

ESRC offers £10.8 million for secondary data analysis projects

Researchers and teachers in the UK have an embarrassment of riches when it comes to social science data.

Workshop series aims to foster ideas and collaboration

Thanks to funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC), ESDS is home to a unique and internationally renowned collection of data ranging from longitudinal cohort studies to international macro databanks and qualitative data resources. These data represent an impressive investment in the lifeblood of social science research – and the ESRC is keen to maximise its value to scientific discovery and its benefit to public policy.

For this reason the ESRC has launched the Secondary Data Analysis Initiative, a funding scheme that aims to deliver high impact policy, practitioner-relevant research and more prevalent data analysis skills through a deeper exploitation of its major data resources. In all, £10.8 million will be made available, commissioned in a number of

The initiative will actively seek to extend the community of researchers who use large and complex data, regardless of where they are in their academic careers. In particular, those from disciplines well beyond the traditional users of these data are encouraged to apply; examples include researchers in economics, geography and specialist areas of sociology.

Phase one will be devoted to funding around 20 small-scale projects of up to £200,000 each for a period of up to 18 months. Details on the call are available at the ESRC website. Proposals will be accepted until the end of April 2012, with a start date in October 2012.

Finding inspiration and resources

To support those seeking to apply for a grant under this initiative, the ESRC has commissioned ESDS to organise a series of free workshops where users can better understand the potential of various data resources. Some workshops focus on specific data collections, some on types of data (qualitative, international macrodata, business microdata), and others on the data resources that support key research themes

(housing and the labour market). In many cases, these workshops offer hands-on access and customised support for research questions.

Workshops will be held throughout the UK from December 2011 until March 2012 in order to support timely grant applications in April. As such, they are designed specifically for those who qualify under the initiative. The ESRC website has details of the workshops, including updates on programmes and booking information.

For more on the Secondary Data Analysis Initiative: www.esrc.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/delivering-priorities-funding/secondary-data-analysis.aspx

For more on the workshops: www.esrc.ac.uk/news-and-events/events/data-training-workshops.aspx ■



How are ESDS data being used?

Case studies demonstrate real-world examples of teaching and research.

Christine Rivers has used ESDS data to teach an introductory social sciences course that meets the diverse abilities of the student body at the Open University.

Alison Ledger used one dataset for medical school students to create an 'artistic' response (such as poems or songs) from the set's transcripts.

Mark Brown has used his experiences having sociology undergraduates work with quantitative ESDS data, as part of methodology training, to secure an ESRC grant for further research into how students could transfer such skills into practical dissertation work.

These are just a few examples of the many practical, real-world ways to use ESDS data to teach quantitative and qualitative research skills to undergraduates, postgraduates and advanced researchers. These case studies are now published on the ESDS website to demonstrate the impact these data have when used by students to critically engage with both data and methodologies in the classroom, and then bring these topics and theories to life.

Outside the classroom, researchers continue to utilise the data collections to further social science research that informs government policy and public discourse on social issues. From research that shows a link between obesity levels in the elderly and their use of a free bus pass, to the link between comprehensive secondary schools and social mobility, ESDS data continue to fuel important research.

Further case studies highlighting research using ESDS data are also featured on the website. These case studies include information on research outcomes, methodologies and results as well as links to the specific ESDS datasets used.

Read our case studies:
www.esds.ac.uk/resources/datainuse/casestudies.asp ■

Sharing ESDS data and expertise

Did you know that ESDS has offered more than 40 training events over the past twelve months, reaching more than 2,000 people?

Whether you are looking for the right data and variables, need help with managing your research data, or are seeking opportunities to learn and collaborate, ESDS has something for you. Many events are targeted at early career researchers, although some have engaged with more specialist audiences such as a recent data management workshop designed for trainers. Feedback tells us we are meeting users' needs, with an average satisfaction rating of 87 per cent for content and 85 per cent for usefulness.

Workshops are one of the key ways that the ESDS promotes and encourages data re-use. Training events make up just part of the portfolio of user-oriented events organised each year. Also popular are

ESDS user group meetings, structured to support those who use a particular major study, and showcase events such as the annual ESDS International Conference and biennial ESDS Government Conference. In addition, ESDS staff also presented or gave expert contributions at over 200 external events in the past year, both at home and abroad, including the UK Data Archive's flagship workshop on 'How to set up and run a data service'.

We are now looking for ways to extend ESDS data and services to a wider community of data users through the ESRC Secondary Data Analysis Initiative. We are also investigating ways to cut the time and costs of event travel by introducing online resources. July 2011 saw ESDS's first webinar (on data management planning) which attracted some 65 participants; more are planned in the coming months.

Find out what is on the ESDS event calendar: www.esds.ac.uk/news/ESDSforthevents.asp ■



Understanding Society – a step closer

November marks a major milestone in the development and delivery of *Understanding Society*, as data from the first interviews with 100,000 people in 40,000 UK households become available for researchers to use.

Data from the whole of Wave 1 of the survey (collected across a 24-month period of January 2009 to December 2010) are now ready to access and use via the

ESDS. The available data also include the Ethnicity Boost Sample, a unique resource which offers an unprecedented opportunity to examine and analyse ethnicity-related topics and issues.

"This is a momentous step for everyone who works on this world-leading study," says Nick Buck, director of the study. "We need everyone now to spread the word that this fantastic resource is available and to



New microdata available via Secure Data Service

The Secure Data Service now makes available secure access to business microdata collected by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and other government agencies.

Previously, these data could only be accessed at the ONS onsite secure facility, the Virtual Microdata Laboratory (VML). These data are confidential, and collected under statistics legislation. As the data are also highly identifiable they can only be accessed under secure conditions.

Data about a wide variety of business activity are collected. One of the most used datasets is the *Annual Respondents Database*, the most comprehensive business survey undertaken by the ONS, which collects detailed information about costs and income and how they are derived. Crucially, a measure of Gross Value Added is calculated for each individual business – economists

make sure that every researcher with an interest in the social and economic circumstances, attitudes and beliefs of people in the UK is using *Understanding Society*.”

Nick said he was also looking forward to the release of Year 1 of Wave 2 data, which would mark a further milestone for the survey in respect of longitudinal research opportunities.

A team of researchers with early access to the data is already working on a range of articles to be published early next year. Topics range from: the role social support networks play in coping with stressful events

widely regard this as a proxy for productivity – and is only available in these data.

Other business survey areas in the collection include:

- **Innovation, research and development** – *UK Innovation Survey; Business Expenditure on Research and Development Survey*
- **Employee wage data** – *Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings; New Earnings Survey*
- **Industrial relations** – *Workplace and Employment Relations Survey*
- **Productivity** – *Annual Respondents Database; Monthly Production Inquiry*
- **International trade and foreign direct investment** – *International Trade in Services; Annual Inquiry into Foreign Direct Investment*

Secure social data

The Secure Data Service can also provide researchers with the most detailed versions of popular social science collections, including:

- *British Household Panel Study* and *Understanding Society*

throughout the life-course; young people's health and well-being; the division of housework; links between parents' income and children's achievements; to specially-commissioned ethnicity-related research using the survey's unique ethnicity boost sample.

“This is an exciting time for anyone interested in mapping the UK's social landscape,” said Paul Boyle, Chief Executive of the Economic and Social Research Council, which has funded the survey. “With the latest release of data, researchers and policy makers will have access to unprecedented information allowing insights into our family

- *Labour Force Survey*
- *General Lifestyle Survey*
- *Wealth and Assets Survey*

These datasets contain additional variables not available in the Special Licence versions. They also contain the most detailed geographies – including postcodes and grid-references – for every respondent. Using the latest ArcGIS software, researchers can undertake spatial analysis of these data.

One of the Secure Data Service's latest acquisitions of social data is the *Millennium Cohort Study* linked with the Department for Education's *National Pupil Database*. These linked data can only be accessed through the Service.

See the complete library of data available through the Secure Data Service: securedata.data-archive.ac.uk/find/data-library

Learn more about the Service and how to become a member: securedata.data-archive.ac.uk ●

relationships, health, our attitudes to the changing environment around us, our finances and neighbourhoods and much more.”

Find the data and documentation: www.esds.ac.uk/findingData/usoc.asp.

Learn more about the survey: www.understandingsociety.org.uk. ●



Update on changes to the General Lifestyle Survey

The ONS has published an update about non European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (EU-SILC) questions asked in the *General Lifestyle Survey* (GLF).

This follows the ONS decision to discontinue the GLF in its current form from 2012 and to move the EU-SILC questions asked in the GLF to the *Family Resources Survey* (FRS).

Questions moving to the FRS include income, poverty, social exclusion, and living conditions. Wave 1 data will be collected from April 2012. A new stand-alone longitudinal survey will collect EU-SILC data for Waves 2-4 only. Because further testing of telephone interviewing is required, telephone interviewing for EU-SILC Waves 2-4 data collection will not begin until January 2013 at the earliest.

Health, family formation, drinking, and smoking, will move to a new survey to be created by merging these questions with the

ONS Opinions survey. This new survey will be called the *Opinions and Lifestyle Survey*. Smoking questions that are already asked on the *Opinions* survey will be retained in the *Opinions and Lifestyle Survey*. As with the *ONS Opinions* survey, the *Opinions and Lifestyle Survey* will have questions that can be added for a month or more with a quick turnaround for question sponsors.

The ONS update about the GLF changes contains a complete list of GLF questions that will be retained in the *Opinions and Lifestyle Survey*.

ESDS Government will hold a half-day *Opinions and Lifestyle Survey* user meeting on 21 March 2012. The ONS will discuss the new survey and users of the GLF and the *Opinions* surveys will present research papers.

Further details of user meeting:
www.ccsr.ac.uk/esds/events

ONS update: www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/consultations/closed-consultations/2011/the-future-of-the-glf-survey/index.html ■

Criteria for Approved Researcher status under review

What constitutes a 'fit and proper researcher' – and what constitutes a 'suitable project'?

These are questions the ONS is trying to answer in its ongoing work to both make government data available for bona fide research while protecting the privacy of respondents.

The disclosure of personal information held by ONS is an offence under the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 (SRSA) unless an exemption applies. However, disclosures of personal information can be made to an Approved Researcher, a person who is considered 'fit and proper' and working on a 'suitable project'.

With this in mind, ONS has conducted a review of the criteria which are used to base any decision to grant research access using the Approved Researcher legal gateway.

During the review and subsequent discussions with key stakeholders, one of the main areas that sparked interest was the potential to replicate, validate or legitimately challenge official statistics as a valid statistical research project. This is seen as a major improvement over the current Approved Researcher criteria. By explicitly allowing this type of research within the criteria, this would not only have the potential to improve quality, but also significantly increase public trust in official statistics.

ONS is now in the final stages of its review. The findings and recommendations will be made to the National Statistician by the end of the year. Should new criteria be approved, they will be published on the ONS website.

Those with specific questions or concerns are encouraged to contact the ONS at legalservices@ons.gsi.gov.uk. ■

Forthcoming events

13 January 2012:

Sharing quantitative research, University of East Anglia

17 January 2012:

Growing Up in Scotland (GUS) Data Workshops Winter 2011/12, Stirling

24 February 2012:

Longitudinal, Mixed Methods and Action Research, University of East Anglia

20 March 2012:

Living Costs and Food Survey user meeting, Royal Statistical Society, London

21 March 2012:

Opinions and Lifestyle Survey User Meeting, Royal Statistical Society, London

11-13 April 2012:

Sociology in an Age of Austerity, University of Leeds

4-8 June 2012:

IASSIST 2012: Data Science for a Connected World: Unlocking and Harnessing the Power of Information, Washington, D.C., USA

2-5 July 2012:

5th ESRC Research Methods Festival, St Catherine's College, Oxford

ESDS forthcoming events:

www.esds.ac.uk/news/ESDSforthevents.asp

See the ESDS workshop series supporting the ESRC Secondary Data Analysis Initiative: www.esrc.ac.uk/news-and-events/events/data-training-workshops.aspx ■

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