

# Learning Together

NCRM Highlights 2020-23

## About NCRM

The [National Centre for Research Methods](#) (NCRM) provides cutting-edge research methods training and capacity building across the UK.

The centre runs a diverse programme of courses, workshops and events throughout the year, covering a vast array of topics in a variety of interactive formats.

In addition to our training, we produce learning materials, host an extensive library of online resources, conduct research and support innovation in research methods.

Through these activities, NCRM aims to advance methodological practice in the social sciences and beyond, across all disciplines and sectors.

Our training and resources are designed for both academic and non-academic researchers, and cover core, intermediate and advanced methods.

NCRM is a partnership between three universities with international reputations in methodological research and training in the social sciences: the University of Southampton, The University of Manchester and the University of Edinburgh.

This core team is complemented by nine, strategically selected institutions from across the UK, which deliver and advise on training, and provide subject expertise diversity.

These nine centre partners are: Centre for Multilevel Modelling at the University of Bristol, Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex, National Centre for Social Research, Timescapes Archive at the University of Leeds, University College London, University of Exeter, University of Glasgow, University of Liverpool, and Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research and Data.

NCRM was established in 2004 and has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council through a number of phases. The current five-year funding phase runs between January 2020 and December 2024 and focuses on training and capacity building.



THE UNIVERSITY  
of EDINBURGH

# A note from our Director

NCRM's training and events reach thousands of researchers every year, equipping postgraduates, early-career researchers and experienced researchers with skills in core, intermediate, advanced and innovative methods.

Despite the many challenges posed to higher education in recent years, our centre has continued to maintain access to this much sought-after training.

I'm enormously proud of the work that NCRM and its centre partners have delivered amid these changing times, and I am delighted to be able to share some of our highlights in this publication.



We are now in the second half of our current five-year phase, which began in January 2020.

So far, we have attracted more than 7,000 participants to our courses and events, and NCRM's website and online resources have had close to one million users.

These researchers are from diverse sectors – from academia to healthcare – and represent all disciplines covered by our funder, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). Twenty per cent of participants are from outside the social sciences.

The high quality of our training is widely recognised and feedback from our training participants demonstrates how our activities are having wide-ranging impact.

Together with some impressive case studies, this feedback has given us insight into the ways that NCRM courses, creative events, methodological networks and our vast collection of free resources are helping researchers to develop their methods and enhance their research.

The activities shown in the following pages highlight our commitment to providing innovative research methods training in the social sciences and beyond.

As we look to the future, we will continue to respond to the needs of researchers and the changing demands of the research environment.

We have exciting initiatives and events planned – including the 2023 Research Methods e-Festival, our 20th anniversary celebrations in 2024, outputs from our Innovation Fora programme, the launch of new national networks and methodological collaborations – and we very much look forward to sharing these with you.

**Professor Gabriele Durrant**

*Director, National Centre for Research Methods*

*Professor of Social Statistics and Survey Methodology, University of Southampton*

# Online resources



The NCRM website hosts one of the largest collections of [research methods resources](#) – all freely available and easy to access.

Since 2020, our website has had close to one million unique users, with some learning resources viewed tens of thousands of times.

At the heart of this is our [EPrints library](#). This extensive repository has more than 3,000 publications, which range from guides and papers, to books, chapters and multimedia recordings.

The library is fully searchable and contains literature on a vast array of research methods topics, providing guidance for both learners and trainers.

Researchers can also search our growing selection of [online learning resources](#). These are packages of multimedia

guidance materials on key topics, all presented by expert trainers.

The NCRM website contains more than 50 of these resources, which include more than 140 video tutorials. More than half of these resources have been added over the past three years.



## 2,647,040

website views

Our website also features [podcasts](#) and [videos](#), which include presentations from our major events, interviews and webinar recordings.

All of our videos are also available to watch on our [YouTube channel](#), which now has more than 15,000 global subscribers. We host more than 360 videos, which together have been viewed over 1.5 million times.

# Training

NCRM and its centre partners offer a wide range of [training and capacity building activities](#) throughout the year, both online and in person.

At the core of these activities are our [short courses and workshops](#), which cover topics at introductory, intermediate and advanced levels.

Our programme of courses is complemented by large events, such as the NCRM Annual Lecture, MethodsCon and our Research Methods Festivals, which take place every two years. In 2021, we held the first online edition of the festival, which was hugely successful and offered more than 80 sessions to around 1,000 participants.

In collaboration with our centre partners, we run bootcamps, spring and autumn schools, online discussions and seminar series. Our searchable training database also features a broad selection of courses run by external providers.

With all of our activities, we aim to provide training for researchers working in any sector or field of study, covering quantitative, qualitative, digital, creative, visual, mixed and multimodal methods.

## 2020-2023 training highlights

**158** courses  
**3,260** participants



One in five participants from outside the social sciences



More than  
**4,000**  
event participants

Feedback from NCRM users:

“ As a practitioner of social media listening/ analytics over the last decade, this video inspired me to structure my own potential academic research proposal. ”

“ My knowledge has moved on and I am able to use that enriched knowledge in my teaching and supervision. ”

# Engaging the research community



Since 2020, NCRM has been executing an ambitious engagement strategy, one that focuses on developing networks and collaborations that enhance innovation and contribute to methodological interdisciplinarity.

Our aim is to support the research community in the UK and further afield. Through [an array of activities](#), we maintain, develop and explore relationships with a broad community of researchers

and organisations across many sectors, including ESRC research methods investments.

One example of this work is the establishment of a [training network for ESRC-funded doctoral training partnerships](#). Through this group, we share resources and insight and respond to postgraduate researchers' training needs.

We have also launched several [methodological](#)

[special interest groups](#), which connect researchers with shared interests. These include a group focusing on [collaborative and participatory methods](#), and another exploring [video interviewing](#).

## FIVE

networks focused on data, methods and training

In another project, we collaborated with the Dementia Researcher network to create a new podcast, [Methods Matter](#). Across two series, experts from our centre partners have provided expertise on a huge range of topics.

Elsewhere, NCRM ran [MethodsCon](#), a two-day event that focused on methods in health and social science research.

We have also supported scholars to deliver events in our successful [Innovation](#)

[Fora programme](#). These events see experts come together to discuss ways of advancing research methods of different types.

So far, they have explored topics such as the study of elites and decolonial research methods, attracting thousands of participants from around the world. Many more are planned, including a number organised jointly with UKRI Future Leaders Fellows.

Exciting new projects also include the creation of short

life working groups with researchers in different fields.

One group will involve researchers in the voluntary and charity sector, while another will see us collaborating with postgraduate researchers at ESRC-funded doctoral training partnerships who are working in the area of health and wellbeing, plus pathway leads at the partnerships.



Methodological  
Special Interest Groups  
**LAUNCHED**

## How to engage with NCRM

**NCRM is open to new ideas for collaboration and ways we can support you, a team within your organisation or a network in a particular field of study.**

We have funding available to help you develop methodologies through our Innovation Fora programme. You can also join an existing NCRM network or launch a methodological special interest group.

Researchers are welcome to pitch a spring, summer or autumn school on new methodological developments. And you can

contribute to or attend our major events, such as our Research Methods Festivals.

We welcome insights on emerging training needs and invite you to share your methods expertise by working with us as a trainer, developing a course or online resource or writing a blog post for our website.

If you'd like us to deliver training for you, we can arrange bespoke courses for any organisation, from government departments and NHS trusts, to research centres, charities and private companies.

To get in touch, email us on [info@ncrm.ac.uk](mailto:info@ncrm.ac.uk). You can also [subscribe to our monthly newsletter](#), [follow us on social media](#) or visit our website: [www.ncrm.ac.uk](http://www.ncrm.ac.uk).

# Research and insight



NCRM runs targeted programmes of methodological and pedagogical [research](#), and gathers insight on new challenges and opportunities.

We also collaborate with experts on new publications, videos and other media, providing excellent educational materials and introductions to innovative practices. Here are some of our recent highlights.

Our ongoing work includes [pedagogical research](#), which explores approaches to the teaching and learning of social research methods.

The most recent outcome of this work was a systematic review of pedagogic approaches and strategies evident in recent literature (2014–2020) on teaching social science research.

The [review](#) indicates that there is a growing

pedagogical culture in research methods education, with much to be learned from the expanding body of close-to-practice research.

Another of our initiatives is [Changing Research Practices](#), which was set up to explore how to undertake social science research in the context of COVID-19.

This series of connected projects, in collaboration with participating researchers, has produced a trove of



helpful online materials for researchers, including nine guides on adapting methods of different types, plus reading lists and evidence reviews.

Our team also ran many workshops and sessions at conferences. Together, these activities are making NCRM a hub for information on methods in the pandemic and ongoing uncertainty.

We established the [Survey Data Collection Network](#) (SDC-Net) to connect academic and non-academic organisations involved in the design and co-ordination of social surveys.

The aims of this network were to gather and share information about how the COVID-19 pandemic affected data collection practices and to better understand the current and future survey data collection landscape.

## Collections, books and other publications

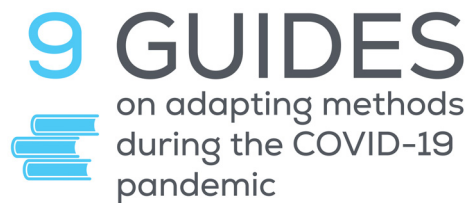
As part of our focus on methodological innovation, we recently published a special collection on investigative methods.

This publication, [Investigative Methods: An NCRM Innovation Collection](#), brings together investigators from different disciplines and sectors to capture the breadth, scope and relevance of these contemporary approaches to knowledge production.

Methods covered by the collection include open-source investigation, the creation and use of digital archives, the study of video and audio recordings, and analysis of large text corpora.

Through 10 case studies, the publication demonstrates how creative investigative

The network's members included representatives from governments, universities and market research organisations.



The [NCRM website](#) hosts publications from these projects, as well as a wealth of information about our research from the past two funding phases.

These projects comprise a variety of investigations, from the evaluation of participatory methods to the exploration of disclosure risk in linked population data.

practices offer powerful contributions to research repertoires in the social sciences.

Other collections include [a set of guidance papers](#) on the ethics of conducting research with children, which was produced by the University of Liverpool.

NCRM also produces [books with Bloomsbury](#), offering practical introductions to specific topics across the full range of social science research methods. And we run a website called [ReStore](#), which is a repository for research methods websites funded by ESRC.

# Impact

NCRM's ultimate aims are to improve the skills of researchers, to advance methodological practice and, in the wider sense, to support research that has economic, societal, policy or cultural benefit.

As part of a new strategic impact framework, we carried out a comprehensive assessment of our impact with a user survey and by collecting impact case studies.

Our findings indicate that NCRM training is having both short-term and long-term impacts.

In a survey of people who had attended NCRM events since January 2020, two thirds of respondents said that they had already used their new or improved skills. And of these, 63 per cent had used their learning on research projects across sectors.

Below are some examples of the impacts described by participants who have attended our courses and events.

As we look ahead, we will continue to engage with our users to deliver courses and resources that meet their needs.

## Examples of impact

### Applying new skills

Many of our participants are now applying newly learnt skills to their research.

In our survey, a voluntary sector researcher described using their new methods skills to ensure evaluations of health and social care interventions are more robust, enabling service improvement within their organisation.

A PhD student told us how they are using new methods to research how Eastern European women living in the UK seek help when experiencing domestic abuse.

And a researcher for a large NHS acute trust explained that they are using their skills to inform the design of an electronic personal health record for sick children and their parents.

### Launching new research projects

We have had many responses from participants on how they are already applying skills in designing a funding bid or research proposal.

An example was provided in a case study by researchers at the Canadian non-government organisation MediaSmarts, who attended a creative methods course. They used insights from the training in a successful funding bid to develop, deliver and evaluate a national digital literacy programme for survivors of family violence living in shelters or transitional housing.

In another case study, trainers on a programming course reported that participants had begun working together on collaborative projects.

## Long-term impacts

We heard from former NCRM grant holders, who continue to be involved with the centre. The researchers provided examples of longer-term impacts from ongoing work.

They included Dr Jose Pina-Sánchez, of the University of Leeds, who used new methods to enhance the measurement of sentence severity to ensure the accuracy of sentencing guidelines in England and Wales.

Another researcher, Dr Helen Kara, was invited to use her enhanced knowledge of ethics to work with the European Commission on a number of projects, including the creation of a new ethics framework for non-medical researchers.



“

The course was

**EXCELLENT**

– far exceeded expectations.

”

*Course participant*



“

The workshops provided space and structure to think through how I might re-orientate my ongoing research and

**ADAPT MY METHODS**

in the face of changing circumstances.

”

*Course participant*

## Support during the pandemic

Work undertaken by NCRM during the COVID-19 pandemic had many impacts.

The Changing Research Practices projects, for example, provided a community for those aiming to find alternative research pathways during the height of the pandemic.

Serena Saligari, a PhD student, explained that the disruption had made her question whether she could continue with her work, but NCRM's initiative made her aware of alternative research methods, prompted her to reconsider the ethics of her research design and enabled her to progress her research with confidence.



comprehensive training  
in research methods

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