



LARIA NEWS

supporting local researchers in the public sector

Contents

Contents	Page
LARIA Conference 2007 - University of Lancaster	1
From the Chair - Andy Davis	7
Research and Consultation at Blackburn with Darwen BC	8
Mystery Shopping in Wakefield	10
LARIA Excellence in Research Award 2007	12
Job Opportunity	13
UK Statistical Disclosure Control Policy for 2011 Census Output	14
Road Safety Messages - A Consultation with Local Residents	16
Exploring Online Research Methods	18
Web-based Council Budget Consultation	20
The Case of the Vanishing Statistics	22
Review - The Use Made of Official Statistics	23
LARIA Annual General Meeting 2007	24
ALGIS in LARIA Update	25
Consultation: Some Novel & Imaginative Approaches	26
R & I News	28
LARIA People	32
Noticeboard	34
Guide for Contributors	35
Next Issue	35
Just the Job	35

This edition was produced by Anne Cunningham, Alan Holcroft, Spencer Payne, Graham Smith, Richard Stevens, Joy Thompson, Mike Towers, John Wicks.

LARIA Conference 2007 – University of Lancaster

LARIA's Annual Conference was held at the University of Lancaster from 27 to 29 March. The theme of this year's conference was 'Going local: the community dimension'.

Day One – Tuesday 27 March

What is a sustainable community and what skills and knowledge do we need to create and maintain them? The opening address was prepared by Gill Taylor, Chief Executive of the Academy of Sustainable Communities (ASC). Unfortunately a cancelled flight left Gill stranded in Spain, so her colleague **Laura Wren** ably stepped into her shoes.



Laura Wren

The ASC has carried out research into the skills required to ensure regeneration and new development can achieve sustainability. The research unearthed a tremendous shortfall of skills in a wide span of professions, with a high percentage of land-use planners, for example, due to retire shortly. The ASC is based in Leeds and is developing expertise in how to link social, economic and environmental programmes – hopefully avoiding the mistakes of the past.

Following the Conference announcements, delegates had the choice of three streams.

Stream 1

Martin Robson, Research Officer for the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, led delegates through the complex segmentation and customer profiling work that has proved an integral part of the design of the Customer Access Strategy for the borough. Adapting approaches more often used in consumer research, the service users of the borough were profiled to create a bespoke MOSAIC. This gave insight into the best configuration of the council's business units to fit likely patterns of use and preferences for different access channels such as telephone and online. Ultimately the work resulted in the creation of two new business units to better meet the needs of residents.

The **GIS Showcase** which followed consisted of three very different sessions, each describing ways in which GIS was helping with service delivery.

- **Delivering Neighbourhood Community Safety Data to the Public.** This presentation was given by **Melanie Greenslade** from Lancashire County Council, who described the 'Lancashire MADE Public' microsite, incorporating the GIS package MARIO for visual interpretation of the data. Reasons for its development, barriers to development, who uses the site and the success of the initiative were all discussed.
- **Using GIS to Deliver Intelligence to the Community.** **Jane Silvester** from Rochdale MBC talked about Stats and Maps, which is a shared community intelligence website that makes data available to partners and residents. The project provides extensive support to all users through drop-in workshops in the community and was identified as best practice by the CPA.
- **The Application of Sub-Regional and Local GIS to Measure Neighbourhood Change.** The final session was presented by **Michael Lloyd** from Mott MacDonald and **Joe Bickerton** from Wirral MBC. This provided a critical assessment of both local and sub-regional applications of GIS in neighbourhood monitoring and covered examples of both success and failure. It recognised that trial and error is often a pre-requisite in developing logical and user-friendly performance monitoring systems.

Stream 2

For the first presentation in this stream, **Lizzie Horton** and **Stephanie Carnachan** of Continental Research spoke on 'Conducting Research into Sensitive Issues', and presented the findings of research interviews relating to the London Borough of Newham's domestic violence strategy. They carried out a total of 18 one-hour in-depth interviews with a mix of women in terms of situation, service usage and ethnic origin. The research was sensitively conducted and provided valuable information on the circumstances leading to domestic violence, triggers for seeking help, the barriers to doing so, and the impact of the assistance provided.

Diane Tinklin from Nottinghamshire County Council and **Janet Lang** from Lang Research Associates presented their work for Nottinghamshire's Children's Centres, on 'Community Empowerment through Community Consultation'.

LARIA Conference 2007 – University of Lancaster cont...

Grounded in the Every Child Matters outcomes, the project captured the views of local residents and fully engaged them in making the programme deliver against need at a local level. It was particularly inspiring to see how the consultation had empowered residents to become more involved, take an active role in forums, and even develop new career directions.



Diane Tinklin



Janet Lang

Stream 3

A joint presentation by **David Pottruff** from the Audit Commission and **Tom Whiting** from the London Borough of Harrow looked at the Performance Management Measurement and Information (PMMI) Project and Harrow's improvement journey.

David reported how a strategic alliance between the Audit Commission and the Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) focused on supporting councils to help improve their services. The action research element of the project took place over a nine-month period and involved eight councils and four 'improvement challenge days'. During these challenge days, local authorities worked with IDeA and Audit Commission staff to explore ways to accomplish performance management improvement.



David Pottruff



Tom Whiting

Tom then spoke about how in Harrow the focus of performance management has shifted from merely measuring and reporting performance to using information to effectively manage performance. He also warned that IT training can present a major

challenge and needs to be part of the overall process. Tom then showed some examples of how Harrow was able to map operational data into a social context using geographic information systems.

A hands-on workshop session that really did achieve what was on the tin! **Laurie Brennan** (Pendle Borough Council) and **Scott Butterfield** (Hyndburn Borough Council) presented a workshop entitled 'E-Consultation – a Hands-On Approach'.



Laurie Brennan



Scott Butterfield

They demonstrated a range of electronic techniques for collecting data, outlining the advantages and disadvantages of Tablet PCs, Interactive Handsets, Instant Messaging, SMS Texting and Augmented Reality Software, as well as looking at likely future methods. They showed how the use of electronic research methods in online surveying is increasing as costs reduce and technology becomes available, but also issued warnings about limitations concerning training, software compatibility, method bias and response rates. So popular did the workshop prove that it was repeated twice the following day!



LARIA Chair Jill Tuffnell presents the LARIA Excellence in Research Award to Wakefield Council

The afternoon's business complete, the opening day proceeded with a wine reception followed by the Conference Dinner. After the meal, Joel Abbey from sponsors CACI Ltd looked on as the LARIA Excellence in Research Award 2006 was presented to Shelley

LARIA Conference 2007 – University of Lancaster cont...

Law and Monika Bugaj of Wakefield Council for their winning Mystery Shopping Programme.

Day Two – Wednesday 28 March

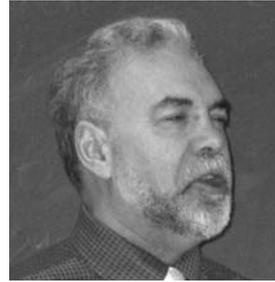
The day opened with an insightful analysis from **Peter Hutton** of Brand Energy Research on the theme of 'Understanding the Brand in Local Government'. Peter emphasised the modern thinking that branding should create a specific, positive picture of the organisation to drive expectations, which must then be delivered. He identified the components of a council brand, and the influences that can be managed to make it successful. His conclusion from the Local Government White Paper, with its emphasis on place-shaping, is that leading edge councils should be focusing on branding the place rather than the local authority.

There was then a choice of two options, one of which was the **showcase** session - a lively and interesting slot which highlighted three diverse and interesting projects in short bite-size chunks.

- The session kicked off with **Tim Carpenter** who bravely demonstrated online the impressive East Sussex in Figures site (www.eastsussexinfigures.org.uk), giving us an overview of how core information can be held on a single user-friendly site.
- **Helen Carlin** then spoke about how social marketing techniques, in particular MOSAIC data, can be used to target and profile current and potential users of children's centres and how this method could be transferred to other services to better understand our customers.
- The session finished with **Judy Parry** giving us a really important reminder that if we use focus groups to gain qualitative feedback we need to be aware of participants' needs, and tailor venues and methods to meet their requirements sensitively.

Meanwhile **Ian White** of ONS and **Neil Storer** from the London Borough of Camden were updating delegates on the preparatory work for the 2011 Census.

Ian reflected on the lessons learned from the 2001 Census and how these had helped to shape the strategic aims for 2011. He explained the aims and



Ian White



Neil Storer

design of the Census Test being undertaken in May this year, and more general developments in the steady progress towards the 2011 Census. Neil presented details of why Camden was chosen as a test area, and how it is working in partnership with ONS on planning the Test enumeration.



Alison Miller



Graham Smith

After the break, there was a three-way choice. **Alison Miller** from the LGA and **Graham Smith** from the Audit Commission provided a timely overview of the changing performance information requirements for local government. Key milestones for the future include the implementation of the new LAA framework, the launch of the 200 national indicators and data collection mechanism, and the first Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA). Details of the framework are still being finalised, and Alison and Graham encouraged feedback and outlined how local authorities can get involved in shaping it.



Paul Norman

Paul Norman from Leeds University gave a stimulating insight into the practicalities of projecting small area populations by ethnic group.

Finding the best trade-off between reliability and demographic detail involves a raft of decisions: how small an area to project for; how

LARIA Conference 2007 – University of Lancaster cont...

many ethnic groups to define; whether to constrain to a larger area projection; whether to use age-specific rates; and whether to impose a borough rate when the local population falls below a certain threshold. Paul showed how to systematically test out combinations of options, weigh up the pros and cons of each, and arrive at a workable strategy.

Last but not least, **Laurie Brennan** and **Scott Butterfield** repeated their workshop 'E-Consultation – a Hands-On Approach' twice more as a result of popular demand.

In the afternoon, delegates came together to hear firstly about Wakefield Council's award-winning Mystery Shopping Programme (see p10). **Shelley Law** and **Monika Bugaj** gave an excellent overview of the programme, including some video footage. They outlined the key stages of undertaking mystery shopping, particularly around communicating with staff about the research, and noted the different expectations of citizen and professional mystery shoppers. Shelley and Monika rounded off their presentation by detailing the findings from their research and the actions that have impacted on policy and practice.

In May 2006 Wolverhampton City Council convened a Citizens' Jury to enable local people actively to engage in the Lyons debate on the future of local government. **Nick Drew** and **Catriona Cameron** described how the Jury had been convened, the issues and evidence that it considered, and the findings emerging from it after two and a half days of working together. They also outlined how the Council and its strategic partners have used the numerous outcomes from the Jury. **Val Smith**, who was a member of the Jury, spoke about his experience of the process, and also how his understanding of the role of local government had changed as a result.

After the **LARIA Annual General Meeting** (of which more on p24), around 40 delegates enjoyed a visit to **Infolab21**. A series of compelling presentations on the work of this campus-based award-winning centre of excellence for ICT research was followed by a tour of the building.

Before dinner, delegates had the opportunity of joining one of five informal **discussion groups**. The well-attended first group, on **Experiences in**



Nick Drew



Catriona Cameron



Val Smith

commissioning research, was enlivened by the participation of representatives of both 'sides' - the consultants, frustrated by unrealistic briefs and clients who change their minds, and the clients themselves, who may have to deal with uncontrollable consultants and unrealistic manager expectations! There was a consensus that effective commissioned research requires:-

- Agreement about what is required and by when
- Avoidance of time-wasting
- Realistic budgets
- Appropriate skills and knowledge
- Trust, understanding and regular communication on progress
- A willingness to learn as the research evolves

The second group discussed the pros and cons of a number of **Census analysis and demographic projection packages**, including among others SASPAC, Supertable, POPGROUP, the Chelmer model and several in-house models. Other data sources including MIMAS and NOMIS were mentioned in this context.

About 25-30 delegates attended the third group, on **'Ensuring consultation is fully valued'**, keen to know how their peers achieve this in their organisations. The discussion was very wide-ranging, and top tips included:-

- Setting minimum standards and procuring high-quality work

LARIA Conference 2007 – University of Lancaster cont...

- Arranging for large pieces of work to be quality assured
- Optimising knowledge through training, seminars, knowledge exchanges, and local and national networks like LARIA
- Developing a strategic focus and finding allies within the organisation
- Disseminating the results and impact of research by a variety of means
- Ensuring that results are diagnostic rather than merely descriptive

More chairs had to be brought in to the fourth group to cater for the large number of delegates keen to explore possible impacts of the **Strong and Prosperous Communities White Paper**. The discussion ranged from those that feel that research and consultation will not change much in their authority to others seeing a potential skills gap if researchers are tasked with leading community capacity building in the future. With both the LGA and Audit Commission in attendance, there was informed debate and an emerging view that LARIA members have an opportunity to shape a strong role for research and consultation to support the ambitions of the White Paper.

In the final group on **Experiences in managing research partnerships**, discussion focused on experiences of involving a wide range of partners in research and consultation activities. These included joint-budget issues, ways to involve key partners, managing research priorities and demands, and sharing ideas around partnership-based research. The group also discussed creating and co-ordinating data sharing groups and enforcing consistent metadata guidelines. This included a short demonstration of Elevate East Lancashire's Local Intelligence System (LIS).

Day Three – Thursday 29 March

On the final day there was a choice of two streams.



Kath Beveridge

Stream 1

Kath Beveridge of Aberdeen City Council provided a stimulating talk on the development of community planning in Aberdeen.

Her wide-ranging presentation traced the history of



Melanie Carr

Stream 2

Meanwhile in Stream 2, delegates heard first from **Melanie Carr**, Evaluation Strategy Manager at the New Heart for Heywood NDC Partnership.

Melanie gave a very thorough and detailed presentation on

community planning and the extensive investment in building partnerships across areas and organisations, public and private. Aberdeen City Council has been a trail-blazer in the field, and introduced on a voluntary basis the approach which is now statutory in Scotland. Much has been achieved in a city which has experienced the pressures of growth for many years, with true community involvement at the local level. The current focus is on regeneration, within a strong performance measurement framework.

Mike Franks introduced us briefly to the neighbourhoods of Oldham in a local and regional context, and described the development of the Neighbourhood Wellbeing Index for Oldham. This makes regular use of operational information systems to measure changing conditions, serving as an early warning system within neighbourhoods and raising questions about the reasons for change. The index is still being developed and will feed into a community cohesion strategy. Mike concluded that neighbourhoods will benefit from consistent and reliable datasets that can identify areas of greatest need and help service delivery respond to community demands.

Finally in this stream, **Judy Parry** of Cheshire County Council and **Bron Kerrigan** of Cheshire Community Council spoke about the development of Parish Plans in Cheshire. Jude explained that the County Council's support for Parish Plans was founded in a general concern for quality of life and social cohesion in rural areas. Three Rural PSA measures were described, all of which had shown improvement. Bron outlined the experience of one parish, where the Parish Plan initiative had led to a number of 'soft' results such as improved communication, some 'hard' results such as a homewatch scheme, and some future projects like planned bus shelters renovations. She further outlined the general support network available in Cheshire.

LARIA Conference 2007 – University of Lancaster cont...

'Evaluation in Practice', illustrated with specific practical examples. She concluded that the partnership had moved a long way towards embedding learning in its day-to-day operations, which was beginning to have a real impact on the development and delivery of its programme. In terms of developing the White Paper's 'responsive services and empowered communities', evaluation was seen as a tool both for resident participation and for holding services to account. Melanie posed the questions of how capacity can be developed and whether mainstream organisations need to do more.



Anne Heaven



Anisha Panchbhaya

Anne Heaven of QA Research and **Anisha Panchbhaya** then gave a practical "how-to" session on recruiting, training and supporting peer researchers based on their experience of a peer research scheme run by Sure Start Highfields in Leicester.

Anisha, who is herself a peer researcher for the project, also outlined the added value of using this approach as a way of building the confidence and capacity of local women. Being involved in peer research has led to job opportunities for some of the volunteer researchers and the City Council has shown interest in using the skills of the peer researchers for future collaborative projects.

Lastly in Stream 2, **Susan Hampshaw** and **Faye Dunbavan** from Doncaster PCT described their experiences of conducting collaborative evaluation



Susan Hampshaw



Faye Dunbavan

with local residents from an NDC area in Doncaster. The process involved a great deal of commitment on the part of the lay evaluators and relied heavily on support from the NDC Evaluation Unit. Susan explained why a collaborative evaluation model was most appropriate for them, and why full control of evaluation by service users with a programme of lay inspections may not always be the most practical option, despite being (in theory) the most empowering one for local people.

To conclude the day, and bringing a fitting end to the 2007 Conference, the streams merged for a final plenary session from **Tony Bovaird**. Newly returned to INLOGOV at the University of Birmingham as Professor of Public Management and Policy, Tony spoke on the challenges facing local government researchers – and reminded the 'grey heads' in the audience that he had been involved in developing LARIA in its early days! He went on to provide the conference with a really stimulating presentation – food for thought to energise all local researchers on their return to the day job! The challenges are many – to be heard, to take on the wider 'local area' issues, not just local government, and to pick issues where there is a need for research and a likely 'win'. Local researchers have more freedom to act than many professions; they can be pro-active and stimulate debate about what makes a difference. Above all – the challenge is to create a more influential role; we have opportunities not open to others.



Tony Bovaird

This summary was collated by Ian Coldicott (Norfolk County Council) from notes provided by the chairs and facilitators of the various sessions.

Next year's Conference will be held at the University of Nottingham, 1-3 April 2008.

From the Chair – Andy Davis



Andy Davis

Welcome to this edition of LariaNews, and my first as Chair.

I'd like to start by thanking Jill Tuffnell for all of her hard work as Chair over the past twelve months. It really has been a busy year for LARIA, which was brought home to me as Jill presented her Chair's report to the LARIA AGM at Lancaster. The wide range of activities that LARIA has been involved with over the past year is extremely impressive. All of this at the same time as the organisation has started to implement the Action Plan drawn up during an Away Day for Council and Activity Group members last June. So, thank you Jill, and best wishes for the future.

If you were able to attend this year's Conference at Lancaster University I hope that you found it as enjoyable, thought-provoking and interesting as I did. There were some excellent presentations, and slides from all the sessions can be found on the LARIA website (www.laria.gov.uk).

One of my personal highlights from the Conference was hearing from the winners of the LARIA Excellence in Research Award. I know that the decision over choosing a winner for the Award this year was particularly

tough, as there were such a large number of exceptionally high quality projects submitted. It really demonstrates the scale of innovative, ground-breaking and exciting research projects taking place amongst LARIA members. It's also worth remembering that research projects that you are currently working on could be picking up the Award next year at Nottingham! See p12 for details of how to enter.

One final thought. I've attended numerous LARIA Conferences and Events since I joined local government, and would usually find myself reflecting after these events that I really should get more involved in LARIA. Of course, on getting back to the office, and getting back into the swing of work, those thoughts were never progressed. The day job very quickly took over again.

That was until I actually decided to do something about it, and volunteer to get involved. For the past year, that has been as part of LARIA's Marketing & Promotions Activity Group and also contributing to the website development project team. And now as Chair!

So I would encourage you that if you would like to get involved and help in some way, please do come forward. There are plenty of areas where we need additional help and support, you get the chance to meet researchers from other local authorities and elsewhere in the public sector, you will be contributing to the continued success of LARIA, and it can form part of your own professional development.

See you next time.

Andy Davis

Research and Consultation at Blackburn with Darwen BC

By Sarah Henry

Introduction

Blackburn with Darwen is one of two unitary councils in Lancashire. Along with Blackpool, it received unitary status in 1998. The borough borders Bolton metropolitan borough and the Lancashire districts of Chorley, Preston and Ribble Valley. In addition to the urban town of Blackburn and the market town of Darwen, the borough is home to rural villages and open moorland.



Corporate Research Team at Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Elise Carroll, Peter Little, Ann Morris, Imran Akuji, Sarah Henry, Donna Thomas (front)

Historically, the borough's employment has been manufacturing based. Although employment in this sector is declining, the proportion of people employed in manufacturing remains greater than the national average. We are a small authority with around 140,200 residents, 30% of whom are under the age of 20. The borough also has a relatively large number of Indian and Pakistani heritage residents, making up around a fifth of its population.

Research, information and consultation

The council has a central research function based in the Policy Department and in addition, a number of departmental sections involved with research, information or consultation. These include Children's Services, Housing Strategy, Economic Regeneration and Culture, and Leisure and Sport. Colleagues from the various teams keep in touch on key issues via the multi-agency Research Task Group, which meets periodically, through other networks, and electronically via the intranet and e-mail.

The corporate research team is headed by Sarah Henry, and has two distinct sections. Part of the team focuses on undertaking and commissioning a range of research and consultation projects and providing information to colleagues, councillors and the public. The other, led by Peter Little, focuses on engagement and participation work with children and young people. Together the team has a wide range of quantitative and qualitative research knowledge and a range of research, analysis and engagement experience.

Survey research

The work undertaken by the team is diverse. Survey research is a key part of this, and in addition to statutory surveys, the research team manages a number of other surveys, including the biennial staff survey. This is a self completion postal survey sent out to all non-teaching, permanent and fixed term staff. It focuses on issues such as satisfaction with the Council as an employer, views on management and senior management, internal communications, training and development and employees' health. Results of the survey have helped the council develop the new People Strategy and have resulted in the creation of a quarterly employee newsletter, Team Talk, which is circulated to all non-teaching staff with their pay slips.

The team co-ordinates Blackburn with Darwen's citizens' panel, which is run as a telephone survey. The change in methodology was made four years ago because younger people and people from Asian heritage background were under-represented when using the postal survey methodology. The citizens' panel is run periodically and has covered topics such as community cohesion, the Council's website, the Council's newspaper and other communications, parks and litter and cleanliness.

Health-related work

In addition to the survey work, the team has been working in partnership with the local Primary Care Trust. Examples of this partnership working include

Research and Consultation at Blackburn with Darwen BC cont...

the additional reporting and statistical analysis of data for the borough's child growth study. This work feeds directly into the multi-agency task group which is working to develop and implement interventions to tackle levels of obesity among the borough's children.

In order to better understand other public health issues such as teenage pregnancy, Elise Carroll has been working on a project to map teenage maternities in the borough. At the outset of this project members of the corporate research team and the Health Partnerships Manager (a joint appointment with the council and the PCT) worked with academics at a local university to set thresholds for mapping the data, in order to balance issues of confidentiality but yet enable the data to be analysed at small areas. The maternities data was mapped to small areas, and whilst the report is confidential, it provided senior practitioners with a more sophisticated analysis from which to develop services.

Children and young people

The team has also been involved with a 'design experiment' project, in conjunction with Manchester University who have been developing this new intensive form of research into innovations in the public sector. Working in the Darwen area of the borough, the project aims to co-ordinate and develop work with young people and families in order to prevent persistent and prolific offending.

The research is examining the impact of three projects on behaviour. One of the projects, which is being co-ordinated by the Corporate Research Team, involves working with a group of young people in the area to set up a Youth Bank. A Youth Bank is a source of funds for projects or activities for young people, which is distributed by young people (www.youthbank.org.uk). The research will investigate if the ability to make decisions, take responsibility and be accountable makes a difference to how the young people feel about their community and the role they play in it.

In developing the Children and Young People's Plan, Peter Little ran a large scale consultation aimed at enabling every young person in the borough, up to age 19, to have a say about key issues affecting them. The consultation took the form of a questionnaire with open ended questions and space for the child or young person to draw a picture of

how things can be improved for them. There were a number of prizes for the best pictures. Following on from the questionnaire, respondents were invited to a 'little chat' with councillors and senior council officers, in which they could give their views on issues in the Children and Young People's Plan. In addition to developing the plan, the results of these consultations were used in service planning at the council, for example in transport planning.

Into the future

Corporate research aims to strengthen its links with the Primary Care Trust, building on the current partnership and acknowledging the importance of public health issues on the work the council delivers. The engagement work with children and young people will also continue and develop, with the Building Schools for The Future and 14 to 19 curriculum development work. Strengthening the skills of practitioners in consultation, engagement and participation is a priority if the council is to rise to the challenges set by the government in the White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities'.

The team has always believed that engaging with national agencies and the government is key to ensuring the right research is carried out at the right time. Therefore, the council participates in initiatives such as the Audit Commission's Area Profiles, the LGA's research into customer satisfaction and DCLG's Lifting the Burdens Task Force. We believe that local government research should lead the way in understanding what people want in their own area.

For further information please contact:-

Sarah Henry, Corporate Research Manager on 01254 585693 or by e-mail at sarah.henry@blackburn.gov.uk

Elise Carroll, Research and Information Officer on 01254 585693 or at elise.carroll@blackburn.gov.uk

Peter Little, Engaging Children and Young People Policy Officer on 01254 585206 or at p.little@blackburn.gov.uk

Mystery Shopping in Wakefield - Winner of LARIA Excellence in Research Award 2006

By Shelley Law

Wakefield Council's Mystery Shopping Programme was designed to give a clear picture of citizen experiences when using Council services and to test how far 'excellent customer service' was the reality in Wakefield.



Mystery Shopping found consistently good customer service at Wakefield's call centre.

Shopping expedition

In 2005 an independent research agency was selected to conduct the fieldwork for the programme, carrying out 174 'shops' across six services. To ensure we were evaluating true customer experiences we used a mix of professional mystery shoppers and Wakefield citizens to carry out the fieldwork. This approach had a number of benefits:

1. Training citizens to carry out the shops helped improve the skills base of priority groups within the community as part of the Council's commitment to investing in people.
2. Including citizens from priority groups (people with both learning and physical disabilities, older and younger people and people from black and minority ethnic backgrounds) helped establish a good demographic profile of shoppers and helped us see whether people from minority groups received different levels of service.
3. The professional shoppers acted as a control sample against which we could check the work of the citizen shoppers for quality assurance purposes.

On the record

To ensure that findings were robust enough on which to base service improvement, the programme needed to provide an objective as well as the usual subjective assessment of service.

For this reason all shoppers, including our residents, recorded all the shops undertaken (audio for telephone and video for face to face). These recordings were then objectively reviewed when analysing findings.

This approach caused some concern amongst employees, particularly those on the 'front line' of customer service who worried whether it would have data protection and freedom of information implications. By working closely with our legal and democratic services and with the Market Research Society, we were able to answer all of the queries we received and retain the confidence of those with concerns. Also, by focusing on the positive aspects of recording (sharing good practice and recognising good performance), we were able to engage employees with the process in a more positive way.

Comparison shopping

To ensure that the programme was a piece of active research, services were shopped across two waves, six months apart. The second wave, following feedback of the findings to management and the employees shopped, was to check whether identified areas for improvement and good practice had been addressed or rolled out. What we found, perhaps not surprisingly, was that in the areas where recommendations had been addressed the experience received by the shopper in the second wave had improved.

We also wanted to understand how our performance compared with 'excellent' rated councils across the country and to judge what actions were needed to gain an 'excellent' rating. To ensure a fair comparison the same shoppers were used to carry out telephone shops in our authority and 16 'excellent' authorities across the country offering similar services to our own.

Communicate, communicate

Communication to employees and citizens was central to the programme's success. Between waves we reported the findings and recommendations for improvement to employees and managers in those

Mystery Shopping in Wakefield cont...

areas shopped. After wave two, teams and managers were approached again with details of how they had improved and what more there was to do.

Findings were also communicated to the wider employee network using the employee newsletter and the intranet. In addition a 'Customerfirst' team has been set up within the Council to instill the recommendations into teams who have not yet been mystery shopped. Citizens were given details and findings via the Council's newspaper 'The Citizen' and its website.

Feeling the benefit

From the 2005/2006 Programme alone, Mystery Shopping has had a positive impact on citizens, employees and on Wakefield Council as an organisation.

Citizens are benefiting from improved services, with shoppers in the second wave saying the amount of queries resolved at first contact and the number of employees seen to be 'going the extra mile' had risen. Carrying out mystery shops has also given citizens a chance to use and judge Council services which they may not have known about or used before.

Employees, both in the services shopped and throughout the Council, have also benefited from the programme. Findings from both waves have helped to identify training and development needs and many employees have already received extra training and support in customer service as a result.

As part of the programme, employees who are seen to 'go the extra mile' during the mystery shops are given recognition for their performance through the Council's Pride Awards.

Changing our ways

The organisational impact of the programme has also been significant. By flagging up issues in policy, staffing and accommodation that make employees' jobs more difficult, it has resulted in extra training, better recruitment and changes in accommodation for some of the services shopped.

The programme has enabled us to set performance targets for the Council's newly developed Customer Care Standards, and see whether they are useful and

appropriate. It has also given us baseline information about citizen experiences and expectations when using services, allowing us to deliver more citizen-focused services.

This information also helps the organisation to develop appropriate and challenging performance indicators around service delivery and customer service to ensure we are constantly striving for improvement in these areas.

Mystery shopping has been a positive process within Wakefield Council and has led to service improvement in some of our key customer-facing services. The programme has now been rolled out throughout the Council with five services being shopped annually.

For more information about Wakefield Council's Mystery Shopping Programme please contact Monika Bugaj on 01924 30 5039 or email mbugaj@wakefield.gov.uk

LARIA Excellence in Research Award 2007

Sponsored by CACI Limited

Get the recognition you deserve

We've all done research that we're really proud of. Maybe you have introduced an exciting new initiative to improve the quality of the research you carry out. Perhaps your research has changed the way your authority works or delivers its services. Or it could just be something you think went well. The range of research is open because we want as many local authorities as possible to enter for the award. This is your opportunity to get the recognition you deserve.

The prize

Once again, the award is being sponsored by CACI Limited, a leading provider of marketing solutions and information systems. As well as paying for a place at the LARIA Annual Conference 2008 for the winner, up to £2,000 worth of CACI data will be provided for use by the winning authority.

The winner will receive a trophy at a special presentation at the annual conference. The award winner will also have the opportunity to present their research either at the conference or at another appropriate event.

The award will be given to an authority, where it is hoped that the employees who carried out or commissioned the research will benefit.

What the judges are looking for

The judges, made up of LARIA council members and external researchers, will be looking for:

- a sound research methodology;
- research that involves trying something new and being creative;
- research that demonstrates an impact on policy and practice; and
- the overall presentation of your submission, including why your research should win the award.

How to enter

You should send a submission of up to 1,500 words. The judges will make their decision based on this, so please don't send any supporting documents or files.

Please email your submissions to Mike Walker, chair of the LARIA Member Development Activity Group, at mike.walker@css.lancscc.gov.uk.

The closing date is 31 October 2007.

Good luck!

Exciting Part-Time Job Opportunity

LARIA Administrator

**Do you want part-time work,
are you retired, semi-retired,
about to retire,
or know someone who is?**

Graham Smith, LARIA's administrator, is retiring in March 2008 and LARIA wants to appoint a highly organised and professional replacement. The role involves administering LARIA's membership system, booking delegates on events, managing and distributing LARIA's publications, dealing with queries about the organisation and some financial management.

The administrator is responsible to the LARIA Admin and Policy Group, which will steer your work. This can involve liaising with the officers and council members of LARIA, attending meetings, preparing reports, managing databases and spreadsheets, and general administration and clerical work. The role also involves providing administration support to ALGIS (Affiliation of Local Government Information Specialists), an autonomous group affiliated to LARIA.

Currently the role is undertaken on a self-employment basis and the rate of pay is £10.70 per hour (revised annually). LARIA would like to continue it on this basis. The Administrator can expect to earn about £5000 per year. On average this relates to about 9 -10 hours per week, although the work tends to be more heavily concentrated in the winter months. Appropriate travelling and other expenses are also payable. The Administrator will be expected to attend day events and the LARIA conference. Graham's assistance will be available during a handover period.

This is a good opportunity for a flexible, adaptable and responsive organiser. You should have strong IT skills and be a good communicator. It would be desirable for applicants to be familiar with local government and have a range of contacts in public sector organisations, though this is not essential. It would also be useful if you were able to work flexible hours.

If you would like an informal discussion then please telephone Graham Smith, the current LARIA Administrator, on 01642 316576. A full job description can also be obtained from Graham at lariaoffice@aol.com. To apply, your application letter should be sent to Graham at 9 Cortland Road, Nunthorpe, Middlesbrough, TS7 0JX by 31 October 2007.

LARIA, being committed to Equality of Opportunity, welcomes applications from all sections of the community.

UK Statistical Disclosure Control Policy for 2011 Census Output

Ian White, ONS

Background

The Registrars General (RsG) for England and Wales, for Scotland and for Northern Ireland have agreed, as part of their commitments to UK harmonisation for the 2011 Census, to aim for a common Statistical Disclosure Control (SDC) methodology for 2011 Census outputs. This will help facilitate the aim (as far as is possible) of harmonising the three Censuses where it is in the interests of users to do so.

Adoption of a common SDC methodology across the UK will be widely welcomed by census users within the local authority community, but will only be possible if there is an agreed SDC policy position across the three Census Offices; that is, an agreement about what constitutes a disclosive risk in a Census context and tolerable risk thresholds.

A statement setting out the SDC policy position, as agreed by the RsG, was announced on the National Statistics website in December and has been disseminated to Census users.

UK SDC policy position

The UK 2011 Census SDC policy position is based on the principle for protecting confidentiality set out in the National Statistics Code of Practice, which includes the guarantee that “no statistics will be produced that are likely to identify an individual unless specifically agreed with them”.

Because the key strength of the Census is its completeness of coverage and its ability to generate statistics about very small areas and groups of people (as is necessary to ensure that Government and other policies take account of the needs of local communities), it is impracticable to remove entirely the risk of disclosure without harming the utility of the data. With that in mind the RsG have concluded that the NS Code of Practice statement above can be satisfied in relation to Census outputs if no statistics are produced that allow the identification of an individual (or information about an individual) with a high degree of confidence. The RsG consider that as long as there has been systematic perturbation of the data, the Code of Practice guarantee would be met.

It is considered that ‘attribute disclosure’ (that is, learning something new about an individual or a

group of individuals) as opposed to ‘identification’ is the key disclosure risk because identification reveals no new information to the user. ‘Attribute disclosure’, however, involves a user discovering something new about an individual from the Census data that was not previously known to him.

In a Census context, where thousands of tables are generated from one database, the risk of attribute disclosure occurring can be addressed by introducing uncertainty about the true value of small cells.

In order to meet the agreed interpretation of the Code of Practice, it has thus been agreed that small counts (that is, 0s, 1s, and 2s) could be included in publicly disseminated Census tables provided that: a) uncertainty has been systematically created as to whether or not the small cell is a true value; and b) creating that uncertainty does not significantly damage the data.

The exact threshold of uncertainty required has not been decided. The RsG will make this judgement at a later stage within the context of results from methodological research into the balance of protection afforded, and damage caused, by various SDC methods.

Different levels of disclosure control are applied to Census outputs according to the mode of access. In general, the aim will be to make as much as possible of the Census tabular output publicly accessible. However, if tabular outputs are likely to be seriously compromised by SDC (for example Origin/Destination flows at low geographical levels) then these could be released under other access arrangements (such as under licence or in a safe setting), where restrictions on access would allow less stringent levels of SDC to apply, in order to protect the utility of the data.

As a result of the Government’s decision to legislate for ONS independence the current NS Code of Practice: Protocol on Data Access and Confidentiality will be replaced. But the obligation to preserve the confidentiality of Census outputs is likely to be heavily informed by the current Code.

Implications of the proposed SDC policy position for SDC methodology

The decision to allow small cells in publicly disseminated tables means that no methods of SDC have been ruled out, and all methods will be

Statistical Disclosure Control for 2011 Census cont...

evaluated. These would include pre-tabular approaches (where the perturbation takes place on a master database before tables are produced), post-tabular methods (where it is carried out on the individual tabulations), or a combination of both (as was adopted in 2001). The RsG have, however, expressed a preference for pre-tabular methods provided that there is no undue damage to the data.

To ensure that the public and expert audiences alike are confident that confidentiality will be preserved by the measures taken to avoid disclosure, clear explanations would be given on the protection afforded by the SDC strategy, and other steps to protect confidentiality, that had been applied.

The choice of SDC methodology for 2011 Census outputs will be based on an evaluation of the risk and the utility of the various possible methods. Methods will be recommended that afford an acceptable level of protection and preserve the highest level of utility of outputs. Consistency and additivity across tabular output is a key requirement for users, and these will be given a high priority in the assessment of the utility of SDC methods.

Next steps

The principle outlined in the RsG's statement provide a basis for both consultation with users of Census data and a two-year period of methodological research. The latter will assess both pre- and post-tabular SDC methods in terms of the protection they afford together with their impact on the integrity of the data (a risk/utility framework). Because of the interdependence between disclosure control of (pre-defined) Census tabular data and disclosure control

for other types of Census outputs (such as microdata samples and flexible user-defined tabular outputs), SDC methods for all types of Census output will be assessed concurrently, and a key consideration in evaluating SDC methods for tabular data will be the potential impact on these other types of Census output.

Local Authority users will be updated and consulted during the research period. There will also be an independent review through the UK Census Design and Methodology Advisory Committee, members of which include Eileen Howes (GLA) and Jenny Boag (Falkirk Council).

The 2011 Census White Paper for England and Wales, and parallel statements relating to the Census in Scotland and Northern Ireland, are timetabled to be published in October 2008, and will formalise the agreed policy position of the RsG by the inclusion of an SDC policy statement. Recommended SDC methods for all types of 2011 Census outputs will be published in autumn 2008 for consultation, and finalised in spring 2009.

For further details, please contact Ian White at ian.white@ons.gsi.gov.uk

Road Safety Messages - A Consultation With Local Residents

By Lee Huxley

Background

A section of the A41 in Chester is one of the worst stretches of road for accidents in Cheshire, with many accidents occurring at junctions along this route. In particular, the Hoole roundabout is the top accident hotspot in Cheshire. Cheshire County Council wants to help reduce the number of accidents on this stretch of road and planned to implement a road safety campaign in spring 2007.

Generally there are three elements to a road safety campaign: engineering, enforcement and education. The engineering and enforcement aspects of this campaign had already been planned and included new traffic signals, improved road markings and cameras on traffic lights. Our colleagues in the communications team were taking the lead on the education aspect of the road safety campaign and wanted us to consult local residents as to how the County Council could best communicate road safety messages for this stretch of road.

Consultation format

Two discussion groups were held at the end of November 2006 in Chester at a building adjacent to the stretch of road being discussed. The participants were recruited from Cheshire's Voice (Cheshire County Council's citizens' panel), and were all local drivers familiar with the stretch of road. The majority of participants were aged 45+ (statistically the most likely age group to be involved in an accident on this stretch of road).

Participants were asked to comment on ideas proposed by the communications team, for example signs and leaflets, as well as a recent article in the newspaper the County Council sends to all residents (www.cheshire.gov.uk/Council/YourCheshire/november_06_pdf.htm). The front page picture from this edition can be seen below. They also discussed their views on other road safety campaigns they had seen, and their own ideas for educating people about road safety on this stretch of the A41.

Findings from the Discussion

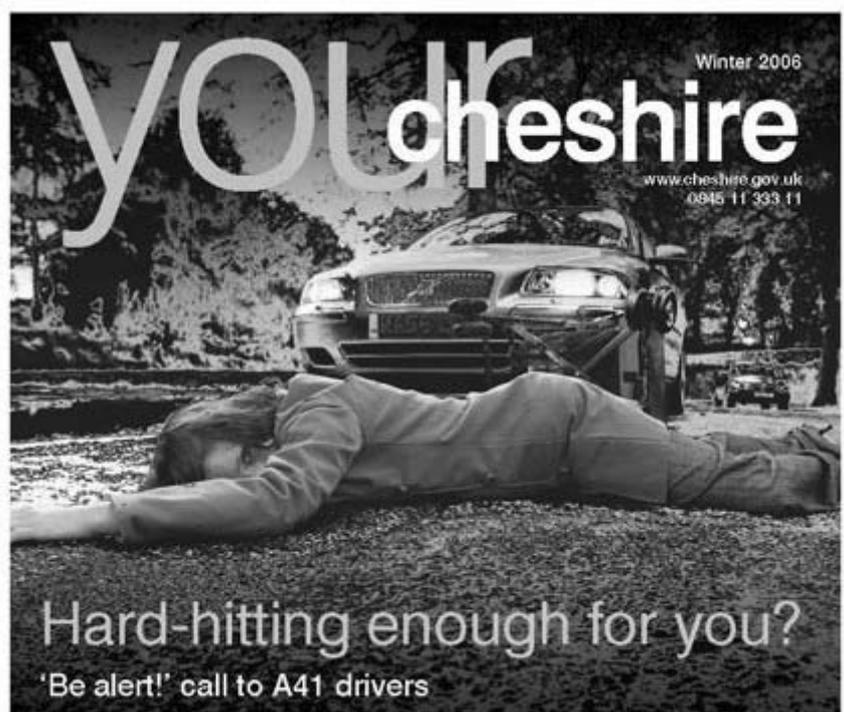
The most effective road safety campaigns are clear, visually graphic and hard hitting.

Newspaper article

- Participants liked the 'Could it be you' section in the newspaper article as it hit home and made participants think they were affected.
- More could have been made of the fact that 'Hoole roundabout' is the worst junction for accidents in Cheshire.
- The picture in the newspaper article was *disliked* (not relevant to the text, not graphic enough and not clear).
- No participants had registered for the better driver course advertised in the newspaper article. Some were put off by the car maintenance. Some felt it was too early to commit. 'Safer driving course' was suggested as a more appealing name.

Road signs

- There was unanimous agreement that signs on approaches to Hoole roundabout are a good idea.



Road Safety Messages cont...

- Participants were shown a selection of possible signs. 'Crash hotspot' was in general the most popular option. Participants disliked the word 'shunt'.

Leaflets

- Participants thought a leaflet (to all local households) was a good idea.
- Tables and bullet points were the most popular layout.
- Popular suggestions for improvement included a map, hard-hitting picture, 'could it be you' section and details of phasing of roadworks.
- Method of delivery is important so that the leaflet is not seen as junk mail, and to encourage people to read it.

Conclusions

There was general support for the communications team's key ideas of signs on the approaches to Hoole roundabout and an informative leaflet delivered to households in the local area.

Participants were pleased they were helping to contribute to the development of the road safety campaign. As the participants were all local users of this stretch of road, they will now be able to see how the road safety campaign progresses.

Update

Since we ran these discussion groups in late 2006, the communications team has produced and delivered a leaflet to local households. The leaflet included many of the suggestions made at the focus groups. 'Crash hotspot' signs are also in production and will be put on the approaches to Hoole roundabout within the next few weeks.

The findings from this consultation have been shared with partners including Cheshire Constabulary and Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service, and this piece of research is being used as a blueprint for further road safety campaigns. We wrote to the participants in January to inform them of the actions that would result from the consultation. The Communications team are now hoping to commission us to run further focus groups with local residents to see if they feel road safety has improved on the A41 as a result of the road safety campaign.

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Exploring Online Research Methods

A new virtual training environment

By Clare Madge, University of Leicester

Introduction

Online research methods, or ORMs, are (usually) traditional methods of data collection adapted to use online. Research methods ranging from questionnaire surveys to participant observation have been adapted for online use through tools such as email, websites and various software packages.



ORMs offer great potential and versatility, helping to overcome distance and travel costs and providing a way of contacting groups or individuals who may otherwise be difficult to reach, such as the less physically mobile. However the spread of online methods, and the awareness of the theoretical, practical, and technical issues involved, has been rather haphazard, due in no small part to the lack of any practical or theoretical guidelines.

Filling the gap

When University of Leicester researchers Clare Madge (Department of Geography) and Henrietta O'Connor (Centre for Labour Market Studies) embarked on a project called 'Cyberparents' (www.geog.le.ac.uk/baby), their main aim was to investigate how, why and in what ways the internet is used as an information source for learning parenting skills. However whenever they reported the results of the project, they were struck by the level of interest in its use of online questionnaires and synchronous online interviews, and the repeated requests for hands-on training in these methods.

Prompted by this demand, a team at Leicester University secured funding from the ESRC's Research Methods Training Programme and set about developing a practical training package focusing specifically on the potentials and pitfalls of ORMs. Known as '**Exploring Online Methods in a Virtual Training Environment**', the finished product can be found at www.geog.le.ac.uk/orm.

Features and facilities

The team felt that given the nature of subject matter, an online learning resource was the ideal means of delivering training in ORMs, offering users choice over how and when to access the package, along with the flexibility to explore different content areas according to need, prior knowledge and experience.

The package provides:-

- a high-quality online portal to provide training in online research methods;
- a self-supporting online resource to enhance understanding of both the theoretical and practical aspects of online research methods including online questionnaires, and virtual synchronous and asynchronous interviews;
- access to a wide range of successful good practice case studies;
- discussion of the ethical issues of online research;
- important resource links; and
- comprehensive technical guidance.

Throughout, the package emphasises the team's belief that there is a need for online researchers to tread with caution and practice their 'craft' with reflexivity. They strongly believe that online research is not going to replace onsite research but rather it is another option in the researcher's methodological 'toolkit'. Therefore the use of ORMs must be carefully considered and their long-term success will ultimately depend on the quality and credibility of the information that they generate.

The training package is structured into six main sections. The core training element is contained in the '**Self Study**' section, consisting of four modules on **Online Questionnaires, Online Interviews, Ethics** and

Exploring Online Research Methods cont...

Technical Aspects. Each of these modules uses a series of interdisciplinary case studies to illustrate the methods in action. The **Resources** sections for learners and tutors act as a portal to key information and links in the area of ORMs. The **Project Background** section offers a range of general information about the project, one aim being to share the lessons learnt with similar projects.

Target audience

The package is targeted at a wide audience including researchers and postgraduates in the HE sector, and researchers working for other organisations, such as those involved with public policy and market research. It has therefore been designed with the different requirements of these users in mind. For example, it is possible to either 'dip in and out' of the package or to work through the modules systematically. For academic users, one useful feature is the 'personal references list' facility which allows users to collect a 'shopping basket' of references as they navigate the package.

Evaluation

From the outset, a programme of rigorous evaluation was established to ensure ongoing feedback could be obtained and used to inform the design and development process. In accordance with best practice, the evaluation programme aimed to ensure the training package would meet the needs of different user communities as effectively as possible. This involved the use of heuristic evaluation, usability studies, trialling and user studies, and content evaluation by recognised subject experts in the field of ORMs.

Looking ahead

Although the website is designed for self-study use online, a range of face-to-face and online training and dissemination activities are planned. Forthcoming events are detailed on the project website. Now that a further two years' ESRC funding has been secured, the package will continue to evolve under its new banner of **'TRI-ORM'** (for **'Training Researchers in Online Research Methods'**), helping researchers in all sectors to make the most of these innovative technologies.

For further information please contact Clare Madge (Tel: 0116 252 3643, Email: CM12@le.ac.uk)

Web-based Council Budget Consultation

**By Steve Milton, Salisbury District Council
and John Green, Research for Today Ltd**

Budget consultation research has three major objectives: to identify which services can be reduced without causing widespread dissatisfaction; to identify improvements to other services that residents most value; and to find the optimal mix of any such changes within overall budget constraints.

A local case study

Salisbury District Council recently investigated resident priorities against a background of a slightly higher than inflation Council Tax rise in 2007 and anticipation that balancing budgets for 2008 and subsequent years might be even more difficult.

The council was aware that conventional SIMALTO Modelling met its objectives, but was reluctant to invest £15,000+ on 250+ face-to-face interviews, and looked for an alternative to this, and to traditional focus groups and postal surveys, which had provided limited and occasionally superficial feedback in the past.

Salisbury had recently recruited a panel of over 3400 local residents by using a flyer sent to all households with the annual electoral registration form. Residents had been asked if they would take part in four to six web surveys per year on a variety of topical local issues. When informed SIMALTO could be done over the web, at about one third of the conventional interviewing cost, the council chose this approach.

Not your typical 'tick-box' exercise

The council and RFT created a SIMALTO internet questionnaire containing several alternative discretionary changes to each of 15 local services. After piloting it with internal council staff, panellists were contacted, provided with a link to a website and invited to complete a budget trade-off questionnaire. They were told the questionnaire would require about 15 minutes to complete and was a challenging but realistic exercise which differed from usual 'tick-box' type surveys.

Problems with the initial mailing meant that only half the panel received this invitation. Four days after 'mail-out' about 15% of those panellists had completed it. A 'reminder' was sent which resulted in a further 20% of invitees returning their form. Then the other half of the panel was mailed for the first time. Almost 20% completed the survey after their single invitation.

A total of 866 questionnaires were completed. Almost 30% of panel members were prepared to spend 15 minutes plus on a survey with no incentives apart from the fact they could see it was a serious study containing difficult choices that reflected the council's own decision-making process.

The results of the survey

Six clear potential saving options and associated cost benefits were identified. While one or two were at variance with the council's previous opinions, the large sample size helped convince them to take a fresh look at the plans during 2007/08 with a view to more closely aligning council priorities to the views expressed.

Although this was largely a cost-cutting scenario, two service improvements were identified as high priorities for residents. And importantly the survey told council which saving options it should not make from the residents' point of view. Differences in priorities between town and rural communities also were identified.

Methodological insights

The council does understand that respondents both able and prepared to voluntarily answer council web questionnaires are not an exact mirror of all residents. But they are no more or less typical of their area than people who attend focus groups or fill out postal surveys.

866 web-panel responses shows that the survey cannot be said to have been biased by any 'special interest'

Web-based Council Budget Consultation cont...

group of residents. Past questionnaires openly posted on the council's website had been influenced by campaign groups. Focus groups had also fallen prey to domination by those with an axe to grind. A fear that the internet was a young person's medium of communication was dispelled by this study; 30% of responses came from the over 60 age group, and only 17% were under 40. This distribution was corrected by statistical weighting.

Positive feedback

Resident feedback to the survey was encouraging. On most of the previous large-scale postal surveys, a handful of people would write in to complain the questions asked were not about the things they wanted to discuss etc. On this web survey we were not disappointed, and again received about 10 - 15 complaints. A few minor tweaks will be made next time in the light of what we have learned. The real surprise was that we had about the same number of unsolicited emails/phone calls from residents congratulating the council on the realistic format of the questionnaire and their satisfaction in seeing the council was taking its consultation seriously. The council's cabinet was certainly impressed and is keen to use this approach for budget consultation again in 2007.

For further information, please contact

Steve Milton - Tel 01722 434255, email smilton@salisbury.gov.uk

John Green - Tel 020 8992 4877, email simalto@researchfortoday.com

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The Case of the Vanishing Statistics

By Jon Carling

There have been substantial improvements in the availability of statistics at regional, district, ward and other geographical levels in recent years. Neighbourhood Statistics is a comprehensive and much-used resource, and NOMIS continues to provide invaluable functionality for those many users who need to cross-tabulate datasets and be flexible in their use of geography. Occasionally, however, there is a need for statistics users to make representations to a higher level in order to argue for continuity or improvements in available data.

Missing regional economic output data

A recent example of this has been the announcement by ONS that annual data about regional economic output (Gross Value Added – GVA) by industry will not be published for 2005. This was expected to be published with the usual reams of GVA data at the end of 2007. It has also been announced that some other parts of the regional GVA series will continue to be provisional for 2005 and 2006. GVA data is much used by regional and local users to inform and influence policy making. The North East's Regional Economic Strategy, for example, has a target of achieving 90% of the national level of GVA per head by 2016. This follows the Government's own PSA target to reduce the gap in regional economic growth rates over the economic cycle. Without good quality data, it is clearly much harder to know how you are progressing against such targets.

Treasury commitments forgotten

The situation is all the more galling because the Treasury made commitments in the 2004 Comprehensive Spending Review to fund the implementation of the recommendations of Christopher Allsopp's review of regional economic statistics in full. That work was to include improvements to methodology and substantially increased sample sizes for surveys that are used to generate GVA, as well as providing an ONS presence in each region. As things stand, the increased samples will not all happen, and the regional presence is having to be funded by the RDAs. And now an important regional dataset is being withdrawn.

At present, those of us who use such statistics can make representations to a Treasury Minister when necessary. Under the provisions of the Statistics and Registration Services Bill, we will be able to make representations to the independent Statistics Board. The Board will contain representatives from central Government, the three devolved administrations and (probably) industry and academia, but as drafted not from English Regional or Local Government.

For more details please contact Jon Carling, Head of NERIP, on 0191 229 6377 or email jon.carling@nerip.com

Review - The Use Made of Official Statistics

Joy Thompson reviews Statistics Commission report number 33

This report was commissioned by the Statistics Commission to fully evaluate how official statistics are used – especially by those outside government. A thorough understanding of their use, both by public and private organisations, provides the Commission with an indicative guide to the ‘public value’ of official statistics.

The report is structured into four sections. Two of these are authored by the Statistics Commission itself, comprising an introduction in Part 1, and a review of the Commission’s own preliminary research in Part 4. The new qualitative research carried out by Ipsos Mori is reported in Part 2, followed in Part 3 by their literature review of what data is used in different sectors and how.

The new research follows up and expands upon the preliminary qualitative research of 16 interviews carried out by the Commission in 2006. Ipsos Mori was commissioned to carry out 52 semi-structured interviews with users of official statistics to explore how the statistics are used and how users view them.

Broadly there are a few key themes that emerge as important to users:-

- **Timeliness of data**
Statistics are perceived to be not as timely as would be preferable. Some users would prefer quicker access even at the expense of great precision, as they are more reliant on data trends than specifics.
- **Integrity of data**
Users state they believe the statistics are credible, and across the public, private and voluntary sectors they are widely used to add further credibility to decision making.
- **Accessibility**
Availability of official statistics was increasingly business-critical in the private sector ‘post-Enron’, and of growing importance in the transparent decision-making of the public sector. However many interviewees did not know the full extent of what is available.
- **Geographical scope**
There was frustration at the difficulty of obtaining comparable data across the four countries of the UK, and a perception that this was more of an issue since devolution.
- **User engagement and gaps in provision**
Users also felt that usefulness could be improved by increased consultation in the planning process. Private sector users indicated a greater use of value added products from intermediaries, such as geodemographics used for targeting or market analysis.

This study on how official data is used and regarded is itself both welcome and timely, and will inform the development of the proposed Statistics Board once the Statistics and Registration Service Bill becomes law this year.

To view the full report see: <http://tinyurl.com/2wkls5>

LARIA Annual General Meeting 2007

New vitality and changing personnel

The LARIA AGM was held at Lancaster University on 28 March.

The year since the last AGM has been marked by some considerable changes in personnel and in the way LARIA works. In her report, Jill Tuffnell as outgoing Chair referred to the 'away-day' that was held in June and how it had resulted in an action plan that is now being implemented. This deals with key issues such as how to improve our awareness of members' expertise and training needs, make greater use of e-technology, and improve publicity. The plan also covers the use of volunteers, paid staff and other management issues.

One of the most fundamental changes has been the recognition that LARIA needs to broaden its remit. This is reflected in the new strapline '**supporting local researchers in the public sector**', and in the move to increase the number of members on the Council. This necessitated a change in the constitution and an appropriate motion was passed unanimously.

Jill Tuffnell was succeeded as Chair by Andy Davis of Warwickshire County Council, and Clive Lloyd as outgoing Vice-chair was succeeded by Mike Walker of Lancashire County Council. Roger Sykes, an old friend of LARIA and now Head of Studies with the Audit Commission, was elected to the Council for a two-year period, together with a new face, Andrew Lavelle of Staffordshire County Council. Another newcomer to the Council is Joy Thompson of New East Manchester NDC who takes charge of the Newsletter Activity Group, while Anne Cunningham remains editor of LariaNews.

Knud Moller, Hon Secretary

ALGIS in LARIA Update

By Jane Inman

ALGIS AGM

ALGIS held its AGM in March at the offices of the Greater London Authority. Members enjoyed a tour of the GLA Library and the building. After lunch and the AGM, Annabel Davis, Head of Information Services at the GLA, spoke about the service her team provides. Tim Allen, Head of Research at Local Government Analysis and Research (LGAR), part of the Local Government Association, followed this with a strategic view of the role of local government research and information.

We have a new committee member as a result of the AGM. Ruth Byford, a Taxonomy Officer from Essex County Council, joins us and will initially help with the website whilst Claire Hanlon is on maternity leave. David Smith steps into the Secretary's role as we say goodbye and a big thank you to Joanne May who has kept us on track in that capacity for the last couple of years. Hazel Shepherd has agreed to continue with the Newsletter and Sarah Carter as Treasurer. Thanks are due to all.

Guidelines for Official Publications in Local Authorities

Local Government Analysis and Research (LGAR) and ALGIS have been working on a new publication designed to help everyone with responsibility for writing, compiling and publishing official documents in local authorities. This topic was last tackled by SCOOP (Standing Committee on Official Publications) in the 1980s, and the time was right for an update. SCOOP supports this new version which will be accompanied by a web resource and should be available in June. It will be available at www.nfer.ac.uk/LApublishing. To register to receive notification of publication please email the LARIA office: Lariaoffice@aol.com

Visit to the Welsh Assembly

At the time of writing, we are looking forward to our next event which is a visit to the Welsh Assembly on 12th June 2007. Designed by Richard Rogers this fascinating building should provide us with an interesting day out, which we hope will include a chance to sit in the public gallery for a plenary session of the Assembly.

Finally... ALGIS is keen to recruit new members, so if there is someone in your organisation managing information - whether that is in a traditional library, through the web or an intranet or managing Freedom of Information requests – PLEASE tell them about us!

www.algis.org.uk

Jane Inman
Chair of ALGIS in LARIA
janeinman@warwickshire.gov.uk

Consultation: Some Novel & Imaginative Approaches

**Report of Joint LARIA/LGA Seminar
15th February 2007**

Note: the full version of this report can be viewed on the LARIA website, along with copies of the presentations.

With the dramatic growth that has taken place in public services consultation over recent years, it was appropriate to draw together some accounts of approaches that can claim to be novel and imaginative. A range of effective ways of conducting research and consultation to get the best out of participants was at the heart of the day's presentations.

Organised jointly by LARIA and the LGA, and chaired by **Debbie Lee Chan**, the seminar was held in London on 15th February and attracted a nearly full-house of around 60 delegates.



Robin Clarke



Celeste Wentt

The opening presentation was given by **Robin Clarke** from the Office of Public Management, with the title **New Labour's 10 Years of Innovative Consultation – How Was It For You?** From a position in 1997 when not much consultation was taking place to the present time when consultation seems to be endemic at local and national levels, the question was raised of the place and value of consultation in a representative democracy.

This was followed by **Stephen Hilton** from Bristol City Council who gave a presentation under the heading **It's Consultation Jim But Not As We Know It – the Future of Citizen Engagement in a Digital World**. In a thorough and expansive account of consultation methods using digital technology, Stephen raised many issues in relation to survey participants in a digital age.

The last presentation of the morning was given by **Celeste Wentt** from the London Borough of Camden, entitled **Taking the Mystery out of Mystery Shopping – Engaging and Empowering our Customers**. With Camden Council having a large number of customer contact points the key question related to the quality of customer experiences when dealing with the Council. Whilst it was accepted that Mystery Shopping as a technique is well known, Camden's use of its own customers as the mystery shoppers was reckoned to be a move away from the conventional.

Paul Najsarek, London Borough of Harrow, opened the afternoon sessions with a presentation on the **Harrow Open Budget Process**. Considered to be the 'Rolls Royce' model of participatory budgeting, it was very much an exercise in improving trust between residents and the Council.

Leading on, **Anne Heaven** from QA Research gave a presentation entitled **Practical Planning for Peer Research**. Peer research is the training of local people to gather community intelligence in their local areas. With advantages including the ability to reach difficult respondents and the bequeathing of reusable skills, this method when properly developed helps toward the ambition of empowered communities expressed in the Government White Paper.

Consultation: Some Novel & Imaginative Approaches cont...



Annabelle Phillips



Sam Plum



Sara Mumby

The penultimate session was given by **Annabelle Phillips**, Research Director at Ipsos-Mori, and was entitled **Jazzing Up Group Discussions**. In a wide-ranging account of developing participative research methodologies, many approaches were outlined which took groups beyond standard discussions.

The day's final session was presented jointly by **Sam Plum and Sara Mumby** from Pendle Borough Council on **Consultation for Revitalising Local Neighbourhoods**. Looking at how Pendle Council and the Housing Market Renewal Pathfinder have consulted with local people on neighbourhood regeneration issues formed the crux of the first part of the presentation. The second part of the presentation described the consultation processes used in a neighbourhood of Pendle where engagement has traditionally been difficult.

In summing up the day, Debbie Lee Chan pointed out some key issues:

- the importance of understanding where people are coming from when deciding how to engage them;
- with confidence, novel and imaginative approaches can work;
- maintaining the principles of good consultation is important;
- big ideas can be adapted to meet small budgets.

Bob Cuthill, LARIA Promotions Coordinator

R & I News

In LARIA's new spirit of inclusivity, **R & I News** merges with **News from Elsewhere** to bring you the latest news stories from all our contributors.

CCSR

New Research Collaboration – Measuring Community Involvement and Regeneration Outcomes

The Centre for Census and Survey Research at the University of Manchester has embarked on an innovative research collaboration with East Manchester New Deal for Communities. This arrangement sees the expertise of the two organisations combined to assess the impact of regeneration.

East Manchester has a population of over 60,000 people. It is an area of significant deprivation with high unemployment. However, it is undergoing a major regeneration programme under New Deal for Communities. East Manchester's New Deal for Communities was established in 1999 to drive forward regeneration in the areas of Beswick, Openshaw and Clayton. As one of 17 pathfinder schemes nationally it was provided with around £50 million over 10 years to tackle five outcome areas: crime, unemployment, educational attainment, ill-health and the physical environment including housing.

The collaboration involves the secondment of CCSR research staff, ongoing consultation, and applications for two new PhD students. The work will include research into measuring the impact of community consultation in East Manchester, estimating population change, and the collection and analysis of secondary data relating to progress towards meeting strategic objectives.

For further information contact Dr. Kingsley Purdam, Research Fellow, CCSR at Kingsley.purdam@manchester.ac.uk or visit <http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/> or www.neweastmanchester.com

Comhairle nan Eilean Siar

Outer Hebrides Migration Study: Strategic Thinking and Joint Working Required to Meet the Challenges of Population Change

In 2005, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, in partnership with Communities Scotland and HIE Innse Gall (the economic development agency serving the Western

Isles), commissioned a study to investigate the dynamics of migration and population change as it affects the Outer Hebrides. The overall aim of the research was to identify the causes, key drivers and socio-economic impacts of population change and to propose evidenced-based solutions for achieving demographic, social and economic sustainability for the Outer Hebrides. The study is now complete and was published early in 2007. It has been warmly endorsed by the Outer Hebrides Community Planning Partnership.

Long-term population decline is a persistent concern for agencies in the Outer Hebrides and although past trends are well documented, little is understood about the true dynamics of migration and the social and economic impacts of past and future change. Limited resources and insufficient information has made it difficult for agencies to plan ahead and develop a cohesive action plan for targeting population decline. This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the situation where a solid baseline has been determined based on clear and robust findings. The report subsequently proposes a number of policy recommendations specifically aimed at achieving demographic sustainability. The research was carried out by consultants Hall Aitken.

For more information please contact Isla Macdonald, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, 01851-709261 isla.macdonald@cne-siar.gov.uk

The report is available at <http://www.cnesiar.gov.uk/factfile/population/migrationstudy.htm>

Local Government Analysis and Research

Local Government Analysis and Research Bulletin

The Local Government Analysis and Research Bulletin is now published on the 28th of each month. The bulletin highlights the latest key issues, developments, research and statistical findings impacting on, or of interest to, local government. It brings together the work of the LGA and all the central bodies and information is grouped under themed areas.

To find out more about us, please visit our website at: www.lgar.local.gov.uk. The latest edition of the bulletin is available by following the link under 'Monthly Bulletins'.

R & I News cont...

To register to receive the bulletin each month, please visit: <http://www.lgar.local.gov.uk/lgv/reg/user-register.do>

Norfolk County Council

Deprivation in Rural Norfolk

The Norfolk Investing in Communities (IiC) Partnership commissioned Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion (OCSI) to develop innovative ways of measuring and highlighting deprivation in rural areas. The goal was to provide the Partnership with the evidence to ensure that rural areas receive their fair share of resources. The project aimed to redress the limitations of existing standard data sources for measuring rural deprivation, particularly at small area level. Work focused on four main areas; uncovering pockets of deprivation; the 'rural share of deprivation' in Norfolk; deprivation issues in rural areas; and profiling settlements.

The problem of a lack of sub-Super Output Area (SOA) data for measuring and analysing deprivation in rural areas was addressed by statistically modelling key deprivation data down to Output Area (OA) level, and validating these models against a range of household and OA level administrative data sets covering various benefit claimants, children eligible for Free School Meals, pupil attainment at Key Stage, and pupils with Special Educational Needs.

It is argued that area-based indicators such as the Indices of Deprivation 2004 (ID2004) are less likely to be able to capture adequately the level of deprivation in potentially less homogeneous rural areas with a single score. By modelling the data down to OA level, the research found 'pockets of deprivation' which were otherwise 'hidden' in less deprived Super Output Areas. Although the most deprived SOAs in Norfolk are overwhelmingly urban, many of the most deprived OAs do not lie in the most deprived SOAs, especially outside large urban settlements. Based on the ID2004, it is clear that the large majority of deprived rural areas at OA level would not be identified at SOA level.

Additionally, the research showed that focusing on the most deprived SOAs risks ignoring large numbers of deprived people and communities living outside the most deprived areas.

Many small settlements across Norfolk are home to vulnerable groups experiencing particular deprivation issues. Information at settlement level can help

target programmes and help local communities with the evidence base to support the development of community and parish plans and strengthen local funding applications. The detailed data sets collated for the project were also used to create area profiles for 185 Norfolk settlements and urban areas.

Though the report's analysis is restricted to Norfolk, the OA level modelled deprivation data (all the ID2004 measures and a number of benefit claimant rates) have been developed for all areas across England and so will be available for use by other local partners across the country.

Downloadable versions of the OCSI final report, technical report, Norfolk settlement profiles and maps are available through the Norfolk CC website at www.norfolk.gov.uk/ruraldeprivation

The OA-level modelled datasets developed as part of the project are openly available; the data is free, although there may be a small processing charge. To obtain the data and for more information on the methodology, please contact Tom Smith at OCSI, **Tel 0870 240 1474, email: tom.smith@ocsi.co.uk**

For more information, please contact Wendy Pontin, Tel: (01603) 222737, e-mail: wendy.pontin@norfolk.gov.uk

London Borough of Waltham Forest



Community Engagement Training Programme

The London Borough of Waltham Forest has recently established a new training programme that aims to deliver better quality services to all its residents. The Community Engagement Training Programme has been developed in partnership with the Market Research Society (MRS) to ensure Council officers can effectively gauge the views of residents before considering what services should be delivered.

The programme, which is part of a wider programme of building the capacity of Waltham Forest Council to engage more effectively with local residents, covers many of the major aspects of research, such as:

- How to plan and manage community engagement work
- Qualitative and quantitative research techniques and creative approaches to carrying out community engagement

R & I News cont...

The scheme also focuses specifically on 'Inclusive and Accessible Community Engagement' - the first course of its kind in the UK. The course covers how best to engage with diverse communities such as ethnic minority groups, children and young people and disabled residents.

"Ultimately, this training course will help us listen to and engage more effectively with residents and ensure we can deliver the services they want in an accessible and convenient way," says Waltham Forest Council's Cabinet Member for Communities and Housing, Cllr Marie Pye.



The training programme in progress

So far 30 Council staff have successfully completed the programme and many more have signed up to participate. Waltham Forest Council is committed to continuing to deliver the programme in partnership with the MRS. Local partners in the PCT, Police and the community and voluntary sector, as well as officers from neighbouring London Boroughs, will soon be invited to take advantage of the training programme.

For further information on the training programme, please contact the Authority's Consultation Manager:
Mark.yeadon@walthamforest.gov.uk or
020 8496 4472.

West Norfolk Data About West Norfolk (Dawn)

As it sought to move towards evidence-based working, the West Norfolk Partnership (WNP), the Local Strategic Partnership for West Norfolk, had an increasing requirement for information to underpin its priorities and inform decision-making and resource allocation. The local online information service known as **Dawn**



(<http://dawn.localknowledge.co.uk/>) was initially commissioned to meet this need. The site was developed by the Local Futures Group, who have developed local information systems throughout the country using their SMART Observatory software.



One key focus in developing

Dawn has been to identify 'neighbourhoods', which are clusters of wards. These can be used by partnership agencies to provide a local focus to joined-up activity, and support the move towards neighbourhood policing. Now that these areas have been agreed by both the police and partner agencies, we can get a picture of issues at super output area, ward and neighbourhood level.

To improve local data sharing and partnership working, the WNP is developing a 'hub and spoke' model to ensure up-to-date local ward-level data is regularly entered onto **Dawn**. Strong links have already been formed with the Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) analyst from the police, and the health analyst, to get local crime and health data onto the site. **Dawn** also has over 1,000 national indicators, maintained and updated by the Local Futures Group from their Local Knowledge service. We have a core team who coordinate the data entry for maximum effectiveness, with individuals taking responsibility for the data import. This set-up has highlighted issues in the way data is collected across agencies, using a variety of different geographies and formats. To address this, we have started to develop some data-sharing protocols.

Since its creation, **Dawn** has proved invaluable to a range of organisations and partners, providing an evidence base for external funding applications, action planning and for West Norfolk's Safer & Stronger Communities Fund. We have invested in branding and promotion to ensure that our site is as memorable and far-reaching as possible. Flyers have been distributed, and demonstrations given to a range of people and organisations, including the voluntary sector with the help of our Partnership Officer based in this sector. We are confident that **Dawn** will continue to grow, with more agencies inputting their local data and as many partners as possible utilising this valuable and exciting tool.
For further information, please contact Laura Beveridge (laura.beveridge@west-norfolk.gov.uk)
or Martin Slater (martin.slater@west-norfolk.gov.uk)

R & I News cont...

Worcestershire County Council

The Research & Intelligence Unit at Worcestershire County Council are involved in an increasingly wide range of activities. This short selection gives a "flavour".

Profile of Worcestershire's Labour Market

The unit has recently finished a detailed analysis of the Worcestershire labour market focussing on issues of gender and ethnicity. It is hoped that this will add to the knowledge base regarding these issues and provide a benchmark for future monitoring in this area.

The profile adopts a life-cycle approach, so that it also covers important information about the experiences of groups *before* they enter the Labour Market. This is vitally important, as many of the trends that occur within the Labour Market can be traced back to educational experience and to the choices made during higher education.

In addition to considering the trends and patterns within the Labour Market, the profile examines the issue of a pay gap, going beyond traditional commentary in identifying why this still exists. Other topics that are examined are the nature of economic inactivity and the concept of a work-life balance.

For more information, please contact Sally Pugh, Tel: (01905) 766713, e-mail: spugh@worcestershire.gov.uk

Putting History Firmly on the Map

Worcestershire County Council's Research and Intelligence Unit and Archaeological Unit have teamed up to produce a variety of different mapping tools. The first stage has been to create some archaeological 'grid-style' maps, allowing gaps in existing knowledge to be identified.

There is already an historic environment record of more than 15,000 known and recorded archaeological sites, monuments and historic buildings and archaeological investigations extending back around 200 years. However, it is suspected this record is heavily biased towards places that have seen intensive modern development. The mapping will be used as a key element of grant applications to allow work to be undertaken in areas where archaeology appears under-represented. This will in turn allow an improved level of planning and agri-environmental advice in those areas.

Further improvements and developments to this work include animating the maps over time, spatially analysing the data and producing 'contour' maps giving a wide range of tools to improve the visualisation of archaeological data.

For more information, please contact Chris Baker on 01905 768333 or e-mail: cbaker1@worcestershire.gov.uk

Partnership Tasking 2007/08

From 2nd April 2007, Research Officers based at the Research & Intelligence Unit at Worcestershire County Council are providing analytical support for all four Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) in the County. These posts are funded by the CDRPs, and the Research Officers will work at the County Council and on location in the individual areas in order to inform each partnership about issues relating to Crime and Community Safety.

Working with partners in Bromsgrove, Redditch, Wyre Forest and South Worcestershire, the R&I Unit will support the tasking process for Community Safety Partnerships. This is based around the National Intelligence Model, and uses a structured approach to data analysis and presentation to help partnerships in identifying areas and issues they need to address. The tasking employs a monthly multi-agency meeting, chaired either by the fire service, Primary Care Trust or district council, depending upon the district. Each meeting considers particular issues and incorporates the use of Geographical Information Systems (GIS) to identify locations, trends and geographical extent. Short-term actions are identified and undertaken, largely, before the next meeting. Examples include the "tasking" of Neighbourhood Wardens to patrol specific areas and particular environmental improvements. This is linked to the Local Policing "Partners And Communities Together" approach, for which North Worcestershire is the Pathfinder division for West Mercia Constabulary.

For more information, please contact Rob Morris, Tel: (01905) 728355, e-mail: rmorris2@worcestershire.gov.uk.

LARIA People



Graham Smith

Handing over the reins

Readers who attended this year's conference at Lancaster will have been aware that it was the last in a long line of memorable LARIA events to be masterminded by the familiar figure of Graham Smith (left). Many will also have met the new LARIA Events Organiser, Aileen Wood (right), who now takes forward LARIA's programme of seminars, workshops and conferences.

A founder member of ALGIS, with a wide-ranging public-sector background encompassing training and development, librarianship and information science, Aileen brings a wealth of experience to the role. Graham has not completely freed himself from the LARIA yoke just yet - but he's working on it! (see advert on p13)



Aileen Wood



Nicola Underdown

New face at ARO

The Association of Regional Observatories (ARO) has recently been joined by a new co-ordinator, Nicola Underdown. Nicola joins ARO from the East Midlands Universities Association, bringing experience of partnership working and development of programmes for collaborative working.

Please remember to send us stories like these for LARIA People. If you don't tell us, we can't tell LariaNews readers!

Several people take on new roles in LARIA following the Lancaster AGM. Here we meet the new Chair of LARIA, Andy Davis:-

In my day job I am the Manager of the Warwickshire Observatory, which at the time of publication will only recently have been launched. It's an exciting venture for us at Warwickshire County Council, formalising much of the partnership working that the research team has been doing on more of an informal basis for many years. It also gives us huge potential to get involved in many areas of new and interesting research. Anyway, a bit more about me....

I'm an Economics graduate, and not really knowing what I wanted to do when I graduated, found myself on a Masters degree course in Regional Planning, a mix of economics, geography, planning and politics. It was also an opportunity to remain a student for an extra year! Whilst on the course we went on a visit to the research team of the local authority to do some work on population forecasting to feed into one of our pieces of coursework, and it was shortly after that I realised that I wanted to go and work for 'the Council'. It was a life-changing moment!

I started my career in local government at Birmingham City Council, where I worked at the Birmingham Economic Information Centre, based in the council's economic development department, and remained there for over four years. My main activities there were economic and labour market analysis, production of labour market reports, sector reports, economic assessments etc., along with working with colleagues in preparing for the release of the 1991 Census and carrying out some of the initial analysis of the results.

LARIA People cont...



Andy Davis

I'm now into my second decade working for Warwickshire County Council, having arrived in 1996 into a job that I thought I would probably stay in for no more than two years. How time flies! However, during that time I've been in a number of roles.

I joined the County Council as its Economic Research Officer, at a time when the research team was relatively small for a County Council, employing just two other research officers, an admin officer and a team leader.

After a couple of years I was given the role of Research Team Leader, which, as I quickly found out, also came with me having to continue to carry out the County's economic research. Looking back, it is fair to say that we didn't do our most rigorous pieces of economic research or projects during this period, as I became increasingly embroiled in 'management' things. Like signing Annual Leave cards. Thankfully, we employed another Economic Research Officer some time afterwards.

A two-year stint as Acting Joint Head of Performance Management followed in 2004, which, as I soon discovered, also came with me carrying on as Research Team Leader! And attending lots more meetings. Other parts of this remit included responsibility for our departmental Library & Information Service, IT team and Improvement Team (which included performance management activities). Overall, it was a great and challenging experience.

This ended in 2006 when I was given my current role, to get plans we had developed to set up a Warwickshire Observatory, off the ground. Which brings me to where we are now! We'll be happy to share our experience in establishing the Observatory with LARIA members as we get going if anyone is interested in what we have done and how we have gone about it.

Outside work, some of the things I like include: cycling (Warwickshire has to be one of the best places in the country for cycling – not too hilly, not too flat, as well as having some lovely countryside, villages and towns); playing badminton (singles or doubles, really don't mind as long as I can play); visiting good pubs and restaurants; listening to music (very varied taste from classic rock to 80's pop); current affairs; cinema; Top 100 anything on TV; and spending time with family and friends.

Noticeboard

CCSR

The Centre for Census and Survey Research (www.ccsr.ac.uk) at Manchester University will be running two new one-day research training courses in September 2007.

- 1. Cognitive Interviewing for Survey Development and**
- 2. Multi-item Scale Development for Surveys**

Details are given below. Places are likely to be limited. For more information and to book please go to CCSR home page or to www.ccsr.ac.uk/courses/external/2007-2008/

1. Cognitive Interviewing for Survey Development

This one-day course is designed to familiarise participants with the powerful and efficient method of testing survey questions called Cognitive Interviewing. Cognitive Interviewing is a type of in-depth interviewing which focuses on respondents' thought processing in answering survey questions and uses specialised techniques such as probing, observation and paraphrasing. The course is about what cognitive interviewing is as well as how to do it. The course includes hands-on training and practical exercises. The course is suitable for researchers and policy practitioners working across a wide range of disciplines.

2. Multi-item Scale Development for Surveys

This one-day course is designed to assist participants from all disciplines in how to write and test questions to develop their own high-quality multi-item scales. Multi-item scales are very popular in psychology, education, and health to measure abstract concepts, but can equally be useful in other disciplines such as sociology, political science, and survey research, etc. The day will be a combination of lectures and workshops in designing multi-item scales and critiquing existing ones. We will also spend 1½ hours towards the end of the day in the computer lab practicing applying the basic statistical tools to the evaluation of some pre-existing scales. The course is suitable for researchers and policy practitioners working across a wide range of disciplines.

Guide for Contributors

The LARIA Newsletter Group actively encourages all relevant contributions – articles, news items and reports – about the work of Research and Intelligence units and other organisations involved in research and policy analysis. Details of relevant courses, conferences and services are also welcomed.

The aim is to produce an interesting and informative newsletter which appeals to as wide a range of research practitioners as possible, from statisticians to social researchers. Contributions should be as user-friendly and jargon-free as possible. Explanation of acronyms used is particularly important.

The Group meets shortly after the deadline for each edition to discuss contributions received. We need to ensure the content is suitable for our readership. Articles tailored to LariaNews stand a greater chance of making the final edition than general press releases. We also welcome cartoons, graphics and pictures which illustrate the text and offer additional insights.

As a guide, 300 words will suffice for news items. 1000 words is an appropriate length for feature articles. We occasionally receive longer academic articles which are less suitable for a newsletter. If the content is relevant to LARIA members we will publish an abstract in the newsletter and a link to the full article on www.laria.gov.uk.

Please send any comments about LariaNews to the Editor. We appreciate your feedback and will discuss any material received. Articles may be edited. The Editor's decisions are final.

Next Issue

Copy should be sent or emailed in Word format to the Editor (address on back page) to arrive by 3rd August 2007.

Any graphs, tables, photographs or adverts need to be supplied in jpeg or bmp format.

The views expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily of their employing organisation or of LARIA. Readers are advised to ascertain for themselves that courses, conferences or services advertised are appropriate for their needs.

Just the Job

Just a reminder that advertising research jobs on www.laria.gov.uk is free to corporate members of LARIA. And with corporate membership costing only £60, it could soon pay for itself. Look under 'Job Vacancies' and 'Membership' on the website.

LARIA was established in 1974 to promote the role and practice of research within the field of local government and provide a supportive network for those conducting or commissioning research.

There are three forms of LARIA membership - full membership and associate membership for individuals and corporate membership for organisations. LARIA is managed by a Council, mainly elected by the full members.

LARIA is registered as Specially Authorised Society under the Friendly Societies Act 1974. Its activities are of interest to all people working on Research and Intelligence activities for Local Authorities or allied fields, and depend upon active participation of such people to promote, maintain and develop professional practices.

LARIA in Scotland (LiS) has its own steering group, whose chair is also on the LARIA Council. It plans workshops, and other events, and is developing networking at a Scottish level.

ALGIS in LARIA is an autonomous group affiliated to LARIA. It represents the interests and concerns of information specialists within local government. The group organises small events and visits, publishes a quarterly Newsletter and undertakes any other activities designed to raise awareness of the potential and actual benefits of the work of information specialists within local government.

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EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

LARIA wishes to encourage participation in its Activity Groups, its events, its newsletter and its other activities. It aims to remove barriers to participation associated with race, gender, age, faith, disability and sexuality. It expects its members, delegates and speakers at its events, and contributors to its newsletter to help in achieving that aim.