

Methods Programme Business meeting, Tuesday May 20th 1.30 –3pm

This note sets out in more detail some of the issues that will be discussed in the business meeting on Tuesday May 20th at 1.30. It would be helpful if participants could discuss some of the proposals beforehand so that we can move through each topic quickly.

1. Events for research staff

It is important that the RM Programme addresses capacity building amongst researchers who are establishing themselves in the social sciences. In particular, we need to ensure that the Programme does all it can to stimulate and develop methodological expertise and understanding amongst the researchers employed on projects.

I want to set out a number of proposals and ask whether participants wish to support these. It is important to stress that these proposed events are entirely voluntary – there is no obligation to attend.

i. Annual 2-day workshops

These would be restricted to researchers employed on projects. They could include any of the following:

Presentations based on the projects on which people were working

Discussion groups on particular topics (eg getting access; ethical issues; interviewing)

Presentations from national/international experts

Career-related presentations/ workshops

It will be important to hear the views of researchers attending the meeting

ii. Staff exchanges between projects

The Methods Programme contains a very wide spread of projects in terms of methods used and disciplinary perspectives. It therefore provides an opportunity to think about the benefits that may come from short exchanges between projects. This might mean a week spent with a team working on a closely related topic or a few days spent with a team doing something entirely different. The former might be beneficial in learning relevant methods or gaining ideas that could be applied one's own project. The latter might provide a way of breaking down stereotypes, learning more about the research processes of different disciplines and generally broadening one's experience. It is important to stress that any such visits would need to be made with the full approval of the Principal Investigator on both sides and may only be of interest to a limited number of people.

Is this of interest? If so, how can the Programme facilitate it? One possibility is to provide the costs of travel and accommodation for any researchers who wished to visit another project.

iii. Exchanges between researchers in government and academia

In similar vein, the Programme could facilitate and support short exchanges between researchers working in government and working on a project within the Programme. There are clear benefits to both sides in improving mutual

understanding. Such an exchange, if restricted to short periods such as a week, could provide a basis for longer-term exchanges and collaboration. Sue Duncan, Government Chief Social Researcher, will set out some ideas.

2. Dissemination activities

As with all programmes it is important that there is early planning on dissemination. This note sets out a number of possibilities. Other ideas will be very welcome.

i. A special issue of the International Journal for Social Science Methods.

The editor, Julia Brannen, will be outlining some possibilities.

ii. Methods Programmes streams at conferences

ISA Research Committee on Logic and Methodology, RC33 is holding its Sixth International Conference on Social Science Methodology, entitled: "Recent Developments and Applications in Social Research Methodology", in Amsterdam, on August 17 - 20, 2004. There is just time to submit a proposal for a session if there are a number of teams interested in taking part.

A session should last approximately 90 minutes or 120 minutes, and have four to six papers. The session should be as international as possible and focus on recent trends and developments in quantitative and qualitative methods. Papers which combine methods and empirical results are highlighted as being very welcome.

The 2004 Conference of the Royal Statistical Society will be held in Manchester during the week of 06.09.2004. The Programme Committee is now seeking proposals for streams. I would like to propose a stream based on work arising from the Methods Programme. Please let me know if you would be interested in taking part.

Other suggestions would be very welcome

iii. An International conference organised by the Methods Programme

At the end of 2005 we might hold a conference organised around streams related to work funded by the Methods Programme. The intention would be to identify a number of streams and include a mixture of papers from the Methods Programme and others. Key overseas academics would be invited.

Should such a conference have an explicit methods focus? Should there be an overarching theme? How would this differ from the RC33 conference, above?

Your views would be very helpful.

iv. Social Research Methods - a series of paperbacks on methods emerging from the ESRC Research Methods Programme.

A number of people have already responded to a request to submit plans for a contribution to this proposed series and a draft proposal has gone to Sage. Kay Bridger, Sage editor, will be at the meeting to answer questions and provide further information.

The series would be designed to demonstrate the strength of UK methodological research. The series would complement the existing qualitative (blue) and quantitative (green) Sage series with a focus on combining methods or mixed methods. Innovative or cross-disciplinary applications of existing methods would be particularly welcome.

They would be pitched at a post-graduate level audience and would cross the social science disciplines. They would be aimed at an international audience but might explicitly have a European focus, thus differentiating them from the US series.

Length: About 30-40K words; Cost: under £10

v. A Working Paper Series

We have received our first Working Paper that will soon be available from the web-site. Please think about turning any preliminary papers or 'think pieces' into programme working papers.

vi. Methods Report

An informative themed 'newsletter' produced twice yearly containing informative articles written by Programme members. This will be distributed as hard copy widely – and will also be available on the web-site.

Suggestions needed, please.

3. The next meeting of RM Programme teams

We have included a feedback form in the conference packs. Your views on this conference are important and will inform future events.

Unlike most programmes where there is a set of core substantive questions around which dissemination conferences can be organised, the RM Programme is much more broadly-based. Whilst this makes it difficult to focus on a single theme that will be of interest to all programme members, it opens up some alternative possibilities that are very exciting.

The teams funded under the Programme contain a huge wealth of experience and expertise across disciplines and across methodological areas. What can be achieved by bringing together this expertise over a 2-day meeting? Is there scope for some cross-disciplinary exchange of methods? Can a consensus be reached over how to ensure long-term resources for training in methods? Can we identify where there is a need to improve methodological rigour? How can this be achieved?

One suggestion is that the next meeting (next year) might focus in causality.

Angela Dale, 13/05/2003