

# METHODS BRIEFING 15

## Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS)

**Nigel Fielding, Ann Lewins, Christina Silver\*, Ray Lee\*\***

\*University of Surrey, \*\*Royal Holloway, University of London

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A series of methods briefings from projects funded by ESRC as part of the Research Methods Programme.

The Programme aims to develop qualitative and quantitative methods within the context of substantive research. It also aims to encourage effective dissemination of good practice.

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CCSR  
2nd Floor  
Crawford House  
Manchester  
M13 9PL

0161 275 4891

[www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/](http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/)

### Background

The CAQDAS Networking Project has been in existence since 1994 when our first wave of ESRC funding was secured. It grew out of a conference held at the University of Surrey in 1989 which brought together for the first time developers of qualitative software programs and their early adaptors. We remain the only funded resource in the world providing independent information, training and support in choosing and using the range of software designed to facilitate the management and analysis of qualitative data. We are therefore able to provide information, advice, free seminars and software-specific training at low cost.

Our lead trainers have extensive experience in using and training in a number of CAQDAS packages and have supported thousands of researchers in their work across the range of applied and academic, disciplinary and methodological contexts, in the UK and increasingly across the world.

Over the years we have been able to extend our outreach, increase the number of packages we can train in and support and diversify our freely available resources. Under the ESRC Researcher Development Initiative (2006 - 2008) we will continue these developments.

### Philosophy and aims

Underlying our activities are a number of principles concerning the use of software in the process of conducting qualitative research and analysis.

Firstly we see our role as *facilitative rather than prescriptive*. A large proportion of our work is with researchers and students who are

deciding whether to use a software package, and if so, which one to choose. Our role is to help them make an informed choice rather than to promote one product over another. Our philosophy has always been based on the idea of using 'the right tools for the job'. As software develops and diversifies this philosophy becomes even more relevant. All CAQDAS packages have pros and cons and the choice between them is necessarily based on different factors for different researchers, methodologies, data types etc. We have no commercial ties to any developer and do not endorse particular software packages. We always balance our training and seminar programme, and we regard it as a priority to highlight new products as well as new features in established ones.

Secondly we aim to encourage *experimentation and imaginative approaches* to the use of software rather than the homogenisation of methods. Whilst software packages differ in emphasis and offer different tools we resist the idea that there is a 'right way' to use any given product. There may be efficient ways in which to use tools but we encourage their critical and flexible use.

Thirdly we aim to facilitate *networking across disciplines and software products*. Since the inception of the project we have been keen to continue facilitating the link between software developers and users. Our Software Development Seminar series and the email discussion group *Qual-software* remain key ways in which we contribute to this process. More recently we have

been providing forums where users of different packages can meet and discuss their experiences and explain their project-specific application of software. We facilitate user-groups and seminars where users of different software present work in progress.

## Software training in stages

### Software planning seminars

**Free** awareness raising introductions to several software programmes aimed at those who may not yet have decided whether, or which CAQDAS package to use. Interactive demonstrations held at Surrey and in different locations around the UK throughout the year. We attempt to balance outreach by presenting in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland as well as the English regions. Under RDI we will be utilizing the Access Grid Node to increase outreach still further.

### Software development seminars

**Free** seminars where Software Developers, Methodologists and expert users are invited to present their work. Developers have the opportunity to preview new developments and run workshops; Methodologists to discuss particular innovative applications in software usage; and Expert Users to present work in progress and discuss their experiences.

### Introductory workshops

Full-day intensive workshops offer a thorough introduction to a specific software package, aiming to get the researcher started with the software and to familiarise with early usage tools, whilst also enabling some understanding of how the software will be useful in the long term. Workshops are accompanied by full step-by-step documentation and held in response to demand. Software which we frequently run introductory workshops in include: ATLAS.ti, HyperRESEARCH; MAXqda, QDA Miner; QSR NVivo, Qualrus.

### Follow-up workshops

Full-day project-oriented workshops in Atlas.ti and NVivo are for intermediate and advanced level users and focus on the specific project needs of participants. Tutors make specific preparations for individual needs/requests. We also provide

customized events including one-to-one follow-up sessions.

## Free online resources

<http://caqdas.soc.surrey.ac.uk/>

**‘Choosing a CAQDAS package’**: by Ann Lewins & Christina Silver aims to facilitate researchers in their choice between packages. It supplements our Software Planning Seminar series and is frequently updated to include more packages.

## Slides from recent seminar presentations

We now request all presenters, whether software developers, methodologists or expert users to allow their slides to be uploaded onto our website.

## Web links to other resources

### General Resources

Online journals, discussion lists, data and meta-information resources, forthcoming conferences

### Software Developer and Contact Sites

Freeware, commercial CAQDAS software & data conversion/collection software

### CAQDAS Bibliography

Frequently updated bibliography on qualitative data analysis and software – direct links to several freely available articles

### Advisory Helpline

Ann Lewins or Christina Silver can be contacted by phone or email to provide independent information about software products, and support in their use.

Ann Lewins:

Tel: 01483 689455

Email: [A.Lewins@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:A.Lewins@surrey.ac.uk)

Christina Silver:

Tel: 01483 682791

Email: [C.Silver@surrey.ac.uk](mailto:C.Silver@surrey.ac.uk)

Our sister project ‘Online QDA and CAQDAS’ is a set of training support materials which address common problems (both early and advanced) of using Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) methods and selected Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) packages.

Further details are available from:

Ann Lewins

[caqdas@soc.surrey.ac.uk](mailto:caqdas@soc.surrey.ac.uk)

Tel: 01483 689455

<http://caqdas.soc.surrey.ac.uk/>