

PDF - QUALITATIVE METHODS: THE NEW ORTHODOXY? - researchcub.info is an interesting moment to write Progress in Human Geography's first report on qualitative methods. In one sense, it suggests these methods have, at long last, arrived and been accepted as established approaches. That this is an overdue recognition needs little emphasizing when surveying the number of articles drawing upon, at least in part, qualitative material. However, a less encouraging omen is the recent column in the UK Economic and Social Research Council's Social Sciences, penned by the chief executive (Marshall, 2001). In it he asserts: 'British universities and colleges are not producing quantitatively competent social scientists in sufficient numbers.' Although he does not mention what 'non-quantitative' research is doing, he discusses a series of remedial measures – such as compulsory training in statistics, prioritized awards for quantitative PhD projects, tied studentships and specialist research centres. To paraphrase Spike Milligan's comment on army training, the attitude appears to be – if someone dies when you hang them, keep hanging them until they get used to it. It is already feeding through into new postgraduate Research Training Guidelines. The problem we are told is acute, though the evidence presented is scant and, moreover, ironically seems to consist of unanalysed, qualitative reports from meetings with civil servants: 'Failure to [remedy the shortage] is likely to result in Britain falling behind the rest of Europe, both in the provision of talented quantitative social researchers, and the ability to design public policy on a reliable evidence base.' It seems to imply that qualitative research has not only arrived but gone too far. Within geography, the last decade has undoubtedly seen an expansion in qualitative work both in terms of the types of work and the topics addressed. So in this first report I want to spend some time looking at the range of topics, then beginning to look at the range of methods that might be covered. I want to suggest that we have moved from a period when papers were prefaced with legitimations of qualitative work to a time when we are seeing debates within qualitative methods over establishing orthodox approaches and standards. I want to conclude this report by pointing towards some gaps.

## **QUALITATIVE METHODS: THE NEW ORTHODOXY?**

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