

International Monetary Fund data released to UK academia

Following the establishment of the ESDS, the International Monetary Fund has agreed to give UK academics access to the statistical databanks they produce. The University of Manchester and the IMF have signed an agreement that will offer free access to authorised academic users for a period of five years.

The agreement will provide access to the following IMF databanks: International Financial Statistics (IFS), Balance of Payments Statistics, Direction of Trade Statistics and Government Finance Statistics. These databanks provide a very complete picture of national finance, economic development, balance of payments components and international trade for countries around the world. 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 global economic activity.

The IFS is a standard source of international statistics relating to all aspects of international and domestic finance and covers topics such as exchange rates, money and banking, interest rates, prices, wages, production, employment and government accounts. The IFS is updated monthly and contains approximately 34,000 time series covering more than 200 countries and areas. Quarterly and monthly time series are generally available from 1957 with most annual series beginning in 1948. The IFS can be used to examine over 50 years of global economic change as well as the impact of more recent developments.

The aim is to make the IMF data available from the end of June 2003 to coincide with the ESDS launch event which will take place on the afternoon of 30 June 2003 in Regent's College, London.

ESDS consults user

An early task for ESDS was to undertake a user consultation exercise. Phase I of this activity was tackled by undertaking a web-based user survey. Conducted in March 2003, the survey aimed to gather feedback from current and potential users of social and economic data on the relevance of the data and support services planned by each of the four ESDS specialist data services: government; longitudinal; international; and qualitative. Stakeholders targeted were from across the social science communities and across disciplines - active researchers; higher and further education teaching staff; research

Iraqi Trade with Rest of World



Source: IMF Direction of Trade

students; and research support staff.

A total of 367 responses were obtained across the four surveys and three winners were selected to receive a prize of an Amazon gift voucher. The full report, *Accessing and Analysing Social and Economic Data: Users' Needs Uncovered* can be found on the ESDS web site. The results of the surveys are much welcomed by the ESDS team. Not only have they helped confirm and consolidate the deliverables already proposed for the services, they have helped pinpoint more precisely priorities for both data enhancement work and for planning support activities and resources.

The results of the user surveys suggest that many of the most prominent data sources asked about in the survey are widely used. There is clearly also considerable scope for future use of both existing data within the ESDS remit and those data planned for acquisition by ESDS for research and teaching. The surveys were particularly helpful in:

- identifying the most popular data sources, and gaps in the data collection currently provided under ESDS
- elucidating barriers to accessing and using some types of data and gaining feedback on desirable ways to overcome these
- establishing what software is currently being used for data analysis
- drawing out the key substantive themes of interest to users of data - researchers and teachers alike
- signalling demand for particular modes of user support and training resources

ESDS use this information to help set future priorities and agendas. ESDS Qualidata will be hosting a further user consultation over the next six months in order to help plan development work for the provision of online data browsing systems.

ESDS International news - a new interface to OECD MEI

ESDS International are pleased to announce that the OECD Main Economic Indicators (MEI) are now available through Beyond 20/20. This replaces the previous delivery software - Timeweb Explorer. Beyond 20/20 can be used



to display, subset, visualise and download data and will accommodate the wide range of international databanks to be delivered under the

ESDS. Many governmental and intergovernmental organisations use Beyond 20/20 for the dissemination of time series and it has emerged as the standard software for delivering this type of aggregated data. An online Beyond 20/20 workbook has been developed by ESDS International and the online teaching and learning materials developed by the Timeweb service are still available.

Updated monthly, the OECD MEI contains data on national accounts, industrial production, employment, prices, business trends, finance and trade for the major world economies running from January 1960 to the current month. Students and researchers at UK higher and further educational establishments and research councils can currently access the data free using an Athens username and password (available from their institutional library). Introduction of Athens authentication is the first step in bringing the data access in line with guidelines for other ESDS resources which will in time also involve an integrated ESDS-wide online registration.

Beyond 20/20 workbook: esds.mcc.ac.uk/IDS_Help/OECDWE.htm

Timeweb service: www.bized.ac.uk/timeweb

OECD MEI data: esds.mcc.ac.uk/wds

For feedback or problems accessing the data, please contact : international@esds.ac.uk

ESDS one-stop registration

A streamlined, one-stop registration system is currently under development for the ESDS, following the model developed by the Census Registration Service (CRS). The system incorporates Athens authentication and Single Sign On.

The first phase of the system has been developed for ESDS International. This will go live in time for the ESDS launch on 30 June. Users should log in with a personal Athens username and complete a single, simple registration form in order to gain access to the data.

One-stop registration for the remaining ESDS services will be developed during the following months. Plans are in place for the full system to map to existing UK Data Archive users' original details in order to accelerate the process.

The one-stop system will extend to the census services. All users within UK HE/FE, currently registered with the CRS, will not have to re-register for the ESDS; similarly, all ESDS registrations will automatically entitle UK HE/FE users to access the census data.

ESDS Government news

The recent ESDS Government survey of users endorsed taking 'employment and labour markets' as a theme for the first year. It also highlighted the difficulty that researchers have in finding their way through the very extensive documentation on the core government surveys.

As a first step ESDS Government are working on a user guide for the analysis of employment and labour market issues in the government surveys. This will provide an overview of data sources with hyperlinks to the various documents

available on the web. On 2 May ESDS

Government and the Labour Market Statistics User Group held a meeting in Manchester entitled 'Threats and opportunities for labour market statistics'. Those attending heard about two

important new data sources: the Survey of Income and Living Conditions and the European Social Survey. Speakers from ONS described some of the work on confidentiality that underpins the release of Neighbourhood Statistics.

On Friday 11 July a meeting 'The Health Surveys of England, Scotland and Wales' is being jointly organised with the National Centre for Social Research. A Labour Force Survey User Group meeting is planned for 21 October. Both meetings are free of charge and will be held at the Royal Statistical Society, Errol Street, London.

To find out more about ESDS Government events and to join the list to receive information, please see: www.esds.ac.uk/government



News on the Families and Children Study

The Families and Children Study (FACS), formerly known as the Survey of Low Income Families (SOLIF), provides a new baseline survey of Britain's lone-parent families and low-income couples with dependent children. From wave 3 (2001) the survey has been extended to include higher income families, thereby yielding a complete sample of British families.

This key research is the main vehicle for Government to assess progress against targets in reducing child poverty. The survey aims to monitor change in British families in household composition; family resources; use of benefits; incentives to work, including the impact of Working Families' Tax Credit; labour market participation and family welfare.

"... display, subset, visualise and download data..."

"... a user guide for the analysis of employment and labour market issues..."

Like the earlier survey, FACS has provided the basis for follow-up studies. It has become a true panel, whereby the 1999 respondents were re-interviewed in 2000 and 2001 and new families added to each of these years to allow representative cross-sectional as well as longitudinal comparisons.

Further information, including study description, online documentation and user guides is freely available from the UKDA web site. The data (SN:4427) is available for immediate download to registered users. Please see: www.data-archive.ac.uk

Latest Census Resource Discovery System developments



Under a JISC award, the UK Data Archive is currently developing further its Census Resource Discovery System (CRDS), as part of the CHCC project, managed by MIMAS. The CRDS has been developed to provide search and browse facilities for census data and learning and teaching materials disseminated by the CHCC partners. Over the past year, work has been completed on the CRDS's metadata profile, census-specific keywords, metadata entry system and web site.

The new work will take the system to production-ready standard. As part of this, the CRDS has, so far, been upgraded to comply with the UK Common Metadata Framework (UKCMF) application of the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers Learning Objects Metadata (IEEE LOM) standard for metadata. Further work includes applying the LOM XML bindings and setting up the system as a Z39.50 target. The CHCC project will conclude in September 2003, at which point the CRDS should be ready for use.

CHCC web site: www.chcc.ac.uk

Go Go-Geo!

The second phase of the one-year, JISC-funded Go-Geo! and geoXwalk projects, is nearing completion. The UKDA and EDINA are jointly developing a demonstrator gazetteer and portal, with the aim of increasing access to and aiding the identification and retrieval of good quality geospatial datasets within the academic community.

Before the end of the current phase of the geo-projects, UKDA will undertake further workshops at several designated universities following a successful workshop held in January 2003. The workshops aim to promote the projects, allow for further evaluation of the portal and encourage the creation of geospatial metadata within the academic community. Evaluation of the projects provided useful feedback for further development of the gazetteer and portal.

Relationships were strengthened, during this demonstrator stage, with a number of stakeholders and interested organisations, including the

Association for Geographic Information (AGI), which is undertaking a similar geospatial portal project (Glgateway). At a recent meeting, further collaboration between the UKDA and AGI was discussed. Ideas include holding joint metadata creator training sessions and the development of a geospatial thesaurus.

29th Annual IASSIST Conference in Ottawa

ESDS staff were well represented at the annual conference of the International Association for Social Science Information Services and Technology (IASSIST), held in Ottawa, Canada 27-30 May.

Louise Corti, Head of ESDS Qualidata, spoke on 'New Directions for the UK Qualitative Data Service', and gave another paper on the X4L project to develop learning and teaching resources.

Louise Corti and John Southall, also of ESDS Qualidata, held a very successful workshop on 'Everything you ever wanted to know about preparing qualitative data ... but were afraid to ask'. The event was very successful and very well attended highlighting national data archives growing recognition of qualitative data. Alasdair Crockett, Data Services Manager for ESDS Access and Preservation spoke on 'Data Processing at the UK Data Archive'.

Ken Miller, Head of Information Services, gave two talks: one on MADIERA, the EU-funded project which further develops the UKDA's multilingual thesaurus and provides a new



version of the European Integrated Data Catalogue (IDC) based on the Nesstar platform; and another on the UKDA's experience with moving to DDI-compatible metadata and catalogue. Melanie Wright, Head of Data and Support Services, spoke on the UKDA's consultation project with the Medical Research Council on data archiving and access, and was part of a panel discussion on supporting users of online services.

ESDS also featured in the poster session and was well represented on the various internal IASSIST committees.

"... highlighting national data archives growing recognition of qualitative data."

"... identification and retrieval of good quality geospatial datasets..."

New ESDS web site: progress

The new web site for the Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) will provide top level information about ESDS, links to finding and accessing data across the specialist services and other key social science data, information about ESDS news and training, and pages to support data creators and depositors. The structural logic of the present UKDA site is thus being retained, although the new site aims to be more intuitive and less complex than the present UKDA design.

The site will also enable logical linking to the individual web sites supporting the four specialist functions: ESDS Government; ESDS International; ESDS Longitudinal; and ESDS Qualidata. These sites will have the same style and navigation as the main ESDS site, to retain a uniform 'look and feel' and stylistic coherence, but with the four services employing their chosen colour scheme and images. The idea of 'major series' pages currently found on the UKDA site will be retained for each of these sections for the most popular datasets, and pages

on data enhancements and user support and training materials will be located on the specialist service pages.

The timetable for development work points to a basic site being released at the end of June 2003 with: information about ESDS; overview of finding and accessing data; news, events and training; help; and data creation/depositing. The UKDA download/ordering system currently in place is being redeveloped to accommodate Athens authentication and automated access control. Work is expected to be completed in late 2003.

ESDS is committed to following agreed best standards and good practice in web design and usability. The underlying code of the ESDS web site will achieve compliance with W3C guidelines for XHTML and Cascading Style Sheets, will conform with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and be SENDA compliant.

History Data Service News

Integrated browse lists

The HDS has recently implemented a new resource discovery tool allowing users to browse the whole of their extensive holdings of historical datasets. All collections are themed by period, geography and subject ensuring rapid location and retrieval of the catalogue record. These collections can be ordered in the usual way from the UKDA.

A wide range of collections are also available for automatic downloading in easy to import formats along with their documentation. This service is currently a prototype and may be subject to some disruption.

Try out the browse lists at: hds.essex.ac.uk/studybrowse/index.asp

Census and Registrar General's reports

The HDS is interested in collecting any 'historic' census or Registrar General's Annual Reports and related material. If any reader knows of any dusty copies languishing and in need of a good home, please contact the History Data Service.

Goodbye, hello...

Two staff members of the HDS have moved on: Cressida Chappell left in November 2002 to become the Academic Registrar at St. Catherine's College, Oxford. Hamish James moved in October 2002 to the AHDS Executive and remains in close contact in his role as Collections Manager. We wish them well in their new posts. The new head of service is Matthew Woollard, who joined the HDS from the History Department at the University of Essex.



HDS Head of Service - Matthew Woollard.

Forthcoming Events and Announcements

- 23-27 June 2003 Social Science Week: Revitalising policy through research, various locations
- 24 June 2003 British Society of Criminology Conference 2003, University of Wales
- 30 June 2003 Economic and Social Data Service (ESDS) Launch, Regent's College, London
- 30 June 2003 Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS) Annual Lecture 2003, London
- 2 July 2003 MIMAS Open Forum, University of Manchester
- 2 July 2003 Quantitative Methods Consultation Day, South Bank University
- 3-5 July 2003 BHPS-2003 Conference, Colchester, Essex
- 3-5 July 2003 EPUNet-2003 Conference, Colchester, Essex
- 4 July 2003 Accessing and Specification Workshop, University of Manchester
- 11 July 2003 The Health Surveys of England, Scotland and Wales, Royal Statistical Society, London
- 15-17 July 2003 Social Policy Association Annual Conference, University of Teesside
- 1-12 September 2003 International Seminar: Empirical Analysis of Labor Markets, Cologne, Germany

Further details of these and other events may be found on the ESDS web site.

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