

UK Databytes

Introducing the new UKDA web site

The new UKDA web site has its official launch at ESRC Social Science Week, following several months of development work and usability testing. Users of UKDA online facilities should find access to information and services easier and more streamlined.



The improved navigational structure features a 'quick links' menu bar at the top of each page including login, search the web site or search for data facility, A-Z listing and site map. A drop-down list on every page provides links to related web sites including all ESDS services, AHDS History and the Census Registration Service.

The research and development pages have also been given greater visibility highlighting the extensive and innovative work undertaken by UKDA to spearhead developments in areas such as data preservation and dissemination. The UKDA site follows agreed best standards and good practice in web design, accessibility and usability, complying with W3C guidelines for XHTML.

Searching for data available from the UKDA is improved, and enhanced search functionality has been added providing faster searches; facility to match 'any' or 'all' search words; actual number of hits recorded; ability to refine a names search; and featuring a history of recent searches list. It is also now possible to search the data holdings with the aid of the UKDA's Humanities and Social Science Electronic Thesaurus (HASSET). The hierarchical relationships of terms in the thesaurus can help users to broaden a search or make it more specific, enabling them to choose the most suitable terms for the successful retrieval of data.

An updated major studies page provides quick access to the most popular datasets including those supported by the specialist ESDS services. The browse by subject category list has been updated to include new categories reflecting the growing subject scope of the

UKDA/ESDS data collection. The registration and ordering process remains unchanged.

The enhanced searching functionality has been carried across to the ESDS web site with focused browse and search facilities available for all the ESDS services.

The new web site has been tested by external users, prior to the launch, and feedback has been extremely positive. Gerald Watkins, Information Services, University of Birmingham commented on the new site, "More modern and sophisticated look..." and "...style hasn't been at the expense of content".

Plans for the future include a section with an online tutorial for new users, and further enhancements to the search facilities. The Web Development Team would be grateful for any feedback on the new site. Email feedback@esds.ac.uk with comments or suggestions. ●

ESRC Social Science Week

ESDS is holding two events as part of ESRC Social Science Week 20-24 June 2005. The first is a one-day conference focusing on social inequality - in its broadest sense - and highlighting the value of empirical evidence based on ESDS-supported data from large-scale government surveys, longitudinal surveys, international data sources and qualitative data collections. The conference is aimed at academics, policymakers and analysts. The second is an introductory workshop on the Millennium Cohort Study (MCS) organised in association with the Centre for Longitudinal Studies (CLS). The workshop is designed both for researchers who are considering using data from the MCS in their work and for those in government departments and the voluntary sector who are involved in commissioning research. ●



'Evidence and Enlightenment' in Edinburgh

The International Association for Social Science Information Service and Technology (IASSIST) recently held another successful international conference. ESDS and UKDA participated in the event, which this year was hosted by Edinburgh University Data Library, and ran from 25-27 May. This event was a joint conference between IASSIST and the International Federation of Data Organisations.

Staff of the ESDS services contributed on a variety of themes. In the session on cross-national socio-economic data, Keith Cole, ESDS International, outlined the recent rapid growth in importance of cross-national research. He reported on the experience of supporting the new community of international data users emerging from this development.

Louise Corti, UKDA, in a session on 'Enlightened Policies: Improving Collections and Acquisitions', examined the processes of revising and maintaining the collections policy for a national archive, drawing on the experience of a long-established data archive. In this session, Zoe Bliss discussed the acquisitions strategy of AHDS History and outlined how collections were selected from the large number offered. Corti also delivered a paper, co-written by Libby Bishop, ESDS Qualidata, on mark-up standards for metadata. The paper described the new qualitative archiving and demonstrator project, Smart Qualitative Data: Methods and Community Tools for Data Mark-Up (SQUAD) looking at 'smart



qualitative data', alluding to semi-automated natural language processing tools to help web-enable a wide range of qualitative data.

Lucy Bell, UKDA, delivered a paper on a new Shibboleth project, Shibboleth Authentication for Access to the Resource Infrastructures of the UKDA (SAFARI UKDA). Shibboleth is an alternative and flexible access management system and this project is testing access to three social science data resources. Ken Miller, renowned for his insightful and amusing talks, outlined the factors leading to the planned replacement of the UKDA search system and demonstrated some of the powerful and advanced

searches now available.

The paper entitled 'Large-scale, cross-sectional government datasets; research published and recent developments', written by Jo Wathan and Vanessa Higgins, representing ESDS Government, reviewed the way microdata is currently being used by the UK academic community.

Finally, Sam Smith, of ESDS Government, presented a poster and accompanying paper detailing the work carried out in making the Samples of Anonymised Records (SARs) accessible over the data grid. This covered satisfying policy requirements, rather than the pure technical issues. ●

ESRC Review of International Data Resources and Needs

The ESRC are currently conducting a review of international data resources and needs, being undertaken on their behalf by Frank Cowell and Tanvi Desai of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). The ESRC's role in developing social science in the UK involves a strong commitment to work across national boundaries, taking advantage of the intellectual opportunities to be gained from co-operative and comparative research. The ESRC's International Strategy seeks to place ESRC as a major player within the European Research Area (ERA) and to strengthen significantly the extent of international research and policy co-operation more widely.

The review is being commissioned by the Research Resources Board to assist it in formulating its strategic research agenda in line with the Council's International Strategy. This is a major and

important piece of work, the findings of which will form the basis for a range of new initiatives in order to support and encourage international and comparative research, including the international comparison of sub-national areas within nations.

The scope of the review is wide ranging and will be assessing the international data needs of the research community, collecting opinions on data use, knowledge acquisition and data needs.

Contributions are welcomed from anyone involved in using international data resources for the purpose of social science or medical research. Individuals can contribute to the review. The review will take place between April 2005 and January 2006.

rlab.lse.ac.uk/ESRCData/ ●

International Energy Agency data to be released to UK Academia

ESDS International has signed an agreement with the International Energy Agency (IEA) which will give UK academics free access to high quality macro international datasets on energy production, trade, stocks, transformation, consumption, prices and taxes and greenhouse gas emissions.

This agreement will make it easier for UK academics wanting to use international data in research or teaching to obtain access to reliable and continuously updated statistics relating to energy markets and greenhouse gas emissions. It also represents a significant contribution by the ESRC to the work of the cross council UK Energy Research Centre (UKERC) and the development of the Towards a Sustainable Energy Economy (TESC) Programme.

Free access to the IEA databanks will be provided to UK further and higher education users via the service's online data delivery software Beyond 20/20 Web Data Server. ●

New CESSDA president

Congratulations to Kevin Schürer, director of ESDS, who has recently been elected president of the Council of European Social Science Data Archives (CESSDA).

Review of ESDS

The ESRC, in collaboration with JISC, is reviewing the services provided by ESDS and would like to hear from its users. ESDS is contracted to promote the wider and more informed use of data for research and teaching in the social sciences, and to ensure that these data continue to be available over time. The review aims to evaluate the performance of ESDS to enable ESRC/JISC to decide whether or not their grant should be renewed beyond September 2007.

ESYS, an independent strategic consultancy, has been commissioned by ESRC, as part of the review, to undertake a user survey to seek the views of ESDS users and suppliers. The survey will include an online questionnaire, targeted telephone interviews and a series of focus groups. The findings from the survey will be submitted to ESRC at the end of July 2005 in the form of a report which will then be referred to ESDS for a formal response to feed into the Review.

Users of ESDS are invited to participate in the online survey which will be launched on 6 June 2005. The online survey will remain open for three weeks.

www.esys.co.uk/surveys/ ●

Inside the data factory

Acquisitions

The acquisitions team is the first port of call for depositors who need advice about creating data and for those who wish to offer their data to the UKDA for deposit. The acquisitions team provides advice to depositors from the very beginning of the data creation process; at the application stage, where advice may be needed on issues such as obtaining consent for archiving; and towards the end of their research when advice may be needed on how to deposit data at the ESDS.

In addition, the team are responsive to users' requests, maintaining the series collection and are proactive in acquiring new and different data for the ESDS collection. This involves working closely with Government departments, independent social research institutes and data centres, to establish good working relationships and an understanding of requirements from all perspectives. Users' needs are constantly assessed by monitoring current trends and identifying key areas of research. To this end, ESDS has identified the need, and is actively seeking to acquire, consumer data and key financial data from market research companies.

The ESDS collection is augmented by materials accessioned from the academic community. This is formalised by the ESRC and British Academy datasets policies, which include a contractual obligation to

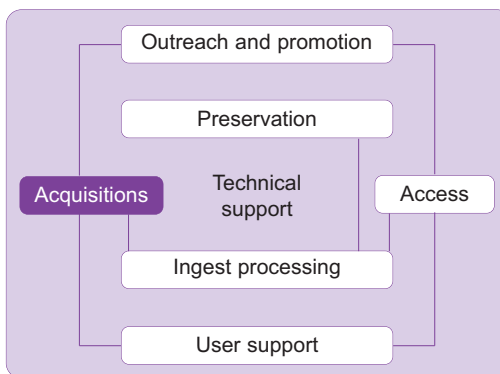
offer data for deposit. It should be noted that this does not exclude data offered by other funding agencies. Recent months have seen the development of a shared database between ESDS and the ESRC to monitor and target materials from an early stage in the

research process and to forge better understanding of respective needs.

In order to manage the flow of materials offered for deposit from academic sources, ESDS has developed a data submission procedure and formed an Acquisitions Review Committee whose members have wide ranging expertise in data management. The Acquisitions Review Committee meets fortnightly to assess all data submissions against criteria which includes relevance to the existing collection, quality and re-use value.

Although the acquisitions strategy is formalised by policy, it is flexible and can be influenced by external comment. Feedback is welcome on areas of the collection which could be further expanded.

www.esds.ac.uk/aandp/create/ ●



Working with ATLAS.ti: XML export standards for qualitative data

Louise Corti visited the ATLAS.ti developers in Berlin in March to discuss the development of a common export standard for this popular Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) program.

ESDS Qualidata is committed to developing non-proprietary standards for storing qualitative data. Primary data cover textual transcripts, audio and video recordings, photos, etc.; but value-added researcher products, for example coded data and annotations created during analysis within a CAQDAS system, are equally important to preserve. Currently each package (e.g. ATLAS.ti, NVivo, MAXqda) has its own proprietary storage format and coded data or an analysed 'project' cannot be exported between software packages. This presents a significant problem for archiving more than just raw data. ATLAS.ti is leading the way in exporting data in the non-proprietary, XML format.

Discussions with the ATLAS.ti team included defining tags for data and variables associated with data to make import and export in and out of CAQDAS packages more straightforward. For example, for a study comprising a set of transcripts, a UKDA 'data listing' could be imported alongside the raw data files directly into ATLAS.ti, pre-assigning the classification known as 'families' for each interview in an automatic fashion. ESDS Qualidata has developed a common XML

schema that it would like to encourage software producers to take up. For study metadata the UKDA uses the XML specification, the Data Documentation Initiative (DDI), to describe qualitative studies. ●



Louise Corti (UKDA) and Thomas Muhr (ATLAS.ti)

The challenges of integrating data

On 19 May the Rural Economy and Land Use Programme (RELU) Data Support Service (DSS) and one of the RELU-funded projects, the 'Data Resources Scoping Study' jointly hosted a workshop on data integration at King's Manor in York. The workshop included presentations on projects involving integration of data from socio-economic and natural science disciplines which

discussed the practical issues involved and approaches to resolving common difficulties.

Participants heard from a number of RELU case studies together with papers highlighting work being undertaken within the government department, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) and within the e-social science research arena.

The programme and slides from the day can be found at relu.esds.ac.uk/eventdetail.asp?ID=1378 ●

AHDS History News

Arts and Humanities Research ICT Awareness and Training (ARIA)

ARIA is a new JISC-funded project aimed at helping universities respond to the Arts and Humanities Research Council's (AHRC) increasing emphasis on generic research training by providing access to a range of training resources in the use of ICT. Such resources are needed if researchers are to make the best use of the new technologies. Preliminary findings indicate a number of structural problems: low awareness of what is possible, both theoretically and practically; training not easy to find; lack of generic tools for particular disciplines; shortage of time in which to keep abreast of new tools.

The main output of the project will be ready access to a suite of resources which give arts and humanities researchers a broad overview of relevant ICT tools and resources and illustrations of their use across the range of disciplines covered by the AHRC. While some of these may be new, ARIA aim to make maximum use of existing resources through a thorough review and selection process and to re-use such resources as far as possible through localisation of content to different subjects. ARIA expect these resources to be a combination of case studies and training materials for use by trainers and directly by researchers themselves. The project is being guided by user surveys and a team of specialist advisers representing the spread of disciplines covered by the AHRC.

aria.dmu.ac.uk/ ●

Forthcoming Events

- 20-24 June 2005:** ESRC Social Science Week 2005, Various venues
- 20 June 2005:** Social Inequality: Using Evidence from Data, Royal Statistical Society, London
- 21 June 2005:** Collaboration, Co-Laboratories and e-Research, University of Manchester
- 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
- 1 July 2005:** Health Survey User Group Meeting, Royal Statistical Society, London
- 5 July 2005:** Introductory workshop to the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, Royal Statistical Society, London
- 9 July 2005 - 19 August 2005:** 38th Essex Summer School in Social Science Data Analysis and Collection, University of Essex
- 11-22 July 2005:** BHPS and NCDS/BCS70 Data Confrontation Workshops, University of Essex
- 15-16 September 2005:** ASC Conference: Maximising Data Value - Data Use and Re-Use, Newland Park
- 29-30 September 2005:** DCC 2005 - Digital Curation Conference, Bath

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

News Byte

Do you realise that the most busy day of the week on the ESDS web site is Tuesday? The busiest time of the day is 2-3pm. Must be that post-lunch thirst for data!

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