



Editor:
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Welcome to the second issue of the ESDS Government newsletter which is packed full of information, including news about value-added products, forthcoming events and proceedings from recent conferences. We hope you find it useful. The next issue will be published in June 2004 - please feel free to send contributions to vanessa.higgins@man.ac.uk.

Best wishes
ESDS Government team

ESDS Government research conference

The first annual ESDS Government research conference was held at the Institute of Mechanical Engineers on 1 December. The conference highlighted the importance of research based on the government surveys and brought together academic and other researchers with government policy-makers to discuss social and demographic changes in Britain. A full report will be available in the next ESDS Government newsletter.

Online user consultation on derived variables

We would like to provide users with a number of value-added products in relation to derived variables, including:

- a set of derived variables to provide comparability with standard census variables;
- derivation of some key variables for employment and labour market analysis on the General Household Survey and Labour Force Survey;
- an index of variables that are consistent over time on a number of surveys.

In order for us to know what variables would be useful to users we have set up a user consultation document on our web site. You can access this by going to www.esds.ac.uk/government/news/ and clicking on 'User consultation on derived variables'.

Family Resources Survey and Family Expenditure Survey used in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation *Progress on poverty study*

The recently published Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) study *Progress on poverty 1997 to 2003/4* was largely based on secondary analysis of the Family Resources Survey and the Family Expenditure Survey. The study by Holly Sutherland, Tom Sefton and David Piachaud from the University of Cambridge and the London School of Economics gives the most detailed analysis to date of the Government's progress on targets for reducing poverty. The summary findings can be found on the JRF web site: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/knowledge/findings/socialpolicy/043.asp>.

Home Office Citizenship Survey data available

The Home Office Citizenship Survey is now available from the UKDA (SN 4754): www.data-archive.ac.uk/. This new survey is designed to understand how people feel about their local community, to examine the roles people play in the community and to monitor initiatives affecting citizens' rights and responsibilities. The survey will be carried out every two years. For information on other new data releases from the UKDA go to www.data-archive.ac.uk/findingData/newData.asp.

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Meetings and workshops

The ESDS Government team will be holding a series of workshops and conferences to provide an opportunity for the exchange of information and views between users and producers of government surveys. These workshops and conferences will provide information on new developments, examples of research use of the datasets and how to obtain the data. Details of all ESDS Government events can be found at www.ccsr.ac.uk/esds/events (including slides from past events).

5 December 2003

ESDS Awareness Day at the Royal Statistical Society, London.

The event is targeted towards social science support staff, such as subject or data librarians, whose roles are to help researchers, teachers and students gain access to data or to support data analysis. ESDS is keen to set up a network of ESDS local representatives or champions and this event will provide an opportunity for participants to sign up to take on this role. For programme details go to www.esds.ac.uk/news/esdsawareness.asp.

23 January 2004

Health Survey User Group at the Department of Health, Skipton House, London.

This meeting is being jointly organised by the Department of Health, the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) and ESDS. It is designed to meet users needs and therefore we want to ensure time for discussion and debate and plans for future meetings. For further details of this event see www.ccsr.ac.uk/esds/events. Queries can be directed to Vanessa Higgins at Vanessa.Higgins@man.ac.uk.

January - May 2004

You may also be interested in the following CCSR courses at the University of Manchester. CCSR offer a wide range of short course training in quantitative research methods and data analysis. Courses are offered at introductory, intermediate and advanced level. Go to www.ccsr.ac.uk/courses/external/2003-2004/ for the full list of courses. Go to www.ccsr.ac.uk/courses/bursary.html for information on bursaries.

20 January 2004: Multiple regression

4-5 February 2004: Introduction to STATA/Data management with STATA

11 February 2004: Logistic regression

7 April 2004: SPSS for social scientists

14 April 2004: Introduction to data analysis - part 1

12 May 2004: Multiple regression

19 May 2004: Logistic regression

26 May 2004: Introduction to data analysis - part 2

Other dates for your diary

3 December 2003

SRA Conference - Improving the Quality of Social Research at the Institute of Education, University of London.

Go to www.the-sra.org.uk/dates%20for%20your%20dairy.htm for more information.

10 December 2003

Social Science Online - The Internet for Psychology at Kings College, London.

Go to www.sosig.ac.uk/events/psychology.html for more information.

16 December 2003

Social Science Online - The Internet for Sociology at the University of Birmingham.

Go to www.sosig.ac.uk/events/sociology.html for more information.

26 March 2004

Centre for Applied Social Surveys (CASS) seminar: Survey Research Resources and Secondary Datasets at the University of Southampton.
Including a talk from ESDS Government. For more details go to www.ccsr.ac.uk/esds/events/other/2004-03-26.doc.

December 2003-May 2004

CASS operates a programme of short courses in social survey research, run by the University of Southampton and NatCen.
Go to www.socstats.soton.ac.uk/cass/courses0304/index.html for more information.

Health Surveys of England, Scotland and Wales

Friday 11 July 2003 - workshop report

A workshop on the Health Surveys of England, Scotland and Wales was held at the Royal Statistical Society in London on Friday 11 July. Representatives from the Northern Ireland Health and Social Wellbeing Survey were also present. The workshop, organised by NatCen and ESDS Government, was a huge success with over 100 delegates in attendance, including representatives from the Department of Health (and national equivalents), Office for National Statistics, NatCen, data users from the academic community and the ESDS Government team. Copies of the slides are available from www.ccsr.ac.uk/esds/events/hse/papers.shtml.

John Fox from the Department of Health (DH) chaired the workshop, which included a number of interesting presentations.

The Government's Perspective: Health Survey for England, Scottish Health Survey, Welsh Health Survey

Sunjai Gupta (DH)

Sunjai explained that health surveys are essential to DH information needs as they provide population-based data, which is independent of whether or not someone makes contact with the health care system. The Health Survey for England (HSE) is an annual, national, representative sample of people living in private households, enabling comparisons across time. It includes a questionnaire and a health examination. As such it is a major monitoring tool for health and health inequalities in England, for example diet (five a day) by household income. The survey began in 1991 with a focus on cardiovascular disease. However, after 1994 the focus temporarily shifted to new topics such as disability; topics are reintroduced to the survey every few years to provide trends over time. From 1993 onwards the sample size was increased to 17,000 to increase the precision of the data and to allow comparison between subgroups. In some years specific subgroups have their sample size boosted.

Peter Craig (Scottish Executive Health Department)

The Scottish Health Survey (SHS) has been carried out in 1995, 1998 and 2003. The surveys are used by the Scottish Executive Health Department and Information Statistics Division (ISD) Scotland to monitor health issues, including health inequalities. The data is deposited at the UKDA but so far there have been surprisingly few published studies resulting from secondary analysis. Usage of the SHS is lagging markedly behind that of either the HSE or the Scottish Heart Health Study (SHHS). However, the SHS is developing in ways that should encourage greater use both inside and outside Government. For example, there were more changes to the survey content in 2003 than in 1998, notably the inclusion of questions on income, health-related quality of life and parental social class. The design has improved in other ways that should also encourage wider use. Linkage of the survey data with mortality and hospital episode should help to ensure that the data becomes more valuable over time. A user group has been established to share ideas and hear about survey developments. Peter stressed how important it is for Government departments to think seriously about how this rich epidemiological data can be exploited.

Anne Kingdon (Welsh Assembly Government, Health Promotion Division)

The Welsh Health Survey (WHS) was first carried out in 1995 and repeated in 1998. It was a postal survey designed to provide a picture of health of the people of Wales, the way the NHS is used and areas where services could be improved. In addition to the WHS, a series of Health in Wales Surveys (HIW) were established in 1985 and focused on health behaviour. NatCen were commissioned to examine the feasibility of combining the WHS and HIW and they recommended that the two surveys should be merged. The pilot study was carried out in July and the new survey will begin on 1 October 2003. Data will be collected continuously throughout the year, initially for two years. The achieved sample will be around 30,000 adults over two years with a minimum of 1200 per local authority. The survey will comprise a 15 minute face-to-face household interview and a 16-page self-completion questionnaire for each household member aged 16 or over. The individual questionnaire will comprise questions on health service use, medicines, illnesses, general health and well-being, health-related behaviours and personal and demographic information. The aim is to publish detailed results for the first two years in 2006. The future of the survey may depend upon budgets and usage of the survey.

The Health Surveys

Melanie Doyle (NatCen) and Paola Primatesta (University College London)

Melanie and Paola gave a detailed overview of the Health Surveys, including survey structure, sample design, quality control, response rates and reports and resources. The talk focused primarily on the HSE with discussion of the Scottish and Welsh Surveys. The English and Scottish surveys comprise a health interview and a health examination via a nurse visit. The nurse takes a variety of measurements depending on the age of the respondent, for example prescribed medicines, blood pressure, waist/hip circumference and saliva, blood and urine samples. However, the Welsh survey does not involve a nurse visit. The English and Scottish surveys include both adults and children whilst the Welsh survey focuses on adults only - the inclusion of children is currently under discussion. Each year the HSE covers a special topic chosen according to health priorities, prevalence in the population and suitability for interview. So far, cardiovascular disease is the most frequently covered special topic. The HSE boost sample for 2004 will focus on the health of minority ethnic groups with approximately 1000 respondents from each group.

Using HSE data in policy modelling for coronary heart disease

Colin Sanderson (London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine)

Colin discussed how he used HSE data, along with data from the US Framingham Heart Study and the British Regional Heart Study, to carry out policy modelling for coronary heart disease. Using a micro-simulation approach it was possible to use a wide range of risk factors including cholesterol, blood pressure and personal history to produce a calendar of predicted coronary heart disease events. The model was complex, including a large number of predictor variables. However the complexity affords a flexibility which would otherwise not be possible. This flexibility enables the model to be used to respond to a range of policy questions at short notice without the need to develop further analytical tools.

Monitoring socio-economic differences in health

Michael Marmot (International Centre for Health and Society, University College London)

Michael gave a number of examples of how the HSE can monitor socio-economic differences in health. The results were what one would expect, thus validating the HSE data. For example, low proportions of adults with low equivalised incomes eat five or more portions of fruit or vegetables per day compared with adults with high equivalised incomes. Michael went on to present further findings from his research illustrating how the HSE can be used to monitor trends over time. Michael's findings included:

- between 1994 and 2001 the highest rates of smoking were among adults in social class IV or V;
- the take-up of smoking among young men and women is evident regardless of social class;
- obesity among men and women has risen between 1994 and 2001;

- women in social class IV and V have a higher prevalence of obesity than those in other social classes;
- there are large social class differences for both men and women in terms of general health;
- women in social class I or II are more likely than those in class IV or V to drink more than the recommended 14 units of alcohol per week.

Ethnic minorities and mental health – the EMPIRIC study

Michael King (Psychiatry and Behavioural Sciences, Royal Free and University College Medical School)

Michael introduced the EMPIRIC study, which is commissioned by DH and is carried out by NatCen and the Medical Schools in University College London, Imperial College, Queen Mary's College and the University of Bristol. The study uses the HSE ethnic boost to assess the prevalence and risk factors for mental illness and the levels of service use across a range of ethnic minority populations. The study follows five ethnic minority groups from the 1999 HSE (Black-Caribbean, Irish, Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani) to compare to white respondents on the 1998 HSE. There was also a qualitative element to examine models and explanations for psychiatric symptoms. Michael's findings included:

- no overall differences in rates of mental disorder between ethnic groups;
- lower prevalence of mental disorder in Bangladeshi women than in White or other South Asian women;
- the highest rates of psychosis were among Black-Caribbeans and Pakistanis;
- Bangladeshis were most likely to consult GPs than other ethnic groups;
- Whites, Irish and Black-Caribbean were most likely to have consulted psychologists or counsellors;
- idioms for mental distress were broadly similar across all groups;
- idioms for physical distress were similar across all groups but 'richer' in south Asian groups.

The Economic and Social Data Service: how to obtain the data and support for users

Angela Dale (CCSR, University of Manchester)

Angela introduced the new Economic and Social Data Service and how ESDS Government can help data users and data providers of the health surveys by providing value-added products such as web-based user guides, seminars, courses and new derived variables on the datasets. Angela highlighted the need for meetings between users and producers of the health surveys via a health survey user group. This was particularly welcomed by delegates and it was agreed that ESDS Government would facilitate and organise the first meeting. The first meeting will be held on 23 January 2004 in London, go to www.ccsr.ac.uk/esds/events/2004-01-23/ to book online and view the programme for this free event.

Linking the Scottish Health Survey to hospitalisation and mortality records

Bruce Whyte (NHS Health Scotland)

Bruce described how record linkage techniques had been used to link data from Scotland's linked health datasets to data from the Scottish Health Survey. This is possible in Scotland because since 1968 national hospital discharge records, cancer registrations and death records containing patient-identifying information have been held centrally in machine-readable format. Linkage is carried out using a probability matching technique, which calculates the odds of cases being the same individual. Matches are based on a 'soundex' identifier derived from the initials, date-of-birth, sex and postcode of individuals. Additional linking items such as birthweight can also be used. The linked dataset will combine behavioural and socio-economic data with hospitalisation and mortality data for the first time on a national basis in Scotland. It will significantly add to the utility of the Scottish Health Survey as a source of epidemiological data and may facilitate comparisons to similar datasets in Europe.

Using weighted data on the HSE

Susan Purdon (NatCen)

Susan described the HSE sample design and the current weighting strategy - the core adult sample is currently unweighted but children and boost samples are both weighted. The HSE has never been weighted for non-response only for selection probabilities. However, estimates for 'all adults' are currently biased towards the elderly and women in terms of non-response. The HSE has never weighted for non-response because most of the published analyses are within age and sex groups and there is little evidence of bias within these groups. NatCen will apply the following weighting strategy to the 2003 data:

- the HSE to be weighted each year so that the core sample has the correct age/sex distribution by regions;
- three sets of weights to be used: interview, nurse, blood;
- checks against census for any other major biases;
- checks that each sub-sample has similar health and health behaviour characteristics.

NatCen will either provide retrospective weights for each previous year or they will provide weighted and unweighted comparisons on the 2003 data to illustrate the impact of weighting.

Child health outcomes

Yvonne Kelly (Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University College London)

Yvonne presented the results of her research, which used HSE data to examine birthweight and health among children. The hypotheses under test were (a) birthweight and social factors exert independent effects on childhood behavioural outcomes and (b) the 'birthweight effect' is potentially modifiable. The results showed that the odds of having a low birthweight baby increases among older mothers, mothers who smoke heavily and mothers with high GHQ12 scores. The research concluded that birthweight and social factors were important influences on the behaviour of children. Also that the 'birthweight effect' is influenced by social environment; an advantaged background protects against problems whilst a disadvantaged background increases the risk of problems regardless of birthweight.

English Longitudinal Study of Ageing: a follow-up of HSE participants

James Nazroo (Department of Epidemiology and Public Health, University College London)

James introduced the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing (ELSA), which is being carried out jointly by University College London, the Institute for Fiscal Studies, NatCen and Cambridge, Oxford and Nottingham universities. ELSA is a longitudinal follow-up study of around 11,500 HSE participants (from the 1998, 1999 and 2001 surveys) who were born before 1952. The study examines relationships between health, economic position and activity, social participation, productivity, networks and support. Respondents will be interviewed every two years with a biomedical assessment every four years. The study began in October 1992, with wave one data collection from January to March 2003 and waves two and three planned for 2004 and 2006 respectively. ELSA will produce an accessible database for researchers and policy communities that can be used to tackle key policy and scientific questions.

Labour Force Survey User Group meeting

Tuesday 21 October

A Labour Force Survey (LFS) User Group meeting was held at the Royal Statistical Society in London on Tuesday 21 October. This brought together the data providers at ONS and data users from academia and other government departments. Copies of the slides are available from www.ccsr.ac.uk/esds/events/2003-10-21/papers.shtml.

LFS developments for macroeconomic analysis

Barry Werner and Ian Knight (ONS)

Barry and Ian summarised the following future developments to the LFS that were stimulated by recent reviews. Each of these developments is currently being discussed or piloted:

- linkage of LFS industry codes with Inter Departmental Business Register (IDBR) data to improve industry data from the LFS and to achieve consistency between the two sources;
- linkage of social security records with LFS records to improve working age benefits data;
- production of early provisional Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) estimates by imputing results from the latter weeks of the quarter;
- inclusion of institutions;
- coverage of non-residents working in the UK (devise questions to identify these groups and a system to weight and gross the data);
- Annual Population Survey (described below);
- re-engineering of the LFS computing system (described below).

LFS developments for local area analysis

Nick Maine and Ian Knight (ONS)

The Labour Market Statistics (LMS) Framework review report concluded that LMS should be presented in a structured way to include labour supply and demand data and data on benefits. ONS want to present sub-national data using the same framework. The LFS already has boosts in England, Wales and Scotland to obtain data at the Local Education Authority and Unitary Authority level. Future developments include:

- an Annual Population Survey (APS) starting in January 2004 to collect information for Local Authority Districts in England. The survey will collect core LFS data to add to the annual LFS;
- LMS re-engineering including a new computing system for LFS production which will reduce the risks of errors at each stage of the process and quicker production of results (the publication of QLFS and annual data two months and eight months respectively after the reference period).

LFS longitudinal data

Catherine Barham and Paul Smith (ONS)

The first Longitudinal LFS (LLFS) datasets were released in 2001 and have been produced back to winter 1992/3. The datasets (which link individuals across either two or five quarters and include a subset of LFS variables) can be used to examine individuals' movements between employment, unemployment and inactivity, gross flows (i.e. the total number of people moving between different statuses) and the impact of government policies. ONS have carried out a joint research project with Southampton University to examine biases in gross flows data from non-response bias and response error bias. ONS are also looking at options for weighting the datasets to account for non-response bias. The implications are that the LLFS is still considered 'experimental' and quality deficiencies should be taken into account when using the data. ONS will carry out further work to investigate the findings in more detail. However, the LLFS still provides useful information on changing working patterns.

Measuring ethnicity in the LFS

Vivienne Avery (ONS)

Data from the Annual Local Area LFS (ALALFS) shows that the White group have the highest levels of economic activity and the Bangladeshi group have the lowest levels. However, because age profiles vary among different ethnic groups, analysis should be standardised by age. Projected growth rates of the working age population suggest that the Bangladeshi group will have a large increase over the next decade. Since spring 2001, the LFS has used an ethnicity classification based on the census classification with six main categories and the introduction of a 'mixed' category. Pre- and post-2001 data are not directly comparable. Changes were also introduced in 1996 to harmonise the classification with other surveys. The introduction of the APS in January 2004 will provide better quality local area information on ethnicity estimates for the Neighbourhood Statistics Programme. The first database will cover January–December 2004 and the first results are planned for June 2005. Topics will include ethnic origin, national identity, religion, country of birth, tenure, qualifications, economic status and socio-demographic variables among others.

Disability and the national minimum wage: a special case?

Tania Burchardt and Abigail McKnight (Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics)

Tania presented the results of research carried out using the LFS to explore the impact of the National Minimum Wage (NMW) on disabled people. The five-quarter Longitudinal LFS was used to examine a 'pre-NMW' group of 17,424 respondents in the period prior to the introduction of the NMW and a 'span-NMW' group of 16,697 respondents in the period which spanned the introduction of the NMW. This allowed for an examination of employment retention, hours of work, entry to employment and change in wages. The difference-in-differences estimator was used. The results showed that relative employment retention among disabled employees initially earning less than the April 1999 NMW level fell between the pre-NMW period and the span-NMW period. However, this was not statistically significant. The main conclusion was that there is no case for the exemption of disabled employees from the NMW because the majority benefited from it or were unaffected.

A panel of regional indicators of labour market flexibility: the UK 1979-1998

Vassilis Monastiriotis (Department of Economics, Royal Holloway University of London)

Vassilis presented a complete set of labour market flexibility indicators for the UK regions over the period 1979-1998 constructed from the LFS and other data sources. The analysis revealed a number of interesting findings:

- labour market flexibility increased throughout the period across all UK regions;
- evidence of convergence in the regional levels of flexibility co-exists with a rather persistent pattern of a North-South dichotomy;
- a clear pattern of regional specialisation in different forms of flexibility (labour-input versus labour-costs) reinforces this dichotomy;
- in contrast to policy expectations, flexibility has not increased faster in the regions with the lowest levels of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita and, thus, had little impact on regional disparities;
- the design of labour market deregulation policies must obtain a regional focus and be tailor-made.

Give that to the temp: differences between permanent and temporary workers as determined by the LFS

David Biggs (School of Health and Social Sciences, University of Gloucestershire)

David Biggs presented his research, which examined differences between permanent and temporary workers. David used the winter 1998 Labour Force Survey to identify that 7.43 percent of workers were temporary, 13 percent of which were agency workers. His main findings included the following:

- agency workers had a younger population than non-agency and permanent workers;
- there were more male than female permanent workers and more female than male agency and non-agency workers;
- female agency workers were more likely than males to state that their reason for working in an agency was voluntary (rather than involuntary);
- a higher proportion of agency workers than non-agency workers were working in an agency involuntarily;
- non-agency workers were twice as likely to be in education than permanent or agency workers and were more highly qualified;
- agency workers were paid less per hour than non-agency and permanent workers.

Discussion on the value of future meetings and other views on the role of ESDS Government
Attendees thought that the meeting had been very useful and it was agreed that the LFS User Group should take place on an annual basis, possibly with a themed element. Interaction between ONS and LFS users should be encouraged and can be facilitated via the esds-govsurveys JISCmail list and the ESDS Government web site. ESDS welcomes comments from users on the value-added products produced so far by ESDS Government, such as the *Introductory Guide to Employment and the Labour Market* and the *analysis of the LFS using STATA*. ONS welcome comments on how the LFS pages on the National Statistics web site could be improved to help users.

European Social Survey: the potential for research and teaching

Wednesday 22 October

A meeting was held on 22 October at the Royal Statistical Society in London to introduce the European Social Survey (ESS) data and to discuss its potential for research and teaching. The meeting was organised jointly by ESDS Government and the NatCen. Copies of the slides are available from www.ccsr.ac.uk/esds/events/2003-10-22/papers.html.

The pursuit of equivalence in cross-national surveys

Roger Jowell (Centre for Comparative Social Surveys, City University)

Roger highlighted a number of problems with obtaining equivalence in cross-national surveys including: cultural incompatibilities, different methodological habits, the influence of opinion poll methodology, the dominance of economic indicators and the general problem of trying to get all the countries involved to aim for equivalence. A number of different measurement strategies were considered when developing the ESS, such as whether it should be continuous or ad hoc and whether it should be cross-sectional or panel. There were particular problems with attitude measurement such as obtaining attitudes/beliefs rather than topical opinions and the relationship between attitudes and the context of recent events in a country. Roger concluded with the five golden rules for comparative studies:

- undue respect for cultural variations can lead to methodological anarchy;
- never design questions or interpret data about countries you know nothing about;
- confine the study to the smallest number of nations compatible with the intellectual needs;
- assume initially that unexpected cross-national variations are actually mistakes;
- resist relying on 'gee-whizz' league tables ranking all nations.

Introduction to the ESS

Caroline Bryson and Ruth O'Shea (NatCen)

Caroline and Ruth gave an overview of round one of the ESS. The twin aims of round one were to obtain high quality data on values across Europe and to raise the standards of cross-national surveys. The survey was designed and co-ordinated centrally but with bottom-up elements at each country level. The central co-ordination involved a number of institutions in different countries. There were also specialist advisory groups such as questionnaire module design teams and a translation taskforce, a scientific advisory board, a funders' forum and 22 national co-ordinators and survey institutes. The survey had three operating principles:

- protocols, panels and persuasion with tight specification on the main elements;
- transparency of key documents on the ESS web site;
- no privileged access for anyone before the public release.

The core questionnaire had three main topics: socio-political attitudes, values and quality of life and socio-demographic background variables with two rotating modules of immigration and citizenship, involvement and democracy.

A good mix of 22 countries participated (this was a great achievement as only nine countries were required to take part in round one). Fieldwork began in autumn 2002 and the first data release was September 2003. The main achievements from round one were:

- using random sampling in each country;
- obtaining 29 language versions of the questionnaire;
- high response rates;
- collection of fieldwork data to improve methodology and response in future rounds.

Using the dataset

Bjorn Henrichsen, Knut Skjak and Kirstine Kolsrud (Norwegian Social Science Data Services)
Bjorn described the ambitions for the ESS data:

- to be available freely and quickly;
- enable easy access;
- use new technology (Nesstar);
- use international standards;
- have thorough documentation which is freely available;
- have high quality data archiving and data service.

Knut and Kirstine demonstrated registration and access to the data from the Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD) web site ess.nsd.uib.no. Simple analyses can be carried out online and more complex analyses can be carried out by downloading the SPSS combined dataset.

Contextual and event data in the ESS

Ineke Stoop (Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands)

Ineke explained how contextual data and event data was collected for round one of the ESS. Contextual data included national socio-demographic and socio-economic data and national systems such as electoral system, education, health care etc. This was difficult to collect and update. It was gathered from a subset of socio-demographics at the NSD and a number of web sites containing country data such as EUROSTAT, the World Health Organisation and the Worldbank. Events data included events that might influence fieldwork such as extreme weather and privacy scandals or events that might influence opinions. The events data was collected from international and national press agencies and monthly reports from the national ESS co-ordinators who were given guidelines in order to minimize individual differences. There were some problems in collecting this data and large national differences in the levels of reporting. Analysis of the data showed that there was no obvious relationship between attitudes and events. A number of changes are suggested for round two, including weekly reports instead of monthly and possibly asking future respondents about important international events. However, the event database gives a fascinating overview of Europe and the participating countries during fieldwork.

Analysis potential

Alison Park (National Centre for Social Research)

Alison demonstrated how the ESS has the potential to be analysed including:

- the exploration of general theories about attitudes and behaviour such as post-modernism, social capital and party identifications;
- the exploration of relationships between structures and circumstances, attitudes and behaviour, for example, differing experiences of EU membership and integration and variations in immigration patterns;
- the examination of single-nation studies, for example why there are low levels of electoral turnout in Britain.

Teaching potential of the ESS – substantive and methodological
Peter Lynn (University of Essex)

Peter discussed substantive and methodological teaching potential of the ESS. It has a number of methodological innovations including:

- high quality specification, development, control and documentation of the survey methodology;
- the availability of standardised survey design variables (strata and sub-strata, primary and secondary sampling units, selection probabilities and design weights);
- the availability of survey process data such as call records;
- standardised auxiliary data such as interviewer observations.

The survey design/data collection methodology can be used to teach:

- sample design e.g. the derivation of design weights from conditional selection probabilities;
- non-response, for example the effect of non-response maximisation efforts, the development of non-response weights;
- survey design such as examples of specifications and outcomes.

All of the above can be done cross-nationally. The ESS provides an exemplar of comparable cross-national data. Teaching potential includes the examination of with and without 'proper' estimation of standard errors, hypotheses testing and model fitting.

Introductory guides to STATA and SPSS

ESDS Government has produced two introductory user guides to the statistical packages STATA and SPSS. The STATA guide uses the 2002 LFS to demonstrate STATA functions. To view and download the documents on the ESDS web site go to www.esds.ac.uk/government/docs/.

Teaching dataset

ESDS Government has produced a LFS teaching dataset using data from the 2002 LFS. The dataset is now available from the UKDA web site (study number 4736): www.data-archive.ac.uk/. A British Crime Survey (BCS) teaching dataset has also been produced from the 2000 BCS and will be available shortly from UKDA.

The LFS and BCS datasets (available in both SPSS and STATA formats) can help class tutors to incorporate empirical data into their courses and thus develop students' skills in quantitative methods of analysis and their knowledge of large-scale government surveys.

Employment and labour market user guide

ESDS Government has produced an introductory guide to using the large-scale government surveys for employment and labour market research. It provides an overview of data sources with hyperlinks to various documents available on the web. To view and download the document on the ESDS web site go to www.esds.ac.uk/government/docs/ELMintro.html.

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

Don't forget the web-based FAQs available on the ESDS Government web site www.esds.ac.uk/government/faq/. They are aimed at both new and experienced users of the large-scale government surveys, covering a range of topics. The FAQs will be regularly updated and new questions added on an ongoing basis. Please email Vanessa.Higgins@man.ac.uk with any suggestions for additional FAQs.

User support, discussion list and mailing list

To obtain user support, email govsurveys@esds.ac.uk or telephone (0161) 275 1980.

To join the JISCMail discussion list, send the following message to listserv@jiscmail.ac.uk:
'subscribe esds-govsurveys <name>'.
'

To join the mailing list to receive ESDS Government newsletters and updates go to www.ccsr.ac.uk/esds/join.

Second Radstats Essay Competition 2004

There are two categories of entry, Student and Open. In each category the first prize is £300, second prize is £200 and further prizes are at the judges' discretion. Account will be taken in the judging of age and experience. The deadline for applications is 1 May 2004. This will be an original essay (maximum 3,000 words) which addresses a current social research/policy question and will involve the critical use and interpretation of relevant data sources. The essay awarded first prize will be featured on the Radical Statistics Group (RSG) web site (www.radstats.org.uk) and also in a special issue of *Radical Statistics*, the newsletter of the RSG (past copies are shown on the web site). The judges decision will be made by 1 July 2004. Applications are encouraged well before the deadline. Essays should be sent by email, labelled "Radstats Critical Essay" to essay@radstats.org.uk. Entrants should state their age and the number of years they have been engaged in social research, statistics or the social sciences. Further guidelines are on the web site. Radical Statistics was formed in 1975 by researchers and statisticians with a common concern about the political implications of their work and an awareness of the actual and potential misuse of statistics. The RSG is independent of any other organisation. Members are radical in being committed to helping build a more free, democratic and egalitarian society. Radical Statistics meets once a year (in February) and holds an open conference on a topical theme (details are on the web site, above) and publishes a newsletter three times a year (interested in joining? - send a message to admin@radstats.org.uk). It also has an electronic discussion list (you can join online at www.jiscmail.ac.uk/lists/radstats.html, where you can also access archives of past messages and get more details on the list).

Key Indicators of the Labour Market

Users of the government surveys datasets may be interested to know that a data redistribution agreement with the International Labour Organization (ILO) for the Key Indicators of the Labour Market is in the process of being signed by ESDS International and the ILO. ESDS International are now in discussions with the ILO about data supply formats. Once the data conversion process is complete, these datasets will be freely available over the web to the UK academic community through ESDS.

The ESDS Government newsletter

We produce this newsletter twice yearly. It contains articles that report users' work, proceedings of conferences and other meetings and alert readers to new opportunities, workshops and conferences that are coming up. If you have any news or articles that you think may be relevant for the next newsletter, in June 2004, please email Vanessa.Higgins@man.ac.uk.

Let us know what you think

This is the second newsletter of ESDS Government and we would like to hear your views about it. We want to provide you, as users of the government surveys, with a newsletter best suited to your needs. Please send views and suggestions on content, ideas for regular features, the name and design or any other topics to Vanessa.Higgins@man.ac.uk.