

A Description of the ESRC Survey Link Scheme, 2005 - 2008



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1 About the Scheme

The ESRC Survey Link Scheme ran from January 2005 to January 2008. Supported by the ESRC Training and Development Board it existed to give academic social scientists the opportunity to acquaint themselves with professional social survey research, carried out by the agencies discussed in Section 3. It thus provided a bridge between the academy and the practical worlds in which professional survey research is carried out.

Two linked components were offered, typically taking one day each:

- A. Attendance at a free one-day workshop, which provided a briefing on a particular survey. The day included an introduction to survey interviewing in the field, an introduction to CAPI – Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing – and guidance through the CAPI questionnaire of a particular survey by professional staff from the agency carrying out the fieldwork. These workshops were held at various locations throughout the UK.
- B. Free opportunity to go out with a professional interviewer for one day, and observe a social survey interview in the field. This could be arranged close to where the scheme participant lives, and takes place after attendance at the workshop.

Funding was for the calendar years 2005 to 2007, and ended on 3 January 2008. This document presents the experience of the grant-holder, not the ESRC.

1.1 Aims and Objectives

The specific objectives which the Scheme sought to achieve in the period January 2005 to December 2007 were:

1. To remodel the interviewer briefing phase of the scheme into self-run workshops including presentations by staff of the leading survey agencies such as Office for National Statistics (henceforth ONS) and the National Centre for Social Research (henceforth NatCen).

This was accomplished and is reported in Section 2.

2. To increase workshop participant numbers to 120 in the first year, 150 in the second, and 180 in the third year, drawn particularly from ESRC and other research students.

This was accomplished in years one and two, but slightly under target in year three. This is discussed in Section 2.4.

3. To provide wider geographic coverage both of workshops and among participants, particularly focusing upon the English regions, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Wide geographical coverage has been a key feature of the scheme as reported in Section 2.2.

4. To continue to provide opportunities for fieldwork accompaniment within survey agencies, and to maximise these opportunities, subject to what the survey agencies could offer.

This was accomplished and is reported on in Section 3.

5. To appoint an Outreach Officer, (0.3 of f.t.) to help run the Scheme.

Mr Tom Daly has held this role for the duration of the scheme. Details of his role are in Section 6.

6. To establish, maintain and continue to build on existing relationships with professional Survey Agencies such as ONS (Office for National Statistics), NatCen (National Centre for Social Research) , ISER/NOP (National Opinion Research) and BMRB (British Market Research Bureau International), NISRA and ARK (Northern Ireland).

This has been a successful part of the scheme and good relationships have been built with all agencies. This is detailed in Section 4.

7. To enhance visibility of the Scheme on the World Wide Web.

The scheme has a well established web site which has been a key part of its publicity strategy as detailed in Section 5.

8. To publicise the workshops and opportunities for fieldwork accompaniment alongside the ESRC Question Bank, which Martin Bulmer also directed.

Teams from the two resources have worked closely together to achieve this aim as detailed in Section 6.

2 Workshops

The results of the workshops from 2005 - 2007 are presented below. The workshops were highly successful, presenting a wide range of surveys to a greater geographical spread of venues. Efforts have been made to vary the surveys being highlighted; and in 2007 new surveys featured included the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, the Scottish Social Attitudes Survey, the British Crime Survey and the European Social Survey.

2.1 Overview of the workshops

A typical workshop programme is reproduced in Appendix 1. The workshop day began at 10am with registration of participants. The morning sessions included;

- Introduction to the scheme.
- Overview of the ESRC Question Bank and how Survey Questions can be discovered.
- Introduction to Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing.
- Overview of Blaise using a demonstration programme.
- Showing of NatCen DVD of some of their interviewers discussing experiences in the field (30 minutes).

A sandwich lunch was included in most workshops.

In the afternoon of the workshop a presenter from one of the professional survey agencies gave the following presentations and practical sessions:

- Overview of the survey being covered.
- Discussion of the key parts of the fieldwork process including quality of data.
- Demonstration of sections of the questionnaire using the BLAISE script.
- Participants would then get into pairs and run through the Blaise questionnaire as if they were interviewer and respondent.
- Summary of the day .

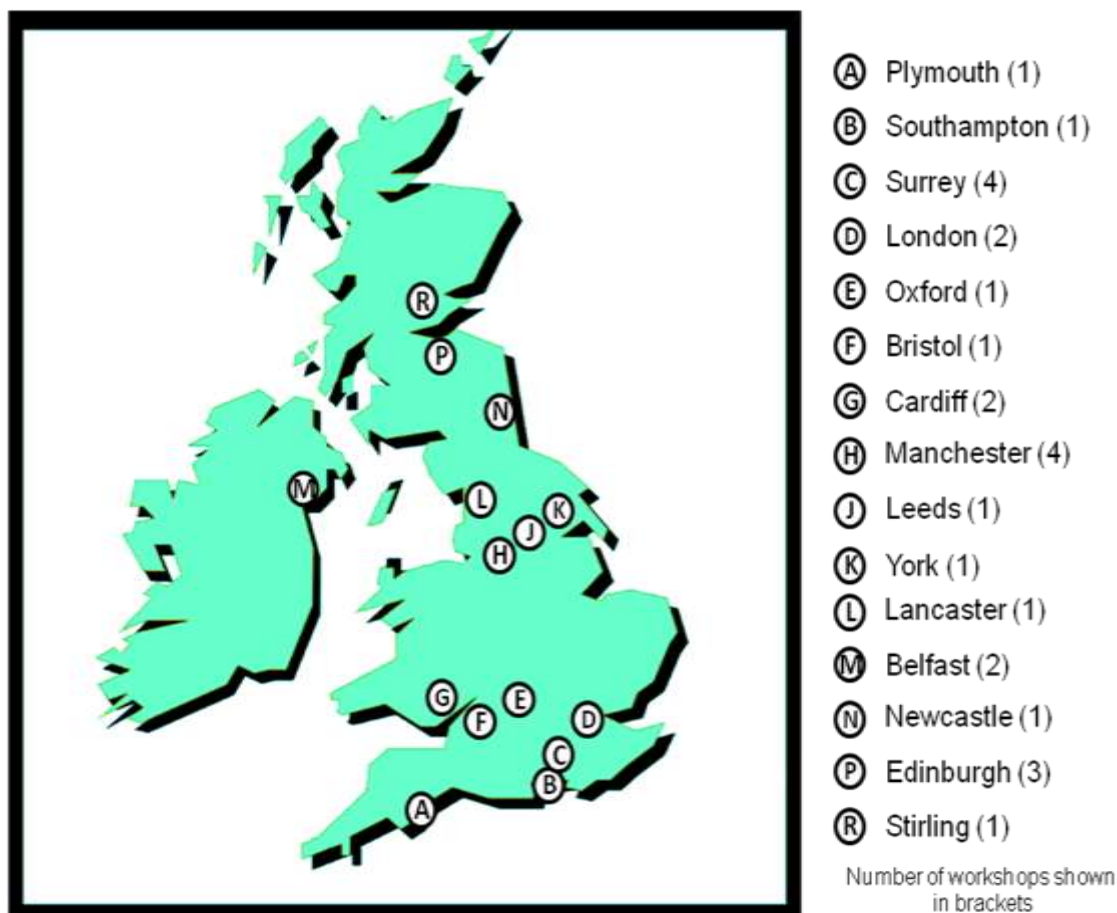
Each applicant received on arrival a workshop pack with the agenda for the day, slides from the presentations, details about Blaise alternatives and an evaluation form.

2.2 Workshop Location

Workshops have been held in all regions of the United Kingdom. Particular attention was devoted to trying to achieve a geographical spread of venues across the UK, made easier by the existence of ESRC Regional Training Centres. Figure 1 shows the distribution of workshops throughout the period of 2005-2007. During the latter part of

2006 and during 2007 the workshops were mainly concentrated in designated ESRC Regional Training Centres detailed in Appendix 4.

Figure 1: ESRC Survey Link Scheme Workshops - 2005 to 2007



A full list of SLS workshops showing the venue, survey presented, and survey organisation presenting for the Scheme is provided at Appendix 5.

2.3 Survey Organisations

Table 1 below shows the involvement of the survey organizations and the number of workshops they participated in for each year of the scheme. Whilst the Office for National Statistics, the National Centre for Social Research and the Essex Institute for Social and Economic Research have been involved from the start, British Market Research Bureau (BMRB) became involved in 2007 only. The two survey agencies in Northern Ireland, ARK (Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) each gave one workshop.

Table 1: Survey organisations assisting workshops

Survey Organisation	2005	2006	2007	Total
Office for National Statistics	2	3	3	8
National Centre for Social Research	3	2	3	8
Institute for Social and Economic Research	2	2	1	5
British Market Research Bureau			2	2
Access Research Knowledge (ARK), Northern Ireland		1		1
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency			1	1
Independent Consultant (P. Campanelli)	1			1
TOTAL	8	8	10	26

2.4 Bookings and Attendance

Summary statistics of the take up of the Workshops are presented in Table 2. During this grant period 601 applications were received, and of those applying, 449 attended a workshop.

Table 2: Workshop Bookings and Attendance

	2005	2006	2007	Total
Applied	154	209	238	601
Attended	136	154	159	449
Cancelled	7	28	44	79
No Show	11	27	35	73
Attendance Rate	88%	74%	67%	75%
Capacity	203	226	208	637
Capacity Ratio	67%	68%	76%	70%

Targets for attendance were met in the first two years of the scheme, whilst the third year was slightly under target due to the number of people who cancelled or did not attend on the day. Workshops were 'overbooked' where possible to overcome this. In some regional locations such as Plymouth and Belfast we felt that there was a lower take-up because of a lack of interested people and people not wanting to travel to more remote regions.

The increased number of cancellations and ‘no shows’ in year 2 and 3 each represents three or four applicants per workshop. This could be for a number of reasons:

- Year 1 included three workshops in Surrey University and two in Manchester where applicants were more easily targeted.
- During 2006 the application process for the scheme was changed from downloading and posting a paper application form to submitting an electronic form on the web pages. This may have encouraged people to apply who subsequently forgot they had done so hence they did not keep the date in their diaries, this would account for the high number of cancellations in 2007 once a reminder e-mail had been sent out prior to the workshop.
- Students and researchers now have a wide choice of free training events to attend and they may get saturated by applying for too many events. The experience of other free ESRC training schemes, such as the Economic and Social Data Service User Group meetings, has been very similar in the past year in terms of “no shows”.
- A final and related reason could simply be that there are greater demands on researcher and student time in 2007.

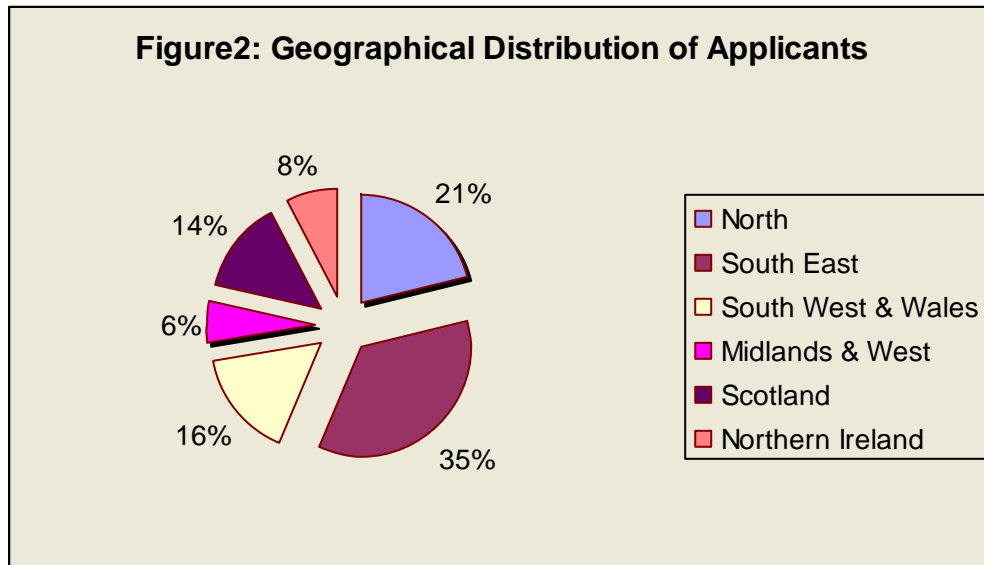
2.5 Applicant details

Table 3 shows the number of applications by occupation.. The greatest proportion, 34% of applications came from PhD students in line with the aims of the scheme. This was followed by academic researchers and teachers and other postgraduates, mainly MSc students. These groups accounted for approximately four-fifths of all participants.

Table 3: Applicants by occupation

	2005 (%)	2006 (%)	2007 (%)	TOTAL
Ph.D students	34	34	35	34%
Other Postgraduates	22	19	24	22%
Academic Staff (Teachers & Researchers)	23	24	29	25%
Government Researcher	5	13	8	9%
Independent Researcher	12	2	2	5%
Voluntary Sector & Charities	4	8	2	5%
Total	100	100	100	100
Numbers =	154	209	238	601

Figure 2 shows the geographical spread of applicants during the present phase of the Scheme



2.6 Evaluation and Feedback

At the end of each workshop participants were asked to fill in an evaluation form shown in Appendix 3. The evaluation form was designed to be consistent with the format used by the National Centre for Research Methods. The evaluation sheets were filled in by 431 participants (out of 449 who attended) and were keyed into an SPSS database and analysed after each event. Feedback was overwhelmingly positive as shown in Table 4 below, with 93% stating that their research would be affected by the scheme and 90% having found the workshop useful. The course materials, workshop packs and presentations were also evaluated highly.

Table 4: Participant evaluations

Question	Category	Response %
Will it affect your research?	Yes	93
Have you found the Workshop useful?	Yes	90
How interesting the content?	Very Good or Good	87
Course material well structured?	Very Good or Good	86
Presentation - Workshop Pack	About Right to Very Good	82
Presentation - Clarity of explanations?	Very Good or Good	92
Are your predominant interests Qualitative or Quantitative?	Qualitative	18
	Quantitative	20
	Both	62

According to the evaluation sheets only 5 people had previous experience of both CAPI and of the Question Bank; 89 had experience of the Question Bank and 29

had used CAPI out of 431 respondents. The Survey Link Scheme workshops thus addressed a major gap of knowledge within the research community.

There was space on the form for participants to write comments, a selection of these are reproduced below:

How the workshop will affect the participant's research:

"It will affect my research in looking up how questions have been asked before and in designing research"

"I will use a wider variety of Secondary sources"

"affect research by (obtaining) practical interview skills"

"...will contribute to questionnaire development, research design and interviewing"

Participants also commented on the usefulness of the focus on the workshop on the data collection side of survey research:

"As secondary analyst gave me an insight into factors that might affect data quality"

"I will take into account the biases when I conduct interviews and be more careful about data quality"

"It gives me an insight into the data collection stage"

"It has given me a broader knowledge of the research process in particular data collection techniques"

"I do secondary analysis and so it is good to know how data is gathered"

Professor Laurie Moseley who attended the scheme was so impressed with the training provided that he produced a full report for the SLS web pages which can be viewed at: http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/slsdocs/docs/laurie_moseley.pdf.

3 Fieldwork

The fieldwork part of the scheme has remained popular with those attending the workshop day. Those participants who expressed an interest in fieldwork were asked to fill in a confidentiality form and contact the Scheme Administrator who then passed their details on to the survey agencies. This enabled us to manage the flow of applicants to each agency for interviewer accompaniment.

3.1 Interviewer Accompaniments

Table 5 shows the number of interviewer accompaniments throughout the scheme. This element of the scheme was complex and labour intensive and this is reflected on the lower number of applicants who actually completed their fieldwork. Once the names of the participants wishing to go out with an interviewer had been given to the survey agencies, the person at the agency responsible for the scheme would match up the applicant with an interviewer. For some surveys this was further complicated by the fact that fieldwork is only conducted over a short period of time. Once the applicants and the interviewer were matched, they were given each other's contact details so that they could arrange a convenient time to go out. At this point a number of applicants fell out of the system as they failed to get in touch or their contact details had changed.

We are unable to give completed figures for the ISER accompaniments as records were not kept.

Table 5: Interviewer Accompaniments

Organisation	Applied	Completed	Cancelled
ONS	69	35	33
NATCEN	82	30	52
ISER	9	N/A	N/A

Note: There were no interviewer accompaniment visits arranged by BMRB and NISRA because of the sensitivity of the surveys featured or the location visited.

Each participant who went out with an interviewer was asked to provide feedback on the process. This feedback indicates that the interviewer accompaniment is a valuable part of the training of researchers with all those who went out finding it useful and interesting as a the selection of quotes below shows.

“The fieldwork experience will let me have a better understanding of data collection; and increase my awareness of the strengths and difficulties of interviewing”

“My experience of the fieldwork gave me a real insight into surveying and its challenges and complements my own (experience).....it was valuable to see real life surveys being conducted, together with the challenges faced in collecting good quality data...”

“The fieldwork experience has given me a better understanding of the challenges faced in gathering opinion data as well as a clearer appreciation of public attitudes to questions...the public seem unaware of the importance of social research...I have got a new perspective on

the interview process...I thoroughly enjoyed the fieldwork opportunity and found it of real use to my work."

4 Relations with Survey Agencies

As indicated above the major survey organisations have continued to play a vital part in the workshop presentations and fieldwork. We have forged close links with them; and they have found that the workshops have provided them with a useful insight into the way that their own surveys have been used. They have also found it a useful educative function for their own staff.

We should like to acknowledge the work and major contribution which the presenters put into making the Scheme such a success during the last 3 years. We were particularly heartened by the commitment to the Scheme shown by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the National Centre for Survey Research (NatCen), the Institute for Social and Economic Research (ISER), BMRB International, the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and the team at the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey. The Scheme would have faltered without their active response to the requests for presentations and interviewer accompaniments.

A good deal of effort has been devoted to maintaining relationships with the professional survey organisations. Two have been of outstanding importance throughout, the Office for National Statistics and the National Centre for Social Research. In addition, one workshop in each year has featured the British Household Panel Study, presented by members of the BHPS team at the University of Essex, who have liaised on our behalf with NOP, who carry out the interviewer accompaniment for this survey.

During 2007 we were pleased to add the British Market Research Bureau International (BMRB) to our participating agencies, and they presented on the British Crime Survey and the European Social Survey.

We have worked with the Scottish branch of Natcen, Scotcen, in 2005 and 2007, featuring the Scottish Social Attitudes survey in the latter year.

Our Northern Ireland workshop presentations have been made by ARK (NI) and by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, featuring the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey and the Continuous Household Survey [NI].

5 Publicity and Recruitment

Publicity for and recruitment to the Survey Link Scheme are two sides of the same coin. Publicity is dealt with in this section, Recruitment in Section 6 on Staffing. If the Survey Link Scheme is to be a success, recruitment must be sustained, and numbers participating in the Scheme increased, so as to further the ESRC Agenda for enhancing UK quantitative research skills. The Scheme Outreach Officer was responsible for generating participants for each workshop. There is further information about this work in Section 6 below.

Recruiting enough participants in turn requires effective publicity, to make the Scheme as widely known as possible to the UK social science community. The Scheme has therefore been publicised in a number of ways during the three year grant period.

5.1 Publicity

We have targeted those supervisors listed in the ESRC *“Institutions, Outlets and Advanced Courses Approved for the receipt of ESRC Studentships”* document on the www. This was used at the beginning of the scheme to mail out publicity items to all relevant academic departments in the UK with a note asking for them to be placed on a notice board. Moreover, we made every effort by our publicity and ESRC’s to encourage participation by ESRC sponsored personnel.

A leaflet detailing the scheme as well as a bookmark were developed and are shown in Appendix 2. These two items were given out at conferences, mailed out with the Department of Sociology at Surrey publications, including the quarterly Social Research Update and were inserted into packs given out by the Government side of the Economic and Social Data Service.

In addition to this the publicity strategy can be illustrated by the amounts of materials that were sent out in 2007 alone:

- Distribution of SLS leaflets at ESRC event “Developing the Researcher”
- Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) away day – SLS workshop flyers
- ESRC Social Science Week, seminar Queen’s University, Belfast – Distribution of SLS publicity materials & workshop dates
- Qb Newsletter No. 3 – SLS workshop dates
- Social Research Update (SRU) distribution – SLS bookmarks
- CAQDAS conference – distribution of SLS publicity materials
- Day course at Department of Sociology, University of Surrey – distribution of SLS publicity materials
- SRU distribution – SLS bookmarks

- Social Research Association (SRA) Summer Event – Distribution of SLS bookmarks
- European Survey Research Association Conference – distribution of SLS publicity materials in participant packs
- Qb Newsletter No. 4 – SLS workshop dates

A web site was developed early in 2005 and enhanced in 2006 with the addition of the electronic application form. This can be seen at <http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sls.htm> (the web pages will remain online in a reduced format until the announcement of the result of the Survey Resources Network in Autumn 2008). The site contains six main pages with an introduction to the scheme, a page detailing the workshops, an electronic application form (currently take off), a resources section which primarily points to CAPI resources, a testimonials page giving a selection of feedback from past participants and staff contact details. Figure 3 below shows the Workshop page as an example.

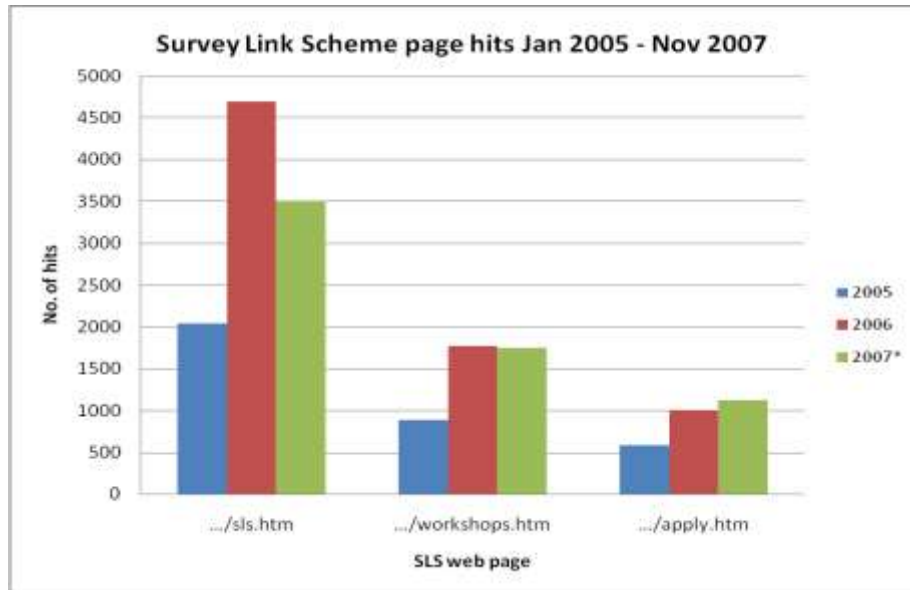
Figure 3: SLS web page: Workshops

The screenshot shows the ESRC Survey Link Scheme website. The header includes the 'Survey Link Scheme' logo and the 'Qb' logo. The main content area is titled 'WORKSHOPS: CONTENT' and lists several topics to be covered, including Question Bank, CAPI, BLAISE, Interviewing Video, and Guest speaker from survey organisation. Below this, there is a section for 'Fieldwork' and a table titled 'WORKSHOPS: DATES AND SURVEYS'.

Date	Survey and Organisation	Venue	Organisation
18/1/07	Health Survey for England	City	NatCen
14/2/07	Labour Force Survey	Edinburgh	ONS
21/3/07	English Longitudinal Study of Ageing	Bristol	NatCen
18/4/07	British Crime Survey	Leeds	BMRB
16/5/07	General Household Survey	Lancaster	ONS
21/6/07	Scottish Social Attitudes Survey	Edinburgh	NatCen
4/7/07	British Household Panel Survey	Manchester	ISER
7/9/07	European Social Survey	Cardiff	BMRB
17/10/07	Expenditure & Food Survey	Southampton	ONS
21/11/07	Continuous Household Survey	Belfast	NSRF

Statistics in Graph 1 below show that the site was well used, with just under 5000 hits in 2006, a large jump from 2005 when the web site was being developed. The figures are lower for 2007 as at the time of the writing of this report the last quarter statistics were not available. We fully expect the figures for 2007 to reach those of 2006 when these statistics are taken into account. This also applies to hits to the workshops page and the application form.

Graph 1: SLS Web Site Statistics



The Scheme has also been publicized on a number of key UK research web pages:

BHPS (British Household Panel Survey)	http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/ulsc/bhps/
Centre for Applied Social Surveys	http://www.s3ri.soton.ac.uk/cass/
Centre for Census and Survey Research	http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/
ESDS (Economic & Social Data Service)	http://www.esds.ac.uk/
ESRC Society Today	http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk
Intute (previously SOSIG)	http://www.intute.ac.uk/
ISER (Institute for Social and Economic Research)	http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/
Joint Information Systems Committee:	http://www.jisc.ac.uk/
LARIA (Local Authorities Research Intelligence Association)	http://www.laria.gov.uk/links_f.htm
NCRM (ESRC National Centre for Research Methods)	http://www.ncrm.ac.uk/
SRA (Social Research Association)	http://www.the-sra.org.uk/
UK Data Archive	http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/

5.2 Recruitment of Participants

The Scheme Outreach Officer was responsible for generating participants for each workshop. There is further information about this in the Staffing section below.

6 Staffing

Table 6: Staffing of the Scheme

	Time	Role	Duration
Professor Martin Bulmer	0.08FT	Director of the ESRC Survey Link Scheme (also Director of ESRC Qb)	Jan 2005 – Jan 2008
Mr Tom Daly	0.4 FT ¹	Outreach Officer	Jan 2005 – Jan 2008
Mrs Amanda Eastell-Bleakley	0.2 FT	Administrator	Jan 2005 – Jan 2006
Mrs Jenny Rains	0.2 FT	Administrator	Feb 2006 – Jan 2008

The Survey Link Scheme Outreach (Liaison) Officer, Tom Daly, continued his contacts with ESRC, Survey Organisations, University personnel and potential participants to promote a wider uptake of the Scheme. He assisted in the development of publicity material by website and in the format and presentation at the SLS Workshops. Recruitment of participants was conducted by contacting the nearest academic departments to the workshop location, including Departments of Sociology, Economics, Education, Psychology and Geography as appropriate. This was achieved using the ESRC and the HERO web sites which gives details of all UK Universities and Colleges. This route of recruitment was successful with 40 % of those who filled in an evaluation form saying they had found out about the scheme through this route.

In addition, he provided short presentations at Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) events.

The main task of the Outreach Officer lay in promoting the Scheme as widely as possible. Accordingly, contacts were made in telephoning and emailing Heads of Departments, Course Directors and others within institutions who might have an interest in the Surveys that were the subject of the particular Workshops. As mentioned above, he targeted particularly those academics that had been in receipt of ESRC funding either directly or as postgraduate supervisors.

¹ Increased from 0.3FT in 2006

Prior to the workshop he sent the Institution a schedule of the system and administrative arrangements required for the workshop's smooth operation. This was re-enforced on the afternoon before the workshops by the Liaison Officer establishing on the ground that the facilities within the Institutions were adequate for the purpose; and, in particular, that the IT arrangements met the demands of the BLAISE program operated by the Survey Organisations. It has often been found that local IT protocols within the host institutions were incompatible with the software requirements.

On the day, the role included presentations on elements of the workshop and in facilitating liaison between the Institution running the workshop and the presenters. This included an introduction to the workshops and asking the attendees what they hoped to elicit from the workshop. This was used as a benchmark for the plenary session feedback. After each workshop he analysed the evaluation sheet on the efficacy of the workshops to determine whether any significant changes were necessary to the format of the workshop day or the administrative arrangements.

The Question Bank team comprising Julie Gibbs, Graham Hughes, Laura Hyman and Zoe Tenger have also developed and presented presentations on the scope of the resources available on the ESRC Question Bank, with one of this team attending each workshop. In addition to this Julie Gibbs attended each of the Scheme team meetings having an input into the planning of the workshops. The Scheme web pages were incorporated into the Question Bank and have been maintained by the Qb staff. Graham Hughes has taken a large role in the budget planning for the Scheme whilst Zoe Tenger has helped from time to time with the administration tasks. During the Spring and Summer of 2007 both Mr Daly and Mrs Rains needed extended leave due to operations. During this time the SLS was maintained by Julie Gibbs, Graham Hughes and Zoe Tenger.

7 Experience of ESRC Regional Training Laboratories

We found that all of the ESRC Regional Training Centres used as listed in Appendix 4 were of a high standard for SLS training. We found using the Centres throughout 2007, rather than the ad-hoc facilities in years 1 and 2 has proved very beneficial: in general they have been better equipped and organised to meet varied demands of the SLS workshops. The Centres staff were supportive and helpful and IT support was good.

At two of the Centres we had a problem with noise, either from other people having access to the room or through noisy air conditioning. Where these issues were found, staff at the Centres did all they could to alleviate the problems sometimes moving us to another room. Visits in subsequent years demonstrated the improvement that had been made.

There were some teething problems in BLAISE based CAPI programs due to the Centres staff being unfamiliar with the demands of this specialist software. The problems encountered principally revolved round the local IT access rights. For security reasons local protocols did not allow external data to be saved to their machines: this affected the running of the BLAISE based survey questionnaires and in one occasion full access to the Question Bank material.

8 Finance and Budget (provisional figures: December 2007)

Table 7: SLS Finances

	Budget	Actual
Staff Salaries	45,785	45,392
DCR Charges	21,771	21,701
Overheads at 46%	31,083	30,863
Total Staff Costs	98,639	97,956
Consumables	9,420	9,497
Travel	20,411	20,168
Other Costs	34,541	32,394
Total Other Costs	64,372	62,059
Total	163,011	160,015

9 Impact of Cessation of Survey Link Scheme, January 2008

During 2007, Professor Martin Bulmer, the grant holder, and a senior colleague at the University of Surrey, applied for a grant for the continuation of the scheme for the calendar years 2008 and 2009 under the RDI 3 scheme competition run by the ESRC Training and Development Board. This application was not successful, so the Scheme ceased on 3 January 2008, and will not be offered to the UK social science community in 2008.

The decision not to continue with the scheme was met with regret both among the professional survey agency partners, and among members of the small advisory committee which has advised Professor Bulmer during the life of the Scheme. The membership of this advisory group is listed in Section 10. There is no doubt that the Scheme has met a need in the social science community which is not met in other ways, in spite of the resistance in some quarters to large scale participation in the Scheme. There is not an overwhelming demand for the scheme from those who train UK social science postgraduates.

Two comments received bear repetition in relation to the value of the Scheme, and the need for its continuation. A member of the Advisory Committee with long experience of the Scheme and substantial input into ESRC planning for quantitative methods wrote to the Chief Executive of ESRC:

“On a different but related matter, I have just received a letter from Martin Bulmer about the decision to terminate ESRC's "Survey Link Scheme", inviting people to write to you about it. Just to say: that as one of the founders of the scheme with Aubrey McKennell and Martin, when we gained ESRC support for it over 20 years ago, and as a current member of the steering committee, I think it has served the social science research community very well. In many ways the scheme provides just the kind of contribution to capacity building for longitudinal research that you stressed in your talk in Oxford. Survey methods as operated by the top professional agencies, are missing from the average academics toolkit. To have the opportunity for exposure to them through the goodwill of the top agencies seems a pity to lose. I hope very much that there will be an opportunity to reconsider the decision and build upon, rather than sacrifice what was a valued programme.”

The Chief Executive of the leading professional survey agency outside government wrote in somewhat similar terms:

“With all the zeal of a recent convert I really do think that potential researchers have a lot to learn about where data comes from and how much trust to put in it. Seeing how our interviewers (and those of other reputable organisations) ensure that data is of high quality is an extremely important lesson (to give one example we recently found when carrying out a survey jointly with another organisation that our interviewers systematically elicited more information about past "criminal" behavior than did the other organisation's interviewers). An understanding among researchers that survey data (and indeed many categories of admin data) do not grow on trees or emerge spontaneously in perfect form and that questionnaires need to be carefully designed to work successfully in real-life situations is very valuable indeed. Much of the most valuable social data will continue to come from face-to-face surveys for years to come, despite advances in the use of admin data and the (slow) growth of web methodologies. So whatever the outcome of particular research proposals, I would argue strongly for the interview experience as an essential element in a rounded training for researchers and I am glad that you (and the ESRC) share this view.”

Since the RDI3 decision, ESRC has indicated their continuing support for a replacement for the Survey Link Scheme, to be included in the call for the Survey Resources Network which is expected to be published in January 2008. Notices to this effect have been placed on the Survey Link Scheme website, to indicate that it is likely to re-emerge in autumn 2008.

There remain a number of issues to be resolved in designing a replacement of the present scheme:

- a) What weight to give to the workshops and to the interviewer accompaniment. In our view, the referees of the RDI3 proposal were too optimistic about how far the interviewer accompaniment could be expanded.
- b) The practical problems of running this part of the Scheme are considerable, and partially account for its low take up. Postgraduates are not being pushed by their institutions to take part. Many who express initial interest do not follow through. The following comment from the placement administrator at a major survey company hits the nail on the head.
“The main problem is that the students are too busy to accompany our interviewers. I can understand this as most seem to be writing their dissertation. Most do not have transport which is sometimes a problem, although our interviewers are very good and do pick them up from stations. It is quite tricky for the students to be available when there is an interview arranged.” (October 2007)
- c) How could increased throughput of postgraduate social scientists in the interviewer accompaniment be achieved ?
- d) Should certain types of ESRC award holders, such as those receiving a stipend supplement for quantitative methods, be expected to participate in the Scheme as a matter of course ?

10 The SLS Advisory Group

The Scheme was fortunate in enjoying the informal advice afforded by members of the SLS “virtual” Advisory Committee over the period 2005-2007.

Its members were:

- Professor John Bynner, Institute of Education
- Professor Angela Dale, University of Manchester
- Professor David De Vaus, LaTrobe University, Melbourne
- Ms Karen Dunnell, National Statistician, Office for National Statistics
- Professor Jennifer Platt, University of Sussex
- Mr Roger Thomas, National Centre for Social Research.

We are indebted to this group of people strongly committed to the value of social survey research for their constructive input, and for assisting us in trying to bridge the gulf between UK academic social science and UK professional survey research.

Martin Bulmer

Director
 ESRC Survey Link Scheme
 January 2008

Appendix 1: Workshop Agenda example

ESRC Survey Link Scheme Workshops

AGENDA		QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, BELFAST 21 NOV 2007
10.30	Introduction	Tom Daly - Welcome, Purpose of Day and Format, Domestic arrangements
10.45	Question Bank	Julie Gibbs - What does it offer, how might researchers use it? Internet Link – interactive session using Qb material.
11.15	CAPI	Julie Gibbs – What are the advantages and disadvantages, examples and major users.
11.30	BLAISE	Tom Daly – Introduction to the program and its uses, practical development of a questionnaire; and input of responses.
12.00	Role of Interviewer	Interview guidance and rapport – NatCen video
13.00	Lunch	Lunch will be provided
13.30	Continuous Household Survey	Iain Bryson – Department of Finance and Personnel Northern Ireland. Background to the sample design, questionnaire content and use of different methodologies - self completion and card sort.
14.15	Questionnaire on CHS	Coverage of the CHS, the problems, the results and some consideration of the quality of data. Hands on practice using CHS questionnaire
15.00	Tea/coffee	
15.15	Continuous Household Survey	Continuation
16.15	Plenary	Any questions..... Expense forms and evaluation sheets
16.45	End of Day	

Appendix 2: SLS Publicity Materials

Bookmark:

<http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sls.htm>

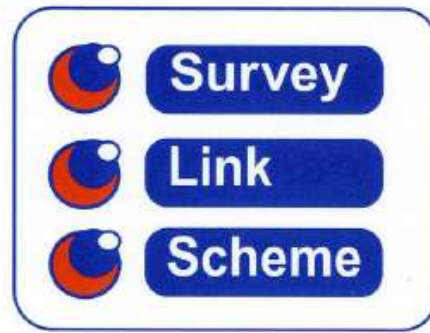
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<http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sls.htm>

<http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sls.htm>



Aimed at academic social scientists, social researchers, postgraduate students and teachers of research methodology.

Bridges the gap between academic and survey organisations including ONS, NatCen, NOP, BMRB.

- Demonstrates how professional social survey research is carried out via a FREE one day workshop, followed by an opportunity to observe data collection in the field.

See how the ESRC Question Bank can help you.

Introduces participants to CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing).

Further information and workshop dates online:

<http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sls.htm>

Leaflet: front and back cover

Contacts:

The Survey Link Scheme is run from the Sociology Department at the University of Surrey with three members of staff:

- Martin Bulmer, SLS Director
- Tom Daly, SLS Liaison Officer
- Jenny Rains, SLS Administrator



If you require further information or would like to reserve a place on one of the workshops please visit the website or contact Jenny Rains:

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The ESRC Survey Link Scheme



<http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sls.htm>



<http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sls.htm>

Leaflet: Middle inserts

About the Scheme:

- Provides a bridge between academics and the major survey organisations, such as ONS, NatCen, NOP, BMRB.
- Gives academic social scientists an insight into social survey research, carried out by national research organisations.
- Involves a one day workshop and an optional day with an interviewer in the field.
- Supported by the Training and Development Board of the ESRC.

Who it is aimed at?

- Academic social scientists, social researchers, postgraduate students and teachers of research methodology.

What does it do?

- Demonstrates how survey questionnaires are constructed.
- Shows CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) operating in a social survey environment.
- Gives a firsthand of view of how survey data is collected in practice.
- Helps qualitative as well as quantitative researchers by assisting them in the construction of their own interview guides and methods of data collection.

Workshops:

- Provide a briefing on the fieldwork procedures of a particular survey.
- Programme includes:
 - Introduction to survey interviewing in the field.
 - Guide to the ESRC Question Bank.
 - Introduction to CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing) using BLAISE software.
 - Guidance through the CAPI questionnaire of a particular survey by professional staff from the agency carrying out the fieldwork.
- Workshops throughout the UK are FREE, with reasonable travel costs paid.



Fieldwork:

- An opportunity to shadow a survey interviewer near your home base for a day.
- Observe how a survey interview is conducted in a respondent's home.

Workshop details and dates together with an application form can be found on the SLS website:

<http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sls.htm>

<http://qb.soc.surrey.ac.uk/sls.htm>

Appendix 3: Scheme Workshop Evaluation Form

11 ESRC Survey Link Scheme Workshops

11.1 WORKSHOP EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRE 11.2 Queen's University, Belfast 21st November 2007

Your reactions to the style, content and organisation of the course would be most useful in thinking of improvements for subsequent courses. Your comments are anonymous.

Please complete this form at the end of the day and return it to SLS Team before you leave.

11.3 GENERAL

11.4

Male / Female.....

MSc / PhD / Other.....

Occupation.....
(e.g. research student, academic researcher,
non-academic researcher etc)

I am an ESRC funded Postgraduate
 My post is funded by the ESRC

Academic background.....
(e.g. social science, science etc)

Field of research.....

Is your research: qualitative?..... quantitative?..... both?.....

How did you find out about the course?

Did you have all of the information you needed prior to the course? YES / NO
(e.g. timings, directions etc)

Ctd....

11.5 COURSE CONTENT

11.6

Overall, how interesting did you find the course content?	Very good []	[]	Fair []	[]	Not at all []
Was the course material well structured?	Very good []	[]	Fair []	[]	Not at all []
How much prior knowledge was assumed?	Too much []	[]	About right []	[]	Too little []
<p>If any, what changes would you make to the course content?</p> <p>.....</p> <p>.....</p>					

11.7 PRESENTATION

11.8

How would you rate the workshop for:					
Clarity of explanations	Very good []	[]	Fair []	[]	Not clear []
Opportunities to ask questions	Very good []	[]	About right []	[]	No opportunity []
Workshop Pack	Very good []	[]	About right []	[]	Insufficient []

Do you have any comments about the course presentation?

.....

11.9 OTHER

11.10

Have you used the following before? Please tick:

CAPI []

BLAISE []

QUESTION BANK []

Have you found this workshop useful for your own research? Yes [] No []

If yes, how will it affect your research?

.....

Were there any other aspects of the organisation of the workshop that you think could be improved?

Yes []

No []

If yes, please explain:

.....

Please tick which forms of publicity you think are most useful for potential participants:

- | | |
|--|-----|
| Direct mail | [] |
| Newsletters: | |
| ESRC Data Archive bulletin | [] |
| Survey Methods (National Centre for Social Research) | [] |
| Surrey Social Research Update | [] |
| Email lists | [] |
| Presentations by Liaison Officer | [] |
| Other, please specify | [] |

.....

Appendix 4: ESRC Regional Training Centres

University	Faculty/School
University of Bristol	School of Geographical Sciences
University of Edinburgh	School of Social and Political Studies (and Centre for Research on Families and Relationships)
University of Manchester	Department Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research
University of Plymouth	School of Sociology, Politics & Language
Cardiff University	QUALITI, School of Social Sciences
Flyde College, Lancaster University	Centre for Applied Statistics
University of Southampton	Statistical Sciences Research Institute
Stirling University	Applied Social Science
City University	Sociology Department
Queen's University, Belfast	Education Department

Appendix 5: Workshop Location and Survey Agencies and Organisations assisting at presentations

Date	Location	Survey	Organisation
21-Mar-05	University of Surrey	British Household Panel Study	Independent Consultant
29-Apr-05	University of Surrey	British Household Panel Study	ISER
10-Jun-05	University of Manchester	Health Survey for England	NatCen
22-June-05	Napier University	British Social Attitudes Survey	NatCen
23-June-05	Napier University	Scottish House Conditions Survey	ONS
21-Sep-05	Cardiff University	British Household Panel Study	ISER
5-Oct-05	University of Surrey	Labour Force Survey	ONS
11-Nov-05	University of Manchester	National Travel Survey	NatCen
10-Jan-06	City University	Health Survey for England	NatCen
28-Mar-06	University of Surrey	British Household Panel Study	ISER
8-May-06	Northumbria University	General Household Survey	ONS
29-Jun-06	Bristol University	Millennium Cohort Study	NatCen/CLS
21-Jul-06	University of Oxford	Family Resources Survey	ONS
22-Sep-06	University of York	Expenditure & Food Survey	ONS
20-Oct-06	University of Manchester	NatCen Families & Children Study	NatCen
22-Nov-06	Queen's University, Belfast	Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey	ARK
10-Jan-07	City University	Health Survey for England	NatCen
14-Feb-07	Edinburgh University	Labour Force Survey	ONS
21-Mar-07	Plymouth University	English Longitudinal Study of Ageing	NatCen
18-Apr-07	Leeds University	British Crime Survey	BMRB
16-May-07	University of Lancaster	General Household Survey	ONS
21-Jun-07	University of Stirling	Scottish Social Attitudes Survey	NatCen
04-Jul-07	University of Manchester	British Household Panel Study	ISER
07-Sep-07	Cardiff University	European Social Survey	BMRB
17-Oct-07	Southampton University	Expenditure & Food Survey	ONS
21-Nov-07	Queen's University, Belfast	Continuous Household Survey	NISRA