

Methods@Manchester - a vision for 2011-16

methods@manchester was set up in October 2009 and began activities in January 2010. During this time firm foundations have been laid down and our strategic direction have become clarified and confirmed. This document sets out a vision for the development of methods@manchester over the next five years, during which it will merge with the Faculty of Humanities researcher development programme and take on a key role with respect to the DTC.

1. Aims

The University of Manchester has a depth and breadth of methodological expertise that would be the envy of most other UK universities and, indeed, most other universities world-wide. An over-arching aim of methods@manchester is to make engage with this expertise so that it has more impact within and outside the University. The University of Manchester should be instantly recognised as the UK leader in social science. Within this over-arching aim there are three subsidiary aims:

(1) to provide high quality training and development for research students and researchers, not only at the University of Manchester but, through Methods NorthWest, the new ESRC-funded Doctoral Training Centre.

(2) to promote inter-disciplinary initiatives within the university and thus capitalise on Manchester's disciplinary breadth and methodological strengths.

(3) to promote, externally, Manchester's methodological strengths

2. Achieving these aims

2.1 Training and development for research students and researchers

The University of Manchester has a strong ethos to promote the development of graduate students and researchers in both generic and research-related training. Its generic training provided under Roberts funding has been extremely successful and has laid an excellent foundation to meet student-needs. From 2012, [methods@manchester](#) will assume the leadership of an overarching Faculty of Humanities Researcher Development Programme, combining the transferable skills training currently delivered by the Faculty Researcher Development Team with the methods-related training and awareness raising currently delivered by methods@manchester. This will enable transferable skills training to be more effectively embedded within a coherent research-related development programme, providing seamless provision at all levels in keeping with the Researcher Development framework. As now, provision will augment, rather than replace, the basic methods training provided by PhD programmes and schools in the Faculty.

Methods NorthWest represents an extended version of methods@manchester than brings together resources and activities to maximise the benefits of the collaboration for all PhD students at the three universities. MethodsNorthWest has its own web-site and logo (<http://www.methodsnorthwest.ac.uk/>) that receives feeds from the separate universities. Joint activities and ways of working together will be developed during 2011.

The paragraphs, below, set out the main areas in which activities will be developed.

Transferable Skills

The wealth of courses which are now available through the Faculty Training and Development Unit, for example, academic writing, giving presentations, preparing for a viva, networking effectively, will continue and expand in response to expressed needs and expectations of the Research Councils.

Training in public engagement and enterprise skills will be offered as part of a wider approach to the development of skills in knowledge exchange and maximising the impact of research. Embedding such training within methods@manchester will increase the opportunities available for researchers to demonstrate their skills through contributions to seminars and events.

The Researcher Development Framework will form the focus for researchers to engage with their personal and career development. Embedding the transferable skills programme within the methods@manchester structures will support the RDF approach of considering development along a continuum from PhD to senior academics.

The strong links which have already been established with Researcher development teams in the other faculties will continue, allowing for shared delivery of training events, promoting an extensive interdisciplinary approach to the development of transferable skills. Through the work of Vitae, the national umbrella body for researcher development, researchers at Manchester will continue to have the opportunity to undertake training provided at a national level.

Ethics

The web resources now available will be continuously updated and augmented by talks from experts and discussions led by experienced members of staff. We will aim to work with the University Ethics Committee to ensure that students and staff in the humanities and social sciences are not only informed about the University ethical procedures but have an opportunity to work through what this means, in practice, for their own research.

Research resources

The University of Manchester, and the UK generally, has a vast array of research resources that include data, short courses and on-line support materials. We need to ensure that all students, supervisors and research staff are fully aware of the rich mine of research resources, many funded by ESRC or JISC, that are available to support their research. This includes courses and workshops (some run by CCSR, others by NCRM); large-scale data sources such as the UK's longitudinal studies and census programme as well qualitative resources (eg Timescapes, the British Library's holdings); and a host of on-line materials that support qualitative analysis (eg CAQDAS) and quantitative analysis (eg LEMMA, for multilevel modelling). Dissemination about these resources requires a continuing series of workshops and talks (some run by internal experts and some from invited external speakers), email alerts and short videos.

Methods workshops

Methods workshops form an important way of raising awareness and providing additional training on particular topics, for example international comparative analysis; analysing qualitative data; sensitive interviewing; running focus groups. The workshops are responsive to expressed needs (eg computer assisted analysis of qualitative data), but also identify areas of growing importance as well as opportunities afforded by visiting academics.

What is...?

The *What is?* series of weekly (during semesters) talks that provide accessible introductions to key methods in the social sciences and humanities. Each talk covers a separate topic (eg multilevel modelling or ethnography) and each topic has its own page on the methods@manchester web-site that explains what the method is, who the Manchester experts are, and holds a recording of the talk. For some methods there are also links to further courses and resources and a short videos.

The talks and the associated web-pages and recordings have provided an identity and backbone to methods@manchester. The web-pages also provide a showcase for the expertise in a wide range of methods at the University and are now being widely publicised externally.

In the coming years we will expand these pages, update older pages and amplify them with links to publications and University experts.

Supervisor Awareness Training

The merged team will be well-placed to enhance and promote the supervisor awareness training currently offered by the Researcher Development Team. By working within the methods@manchester model, such training will be contextualised within the research environment and encourage engagement.

The Annual Methods Fair

On September 29, 2010 we held the first Methods Fair, particularly targeted at new PGR students. We ran a day of short, student-led talks, posters, stalls to promote resources, and workshops on topics such as multilevel modelling, qualitative comparative analysis, doing fieldwork. The event provided an easy introduction to the range of resources and support networks available to researchers and provided an opportunity for networking and awareness-raising about methods and methods-related issues. About 200 researchers attended the event and it was very positively evaluated. We envisage that this will now become an annual event, organised as a joint activity with all DTC partners fully involved. The 2011 Fair is planned for October 5, 2011.

2.2 Promoting inter-disciplinarity

Inter-disciplinarity underpins innovation and is essential to answer many of the 'big' research questions that are at the forefront of the Research Council's agenda. methods@manchester aims to address this from a methods-related perspective in a number of ways:

(1) Identifying broad research themes that demand a cross-disciplinary perspective

We were successful in obtaining an ESRC research seminar series on 'The Impact Agenda' that comprises six one-day seminars and involves a wide-range of disciplinary areas. The first meeting was on January 12, 2011. Similarly, we were awarded (via NCRM) an ESRC-funded grant to promote methodological innovation and capacity building in research on ethnicity, which involves cross-disciplinary within the social sciences.

A grant application has been submitted to NCRM on methodological challenges facing cohort studies concerned with issues of ageing. If successful this will bring together the investigators of the major ageing cohort studies in Britain and abroad with methodological experts from the social sciences and beyond. We envisage that this pattern of external funding will continue.

We are starting a series of seminars on 'Social responsibility and research methods' that involve cross-disciplinary conversations where the biological sciences, medicine and engineering come together with social sciences, arts and humanities to explore how methods and research ethics relate to a range of decisions over research processes and procedures. The first meeting is on June 8th 2011.

(2) Organising cross-disciplinary meetings on specific topics

These meetings, at the moment held annually, bring together invited speakers to discuss their research. In February 2010 we held a meeting in 'researching consumption' that involved economists, statisticians, health experts and sociologists. In February 2011 we are holding a meeting on methods of thinking about and establishing causality from different disciplinary-perspectives. These meetings generate intensive discussion and can sow the seeds for further collaboration.

Although these examples are specifically aimed at promoting cross-disciplinarity, almost all our events successfully bring together staff and students across a wide-range of disciplines. For example, the What is...? regularly represent 5 or 6 different disciplines whilst the methods-related workshops, similarly, bring together researchers across a wide disciplinary spectrum.

Over the next five years we plan to build on these initiatives to promote inter-disciplinarity and thus lay the foundation for an increasing number of research grant applications.

2.3 Promoting and publicising research methods at the University of Manchester

Promoting research methods at the University of Manchester starts with the web-site. It is envisaged that by 2012 the DTU and methods@manchester web-sites will have come together, but in a way that preserves the best of both.

The web-site is crucial to all activities and provides information internally and an external show-case for Manchester. Most important for external visibility are the 'methods' pages that highlight those research methods where Manchester has particular strengths. These pages, based on the What is ...? talks provide information about the expertise available at the University of Manchester as well as an audio-recording of the introductory talk and, for some methods, a short video.

Manchester-based PGRs and researchers have ready access to information about the workshops and courses run by the DTU/methods@manchester. Many workshops have been recorded so that researchers can listen again to the presentations linked to the overheads used.

There are also extensive resource pages, discussed above, that serve both internal and external needs, with links to Manchester-based resources as well as information and links to a very wide range of national resources. These will be maintained and updated with new topics and new materials.

Web 2.0 technology (blogs, Twitter) is used to keep in touch with PGRs and researchers and there is scope for enhancing our presence on the Sage Methodspace and socialsciencespace as well as publishing videos on YouTube.

Our externally funded seminars are valuable in promoting methods@manchester. They attract high visibility speakers and many participants from outside Manchester.

We plan to use all these methods to promote the visibility of methods@manchester in the coming years. This should have pay-off not just in terms of recognition by funders but also in terms of applications from graduate students.

We now have about 800 subscribers to methods@manchester subscribers to receive a weekly email notice of events and news. All PGRs and researchers in the Faculty receive a monthly bulletin from DTU. We envisage that these different ways of communicating can come together in a fairly seamless way.

The methods@manchester web-site comes at the top of any Google search that includes the words 'Manchester' and 'methods' and is also top of Google searches for 'research methods training'.

3. Governance

A Management Board plays an important role in the strategic direction of methods@manchester. It meets twice a year. Full papers are sent to all Board members before the meeting and minutes are circulated immediately afterwards. Its current composition has the following components:

- (1) Research directors within each School in the Faculty (or their nominee)
- (2) Directors of research centres/institutes in the Faculty.
- (3) Additional individuals holding key positions within the Faculty; from other Faculties in the University and, additionally, a member from the Institute of Health Sciences and Manchester Informatics.

From March 2011 we are also inviting representatives from the Lancaster and Liverpool arms of the DTC to attend the meetings.