

**Advisory Groups Paper (97)07****OUTPUT PRODUCTION AND INFORMATION SERVICES****Current Work Of The Output Production Project Team**

This paper sets out the position that has been reached in preparatory research on production systems. It is prepared for the information of Group members.

**Advisory Group members are invited to :-****1. Forward comments and suggestions to the project team****Advisory Groups Paper (97)07****The geography for output**

1. Dr David Martin (University of Southampton) has established a prototype to demonstrate how an output geography, separate from that used for collection, can be created automatically. It has been demonstrated to an ESRC/JISC workshop and to the recent meeting of the Working Group on Output, Geography and Confidentiality(OWG). It has been well received, as has been reported in other papers prepared for this meeting.
2. The project team will be working with colleagues in the Geography project, using the 1997 Test areas to assess the operational implications.

**The systems for data analysis**

3. The preferred software currently (though not exclusively) used in ONS is SAS. Some customers have reported that this has restricted the ability of Census Division to meet their requests as fully as they would like. The potential to improve is being explored for the future. GRO(S) are currently evaluating the SuperCROSS package, produced by the Australian company Space-Time Research, and this will be considered by the Project team. The potential of other software packages is continually being reviewed.
4. The timescale is for the system to be in place for use within the Dress Rehearsal work in late 1999/early 2000. The current view is that it is unlikely that a single piece of software will meet the requirements, thus two or three packages might be in use to provide the range of census products. Recognising the rate of change of technology, sufficient flexibility will be built into the system to allow for new products, new formats, even new media(?) to be included to meet customer demands.

## The potential for screen-based metadata from the 2001 Census

5. The biggest changes in working practices between the 1991 and 2001 Census will be in the use of personal computing equipment. This is likely to be not just for data processing and supply of data but also for the screen-based use of support material. The project team's research work is aimed at ensuring the media used is appropriate to both the metadata involved and to the customer requirement. As part of this, the potential for using CD-ROM and multimedia is being examined. A separate exercise will review the content of the metadata, for example, statistical definitions, statements on quality and coverage and so on.
6. The means to write data and tables to CD-ROM has been explored and is now in use. The key to this has been the availability, since 1995, of equipment which can be attached to a PC and write individual CDs. This is now in regular use to supply our customers.
7. Not only does the Census produce a lot of data supplied in several different ways, but it also produces a huge amount of information about data (or 'metadata') in the form of Definitions, User Guides and Prospectuses. Currently customers have to find their way round all these publications. The research team has explored the use of authoring software to create multimedia products that can effectively convey information via the PC screen. The aim is to improve the availability of the metadata and the ease with which the User can find their way to the data they want. The two prototypes created by the team were demonstrated to the recent meeting of the OWG. The software packages involved were *IconAUTHOR* and *Microcosm*. The response from OWG was encouraging, with the view was that the work should be continued. To see a third prototype, which is now open to public inspection, you are also invited to visit the 2001 Census page on the ONS website on <http://www.emap.co.uk/ons/2001.htm> which is to be expanded and regularly updated.
8. The acceptability of the Internet at commercial and individual levels, and the commercial success of the CD-ROM, has ensured that, in the view of the industry pundits, they are likely to be a means of dissemination for at least another seven years. Such a time span takes us into the main period of supply of information from the 2001 Census.

## The mechanism for supply of products

9. The project team is engaged in a series of discussions with both the suppliers and users of large datasets, and with commercial interests associated with this work. Visits to CCTA, The Data Archive have been included on the supply side. *At present*, the three main mechanisms by which delivery of census statistics is likely are (i) direct supply by Internet or other on-line systems, (ii) on hard media such as CD-ROM and (iii) indirectly after analysis has been done on the users behalf. The current experiences and future plans of users are very important. The work of the Manchester Universities on KINDS is a case in point. Pilot visits will be exploring views on supply mechanisms.

## Future Plans

10. Future plans include
  - feeding the results of the pilot visits into the main phase of consultations on Outputs,
  - expanding the technical capabilities in the screen-based approach to the full, for example providing links from the metadata straight to the tables (or other products),
  - assessment of the feasibility of full scale implementation of the prototype system for the automatic generation of output areas, and
  - continuing to assess tabulation and data analysis software, both that currently in use in the Census Offices and elsewhere.

Progress on these issues will be reported to future meetings of Advisory Groups.

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March 1997