdisciplinary research. It was generally regarded as important to promote a broad range of methodological approaches and to promote rigour and quality, and the need to promote basic as well as advanced methods was repeatedly raised.

The issues that respondents felt should be addressed by the new Centre show many similarities to responses regarding the current status of research methods. A number of quantitative methods were mentioned, such as simulation methods, econometric methods, Bayesian methods, randomised control trials and Geographical Information Systems. Some of the responses were discipline-specific; for example, ‘econometric methods’ was only mentioned by researchers within economics. However, some methods were listed across disciplines: simulation methods, for example, were mentioned by statisticians, geographers and economists. Some methods were only mentioned once or twice, such as game theory, robust statistics and data fusion. Many respondents referred to modelling techniques such as regression analysis, advanced statistical modelling, longitudinal and panel data methods, multilevel modelling, structural equation modelling, social network analysis, and multivariate data analysis. In addition, methods such as time series analysis, event history analysis, path analysis and geographically weighted regression were frequently mentioned.

In addition to quantitative methods a variety of qualitative methods and approaches were regarded as important and emerging, including case-study methods, discourse analysis, narrative methods, action research, grid technology, observation-based studies, participatory analysis and collaborative approaches. Many answers referred to data collection and data quality, such as (qualitative) interviewing (computer assisted, web-based and telephone-based), focus groups, and the use of audio and video technology. Other responses went beyond specific methods and addressed issues such as research ethics, evidence-based policy, policy evaluation, the use of government statistics, and the need to develop e-social science.

Some respondents also used these questions as an opportunity to comment on the broader tasks and functions of the new Centre. The function of the Centre in terms of disseminating information was emphasised. In particular, it was apparent that there is a great need to make available information about which existing methods are best to use for which type of data. The need for good quality teaching material was also stressed by some respondents. Archiving of qualitative data, gaining access to data—and qualitative data in particular—and data protection were highlighted as important issues. In addition, many responses referred to the need for high-quality training in

quantitative and qualitative methods on a basic and advanced level (see below, under training).

Respondents to the online survey were also asked the types of activity in which they thought the Centre should be involved, and were given a list of possible answers. The specific question that was asked was:

“In which of the following do you think that the National Research Methods Centre should be involved in? (select as many as apply).”

The answers are summarised in Figure 1. The results show that approximately 75% thought that the Centre should support methodological innovation and that it should support the development of existing methods in new areas of application. Just over 70% indicated that the Centre should encourage the mixing of methods as well as inter-disciplinary collaboration. Support for development of cutting edge methods was favoured by slightly fewer people: 65% of respondents. Three percent of participants in the survey did not answer this question.

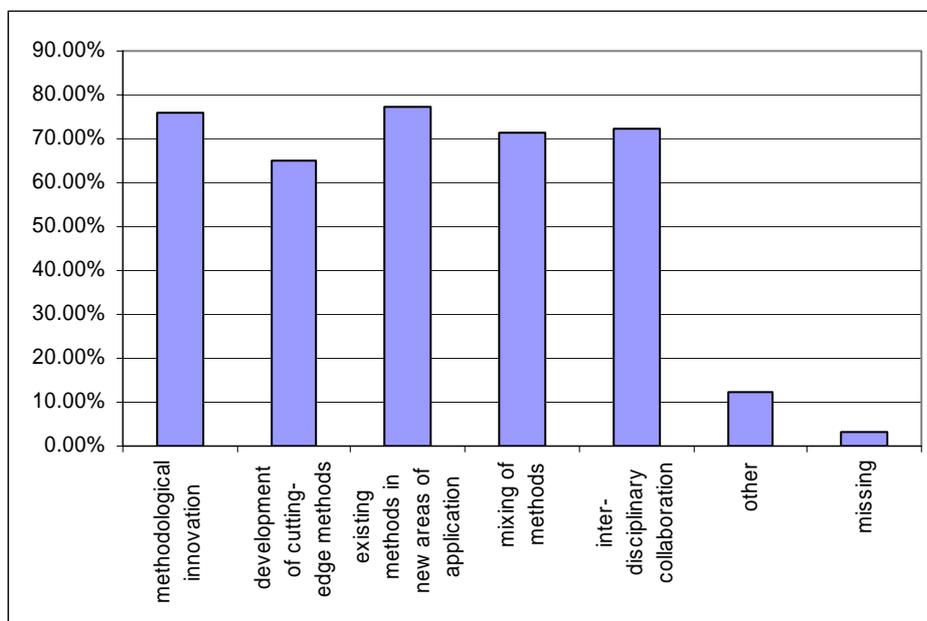


Figure 1: Percentage of respondents indicating areas in which they felt the Centre should be involved.

2.3. General Aspects of the Centre's Research Programme

The consultation showed, through responses to the on-line questionnaire, interviews with associate members, and the workshop consultation, that there is a great demand for the Centre's research programme to provide broad methodological coverage. In particular, there is a need to encourage interdisciplinary research, as well as the further development of different methodological approaches, including the combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. Some responses stressed the development and promotion of innovative research methods within the context of substantive topics. The application of methodological research to substantive questions was particularly emphasised by the associate members. In addition to methodological innovation and cutting edge research, there is felt to be a great need for the Centre to support the development of existing methods. At the same time, some responses from learned societies questioned the value of further work on research and research methods and emphasised that research needs a clear link to scientific content, emphasising the role of the Centre in relation to training and capacity building.

Gathering information about methodological research that has previously been carried out was stressed by researchers both inside and outside academia. It was emphasised by several workshop participants that it will be important for the Centre to undertake regular, systematic and up-to-date reviews of methodological research; this was also indicated by responses to the questionnaire. It was generally regarded as important to identify current gaps in research and needs for further development of methods. The need for the Centre to take on this objective and to identify gaps in research and training provision was emphasised.

Another function of the Centre should be to promote existing sites of commitment to methodological research, as well as to develop close collaboration between the leading methodologists in the UK. This issue was primarily stressed by participants in the consultation workshops, where the establishment of research networks in the UK (and across Europe) was proposed. One outcome of the workshops was a recognition of the increasing importance of e-learning, e-resources and online data collection. The

maintenance of close links between NCRM and to the new National Centre for e-Social Sciences was advocated.

The consultation has shown that the NCRM needs to be seen as part of the ESRC's broader strategy aimed at enhancing the capacity of the UK social science community. The importance of engaging with existing initiatives and establishing strategic partnerships has been stressed. In particular, the new Centre should aim to establish collaborations with the ESRC Research Methods programme and other ESRC initiatives, such as the new National Centre for e-Social Science Learning and the Centre for Applied Social Surveys (CASS). The consultation has shown that an engagement with potential users of the research is important. In particular, the importance of establishing and fostering links and networks between academia and governmental departments, as well as with the private and voluntary sectors, was stressed; it is important that the Centre is involved in exploring further areas of research and in facilitating studies on policy development and evaluation.

3. Training

Respondents to the consultation exercise were in widespread agreement about the general proposition that there is a need for more training in research methods. Most researchers were able to specify areas within their field which would benefit from additional training (see under point 4.3, below). Around 90 per cent of questionnaire respondents answered the question of whether they would like to broaden their own range of methodological expertise, almost all of them in the affirmative. Anecdotal evidence supported the idea that additional training would meet with a good take-up from among researchers and those (staff and students) for whom they had responsibility; it was also pointed out that high-quality training courses often attracted participants from overseas.

More specific points about training needs and their provision fall into four main areas:

- 3.1 The level at which training is needed
- 3.2 Topics on which training is most needed
- 3.3 The format of training provision, and access to it
- 3.4 Information about training.

These are dealt with in turn, below.

3.1. The Level at Which Training is Needed

Respondents to the questionnaire were asked to choose one level—of basic, intermediate and advanced—at which there is the greatest need for training. Responses are shown in Table 2.

Unclear here is respondents' understanding of the terms 'basic', 'intermediate' and 'advanced', which may have been taken to mean different things, especially in relation to their applicability in different methods. However, it appears that there is a clear-cut demand for basic-level research *in certain fields*. Researchers who have previously been practitioners often lack a solid grounding in the principles of research (e.g. in educational research, some health-related research and those who enter socio-legal with a training in law), and individual departments or organizations may not be able to provide this themselves.

Table 2: Respondent perceptions of the level at which training is most needed

Level of training	Frequency	Percent
Entry	68	23.2
Intermediate	142	48.5
Advanced	57	19.5
missing	26	8.9
<i>Total</i>	<i>293</i>	<i>100.0</i>

A point which emerged repeatedly throughout the consultation relates to the need for *ongoing training throughout researchers' careers*. This includes the need for advanced training in emerging or developing areas of research methods, but can also refer to the needs of researchers to gain training in methods with which they have not previously worked and need to obtain a basic grounding.

Connected to this is the central role of *training for trainers and supervisors*. Respondents felt that it is important to ensure that those who supervise students (or junior staff) are aware of the full range of research methods and of where these can be applied. This does not mean that supervisors need know how to use these methods, but they should know that they exist, when they are relevant, and how and where students could learn more and undergo training in them. Encouraging collegiality and the sharing of ideas among trainers and supervisors, even those whose research interests are disparate, is something that currently lacks appropriate emphasis but which respondents felt would be beneficial if encouraged.

Respondents from both academic and non-academic backgrounds raised questions about the ESRC's current strategy of *funding Masters students only when they plan to proceed to PhDs*. Some employers, such as government departments, value the breadth of skills obtained by those who have taken Masters-level courses in social research and view the expertise of those who have taken doctorates as unnecessarily narrow. With this in mind, they would be pleased to see the provision of Masters-only research funding and encouraged further dialogue on this issue.

3.2. Topics on Which Training is Most Needed

Responses to questions about the topics or areas in which there is the greatest need for training were often couched in the perspectives of *specific disciplines*. Thus, for example, it was respondents in health-related areas who referred to the need for training in systematic reviewing, psychologists who mentioned experiments and psychometrics, and geographers who identified a need for training in spatial analysis. Such topics seem to lie outside of the NCRM's focus on methods which are applicable across a range of disciplines, except to the extent that unifying themes might be drawn out from such methods, perhaps in terms of more basic skills that are fundamental to a number of them.

Of the need for training more broadly, some responses were general in tone, referring for example to the need for training in areas such as *quantitative methods, statistics, qualitative methods, CAQDAS and data analysis*. Of the particular methods and techniques which were mentioned, the most common were *multivariate analysis, econometrics, multilevel modelling, discourse analysis, longitudinal analysis and structural-equation modelling*. A number of respondents said *All*, which emphasizes the perception that there is a general need for further research methods training.

Other topics which cut across disciplines were *research design* and *philosophy*. Those referring to *research design* typically mention just 'research design' or 'designing research'; one or two describe something such as "How to design a methodological framework to meet a specific research need". *Philosophy* covers a range of responses relating to ontology, epistemology, philosophy of science, the need to move beyond positivism and the need to understand how certain methods are used and interpreted in ways that move beyond merely technical knowledge of the methods themselves, particularly in other disciplines.

The need for provision of training in generic research-related skills was a recurrent theme. This relates to skills relating to the organization of research, such as management of projects and junior staff, and to additional skills such as foreign-language learning. However, it was also recognized that these types of training might be less immediately attractive to time-pressed researchers, and that they might be

most useful when embedded in existing training provision rather than offered as add-ons.

3.3. The Format of Training Provision, and Access to it

More than 60 per cent of questionnaire respondents stated that there had been occasions on which they had identified a methods-related training need but had been *unable to access training*. Of these, two-thirds identified lack of time as a cause of this difficulty; half referred to lack of funds, just over a third to the absence of suitable training, and one-fifth to being unable to travel to attend a course.

Respondents were also asked to identify the format of training which they would find most useful. The range of options and their responses are shown in Table 3. In addition to these, some respondents suggested providing training in conjunction with other conferences or meetings.

Table 3: Training course formats identified as useful by respondents, including by students/ non-students

Type of course	Respondents indicating this type of training would be useful, %	Students (non-students) indicating this type of training would be useful, %
1 day courses	60.0	67.7 (59.6)
2-3 day courses	44.0	67.7 (37.1)
Summer/ Spring schools	19.5	48.4 (12.7)
Online training	45.7	64.5 (42.7)
Visiting seminars	48.5	54.8 (47.9)
Masterclasses	33.8	40.3 (32.4)
Placements	20.8	35.5 (17.8)
missing	10.9	1.6 (12.2)
<i>Total</i>	<i>100.0</i>	<i>100.0 (100.0)</i>

It is clear that those respondents who were students view training in general as more useful than non-students, whatever format it is to be provided in. However, the most marked differences between *student and non-student preferences* are in relation to 2-3 day courses and summer or spring schools (i.e. residential courses of longer duration). It seems likely that this difference relates not only to students' greater interest in pursuing training opportunities but also to the greater degree of flexibility that they

have in terms of time and to their willingness to commit longer periods of time to attend courses.

Almost half of all respondents indicated that they would find *online training* useful. Such courses are now recognized as no cheaper than conventional forms of training, in part because of the cost of providing suitable support on both technical and substantive matters. However, they offer advantages in terms of accessibility, and guidelines now exist for developing provision of this type. This is an area which presents obvious opportunities for development in terms of collaboration between the NCRM and the National Centre for E-Social Science.

An additional issue to which attention has been drawn is the extent to which courses and other forms of training can be made accessible to researchers from a variety of backgrounds. Training provision may be useful to researchers from government (both central and local) as well as from education, and the need to make courses accessible to both these groups has been highlighted in the course of this consultation. However, there are also researchers working in other areas—such as the private sector and in the voluntary sector—and it is important that the needs and potential participation of these researchers is borne in mind. It is important that, for example, researchers working in charities are not implicitly excluded from courses designed primarily with the needs of academic and governmental researchers in mind.

3.4. Information about Training

Several respondents raised the issue that it can be difficult to find information about existing training opportunities. Existing sources of information available online are often discipline-specific and there is currently no single website containing details about the availability, range and format of existing research methods training opportunities. Establishing, maintaining and making accessible such information should be regarded as underlying the actual development and provision of training, and thus as a priority. Providing this information, perhaps in the form of a website with a supplementary emailing list, is part of the role which the NCRM Hub can play.

4. Organisation and Engagement with Users

This section summarises the main outcomes of the consultation exercise with respect to the organisation of the Centre and its engagement with users. The summary is mainly based on responses from the consultation workshops, interviews with associate members and answers from learned societies. The on-line questionnaire did not address the organisation of the Centre directly.

Since it is vital for the success of the Centre that it develop collaboration with leading methodologists in the UK—who are geographically dispersed—it is intended that the Centre will be structured around a distributed model: the co-ordinating hub, based at the University of Southampton, will complement, and be complemented by, several nodes. In the following discussion the activities and organisation of the nodes, the relationship between hub and nodes, and engagement with users are described in greater detail.

4.1. Activities of the Nodes

Several workshop participants emphasized that the nodes should be involved in cutting-edge research and should become flagships of methodological research and training. It was suggested that the nodes should build upon existing groups to take advantage of their expertise and their important links in specific areas, while allowing for newer groups to develop and come forward.

4.2. Organisation of the Nodes

Participants at both workshops discussed in detail the possible organisational forms of the nodes and, in particular, whether their focus should be primarily (a) methods-based or (b) based on substantive matters. Several suggestions were made. On balance, there was support for the nodes to be methods-based but to retain a strong focus on applications to substantive questions. It was also stressed that the nodes should emphasise inter-disciplinarity.

In addition, it was discussed whether nodes should only be based in single institutions or if they could consist of groups of researchers across institutions. There was general agreement that a node should have a clear base in one institution, while allowing for

the possibility that it could also be distributed in form and involve cooperation between different institutions. There was support for a node being the basis for a wider network, and it was observed that the nodes may vary in size. Some nodes may be quite small and some projects started at one node could be carried on in a different project run by a different node.

4.3. Relationship Between the Co-ordinating Hub and the Nodes

Participants in the consultation workshops suggested that for the success of the Centre the relationship between the co-ordinating hub and the nodes will be key. Concerns were raised that the nodes might “take on a life of their own” and that this needs to be avoided when building up the organisation of hub and nodes. Suggestions were made about how to encourage a good working relationship between hub and nodes and how to avoid a splitting-off of the nodes. It was regarded as advantageous to establish and maintain a productive two-way exchange between hub and nodes; a fruitful interaction between hub and nodes, as well as facilitating a network across nodes, was encouraged. The relationship between the hub and the nodes might take place on three levels: the managerial level, the working level and the promotional level, where the hub may have the responsibility of promoting the output of the nodes and disseminating research.

4.4. Engagement with Users

The discussions in the workshops showed, in particular, that it will be important to establish and foster links and networks between academia and governmental departments, as well as involving statistical agencies and the private and voluntary sectors. The aim would be to bring together researchers from across sectors and to establish a forum where people from different backgrounds can learn from each other. Several suggestions were made about how to establish such links, for example by making possible secondments between academia and governmental departments. The possibility of establishing courses specifically targeted at non-academic researchers, such as those within the broader public and voluntary sectors, was emphasized, but the need to provide courses that are suitable for researchers with mixed backgrounds and needs was also raised. In addition, it was regarded as important to disseminate

information about what social science research is currently carried out within government, within academia, and elsewhere. Responses to the on-line questionnaire emphasised the link between government and academia and stressed the importance of using government data and of carrying out policy evaluation studies.

It was stressed by workshop participants that the Centre should aim to build up networks and collaboration between leading methodologists in the UK and abroad. Some participants emphasised the importance of providing a forum for individual methodologists. It was suggested that it would be worthwhile to build up a group of associate members to support and advise the activities of the Centre, as well as to establish a network of collaborators from both inside and outside academia. The relationship between these collaborators should be two-fold, in that on the one hand they would receive support and information from the Centre and on the other hand they could contribute to the dissemination of research.

5. Summary

5.1. Research

- The Centre's research programme should provide broad methodological coverage (quantitative, qualitative and other), and should support methods at basic and more advanced levels.
- The Centre should promote rigour and quality.
- There is a need to encourage interdisciplinary research, to emphasise new and innovative research methods within the context of substantive topics and to support the development of existing methods.
- It will be important for the Centre to undertake regular, systematic and up-to-date reviews of methodological research, and to identify current gaps in research as well as needs for further development of methods.
- A further function of the Centre should be to promote the work of existing sites of methodological research as well as to develop close collaboration between the leading methodologists within the UK. This should include close links to the new National Centre for e-Social Sciences.
- The importance of engaging with existing initiatives and establishing strategic partnerships has been stressed. The new Centre should aim to establish collaboration with the ESRC Research Methods programme and other ESRC initiatives.

5.2. Training and Capacity Building

- There is a high level of demand for training, and a clear need for the provision of training for researchers at all stages of their careers. However, those who are currently students are most interested in longer courses than those who are employed, apparently reflecting the difficulties full-time researchers face in finding time to undergo training.
- There was no clear indication that training was needed more at basic, intermediate or advanced levels, but in certain fields there is a clear need for basic-level training: specifically, those fields in which entrants to research have not undergone a formal programme of research methods training.

- The previous point applies in non-academic situations in which practitioners or others turn to carrying out research; more broadly, it is important to ensure that training (as well as other) opportunities are made accessible and useful to researchers from a wide range of backgrounds and sectors.
- Training for those charged with supervising staff or students is important, as are forums in which to share and develop understandings of supervision processes and to ensure familiarity with a range of methods.
- Perceived needs for training in specific methodological areas differ across disciplines. An unresolved issue is the extent to whether training provision is more useful in discipline-specific or cross-disciplinary formats. Demand for training in research design and philosophy, as well as in generic research-related skills, is evident across disciplines.
- Provision of information about training is central, and the Hub could play an active role in its provision: this might take the form of a website and (electronic) newsletter, but other ways of doing this should be explored.

5.3. Organisation and Engagement with Users

- The nodes should be involved in cutting-edge research and should become flagships of methodological research and training.
- On balance, there was broad support for the nodes to be methods-based with a focus on applications to substantive questions.
- The nodes should emphasise inter-disciplinarity.
- There was general agreement that a node should have a clear base in one institution, but that this does not rule out the possibility that a node could be distributed in form.
- It will be important to encourage a good working relationship between hub and nodes and to avoid a splitting-off of the nodes. Suggestions were made about establishing two-way communication between hub and nodes as well as encouraging nodes to communicate with each other.
- It is important to establish and foster links and networks between academia and governmental departments, statistical agencies, and the private and

voluntary sectors. Possibilities of establishing courses that are particularly targeted at researchers working within government need to be considered.

- Workshop participants stressed that the Centre should build up networks and collaborations between leading methodologists in the UK and abroad.

Appendix A. Summary Report of Consultation Workshops

Introduction

The ESRC is establishing a National Centre for Research Methods which has the aim of promoting the quality and range of methodological skills and techniques used by the UK social science community. The Centre will consist of a co-ordinating ‘hub’ at the University of Southampton and a series of sub-centres or ‘nodes’ distributed across the country. The hub team at the University of Southampton was asked by ESRC to consult the UK social science community over the shape of the Centre’s research and training programme, in order to inform the call for nodes, planned for March 2004, as well as the broader strategic direction of the Centre. The consultation exercise included an internet-based survey and questionnaire, generating around three hundred responses, as well as two workshops which are the subject of this report.

The workshops were held in London and Edinburgh. Twenty-five individuals were invited to each workshop, selected by the Southampton team to represent a range of potential stakeholders both from inside and outside academia, with a balance across methods, disciplines and parts of the UK, with an emphasis on those at the forefront of methodological developments. Given the tight ESRC timetable, only very short notice could be given and, in total, twenty-seven participants were able to take part in one of the workshops, in addition to participants from the team at the University of Southampton. Some of the participants had been nominated by an original invitee.

Both workshops focused on the following three topics:

- (a) The Centre’s research programme
- (b) The Centre’s programme of training and capacity building
- (c) The organisation of the Centre and its engagement with users

This report summarises the main points made in the discussion at the two consultation workshops on these topics.

The Centre's Research Programme

This section summarises the issues raised and views expressed with respect to the Centre's research programme and longer-term research strategy. The Hub team suggested that views on which specific research methods should be included in the research programme might best be given as input to the web-based consultation and the relative priorities to be attached to different research methods thus received little discussion.

- Concerns were raised that insufficient researchers in the UK are currently working on quantitative research and methodological questions. The importance of encouraging more researchers to work in these areas was stressed. In the past the aim has been to encourage more people to work in quantitative methods and to increase the pool of people working within quantitative methods. It was generally regarded as important to carry existing work forward and to keep the momentum.
- There was a common view that the NCRM needs to be seen as part of the ESRC's broader strategy aimed at enhancing the capacity of the UK social science community. Carrying forward existing ESRC work and promoting a long-term strategy would be vital for the future development and the achievements of the Centre. As part of this, it will be important to engage with existing initiatives and to establish ongoing collaboration. In particular, the following initiatives were mentioned by workshop participants:
 - The ESRC Research Methods (RM) programme directed by Professor Angela Dale: The programme is currently scheduled to end in 2007. There was common agreement that there is a great need for this research to be continued. Carrying forward this research could be an important function of the Centre.
 - Other ESRC research programmes, centres and networks.
- There was a general agreement that the Centre should aim to build upon existing ESRC networks and to encourage co-ordination across ESRC initiatives. It is important to maintain and to build up links with existing research groups and centres supported by ESRC. In particular, it was stressed by workshop participants that careful consideration needs to be given to the relationship between the NCRM and the new National Centre for e-Social

Science. Establishing research links and guaranteeing close collaboration was regarded as important. In addition, there is a need to assess the resources and data sets that have been promoted and developed by ESRC so far and to investigate how they are currently used.

- It was suggested that one function of the Centre should be to promote existing places that are committed to methodological research. Another function should be to develop close collaboration between the leading methodologists within the UK. As part of this, the establishment of research networks in the UK (and across Europe) was suggested. These would allow postgraduate students to work together with senior researchers and would enable them to gain experience in different research areas and to use different methods. It may also be important to establish a forum for individual methodologists who might currently be isolated within their home departments. These methodologists should be encouraged to come together in meetings, workshops and short conferences, with the aim of building up further research links between them.
- Workshop participants stressed the importance of identifying current gaps in research and needs for further development of methods. This could be part of the work of the Centre.
- There was general agreement that the research carried out by the Centre should emphasise inter-disciplinarity.
- The need for a substantive focus to most methodological research was clearly recognised, but it was noted that some methodological research, for example in survey methods, tended to be of a generic kind, despite being widely applicable in practice, and it was hoped that such research would not be viewed as outside the scope of the Centre's research programme.
- The relevance of e-learning, web-based resources and web-data collection as well as the need for evaluating e-learning were discussed. Questions were raised regarding what evidence exists that e-learning works, which aspects work and which do not and which areas need improvement. Close links of the NCRM to the new National Centre for e-Social Science were found to be desirable.
- The need for information about what research has been carried out up to now was stressed by researchers both inside and outside academia. In particular,

concern was raised by a participant working in government that there is generally not enough information available and that it is difficult to obtain information about what research is currently carried out. It was emphasised by workshop participants at both the London and the Edinburgh workshops that it will be important for the Centre to undertake regular, systematic and up-to-date research reviews.

- One participant suggested establishing a new methodological journal, focussing on innovative research methods with applications across the social sciences. This journal would have the aim of making methodology available to a wider social science research community and of encouraging and disseminating discussion about methodology within the social sciences.
- At the Edinburgh workshop it was emphasised that the relationship between design and analysis within the quantitative research programme needs to be considered carefully.
- The issue of how to ensure and to deliver innovation was also discussed.

The Centre's Programme of Training and Capacity Building

This section summarises the key points of the workshop discussions with respect to training and capacity building.

- There was a general agreement that there is a demand for the provision of training in both quantitative and qualitative research methods.
- It is important to assess current training provision and to work together with other institutions that provide training. In particular, some workshop participants suggested linking training to existing provision for '1 plus 3' MSc and PhD programmes.
- Different participants emphasized the needs for different kinds of training and of different kinds of users of training. The following needs received general support:
 - PhD students and junior researchers require training in topics not covered by their own institutions, e.g. at spring or summer schools and conferences;
 - There is a need to support and encourage mid-career researchers to adopt and apply new methods and techniques.
 - It is important to provide training for trainers and supervisors.

- Training provided by the Centre should encompass the needs of both academics and non-academics. The training needs of researchers working within government, in particular, were flagged.
- *Level of training:* The needs for different levels of training were discussed with some participants making the case for more advanced training whereas other participants stressed the importance of a basic level of training. Overall, there was felt to be a need for training at each level: basic, intermediate and advanced. It was emphasised that there is a desire to learn more about existing techniques as well as learning about cutting-edge methods. The popularity of CASS courses was given as an example. When designing training activities, it is essential to consider the needs of the end-users, such as junior and mid-career researchers and academic and non-academic researchers.
- *Form and type of training:* Different workshop participants made the case for the Centre offering different kinds of training events, including 1 or 2 day workshops on particular research topics, 1-week courses and on-line learning.
- *Provision of information and resources:* One of the workshop participants stressed current problems in accessing information about which training courses are available and which are suitable. Often people face the problem that they do not necessarily know which courses they need and which courses are best for them. Difficulties have been encountered in finding out what research is currently conducted and what training is available. There is a need to inform researchers about which training courses are available and which are suitable. It was also suggested that it might be useful to consult employers to find out in which areas there are needs in training. There was support for the Centre to provide such information as well as on-line resources. A website could provide information about training schemes and levels of training available. In addition, the Centre could disseminate reviews of research methods and guidance to the existing literature.
- Geographical aspects of the provision of training were briefly addressed, in particular at the Edinburgh workshop. It was noted that the electronic provision of information and training as well as the provision of distance learning can overcome some difficulties arising from geography, but the limitations of these forms of delivery were also pointed out and it was still felt

that there will be a need for the geographical dispersion of face-to-face training to meet needs in the different parts of the UK.

- Many participants stressed the importance of the relationship between research and training. Careful consideration will be required as to how interaction between the Centre's research and training programmes should be achieved.
- Discussion in both workshops emphasised the importance of international links and international visitors as well as general opportunities for visits and placements. It was generally seen as important that the Centre contribute to fostering international contacts and collaborations.
- At both workshops there was criticism of ESRC's decision to withdraw support for students undertaking MSc training as a terminal qualification. Participants from non-academic organisations, in particular, stressed the value of the rounded training in research methods which some MSc programmes in research methods provide. They noted that, while there do exist needs in their organisations for some researchers with specialist and advanced skills, their primary need was for all their researchers to have a good grounding across the full range of research methods.
- Concerns were expressed by a small number of workshop participants that it might be difficult sometimes to find people with the right qualifications to provide training. However, in general this was not regarded as a major issue.
- One participant raised concerns about whether there was sufficient demand for training and whether sufficient participants for training events will be found. However, the general view was that there is generally a great demand for training, and experiences in the past have shown this. As examples, the Essex Summer School and courses provided by cemmap were mentioned. It was also pointed out that course participants may have very different backgrounds and may come from abroad.

The Organisation of the Centre and its Engagement with Users

The NCRM will consist of a co-ordinating hub and several nodes. This section summarises the main outcomes of the consultation workshops with respect to possible activities of the hub and nodes, the relationship between hub and nodes and the engagement of the Centre with users.

- *Activities of the nodes:* It was emphasised by several workshop participants that the nodes should be involved in cutting-edge research and should become flagships of methodological research and training. A suggestion was made that the nodes should build upon existing groups to take advantage of their expertise and their important links in specific areas.
- *Organisation of the nodes:* Participants at both workshops discussed in detail the possible organisational forms of the nodes and, in particular, whether their focus should be primarily a.) methods-based or b.) based on substantive matters. Several participants thought that the nodes should be primarily methods-based, while at the same time stressing the importance of substantive research questions. It was also stressed that the nodes should emphasise inter-disciplinarity. A concern was raised that if the nodes are primarily methods-based it might be difficult to investigate which methods work best in the context of a particular substantive problem. It was noted that some methodological fields, such as some survey methods, have been developed effectively at a generic level without being tied to particular substantive topics. One participant working within government stressed that a purely disciplinary approach would be disadvantageous for non-academic users, since within government research is not strictly discipline-based but usually broader. One specific suggestion was that the nodes could be established around substantive matters with the hub being primarily methods-based. When the hub team drew the discussion at both workshops to a conclusion, there was broad support for the nodes to be methods-based with a focus on applications to substantive questions. There was support for some flexibility of the classification of nodes by methods, for example “methods for investigating life-cycle dynamics” could be just as suitable for defining the coverage of a node as a more traditional description such as “methods for the design and analysis of longitudinal studies”.
- In addition, it was discussed whether nodes should only be based in single institutions or if they could also consist of groups of researchers across institutions. Several suggestions were made. There was general agreement that a node should have a clear base in one institution, while allowing for the possibility that a node could also be distributed in nature and may involve

cooperation between different institutions. There was support for a node being the basis for a wider network. There was support for nodes varying in size. It was suggested that some nodes could be quite small and some projects started at one node could be carried on in a different project run by a different node.

- *Relationship between the co-ordinating hub and the nodes:* It was stressed that for the success of the Centre the relationship between the co-ordinating hub and the nodes will be important. Concerns were raised that the nodes might “take on a life of their own” and that this needs to be strongly avoided and taken into account when building up the organisation of hub and nodes. It was regarded as advantageous to establish a two-way benefit between hub and nodes. It is important to guarantee a fruitful interaction between hub and nodes as well as facilitating a network across nodes. The relationship between the hub and the nodes might take place on three levels: a.) managerial level; b.) working level and c.) promotional level, where the hub may have the responsibility of promoting the output of the nodes and of the dissemination of the research.
- *Engagement with users:* There was a general agreement that it is important to establish networks and links between academia and governmental departments. It was felt that the Centre should also engage with statistical agencies and the private sector. The aim would be to bring together people from academia and government and to set up a forum where people from different backgrounds can learn from each other. An example of an existing scheme where academic researchers can learn from government practice is the ESRC Survey Link scheme. One suggestion was made to enable secondments between the different actors and between academia and governmental departments.
- Representatives from government felt that it will be important to establish these links with the intermediate managerial level of governmental departments, i.e. with people that are responsible for carrying out the actual research, not just with senior management. Possibilities of establishing courses that are particularly targeted at researchers working within government need to be considered. Again it is important to disseminate information about what research is currently carried out both within government and within academia.

- It was stressed that the Centre should build up networks and collaboration between leading methodologists in the UK and abroad. Some participants emphasised the importance of providing a forum for individual methodologists.
- A suggestion was made to build up a group of associate members who support and advise the activities of the Centre as well as to set up a network of collaborators from both inside and outside academia. The relationship between these collaborators should be two-fold in that on the one hand they would receive support and information from the Centre and on the other hand they could contribute to the dissemination of research.

Appendix B. Summary of Interviews with Associate Members

The associate members of the Centre are academics working at the University of Southampton who expressed an interest in the new National Centre for Research Methods. They come from a broad range of social science disciplines. The following summarises four interviews with different groups of associate members. The groups were selected in order to cover a range of disciplines within the Social Sciences. The interviews were held with representatives from the School of Management, Linguistics (School of Humanities), School of Education and School of Management. The interviews focussed on three areas of interest: a.) research methods, b.) training and capacity building and c.) organisation of the Centre.

Interview with Representative from the School of Management

Research Methods

- The Centre should promote research on case studies: It was felt important to encourage more researchers to conduct case studies, to train researchers how to design and conduct case studies and to promote the use of case studies in teaching. Case studies have become universally referred to in management research, but it is usually US-based. There are not many researchers carrying out case-studies in the UK.
- The Centre should encourage researchers to use (existing) surveys. ESRC has already been active in doing this.
- The Centre should promote: econometric methods, in particular the use of econometric methods within management, development of econometric models, including variables important within management, nonlinear terms, interactions etc., the use of narrative methods and the combination of quantitative and qualitative research and methods
- Although case studies are commonly used most case studies have been conducted in the US and not many researchers in the UK have conducted such case studies
- UK management research lags behind that of the US. The lack of rigor in UK management research has been recognized by ESRC and a new management institute has been established.

Training

- It was emphasised that training is needed on how to conduct and analyse case studies as well as in the use of surveys with applications in management.
- It was felt that there are a lot of general courses on data analysis available but required are courses with applications within management.
- Short courses of approximately one week are a good form of training as well as 1-2 day workshops. 3-month executive programmes are very popular in management training.

Organisation

- The Centre should promote and encourage collaboration between researchers in economics and management.
- Strategy control should be the task of the Centre as well as control of quality of training and research. There is a need to delegate to the nodes without losing all control of them. For example, the Centre should have say over training courses, even if it is the nodes who provide them. Some training should be provided within the Centre.
- The Centre should avoid nodes being separate from each other and should encourage networking.
- There is a need for open seminars that will encourage management scholars to collaborate.

Interview with Representatives from Linguistics

Research Methods

- Within linguistics the use of information technology has grown rapidly over the last years. Corpus linguistics and development of software packages have become more and more important. They are often partially commercially funded
- An important issue is handling of data and making data accessible.
- New methodological approaches require the collaboration of researchers within linguistics, engineering, IT technology, neuroscience, statistics etc. There is therefore a scope for interdisciplinary research.
- There is often a lack in terms of technical expertise, network support and support on computer software.

- Computer packages as well as many methodologies are developed in the US such as study of learning languages and acquisition, empirical studies, data collection, data archiving, data analysis. In particular, in the US data is accessible. There is a need to encourage and strengthen links with researchers in the US.
- A greater need for collaboration between statistics and linguistics was established.
- The Centre should provide continuing and ongoing (statistical) advice, (statistical) consultancy and consistent methodological support, also for grant applications.
- A suggestion was made to build up a national advisory group.

Training

- It was noted that the current provision of training within linguistics is very 'patchy'.
- Problem is often lack of resources, i.e. time and funding, as well as the availability of courses.
- The Centre should provide information where to get appropriate training from.
- There is a general problem of sharing expertise across disciplines. It is sometimes unclear whether ESRC and other training is relevant to linguistics. A lot of linguistic research comes out of arts, and some social science methods, especially quantitative ones, can be hard to access. Methods from other disciplines are often not accessible, and this means there is a need to provide training courses with applications in linguistics, and provide specific linguistics training courses.
- It was felt that there is currently a shortage of training possibilities for mid-career researchers.
- Young researchers need good access to and training in computer based linguistics.
- Regional provision of training specifically for linguistics is needed.
- Training is required on all levels: introductory, intermediate and advanced. Training is necessary both to renew the skills of lecturers and researchers and to train new students.

Organisation

- The nodes should have facilities and staff to train researchers.
- A node should consist of different sites, not just one existing department within a university.

- A question that was raised concerns how ESRC may want to coordinate training within the Centre with already existing ESRC and other training programmes, especially the 1+3?
- The Caqdas project offers a useful model for certain things that nodes could do.

Interview with Representatives from the School of Education

Research Methods

- Recent developments covered multimodal analysis (gesture, position etc. in addition to verbal responses), recording methods, transcription of video data, storing and retrieving data, archiving data, in particular video data, the increasing use of statistical analysis etc.
- Issue of storing and reusing data, in particular since ESRC often only funds research based on new data. Often it is difficult to get funding for research based on data that has been collected before. This issue has implications for storage and archiving of data.
- Case studies were regarded as important.
- There are problems to be addressed relating to the qualitative-quantitative link, that is in terms of linking case-study work to statistical and quantitative work.
- There is a need of linking data with contextual information
- The Centre should promote/ encourage: storing and archiving of data, the development in new technologies such as video data, large scale case studies, interdisciplinary research
- The Centre should provide statistical consultancy, a list of researchers with expertise in different areas, information about different methods available and use of these methods, updates of methodologies, information in terms of software for qualitative analysis.
- Researchers that work for the Centre should have time allocated for consultancy
- The Centre should make information available to non-academics as well.
- The set up of a mailing list was proposed.
- It was seen as important to set up research projects that work across disciplines.

Training

- There is a need for training courses in statistics with applications to education. Tying the presentation of methods to substantive areas is important in order to build research motivation.
- Training in conversation analysis is needed.
- Continuation of training is necessary.
- Courses are required on all levels: introductory, intermediate and advanced.
- The Centre should disseminate information about which courses are available and should publish guidelines which particular methods are available and would be useful to use.
- It was felt that particularly intensive short courses are necessary, such as 1-2 days and 1 week courses.
- The Centre should target courses at PhD students, postdoctoral researchers and mid-career researchers.
- The Centre should provide a webpage with information about which courses are available, also at other sites.

Organisation

- A node should not be a specific department rather an accumulation of departments and researchers within a specific area. The Centre should try to avoid a spitting-off of the nodes and should encourage close collaboration between the nodes.
- Visiting scholarships to the hub and to nodes would enable researchers to learn from and work with those based there.

Interview with Representatives from the School of Medicine

Research Methods

- The School of Medicine is already working on interdisciplinary projects which involve researchers from statistics, geography, demography etc.
- Most research currently conducted aims to combine different methods.
- The Centre should encourage: research collaboration between departments as well as interdisciplinary research, joint research studentships and combined grant applications, database analysis and storing of data as well as e-resources and e-learning.

- The Centre should encourage links to government departments and the public sector.
- The set up of a national electronic library was proposed.
- The combination of methods is important in terms of developing interventions and interpreting their outcomes.

Training

- Training is particularly needed in advanced statistics.
- There is a need to provide more training locally, in particular in terms of more advanced training courses.
- Training is needed in times series analysis.
- Training for mid-career researchers is important.

Organisation

- The MRC has a node-based research Centre based in Bristol, the HSR Centre, but encountered problems with the nodal links.
- It is important to get advice from other centres that are based on the hub and node system.