

UKDA awarded Place of Deposit status

The UKDA, responsible for archiving government records since 1967, became a designated Place of Deposit for public records for The National Archives on 1 January 2005.

As many users of ESDS will know, the UKDA holds on behalf of ESDS many government surveys. Some of these data collections provide a continuous long-term view of social patterns and economic behaviour dating back some 30 years. For example the Family Resources Survey covers the period from 1961, the General Household Survey and the National Travel Survey from 1971 and the National Food Survey from 1974. In all these cases the UKDA also now holds the only preservation copies of the data in the country. Even the originating government department no longer holds a copy of the older data files. These long-term data collections not only provide an important resource for social science research and teaching, but also serve as a vital historical record of the nation.

From then



...until now

Subsequently, over the course of last year the UKDA entered into a series of discussions with The National Archives (TNA) concerning the custodianship and long-term preservation of these important government records. The Public Records Act (1958) sets out the process by which records generated by central government departments are selected and scheduled for permanent preservation. Once selected, such records are designated as Public Records and take on a specific legal status concerning both their access and preservation. Under the 1958 Act public records may be deposited in places other than TNA by agreement between the Lord Chancellor and the relevant authority. Thus, in effect TNA can grant powers to other repositories to hold public records on their behalf.

During the summer of 2004 an intensive site inspection by TNA took place checking that the UKDA conforms to various British Standards (most notably BS 5454) concerning archival procedures, records management, security, access and preservation. The inspection was passed with flying colours, strongly endorsing the work of UKDA, and indeed seeing it as setting standards for others to follow. To quote from the TNA report:

“The facilities which you provide for the preservation of digital public records are excellent, as are the arrangements by which you enable research access to those records. In the 30 years since UKDA was established the organisation has clearly amassed considerable expertise in all aspects of this work, and I was impressed by your thorough and sympathetic approach to archives and research management.”

The TNA also reported that “arrangements for archival preservation and access are of a very high order, and will no doubt stand as a benchmark for other similar services in the near future”.

The award to the UKDA will have no direct impact on the service provided to ESDS, but importantly it does strengthen the relation between UKDA and government departments and will help to ensure the continued flow of high quality government data for ESDS users. For those datasets which are designated public records - mainly government datasets held by the UKDA that are over 30 years old - the new status will also allow unrestricted access. ■



Born free - ELSA

ESDS are happy to announce the release of an important new data source - the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA), a study of ageing and quality of life among older people.

ELSA explores the dynamic relationships between health, social participation and economic position as people plan for, move into and progress through retirement. The study has been developed through a collaboration between University College London, the Institute of Fiscal Studies, and the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen).

Wave 1 of ELSA, carried out in 2002-2003, involved face-to-face interviews with 12,100 respondents aged 50 and over. The sample was drawn from households that had previously responded to the Health Survey for England (HSE)



“...what happens to the data collection...”

in 1998, 1999 or 2001. The questionnaire topics included health and disability, cognitive function, psychosocial health, inter-family transfers and family structure, social participation and networks, detailed economic circumstances, and retirement. The same group of respondents will be visited every two years in order to measure change in their health, economic, and social circumstances. The second wave of ELSA, which is currently underway, involves a similar interview to Wave 1 and a nurse visit.

The core data collected at ELSA Wave 1, and accompanying documentation, are now available from the ESDS, with dedicated pages on ESDS Longitudinal. Geographical variables and mortality data are held by NatCen, who are developing a strategy for providing restricted access to this data. A data users' workshop for ELSA is being planned.

www.esds.ac.uk/longitudinal/elsa/
Contact at NatCen: k.cox@natcen.ac.uk ■

Research methodologists debate online resources

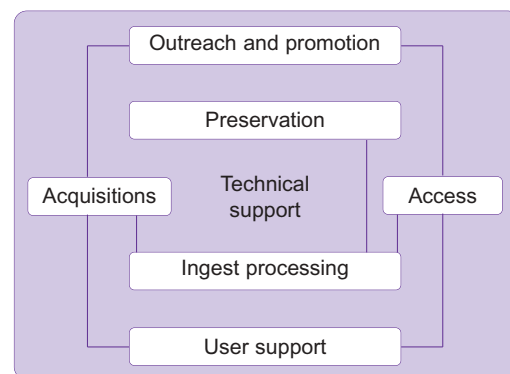
Research methodologists debated the challenge of developing online resources at the ESRC Research Methods Programme meeting on 15-16 December 2004. The meeting brought together developers and users of online materials, with experts covering the following major resource development issues: ease of location by potential users; accessibility; ease of use, quality assurance and fit for purpose; ability to meet copyright, IPR and ethical standards.

Points arising from the workshop included:

- online resources are best seen as learning objects, with repositories a means of storing/hosting learning objects (and information about them) so that they can be used by the wider community;
- a repository needs to ensure that users are not locked into proprietary systems; that content can be moved to and from different systems and materials can be re-used and re-purposed;
- metadata is vital for online materials to be catalogued and retrieved with search engines;
- licensing and Intellectual Property Rights are important areas for producers and users of online materials;
- evaluation of online resources needs to be built in to the development of online materials from the start, increasing innovation and transfer of good practice;
- ethical and confidentiality issues arise across a wide range of materials and apply especially when access to resources is unrestricted;
- long-term storage of teaching and learning materials could include personal custodianship deposit in a trusted repository, either discipline, object-type or institutional-based; sharing data; being captured in a web archive.

www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/archive/notes_000.htm ■

Inside the data factory



Thousands of social scientists throughout the UK use ESDS every year but probably only a small fraction of the total number have any notion about what happens to the data collection that they request from ESDS between it being created and delivered to them for secondary analysis or teaching. In some respects this does not really matter. In much the same way that one does not need to know (or probably want to know) how the beans inside a can of baked beans got there and onto the supermarket shelf when doing grocery shopping on the internet, it is not necessarily important to know what happens to a dataset before it is accessible via one of the ESDS online data dissemination systems. However, in order to help ESDS users understand the processes involved in preparing a data collection for release, and supporting its subsequent use, future issues of UK Databytes will publish a series of short articles that outline the activities involved.

Each of these articles will focus on a specific area of activity within the overall process. Obviously each of these is inter-related and are summarised in the diagram. The next issue of UK Databytes will start with Acquisitions. ■

ESDS Qualidata wins ESRC awards

ESDS Qualidata is set to lead the co-ordination of the new ESRC Qualitative Data Archiving and Dissemination Scheme (QUADS). The Scheme has been funded to encourage the broader acceptance and take up of data sharing and re-use, whilst complementing the core work of ESDS Qualidata. ESDS Qualidata will play a pivotal role in fostering communication and understanding, of the different data needs and methodological approaches to sharing and secondary analysis of qualitative research and data, between the five projects funded under the scheme and the wider community. The QUADS Co-ordination service will provide a web site, organise promotional activities and host meetings to show the project demonstrators being developed.



Louise Corti, Nadeem Ahmad, Libby Bishop

ESDS Qualidata, in conjunction with the Human Communication Research Centre, also won one of the five demonstrator awards known as SQUAD - Smart Qualitative Data: Methods and Community Tools for Data Mark-Up. The project will explore methodological and technical solutions for exposing digital qualitative data to make them fully shareable and exploitable. Initially, the project deals with specifying and testing non-proprietary means of storing and marking up data using universal (eXtensible Mark-up Language (XML)) standards and technologies, and proposes an XML community standard (schema) that will be applicable to most qualitative data. The second strand investigates optimal requirements for contextualising research data, aiming to develop standards for data documentation and ways of capturing this information. The third strand aims to use natural language processing technology to develop and implement user-friendly tools for semi-automating processes to prepare qualitative data for both traditional digital archiving and to enable more adventurous collaborative research and e-science type exploitation, such as linking multiple data and information sources. Finally, the project will further research tools for publishing and archiving enriched marked-up data and associated research materials.

www.data-archive.ac.uk/home/currentrd.asp ■

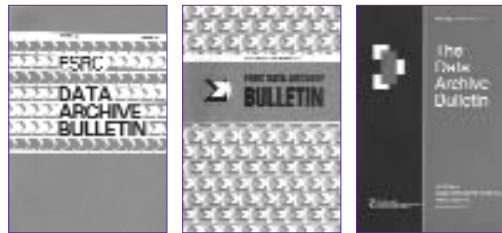
UKDA wins dedicated data support service for research programme



The UKDA together with the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology (CEH) have recently won a bid to provide a data support service for the cross-council Rural Economy and Land Use Programme (RELU). The programme, supported over a five-year period by the three research councils, Economic and Social Research Council, Natural Environment Research Council, and the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, aims to advance understanding of the social, economic, environmental and technological challenges caused by the considerable changes recently being experienced by rural areas in the UK. The interdisciplinary research being undertaken by multi-team projects is enabling academics to work together to inform policy and practice with choices on how to manage the countryside and rural economies. The programme's longer-term aims are to encourage social and economic vitality of rural areas and promote the protection and conservation of the rural environment. The main objective of the RELU data support service, is to ensure that all data management activities are carried out effectively within projects, and to inform the relevant research council data centres with sufficient information to enable planning for management, longer-term preservation and maximised re-use value of RELU datasets.

www.relu.ac.uk
www.esds.ac.uk/aandp/create/reludss.asp ■

Archiving the Archive



Thirty years of the UKDA newsletters can now be searched online. Entering a search term of 'director', for example, reveals former directors of the Archive including Ivor Crewe, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Essex and Sir Howard Newby, Chief Executive of the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

The original newsletter was called the Bulletin, with the first edition in May 1975 and the last, issue 75, in September 2000. Although the Bulletins were originally issued as printed paper copies, all the back issues have now been scanned and converted to PDF files.

All Bulletins, plus UK Databytes and other ESDS and UKDA publications can be searched online through a free-text search.

www.data-archive.ac.uk/publications/publications.asp ■

Focus on new data

The national patient surveys can now be accessed from the UKDA:

- SN 5091** Acute Trusts : Outpatient Survey, 2003
- SN 5092** Acute Trusts : Emergency Department Patient Survey, 2003
- SN 5093** Primary Care Trusts : Patient Survey, 2003

The surveys, deposited by the Healthcare Commission, focused on patients' experiences in primary care trusts, in outpatient, and accident and emergency departments in acute trusts. They were designed to:

- provide detailed feedback to NHS organisations about the experiences of patients and patients' views about their care;
- provide information that the Healthcare Commission can use to assess the performance of healthcare providers;
- monitor the experience of patients at a national level

Most of the surveys in the national programme are centrally developed but individual healthcare organisations implement them, following detailed guidance. Patient survey results are available on the Healthcare Commission's web site. The questionnaires and guidance for surveys currently underway are available on the NHS survey advice centre, the Picker Institute Europe, web site.

www.healthcarecommission.org.uk
www.nhssurveys.org

For a full list of recently released datasets see:

www.data-archive.ac.uk/home/newdata.asp ■

"...pivotal role in fostering communication and understanding..."

"...encourage social and economic vitality of rural areas..."

National Centre for Research Methods

The ESRC National Centre for Research Methods (NCRM) was established in late 2004 to provide a strategic focal point for the identification, development and delivery of a national research, training and capacity-building programme for research methods in the UK. The centre aims to promote a step change in the quality and range of methodological skills and techniques used by the UK social science community, and will provide support for, and dissemination of, methodological innovation and excellence.

The NCRM, working closely with the ESRC Research Methods Programme, consists of a co-ordinating Hub at the University of Southampton and six UK Nodes, which bring different methodological expertise, from multilevel modelling to research synthesis.

ESDS looks forward to working with the new centre, for example through outreach activities, joint events and guides to best practice, providing greater synergy between research methodology theory and practice, and creating and using social science data.

www.ncrm.ac.uk
www.ccsr.ac.uk/methods/ ■

AHDS History News

The JISC has funded AHDS History for a three-year project to create a web-based user interface for browsing, searching, viewing and downloading almost 200,000 images of British historical population reports.

The aim of the project, which started in February 2004, is to digitise all UK census reports 1801-1937 (109,000 pages), the reports of the Registrars General 1801-1921 (70,000 pages) and ancillary material (13,000 pages).

The published returns are of considerable value to historians, and social scientists interested in the development of society over a longer time span. Making these sources available to a wide audience will be of extraordinary value to a very broad range of scholars.

Alongside these published materials will be a selection of associated material from TNA giving insight into the administrative procedure followed in the taking of the census. As well as capturing images, all textual material, containing approximately 50,000 pages, will be OCR'd for user-searching and integrated within the database.

The key deliverable will be a web-based user interface allowing browsing, searching, viewing and downloading images and machine-readable versions of statistical tables contained within the published reports. A fully-operational demonstrator for this project is now available from the project web site.

A user-group is being set up to help evaluate the demonstrator web site and interested researchers should contact the project if they would like to participate in a consultation process to assess user requirements.

www.histpop.org.uk ■

Forthcoming Events

- 6 April 2005:** British Society of Criminology conference - Research Methods: Cutting Edge Developments, Royal Statistical Society, London
- 6-7 April 2005:** Whither Social Capital? Past, present and future, London South Bank University
- 6 April 2005:** Introduction to the ESDS International Databanks, Manchester
- 6 April 2005:** Agenda setting workshop - quantitative methods in e-social science, Lancaster University
- 12 April 2005:** Introduction to the Analysis of Time Series using Stata, Manchester
- 12 April 2005:** JISC Conference 2005, Birmingham
- 14 April 2005:** Social Science Online - Internet for Social Research, Bristol University
- 15 April 2005:** Large-scale government microdata workshop: an introduction to the SARs and ESDS Government Surveys, University of Plymouth
- 3 May 2005:** International Symposium on Confidentiality, Privacy and Disclosure in the 21st Century, Manchester
- 24-27 May 2005:** IASSIST/IFDO 2005, Edinburgh
- 20-24 June 2005:** ESRC Social Science Week 2005
- 20 June 2005:** Social Inequality: Using Evidence from Data, Royal Statistical Society, London
- 22-24 June 2005:** First International Conference on e-Social Science, Manchester
- 23 June 2005:** Introductory workshop to the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS), Institute of Education, London
- 29 June 2005:** MIMAS Open Forum 2005, University of Manchester
- 30 June 2005 - 2 July 2005:** The 2005 conferences of EPUNet and BHPS, Colchester
- 11-22 July 2005:** BHPS and NCDS/BCS70 Data Confrontation Workshops, University of Essex

Further details of events and training courses can be found on the ESDS web site.

News Byte

ESDS International logged its 4000th unique user logged on 24 February 2005.

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