

## Learned Society Researcher Development Questionnaire

Society: British Sociological Association  
Respondent (Name/Position): Judith Mudd/Chief Executive  
Number of members in society (approx.): 2,300

### **1) How does your society contribute to developing the skills and expertise of its members ? (eg research training, doctoral symposium etc)**

Throughout the year we provide numerous developmental opportunities for our members. Last year, for example, we supported seventy four conferences and events which were organised across the country, covering a wide range of research interests and intellectual needs, and catering for members at all stages of their careers.

#### **Skills and expertise development opportunities provided for all members**

##### **Annual conference**

This is the main event in the BSA's calendar, attracting over 550 delegates each year. Modelled on the International Sociological Association World Congress, the format of our annual conference revolves around specialist streams which are designed to represent the major research areas in which sociologists in the UK are engaged and to attract a concentration of specialists in each field to each stream to provide the best opportunities for knowledge, skills and expertise to be shared and developed.

One of the streams at the annual conference is 'methodological innovations', providing a focussed forum for researchers to share and learn about a range of research methods. For example, in 2010 the stream included 19 presentations looking at a variety of research methods. These presentations ranged from a description of the reduction processes observed in qualitative methods, to the challenges and complexities involved in using the internet as a source of qualitative data, to the role of impression management in participant observation. Visual methods were prominent, five of the presentations forming the basis of two visual methods panel discussions. Specific examples of research methods described at this year's annual conference are:

- The use of self-directed participant photography and reflective interviews in a study of social change in post-conflict Belfast, described as deeply revealing of the complex interconnections between class, gender and ethno-national concerns.
- The value of visual methods in drug-related research in improving understanding of political prejudice and social suffering surrounding drug injecting and their contribution towards the development of interventions which might reduce harm.
- The use of video diaries made by participants themselves in a study exploring the experience of people with long term physical and mental conditions.
- An illustration of the added value of conducting three interviews to generate three narratives in relationship studies i.e. interview with the couple, and interviews with each partner separately, this providing

considerable insights into the links between the stories couple tell and their lived relationships.

- A three year study on the experience of breastfeeding for over 30 women which used both visual (video) and audio diaries. Both types of diaries were compared in terms of ease of use, completion by participants, and quality and quantity of data generated. The practical challenges and strategies of using these two types of diaries were also discussed.
- A study comparing semi-structured face-to-face and telephone interviews which asked specifically whether it makes a difference to data generation if qualitative research interviews are conducted by telephone rather than face-to-face.
- A trail-blazing mental health service user-led research project where participants were meaningfully involved in and took shared ownership of the process, which produced research evidence and recommendations critical to subsequent service improvements for mental health services in the area where the research was carried out.

In addition to the opportunities to develop subject specific knowledge, this event also provides more generic skills and expertise development opportunities such as the opportunity to practice presentation skills, to establish new research contacts and networks, and to learn about new research and research methods. The Heads and Professors of Sociology meet at this event, providing an opportunity for them to share and expand their knowledge on professional issues. The conference also includes a 'Teaching, Learning and Professional Issues' stream which provides similar skills and expertise development opportunities and is open to all conference delegates.

### **Study groups**

The BSA operates a network of over 30 active specialist and study groups. Study groups focus on major fields of research within the discipline, like Medical Sociology, Religion and Food. Specialist groups include an Early Careers Forum, a Postgraduate Forum and a Sociologists Outside Academia group, and bring together people who share common experiences and challenges in their academic and professional lives. Each group provides a professional and social network in which individuals with specialised research, teaching and professional interests can connect and develop their own events to supplement the skills and expertise development opportunities at the Annual Conference. Study and specialist study groups currently (July 2010) active within the BSA are:

Ageing, Body & Society  
Animal/Human  
Auto/Biography  
Childhood  
Education  
Family & Relationships  
Food  
Happiness  
Human Reproduction  
Leisure & Recreation  
Lesbian  
Media  
Medical Sociology

Mental Health  
Museums & Society  
Race & Ethnicity  
Realism & Social Research  
Religion  
Risk & Society  
Scottish  
Sexual Divisions  
Social and Public Policy  
Social Aspects of Death, Dying and Bereavement  
Social Network Analysis Group  
Sociologists Outside Academia  
Sociology of Rights  
Sport  
Theory  
Urban Theory & Research  
Violence Against Women  
Visual Sociology  
Weber  
Youth

Further information about the BSA study and specialist groups including convenor contact information is available at: <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/specialisms/>

### **Specific training and support for skills and expertise development**

#### **Media training and support**

The BSA employs the services of a trained journalist and communications expert who provides media training sessions. Our Communications Officer also provides one-to-one support for researchers to help them distribute their research findings via the press, working closely with them to produce press releases and to guide them through newspaper, radio and TV interviews. Looking at a full year (2009 is the latest full year that we can report on) over 20 press releases were written and issued on behalf of researchers which resulted in well over 100 mentions in the press (National newspapers 9 times, national media websites 18 times, national radio 9 times, local newspapers 5 times, local radio 13 times, specialist magazines 1 time, specialist media online 23 times, international media online 9 times, international radio 2 times). A full breakdown of this coverage is available. The BSA also runs regional media training workshops and occasional media training workshop series. For example, in 2008 the BSA held three regional workshops on Social Science Engagement with the Regional Media. These provided delegates with a practical guide to getting research findings to a non-academic audience. These workshops draw on the expertise of professional journalists currently working for regional press organisations and University Press Officers providing guidance on how to initiate and create good relations with the regional media, and with relevant specialist websites and magazines. Practising journalists speak about what they look for in a news story, how a story is developed for TV, radio, print and the web. Press and Communications Officers give practical advice on proactive and reactive engagement with the media. The media training that we offer is open to all members at all stages of their careers.

#### **Training on how to get published**

BSA journal editors share their wealth of knowledge in specific training sessions on how to get published in academia. This training takes place at our annual conference and is open to all delegates. BSA Council has recently agreed to roll this training out and we are planning an additional training session specifically for early career members. Similar training sessions are also regularly included in the BSA regional postgraduate day schools (see below).

### **Presidential events**

In 2010 the BSA President initiated a series of events where the BSA and the discipline more generally can demonstrate their impact or relevance. 'Presidential Events' have two purposes: a) to show that the BSA is engaging with the issues that define our future; and b) to provide opportunities for networking with policy makers, politicians, civil servants, NGOs and the like. These events provide important skills and expertise development opportunities by demonstrating the various pathways to impact that are available to sociologists and helping to develop understanding of how to promote their research to an audience beyond the normal academic networks. For example, In February 2010, a BSA Presidential Event was held at the British Library on putting the 'social' into climate change. An MP and five major figures in the discipline spoke on the importance of putting society into climate change debates, the ways in which social activities can be changed to have a positive impact on climate change, on how better understanding of routine consumption might inform better strategies for enhancing sustainability, and on how scientists need to work with society at large i.e. to be more honest and open about their findings if they want to convince people to alter their daily activities to work for positive climate change.

### **Skills and expertise development opportunities provided specifically for postgraduate members**

#### **Regional postgraduate day schools**

Each year the BSA supports a series of regional postgraduate day schools. During the 2009/2010 financial year five such events were held in Belfast, Edinburgh, Warwick, Newcastle and York providing skills and expertise development opportunities for our postgraduate members across the UK. The Warwick event explored politics and social research, looking at how social researchers approach the issue of personal politics and activist space, how the personal politics of social researchers are communicated, whether social research can/should be a political forum, and how sociologists can contribute to political studies. The Belfast event was a two day event focussing on the philosophy and theories of Pierre Bourdieu in the fields of sociology and anthropology with a substantive focus on education, offering three masterclasses on post-primary, higher and professional education. Other BSA Regional Postgraduate Day Schools focus on the postgraduate experience and career pathways. For example, a 2008 event held at Aberdeen offered sessions on the following: overcoming the challenges of first year studies, planning and conducting postgraduates research, the writing-up process, surviving the viva, beginning to publish, careers in sociology across Europe, and getting a job in North America and the UK.

#### **Annual Postgraduate Workshop**

Further skills and expertise development opportunities for our postgraduate members are provided by our annual postgraduate workshop which takes place the day before our annual conference. For example, the programme for the 2010

annual postgraduate workshop included sessions on: 'Communicating Sociology', about communicating research to the media and how to exercise and express your voice in presentation and teaching situations, led by a journalist and media coach and a vocal coach; 'Career Biographies', where guest speakers share their experiences of developing research interests and being an international academic; 'Challenges', where guest speakers and attendees shared their experiences of the challenges of getting through a PhD, including being a part-time student and balancing family and work; and 'PG Futures', offering advice and guidance on 'how to get the most out of your PhD', including the support and research networks available via the BSA, especially the BSA Postgraduate Forum.

### **Postgraduate Podcasts**

The BSA Postgraduate Forum has developed a very successful series of podcasts which are designed to provide for the skills and expertise development needs of our postgraduate members. The latest, for example, is an interview with Professor Alan Warde who speaks about post-doctoral directions for students who have or who are about to complete their PhD projects. Topics covered in this episode include: an outline of funding available, tips for writing a funding application, and advice on critical criteria and the assessment process (based on ESRC assessment processes). More information can be found at:

[http://pgforum.libsyn.com/index.php?post\\_category=podcasts](http://pgforum.libsyn.com/index.php?post_category=podcasts)

### **Skills and expertise development opportunities provided specifically for early career members**

This is a new and rapidly expanding constituency within the BSA. The BSA Early Careers Forum was launched in 2009 with a very successful event held at the British Library on 'What is out there for Early Career Sociologists?'. The speakers at this event included Jude England of the British Library, who introduced the audience to the huge wealth of resource available to sociologists at the British Library, and Professor John Scott, who spoke about the ESRC postdoctoral fellowships. This event was seen as a very valuable skills and expertise development opportunity. Similar events are now planned provided each year for early career members. For focus for the next one is planned to be the ESRC First Grants Scheme.

### **2) How does your society identify the priority needs for development amongst your members? (i.e. how do you find out what they need)?**

Throughout the year we communicate with and consult our members on a variety of topics via our website, Facebook, members' magazine and members e-news. This helps us to identify the priority needs for development and our Annual Members' Meeting provides a specific face-to-face opportunity for us to garner information on the needs and views of our members. Two specific development needs were identified by members at this year's Annual Members' Meeting: a need for research methods training and a need for continuous generic software training. Strategies for responding to the development needs of our members are discussed within the BSA Council and its Executive Management Team. In addition, the BSA Council includes representatives from each of the BSA's constituencies to ensure that the concerns and needs within each may be brought to Council. The themes and topics of postgraduate and early careers events are suggested by those constituencies themselves to ensure that the right skills and expertise development needs are being met.

**3) Do you provide research training for your members? If so, what's the focus of this research training (e.g. advancement in substantive disciplinary content; specific discipline relevant research skills; generic skills)?**

The BSA is anticipating greater involvement in the provision of research training and Council plans to discuss this with HaPS in the context of awaited news on the Doctoral Training Centres.

Currently most of our training is in substantive areas or in generic transferable skills rather than research methods as such. For example:

Through our annual conference, study group and specialist group events we provide training in the form of providing opportunities in the advancement of substantive disciplinary content (see above);

Through our postgraduate day schools, workshops and postgraduate podcasts and early career events we provide both specific discipline relevant research skills and generic skills (see above); and

Through our specialist media and publishing training sessions we provide generic research training skills (see above).

In addition, our annual conference has a stream on 'methodological innovations', providing a focussed forum for researchers to share and learn about a range of research methods (see above).

**4) How else do you support researcher development?**

**Support Fund**

The BSA Support Fund provides financial assistance for low-income members to support access to skills and expertise development opportunities. Funds are made available to support research related expenses and attendance at conferences and study group events. The BSA Support Fund also provides funding to enable the Association to offer 30 free registrations for UK Concessionary members to help low-income members to benefit from the skills and development opportunities available at the BSA annual conference. A maximum single award of £250 is available per applicant.

**Early Careers Professional Development Award**

The BSA Early Careers Development Award was launched in 2010. It is designed to support the skills and expertise development needs of our early careers members by contributing towards the cost of conference attendance, research training and/or attendance at continuing professional development events. A maximum single award of £400 is available per applicant.

**BSA Publications Prizes**

The BSA seeks to reward excellence in published work in the discipline of sociology by awarding prizes to publications/published articles which make a significant contribution to the discipline.

a) The BSA Philip Abrams Memorial Prize

The BSA Philip Abrams Memorial Prize of £1,000 is awarded annually for the best first and sole-authored book within the discipline of Sociology. The prize was established in honour of the memory of Professor Philip Abrams whose work contributed substantially to sociology and social policy research in Britain. He is remembered for the encouragement and assistance he provided to many young sociologists at the start of their careers. The aim of the prize is to stimulate new ideas and fresh research in sociology by encouraging new British authors. More information can be found at: <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/publications/PAM.htm>

b) The BSA Phil Strong Memorial Prize

This prize was established in memory of Phil Strong (1945-1995) one of the post-war generation of sociologists who influenced the development of medical sociology in the UK. In memory of his contribution as an essayist, researcher and teacher this prize has been established to support post graduate research in medical sociology. In 2010, it is anticipated that there will be one prize to the value of £1200. The purpose of the prize is to contribute to the advancement of medical sociology by supporting post-graduate research in medical sociology. The prize is awarded each year in the autumn at the BSA Medical Sociology Study Group Conference. More information can be found at: <http://www.britsoc.co.uk/medsoc/PhilStrong.htm>

c) The SAGE Prize for Innovation and/or Excellence

The SAGE Prize for Innovation and Excellence (SPIE) is awarded annually to one paper in each of the BSA's four prestigious journals: Cultural Sociology, Sociological Research Online, Sociology and Work, Employment and Society. More information can be found at: [SAGE Prize](#).

d) The Sociology of Health and Illness Book of the Year Prize

The Sociology of Health and Illness (SHI) Book Prize of £1,000 is awarded annually each September to the author(s) or editor(s) of the book making the most significant contribution to medical sociology/sociology of health and illness and having been published over the three years preceding 1st January of the year in which the award is made. The prize is awarded annually at the BSA Medical Sociology Study Group Conference. More information can be found at: [Sociology of Health and Illness Book Prize](#).

### **Codes of Ethics and Professional Practice**

The BSA provides guidelines on ethics and professional practice via its website. These are an important part of many Departmental training schemes and the BSA takes responsibility for the regular updating and promotion of the codes. Together with HaPS (Heads and Professors of Sociology), the BSA has been closely involved in a number of events dedicated to raising awareness of ethical issues and has undoubtedly influenced the Codes drawn up by the ESRC and the RCUK.

**5) Do you provide/ promote other developmental opportunities (e.g. public events – displays, lectures, broadcasts; Data/information resources; seminars)?**

Yes.

We provide comprehensive and constantly updated information about as many other development opportunities for sociologists that we are notified of or find out about through our internal networks and research, via as many of our communications channels.

**6) For each of these different activities, how do you advertise them?**

**Website**

From the home page of our website [www.britsoc.co.uk](http://www.britsoc.co.uk) anyone (not just BSA members) can access a whole host of information which might support their skills and expertise developmental needs. For example:

Events are listed at:

<http://www.britsoc.co.uk/events/ForthcomingEvents.htm>

Research sign-posting and advice can be found at:

<http://www.britsoc.co.uk/about/research.htm>

A comprehensive A-Z listing of organisations and resources which might be of interest to sociologists is available at:

<http://www.britsoc.co.uk/WhatIsSociology/SociologyLinks.htm>

**Members' e-newsletter**

Information about non-BSA sociological events is always included in addition to information about our own events in our members e-newsletter. The June 2010 BSA members' e-newsletter can be found at:

<http://www.britsoc.co.uk/about/membere-news>

**Members' magazine**

Information about research projects, funding and events is included in the BSA Members' Magazine, Network. The Spring 2010 issue can be found at:

[http://www.britsoc.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/77FA27A4-B9F3-42A7-B3E0-487E79E12469/0/Network\\_Issue104\\_Spring2010.pdf](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/77FA27A4-B9F3-42A7-B3E0-487E79E12469/0/Network_Issue104_Spring2010.pdf)

External organisations can also advertise their skills and expertise development opportunities in Network (at very reasonable advertising rates)

**BSA Annual Conference (and other larger BSA events)**

Opportunities area available for organisations outside of the BSA to promote their skills and developmental opportunities to our members and non-members attending our events including: advertising in conference programme, advertising via flyers in conference delegate packs, taking paid exhibition space at



conferences, and sponsoring and hosting special events at conferences. For example Intute and ProQuest have promoted their services at recent BSA annual conferences.

**7) Is there anyone else from your society I should talk to about its research training and development activity?**

You may like to contact any or all of the following:

Professor Rob Mears, BSA Chair Robert Mears  
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