

**Second annual summer school for early career researchers**  
**‘Working across boundaries: Interdisciplinary and multi-method research’**  
**11-14<sup>th</sup> September 2006**

The second NCRM Summer School will be held at the University of Southampton, 11-14<sup>th</sup> September 2006. This year’s summer school will focus on the challenges of conducting collaborative research across disciplinary and methodological boundaries.

Collaborative research has become a common practice, both in academia and beyond. Social scientists from diverse backgrounds are increasingly encouraged – if not expected - to work together, often alongside researchers from outside the social science community, in the exploration of ‘big science’ research questions. These questions are often highly applied, with the rationale for collaboration rooted in arguments concerning the need for ‘joined up’ approaches to the increasing complexity of contemporary social problems. No single discipline or methodological approach, proponents argue, will be able to solve such complex problems in isolation. Instead, an interdisciplinary and multi-method approach is called for in order to provide the best possible means of tackling complex research questions.

Gibbons et al (1994) have referred to this trend as the new mode of knowledge production in contemporary societies, a mode of working which ‘creates a novel environment in which knowledge flows more easily across disciplinary boundaries, human resources are more mobile, and the organisation of research more open and flexible’<sup>1</sup>. Yet such an approach makes huge demands of researchers. It demands a grasp of the unique contributions of different disciplinary traditions and the potential synergies that can be achieved through interdisciplinary working, as well as requiring considerable skills of adaptability and flexibility. Above all, perhaps, it is marked by an openness to developing one’s methodological imagination, contingent on a willingness to consider the strengths and weaknesses of using a broad range of complementary research methods.

This is the challenge of the 2006 Summer School. With contributions from leading UK methodologists, the summer school will consider both the theoretical and practical implications of working across boundaries, alongside opportunities to learn about innovative approaches to multi-method working. In addition, each participant will be allocated to a team consisting of researchers from contrasting disciplinary and methodological traditions to their own, and throughout the week each team will work on developing a research design for tackling a ‘big’ research question in the area of health policy, to be commissioned by Dr Phil Davis, the Deputy Director of the Government Social Research Unit.

**Who is the summer school for?**

The summer school is targeted at early career social science researchers – typically, researchers in the first five years of their post-doctoral career or equivalent. There are thirty fully-funded places available; up to eighteen places will be allocated to research

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<sup>1</sup> Gibbons, M et al (1994) *The New Production of Knowledge*, London: Sage.

staff at the NCRM's Hub and six Nodes, five places will be allocated to government social researchers, and the remaining places are available on an open competition basis. In order to get the most out of the summer school, potential participants must have a willingness to consider the possibilities of working within an interdisciplinary and multi-method framework. No prior knowledge of the area of health is expected: this topic has been chosen for illustrative purposes only, given its broad accessibility as a topic, regardless of participants' actual research expertise.

### **What will participants get out of the summer school?**

By the end of the summer school, participants should:

- have an understanding of some of the theoretical and philosophical arguments surrounding interdisciplinary and multi-method working in the social sciences;
- be able to identify the opportunities and limitations of collaborative research;
- be able to identify a variety of ways in which collaborative research might help to address social science (and broader) research problems;
- have an understanding of a range of innovative approaches to multi-method research design

### **All work and no play?**

In addition to the academic programme, there will be plenty of opportunities for informal socialising, including a first night wine reception in Southampton's John Hansard Gallery and a mid-week trip to Bucklers Hard in the New Forest, followed by dinner in the Montague Arms in nearby Beaulieu.

### **How do I apply?**

The eighteen places for NCRM-based research staff will be allocated at the discretion of Node Directors (usually, up to three places per Node), whilst the five places for government social researchers will be allocated via the Government Social Research network. Once nominated, participants will be asked to complete a summer school registration form, which will be forwarded by staff at the NCRM Hub at Southampton.

All other early career researchers wishing to apply for a place under the open competition are invited to complete the 2006 summer school application form which is available via the NCRM website (<http://www.ncrm.ac.uk>). Applicants will be asked to provide a statement in support of their application, which will be taken into account in the allocation of places, but applicants should be aware that the final allocation will be based on the need to ensure a broad balance of disciplinary and methodological backgrounds across the summer school participants as a whole.

The closing date for all applications is Friday June 23rd 2006. All places are fully-funded, including reasonable return travel costs to Southampton.

## **Provisional Programme**

### **Monday 11<sup>th</sup> Sept: Introductions**

- 1.30 – 3.00 Opening plenary: Working across boundaries: multi-method and multi-disciplinary research: Nigel Gilbert, University of Surrey
- 3.30 – 5.00 Ice breaker session: ‘find your team’ exercise, followed by a preliminary discussion of team strengths and backgrounds
- 7.00 Wine reception and dinner

### **Tues 12<sup>th</sup> Sept: Setting the context**

- 9.30 – 11.00 Current issues in health research: disciplinary approaches: Paul Roderick, School of Medicine; John Mohan, School of Social Sciences; Cathy Pope, School of Nursing and Midwifery, all University of Southampton
- 11.30 – 1.00 The challenges of collaborative government social research: Phil Davis, Deputy Director, Government Social Research Unit
- 2.00 – 3.30 Multi-method approaches in context: Alicia O’Cathain, University of Sheffield
- 4.00 – 5.30 Methods workshop 1\*
- 7.00 Bar and dinner in hall of residence

### **Wed 13<sup>th</sup> Sept: Workshops**

- 9.30– 11.00 Methods workshop 2\*
- 11.30 – 1.00 Methods workshop 3\*
- 2.00 – 3.00 Career development workshop: An introduction to peer reviewing: Graham Crow and Chris Skinner, University of Southampton
- 3.00 Summer school trip to Bucklers Hard, followed by dinner in the Montague Arms, Beaulieu

### **Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> September: The lessons of integrated approaches**

- 9.30 – 11.00 Integrating methodologies: Jo Moran-Ellis, University of Surrey
- 11.30 – 1.00 The lessons of collaborative research: Catherine Lyall, Innogen, University of Edinburgh
- 2.00 – 3.30 Team presentations

*\* Methods workshops will address current methodological innovations, especially in relation to multi-method approaches, and will be run by researchers from the NCRM’s six Nodes.*