The IASSIST QUARTERLY represents an international cooperative effort on the part of individuals managing, operating, or using machine-readable data archives, data libraries, and data services. The QUARTERLY reports on activities related to the production, acquisition, preservation, processing, distribution, and use of machine-readable data carried out by its members and others in the international social science community. Your contributions and suggestions for topics of interest are welcomed. The views set forth by authors of articles contained in this publication are not necessarily those of IASSIST.

Information for Authors:
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The first page should contain the article title, author's name, affiliation, address to which correspondence may be sent, and telephone number. Footnotes and bibliographic citations should be consistent in style, preferably following a standard authority such as the University of Chicago press Manual of Style or Kate L. Turabian's Manual for Writers. Where appropriate, machine-readable data files should be cited with bibliographic citations consistent in style with Dodd, Sue A. "Bibliographic references for numeric social science data files: suggested guidelines". Journal of the American Society for Information Science 30(2): 77-82, March 1979. Announcements of conferences, training sessions, or the like, are welcomed and should include a mailing address and a telephone number for the director of the event or for the organization sponsoring the event.

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Title: Newsletter - International Association for Social Science Information Service and Technology

ISSN - United States: 0739-1137 © 1997 by IASSIST. All rights reserved.
The IASSIST Quarterly is not a newsletter. The frequency and production time means that the content cannot stay in the category of news. Furthermore the content does not resemble a traditional newsletter. There are no letters to the editor nor replies or rejoinders from the membership. Letters and replies are most welcome. But the “welcome” does not seem to have any effect, as the content of the Quarterly is almost exclusively papers from presentations at the IASSIST conferences. Therefore a name like “IASSIST Quarterly Studies” would better cover the function. Is the name important? “What’s in a name”? “IQ” is a beautiful name and most IASSIST members know the type of content to be found in the IASSIST Quarterly. As you all probably are fully aware of the IQ is also available in an electronic form on the internet (www.iassistdata.org). The IQ is a media that is part of IASSIST as a virtual community. I find that the IQ is important for IASSIST also as a traditional community. With the paper version of IQ delivered to your door you receive the physical evidence of our professional affiliation. It reminds you that IASSIST does exist in reality, between conferences!

This issue 26-2 of the IASSIST Quarterly contains the following three articles:

At the Amsterdam conference in 2001 with the theme “Collaborative Working in the Social Science Cyber Space” Julia Paris from Technikon Witwattersand in Johannesburg (South Africa) made a presentation in the session on IASSIST. To the conference Julia Paris brought original African artifacts (not software and data) and this added further color to the presentation on IASSIST and the technology collaboration in Africa. (The IQ can unfortunately only present the text). The article gives a more complex view of Africa than the “poverty-stricken, politically unstable, war-torn continent” that is often presented in the news-media. There are technical initiatives and therefore involvement and further collaboration with IASSIST is recommended.

At the session “Tuning Up Your Web Site: Increasing Its Usability” at the Storrs 2002 conference Stuart Smith from the University of Manchester gave at presentation on “Creating Accessible Style and Content for MIMAS Social Sciences Web Pages”. The presentation was based upon the paper that appears in the IQ: “Accessibility, Social Sciences and the Development of Content Management Systems”. The paper describes how the use of the web has introduced a “digital divide” and how the data services will overcome these technical and cultural issues. The paper demonstrates how the presentation of web-pages on the internet has received a great deal of attention and shows how it is now possible for the content staff to concentrate on the content of the web-pages.

At the same 2002 conference a session was dedicated to “Delivering the U.K. Census: Web-Based Access”. In this session Lucy Bell from the UK Data Archive presented the paper “Let us bring you to your census: recent developments in UK census data provision”. The paper describes the process of setting up a one-stop Census Registration Service (CRS). This is an online system for providing quick and simple user registration for access to the resources from the 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 UK decennial censuses. As the number of products associated with each census has steadily grown it has become important to make an easier access to the census materials. This became the project for “one-stop Census Registration Service”. The article presents the questionnaire sent to users and summarizes the results revealing issues of dissatisfaction with the earlier process as well as preferences for improved functionality with the new system.

Be sure to enjoy the IASSIST web-site. You can locate many of the PowerPoint presentations at www.IASSISTdata.org. (click “Conferences” and then “Multimedia Presentations” under the “Features” heading). If you have made a conference presentation that is missing on the web-site you should contact the collector Lisa Neidert (lisan@umich.edu).

Papers for the IASSIST Quarterly are most welcome. Please contact the editor (kbr@sam.sdu.dk) about submissions.

Karsten Boye Rasmussen, November 2002
IASSIST Collaboration In Africa

Abstract
From a research-collaboration perspective, African researchers have many opportunities to learn from the international community. The International Association for Social Science Information Services and Technology (IASSIST) possesses the resources and intellectual capacity to play a more meaningful role in information sharing and exchange of best practices in quantitative research service delivery. The aim of this paper is to make recommendations with regard to the way in which IASSIST can bring about closer collaboration between its international members and the African region. Closer collaboration could boost the interest of researchers in quantitative research and secondary data analysis, using the new technologies and the services of the existing African national data archives.

Introduction
This paper aims to address closer collaboration between the International Association for Social Science and Information Service Technology (IASSIST) and the African region. Firstly, it gives an overview of the political and socio-economic conditions in Africa and how these conditions hamper the development in the region. Secondly, it deals with the attempts made at regional stability, and finally the role IASSIST can play assisting social science data utilisation in Africa.

Political and socio-economic problems hampering connectivity in Africa
The most familiar landscape painted of Africa is one of a poverty-stricken, politically unstable, war-torn continent. This picture is not entirely exaggerated, but it is beginning to show signs of positive change. Some African scholars believe that there is a “dawning realisation that the impetus for long-range social and economic development is informed by scientific knowledge, technological innovation, entrepreneurial management, and good leadership to transform the harsh conditions of the continent and how it is perceived by itself and others”. (Odhiamb, T.p.2).

The African continent has much to learn from the international community with regard to innovation in the application of scientific expertise and in service delivery. IASSIST has the intellectual capacity, as well as the global network to bring about closer collaboration in the area of quantitative machine-readable social science data. Closer collaboration between IASSIST and Africa implies many challenges.

As the second largest continent with an estimated population of 700 million people, Africa is marked with many contradictions. Although richly endowed with natural resources, it is plagued with abject poverty, economic underdevelopment, and shifting political agendas, those problems are compounded by high rates of illiteracy.

Articles in the news media constantly highlight the pessimism with which local and foreign journalists paint the African political and economic landscape. Africa’s current situation and prognostications for the future are reported in terms of general desolation, ruthless state brutality, unbridled corruption and social dysfunction. African political leaders are held responsible for self-inflicted failure and poor political leadership prevalent in the region. The political leaders are accused of self-aggrandisement, procrastination, pilfering of state funds, and indulging in empty rhetoric. This allegation seems to find substance in ambitious projects with no economic utility that is to be found in some of the most severely poverty-stricken African countries. A well-known example is the Notre Dame de la Paix Basilica in the Ivory Coast, which was built to rival the grandeur of the St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. (Africa News, 2001)

Studies on Africa reflect contrasting viewpoints of the current African situation. They sketch a picture of gloom, with occasional rays of hope breaking through as depicted in the following example. Studies show that many universities in Africa have been in a state of crisis for a long time. This is exacerbated by limited budgets, a shortcoming which leads to low morale among faculty and students. An increased sense of isolation and lagging behind in education makes it difficult for universities to attract and retain top quality professors. Too few graduates are produced from programs that are relevant to development, and therefore, too little knowledge related
Connectivity in Africa
Solving the problems experienced in the African region requires a great deal of scientific investigation. Scientific problem solving, however, requires valid and reliable information. Africa lacks the research capacity to generate data, which is comparable, consistent, reliable and appropriate in this regard. James Dean, Director of Programmes at the Information Institute in Panos, is of the opinion that Africa will not be a fully ‘wired’ society for a long time. However, there are a few countries on the continent that have done well in promoting technological networking, namely, Senegal, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mali, Uganda, Mozambique, Egypt, Kenya and Tunisia. The Ivory Coast used to have connectivity through BITNET, but those links were discontinued due to lack of sustainability planning. Noteworthy initiatives are the examples of the Kenya Computer Institute (KCI) and the African Regional Centre for Technology Information System (ARCTIS) serving 11 African Countries.

The KCI uses electronic mail as a tool for information exchange in the developing world. At present, it is the main means of facilitating collaboration between Kenya, some other African states, and the international community. The KCI provides communication infrastructure and computing facilities, management support, human resources, sustainability, and motivation. International memberships include the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Italy, Sweden, Turkey, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore. From the African region, only Kenya and Uganda are active members. The KCI seems to be the largest and fastest growing electronic network of African scientists. This constitutes a unique pool of Kenyan expertise that could become the means to national development of information technology application in the region. The institute has experience with cutting-edge and mainstream technology, including TCP/IP (protocols) which provide Internet connectivity.

The other example is that of ARCTIS. It is an African regional network supported by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the International Development and Research Centre (IDRC) in Canada. This network handles a wide range of numerical and non-numerical, graphical, and full-text technological information relevant to socio-economic development of Africa. It is linked with several national and international facilities and information sources, and serves as a network using hardware based on local area network and wide area network configurations.

Another noteworthy factor is the existence of other small communities of dedicated electronic networks in Africa, namely, the Non-governmental Network (NGONET) and the Health Network (HEALTHNET) to name a few.

The initiatives cited serve to confirm that Africa holds great possibilities despite the many challenges facing it. It is with a sense of encouragement that one perceives the perseverance of some African scholars and the donor community support to sustain these initiatives. The documentation of these success stories is important for future benchmarking and follow-up.

Few as the existing pockets of research networks in the African region may be, there are clear indications that the region is moving towards workable solutions to its vast problems.

ATTEMPTS AT REGIONAL STABILITY AND INTEGRATION

The Southern African Development Community (SADC)
Several collective attempts at regional stability and integration are underway in the African region. This is evident from initiatives such as the Southern African Development Community, Treaty for Enhanced East African Co-operation, and the Economic Community of West Africa.

The main aim of these initiatives is to pursue integration and greater co-operation between economies in the African region. (Brümmelhoft, 2001). Another objective is to establish a culture of self-sufficiency that could serve as an impetus for social renewal on the continent.

The role of South Africa in the renewal of the African region
As a member of SADC, South Africa is also viewed as the economic ‘powerhouse’ of the African continent. Consequently, it is required to make substantial contributions locally and internationally within the area
of scientific investigation, to assist in the renewal of the continent.

It should be borne in mind, however, that South Africa is also a society in transition, one that is grappling with serious socio-economic issues like the HIV/AIDS pandemic, malnutrition among certain population groups, unresolved conflicts with their roots in the apartheid era, an urgent need for economic transformation and a diverse cultural heritage. As a result of these societal demands there is a growing need for social science research data in South Africa. This is verifiable through reports generated by the National Research Foundation in Pretoria.

The application of social science data in Africa.
South Africa is deemed to be the only African country with a well-established information infrastructure. Without going into the dubiousness of its motivation, the previous Nationalist Party government ensured that South Africa had the necessary structures and research institutions to execute research in social development issues. Here, the Human Sciences Research Council, the Medical Research Council and the Water Research Commission are cited as examples. Despite the strong infrastructure, however, there exists a dire need for awareness and demystification of quantitative analysis. A workshop held by the South African Data Archive in 1997 reflected practical problems experienced by researchers in the analysis and interpretation of data, as well as the manipulation of the data using computerised statistical packages. It has been noted that the rapid advances in computer technology exacerbate these problems. Addressing these problems would be beneficial for any future research efforts not only in South Africa, but also in the broader region.

The National Research Foundation has identified research focus areas to accommodate the investigation of issues such as HIV/AIDS, malnutrition, compact resources, etc. as mentioned above to make use of the unique opportunity available to South African social scientists. Researching these issues presents an opportunity for South Africa to obtain a better understanding of the African situation and the role South Africa could play in social and economic development in the region. However, it is not known how many current attempts at capacity building in social science research are addressing these problems.

Impact of collaboration between IASSIST and Africa
In keeping with social, economic and technological development, collaboration and global exchange of information are becoming more important for the development of underdeveloped countries. IASSIST plays a pivotal role in bringing together social science users and producers of data. The linkage already existing between South Africa and IASSIST could only serve to benefit the whole of the region. South Africa, viewed to have the most developed information infrastructure, seems to be in the best position to be the first port of call for strengthening of collaboration between IASSIST and Africa. This could become the benchmark for Operation Outreach initiatives in the region.

The IASSIST vision and mission already include a collaborative focus. This is found in the Outreach objectives and programmes of the association. The objectives are to:

- Encourage and support the establishment of local and national information centres for social science machine-readable data;
- Foster international exchange and dissemination of information regarding substantive and technical development related to social science machine-readable data;
- Co-ordinate international programs and projects and general efforts that provide a forum for discussion of issues relating to social science machine-readable data; promote the development of standards for social science machine-readable data;
- Encourage educational experiences for personnel engaged in work related to these objectives.” (IASSIST Constitution)

These objectives tie in very well with the social science research needs of the African region.

Recommendations
The following list of recommendations serves to provide options for closer working ties between IASSIST and the African region. The list is neither comprehensive, nor prescriptive. Its purpose is to provide IASSIST and the African regional representation with a starting point for further discussions.

The recommendations are:

- Expand the regional secretariat into an action committee to manage the IASSIST/AFRICA affairs in the African region. Infrastructure assistance could be sought through strategic discussions with the South African Data Archive and the National Research Foundation, as well as institutions of higher learning.
- Organise an IASSIST/AFRICA awareness campaign, with an initial focus on South Africa, to create awareness of the global network among South African social science individuals. The idea is to target social science graduate students, social scientists and information professionals. This could be done through an IASSIST/AFRICA marketing pamphlet and a questionnaire to stimulate their awareness of quantitative
research resources and facilities, and of the existence of IASSIST and possible membership.

- Create an electronic mailing list to disseminate IASSIST information, news and upcoming events, with links to the IASSIST homepage.

- Market IASSIST and the data centres at the annual conferences of the South African Online Users Group (SAOUG), the Library Association of South Africa (LIASA), and the Standing Committee of African Libraries (SCESCAL) in an attempt to reach information professionals that could be instrumental in establishing of data libraries at their residential academic or research institutions.

- Build capacity through research methodology and data analysis training. Arrange regular symposia and workshops on data archiving and secondary analysis, addressing the problems as identified earlier in the paper, targeting universities and technikons. Sponsorships could be sought from the National Research Foundation, Medical Research Council, and Statistics South Africa.

- Circulate the available training material on the IASSIST web site to members with the permission of the authors and the IASSIST Administrative Committee, to assist in the capacity building exercise.

- Convene symposia, workshops, seminars and training sessions on any subject consistent with the IASSIST objectives for networking purposes.

- Publish an IASSIST/AFRICA one-page newsletter customised for the African region, and reflecting IASSIST news and events, e.g. regional news and important announcements from the Administrative Committee, funding opportunities, and upcoming conferences on machine-readable data analysis to be held in the region.

- Tap into the network of the various consortiums to market IASSIST, the national data archive and other data centres.

- Form a data library interest group under the guidance of the IASSIST objectives and joint co-operation of the LIASA leadership.

- Encourage national archives similar to that of the South African Data Archive in the rest of Africa, starting with the Southern African Development Community and Sub-Saharan countries.

- Strengthen linkages between African universities and IASSIST-linked institutions abroad.

- Create opportunities for individuals to attend IASSIST/IFDO conferences to interact with colleagues both in Africa and abroad.

Some of the recommendations require IASSIST intervention, whereas the rest depend on local awareness, support and regional commitment.

**Conclusion**

Despite the serious obstacles in Africa, there is cause for optimism. The seriousness of the African plight is not irreversible. What is needed, though, are more resources, structural analysis, evaluation and scientific investigation by African scholars. Affiliations between IASSIST and the South African Data Archive have made huge contributions towards machine-readable social science data archiving in South Africa under the leadership of Dr. Maseka Lesoaana. Closer collaboration could only assist in enhancing the existing professional working relationship.

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Accessibility, Social Sciences and the Development of Content Management Systems

The World Wide Web is a remarkable medium, which allows the wide spread expression of information, opinion and debate as well as facilitating commerce, entertainment and many other forms of social activity. Educational institutions increasingly rely on the Web as a method of delivery of information for students. Most Further and Higher Educational establishments within the western hemisphere have large scale Web access. This access is increasingly spreading to schools and informal educational organisations, such as public libraries. With such wide scale access and reliance upon it for the delivery of information it was, perhaps, inevitable that the Web would fall increasingly under the control of legislation. Although the pace of development of the Web has been incredibly fast, this growth has many people in its wake: the disabled and other groups such as the elderly and the poor are finding access difficult. It has become clichéd to speak of the ‘digital divide’ (DDN, 2002) but it remains a very real risk for many sections of the academic community. Western countries are already enacting legislation to address this. However, if Web sites are to be truly accessible, particularly in the realm of education, academia must also address the technical and cultural issues that this enforced responsibility has raised.

To address this I wish to consider a particular example: the Manchester InforMation Associated Services (MIMAS). MIMAS provides resources for a variety of data services, ranging from satellite to bibliographic. In essence, MIMAS is an umbrella organisation for a number of different services. These services in the main (with some exceptions) are funded to provide free access to data for UK academics. The Web provides support information about the data services, such as how to register or how to use a particular service. In some instances, it provides access to the services themselves. However, this paper will only concern itself with issues surrounding the use of the Web to provide support materials. In effect, the MIMAS Web site is a primary site that provides overarching information for the data services and access to the data services Web sites (see fig 1.). Thus, whilst it is correct to describe a data service’s site as being part of the MIMAS Web site it is also correct to describe it as a Web site in its own right.

Traditionally employees of the data services have maintained these ancillary, but essential, Web services. Herein lies a problem for MIMAS when considering the management of its Web-based services. The staff members of data services are employed as ‘content specialists’, that is, they are considered experts in the field of the focal point of a particular data service.
For example, librarians are usually involved in the Bibliographic services. If members of the various data services teams also happen to have a high ability in Web development, it is more of a happy coincidence than the result of direct planning. However, MIMAS expects its staff to produce and maintain Web sites. To meet this challenge employees without specialist Web skills have generally used WYSIWYG (What You See Is What You Get) Web editors to produce and maintain Web sites, rather than develop higher Web skills such as an understanding of HTML. This has resulted in a mixture of styles and standards within the MIMAS Web site. However, new legislation (SENDA, 2001) in the UK regarding the accessibility of educational facilities, which is similar to existing American legislation, means that this situation can no longer continue.

The organisation has considered various solutions. First was the retrofitting of the existing Web site. However, this itself is a massive undertaking since the site has never had any standards imposed upon it in terms of HTML versions and issues such as browser compatibility. The code that underpins the site varies greatly in quality and style. The use of WYSIWYG front-end editors, in particular, has led to HTML imbedded with ill thought out controls over style. The irony of this situation is that, originally, HTML was not intended to control the layout or style of a Web page (Siegel, 1996).

Effectively, HTML was originally a guide to the meaning or structure of a document: it pointed to which parts of a Web page were headers, which were lists, etc. However, it did not tell the local browser how to present the information. Choices like background colour and text size were left to the browser producers or to the users themselves through the preferences setting. However, as traditional print designers began to switch over to the Web they wanted their Web sites to be viewed as they wished them to be seen (Siegel, 1996, p21). Initially hacking and reinterpreting the original purpose of HTML achieved this. For example, tables were used to control layout, when their original purpose was actually to present tabular data. HTML, a language originally intended to describe the arrangement of content, was now bastardised to produce the layout as well. Developers took this increasingly further without really expressing any concern for those who had relied on the simplicity of original HTML to access information.

As the Web became a commercial medium, the situation became more complex. Web developers demanded the opportunity to present other media such as animation and video. Technology responded without restraint. There were very exciting developments but increasingly it left behind those who relied on access technology or had low bandwidth connections.

Educational organisations such as MIMAS, without commercial sector resources, were still expected to produce Web sites that, above all, were attractive to the eye. The obvious solution for many of MIMAS’s content orientated developers in this atheistically dominated market was the adoption of WYSIWYGs. Unfortunately, the use of different brands of WYSIWYGs and other HTML editors and versions across the Web site by developers with little knowledge of HTML has resulted in a poorly planned site. It also ignores issues such as interface functionality or content construction. The advent of UK accessibility legislation (SENDA, 2001), which came into force in September 2002, has left MIMAS with no option but to review its entire Web strategy.

The organisation now recognises that it must find a long-term sustainable solution to this situation. It also realises that a rushed decision will lead to a continuation of the problems the organisation already faces with its Web services. However, as a short-term measure, it will retrofit the existing site to meet the Level 1 guidelines of the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C, 2000).

The W3C is generally considered the authority on HTML coding guidelines, especially accessibility. In general, these guidelines recognise that creators wish to control the appearance of their Web sites and that it is legitimate for the user to remove or adapt these controls should they interfere with accessibility. The proposed solution is the separation of style and content structure via the use of Cascading Style Sheets (Lie & Bos, 1999, Chp. 20).

Space precludes a detailed description of the methodology of CSS but, essentially, a style sheet allows a developer to remove the styling elements of a Web site to a separate section. This section can be called by multiple pages to allow the enforcement of consistency across a site. The content of the Web site itself is still structured in HTML or, in the more recent development eXtensible HyperText Mark-up Language (XHTML). Users, should they wish, can theoretically override the style sheet provided with a Web site and use their own or manipulate their browser settings, to provide an experience, which more directly meets their own requirements. Regrettably, although the use of CSS is spreading, it is only the latest versions of Web browsers (Lie & Bos, 1999, Chp. 20) that interpret the standards similarly and further development is needed.

The adoption and spread of CSS is very significant for an organisation such as MIMAS. This is because raw HTML or XHTML free from layout issues is relatively simple to learn. If Web pages are then developed with a more recent version of WYSIWYGs such as Macromedia’s Dreamweaver 4.0, it is possible to rapidly create a Web page to a rigorous standard of HTML. It is unnecessary for the content provider to be concerned about the layout of a page because a CSS controls this externally. Products, such as Dreamweaver, allow the creation of site templates,
which can enhance this procedure by minimising the need for a thorough understanding of HTML by the content provider. The templates control standard issues on sites, which remain the same or rarely change, for example the logo of an organisation. These templates are then used to produce new pages for a Web site. The major advantage of a template and CSS is that it frees the actual Web site content developer or site manager from having to code every single page. Changing just one file can make site wide changes. In a situation such as that faced by MIMAS, which has extremely limited Web development resources, it means that a few Web specialists can assist in the development of Web pages for all the data services of the organisation.

This approach has been piloted for one of the MIMAS services, the MIMAS RLG Web site (Smith & Bell). This site was produced for an internal MIMAS client involved with the bibliographic services. The client wanted a relatively small site that was accessible and simple to maintain as they had only minimal HTML skills. A template was produced in Dreamweaver 4.0, which used XHTML, rather than previous versions of HTML, primarily to explore its potential as a coding system. The Web developer produced a CSS to control the layout of the site but a user could override or replace this. After minimal training and the introduction of Dreamweaver templates, the client is now managing the day-to-day running of the site without assistance. The client consults the Web developer only for major changes or advice. Various tests have proved the accessibility of the site.

Generically, the system just described is a ‘Content Management System’ (CMS). A CMS allows content providers to concentrate on providing the actual content of a Web site without being overly concerned about its layout. Depending on the complexity of a CMS the content providers require very few or no HTML skills. The long-term goal of MIMAS is to introduce a formal CMS to the organisation.

Overall, the relatively simple MIMAS RLG site has shown that it is possible to develop accessible sites that non-Web specialists can maintain. However, these specialists must be prepared to learn some Web skills if they wish their site to remain accessible as they add content to it. Importantly for an organisation like MIMAS, with limited budgets, the development of an accessible Web site through this style of CMS allows content staff to concentrate on their primary function; they are freed from the tension of having to learn advanced Web skills. Instead, a few highly skilled Web developers are now able to apply their skills economically across the data services.

MIMAS has yet to make a final decision about the direction of its ancillary Web-based services in the light of accessibility legislation. It is already acting to ensure that its services are accessible as soon as possible. However, it must also address the longer-term question of maintaining this accessibility. The MIMAS RLG Web site is accessible and maintainable and, if the methods used in its construction were used in conjunction with a more formal CMS methodology, it could be the model for a realistic solution to the dilemma of accessibility and the challenge of balancing moral and legal obligations with budget and skills restraints.

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* Parts of this paper was presented at the IASSIST Conference, June 2002, in Storrs, CT, USA. Stuart Smith MSc., B.A. Hons. (MIMAS Manchester Computing). stuart.smith@man.ac.uk.
This paper describes the development of the one-stop Census Registration Service (CRS), an online system providing quick and simple user registration for access to all the varied resources from the 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 UK decennial censuses.

Introduction
UK higher education institutions, through the UK Data Archive (UKDA) and the Universities of Manchester, Edinburgh and Leeds, have been providing access to UK census data for over a quarter of a century. In that time, the number of data products associated with the 1971, 1981 and 1991 censuses has increased dramatically and now totals more than 50. This number will increase again with the release of the results from the 2001 Census.

Such a wealth of resources presents the academic user with not only the opportunity to use many sophisticated datasets but also a requirement to accept and fulfil the terms and conditions of the various licences covering these products. A new single licence for all 1971-2001 census products is now in development. In line with this new licence and in time for the results of the 2001 Census, the UK Data Archive has been funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) to develop, implement and maintain the one-stop Census Registration Service (http://www.census-registration.ac.uk) to simplify the process of registering for these data products.

This paper reviews the background to the project, explaining the need for such a co-ordinated service in light of the varied actual and potential uses of census data in higher and further education (HE/FE) and the ways in which these applications are currently developing. It also reports the findings of a small-scale questionnaire survey of UK HE/FE staff, undertaken by the paper’s author, which sheds light on views of the old and new registration systems. Lastly, the paper describes the new registration service in some detail and highlights some of the lessons learned during its development.

Background
The official census in the United Kingdom has been taken for 200 years, with 2001 being its bicentenary. It has been conducted every ten years since 1801, with just two anomalies: it was omitted in 1941 due to war-time security issues; and a small-scale, experimental, five-year census was attempted in 1966, using a 10 percent sample of the population.

The end of the 20th century saw more activity than ever before in disseminating census materials to academia. In the late 1970s the UK Data Archive became involved, as it started to disseminate the data from 1971. In those days it took nearly ten years to finalise the census data taken at the start of the decade and to publish them. Progress in the following years has speeded this up considerably.

Access for the academic community to these data has also been assisted by a joint ESRC and JISC programme which started with the 1991 Census. This programme funded a series of academic data services, known as Census Data Support Units (DSUs), which have been disseminating the data to the UK higher and, more recently, further education communities in the past decade.

Following the development of these academic services, the data products available to UK HE/FE have grown in number. The 1991 programme encouraged the development of derived datasets and tools which could be used with the census data. There are now over 50 datasets, including resources such as Deprivation Indices derived from the census data, which can be used. These datasets themselves comprise thousands of tables. The geographical breakdown of these data is sophisticated and, for certain data, such as the Small Area Statistics, takes the data to very small output areas. The 1991 ESRC/JISC programme’s online and offline access services have also been extended to bring in some of the 1971 and 1981 data. This all gives the UK HE/FE community unrivalled access to a vast collection of census data.

The data essentially break down into the following categories:

- Area statistics
- Boundary data
The original registration procedures to access the census data involved the need to locate, print off, complete and have counter-signed locally, a series of forms, most of which were slightly different in both content and format, in order to be able to use all the census data available. A user approaching the census data in the past may well have had to fill in different forms depending on which census year he or she was interested in, which country was needed and which DSU was being used.

In order to reduce the confusion and the administration associated with having to fulfil each clause of each licence, the ESRC/JISC, the three Census Offices and HMSO have developed a new tripartite agreement which will eliminate all the old licences, bringing the data from each census from 1971 onwards under the same terms. This will create a level playing field, so that all the data may be treated in the same way. The intention is also for this agreement to roll forward to bring in new censuses, as and when they are taken.

The UK Data Archive has developed an online system which co-ordinates all the registrations for access to the census data, after having won the tender from the ESRC/JISC to supply this. It was intended to dispense with the multiple paper forms and create a smooth, user-friendly, Web-based registration system which would knock down many, if not all, of the hurdles in the user’s path to the data. The Census Registration Service, established at the UK Data Archive in August 2001, has been developing this system over the course of the past year. The system is now live, meaning that just one online registration now entitles the user to access the data from all the DSUs, for all the years, countries and types of data, using a simple, online, Athens¹-compliant system.

**Consultation**

One of the first tasks in the CRS’s life was to undertake a series of consultations in order to guarantee that the development of the service satisfied all the stakeholders as far as possible. These stakeholders comprised the four DSUs whose registration needs the CRS serves, other experts and a sample of the current system’s users.

Three meetings with the DSUs were held during the first year of the service. In order to facilitate confidential and speedy discussions about the progress of the service a closed JISCmail² discussion list was also established in November 2001. The list has been used extensively and has proved to be a vital forum for sharing comments and suggestions.

Consultation with the future users of the service was considered to be just as important as consultation with the DSUs. A series of surveys were prepared and undertaken between November 2001 and March 2002 in order to ascertain the users’ views of the current registration

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¹ Athens: Legal framework for access to information in digital libraries
² JISCmail: Joint Information Systems Committee's discussion list service

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- Interaction data (origin-destination data)
- Microdata (the Samples of Anonymised Records or SARs)
- Other derived datasets

These data are distributed by the four highly-respected DSUs, funded via the ESRC/JISC Census Programme under its 2001 Census budget:

- Census Dissemination Unit from MIMAS (University of Manchester, http://census.ac.uk/cdu) for the area statistics for 1981, 1991 and 2001 and soon 1971
- Census Microdata Unit from the Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research (University of Manchester, http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/sars) for the 1991 and 2001 Samples of Anonymised Records (SARs)

The combination of the richness of the data resources and the sophisticated dissemination services make the census data valuable for research, teaching and learning; however, one large obstacle has blocked the user’s way in past years: registration.

Because the different census products have evolved over time, almost every one has resulted in a new licence being drawn up between the ESRC/JISC and one of the three census offices in the UK. These three administrations organise the censuses for their areas: the Office for National Statistics administers the census for England and Wales; the General Register Office for Scotland administers the Scottish census; and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency administers the census in Northern Ireland. To complicate matters further, the 1981 and 1991 boundary data for England and Wales and the 1981 boundary data for Scotland are owned and, therefore, licensed by three additional bodies: the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister; a consortium called ED-Line; and the Scottish Executive respectively. Because they have been developed by different organisations, each of these licences is slightly different. Even those licences which relate to the same country can vary in content. Add to this the fact that four distinctly different services distribute the data, all of which have required users to register separately with them, and a complicated system of access becomes apparent.
procedures which were then in place. This was done for three reasons:

1. To elicit their views about the then current and forthcoming census registration systems
2. To start to advertise the forthcoming changes
3. To discover whether any of the current users selected would be interested in beta testing the new system

Initially, all MIMAS and UK Data Archive class tutors using census data and UKBORDERS-selected class tutors were contacted with an email questionnaire on Tuesday 4 December 2001 (Appendix A). Class tutors form a special set of census data users. Under the old system, whole classes of students from one university could register in one batch by signing one licence administered by their tutor. This added to the workload of already busy lecturers whose responsibility it became to ensure that their students were signed up to use the data.

The email questionnaire was sent to 48 class tutors; 19 replied. Their responses indicated both familiarity and discontent with the old system:

- 16 said that they either knew how some, most or all of the system worked
- 9 said they found the system either impenetrable or quite difficult to use
- 7 found it ‘middling’ in terms of ease-of-use
- 10 were dissatisfied
- 2 were extremely dissatisfied

From their written comments, their main concerns were as follows:

- Gathering student signatures is very time consuming
- The registration process involves too much paperwork
- The registration forms tend to be long and complex
- Individual registration for each database is tiresome
- Tutor involvement should be minimised or eliminated

They came up with the following suggestions:

- Speedy online self-registration for students
- A system that is not too technical but easily explained online
- A single form for all census data services

When asked which aspects would discourage them from using – or wanting to use – a system, they came up almost unanimously (n=15) with:

- Tutor involvement in gathering students’ names

This was the key. It was reported that it was difficult to organise signatures for an entire class using hard copies of licences because some from the class will always be absent at the time of signature collection. The class tutors commented on their frustration in having to chase the stragglers.

Following on from the class tutors’ questionnaire survey, all site representatives from MIMAS, UKBORDERS and the UK Data Archive were emailed the URL of an online questionnaire on 7 February 2002 (see Appendix B for the text of the questionnaire). The CCSR representatives were alerted to the questionnaire through the SARs Newsletter.

In total, 373 representatives were emailed the details of the online questionnaire. Seventy-one replied, yielding a response rate of 19 percent. The results from these respondents mirrored those of the class tutors in that they indicated both an understanding of the system and some dissatisfaction about the way it worked.

- 57.75 percent (n=41) were familiar with at least some of the system, with 32.4 percent (n=23) feeling familiar with most or all of it.
- The respondents did not seem to find the system easy to use. 38.03 percent (n=27) found it ‘quite difficult’ or ‘very difficult’ to use, 33.8 percent (n=24) found it ‘neither difficult nor easy’, with only 9.86 percent (n=7) finding it ‘easy’. None of the respondents ticked the ‘very easy’ box.
- Despite their familiarity with the system, the site representatives were, in the main, dissatisfied with it. 42.25 percent (n=30) ticked the ‘extremely dissatisfied’ or ‘dissatisfied’ boxes; 14.08 percent (n=10) were, however, satisfied. No-one ticked the ‘extremely satisfied’ box.

The reasons supplied for dissatisfaction were:

- The need for counter-signatures on the licence agreements and the reliance on the postal service to deliver them both slow the process down
• The confusing abundance of forms and the difficulty in identifying which forms are needed for which dataset and, indeed, whether all the correct ones have been found, all cause frustration

• The time it takes to register puts off potential users (for students in particular, it was emphasised that the system needs to be speedy)

• The need to remember multiple user names for the services and to register separately for each one is burdensome

The questionnaire included a series of suggested improvements which the respondents were asked to tick should they desire them. Although not all of these additional functions were ticked by each representative, they each received a tick from at least 59% of the questionnaire’s respondents. The preferred registration functionality, in order of preference, was as follows:

• A single interface for all services, 95.77 percent (n=68)

• Immediate access to the data after registration, 81.69 percent (n=58)

• Step-by-step online guidance on how to register, 73.24 percent (n=52)

• The functionality to jump from one service to another without logging on again, 66.2 percent (n=47)

• Nothing to sign, 60.56 percent (n=43)

• Helpdesk facility for registration problems, 59.15 percent (n=42)

The results of the class tutors questionnaire were combined with the results of the questionnaire sent to the site representatives and the desires of the respondents incorporated into the system as far as possible.

The functionality of the registration system
After these consultations and further scenario planning, the final specification for the service was decided. This was then programmed, beta-tested and launched. In more detail, the system’s features are as follows:

• It is short, simple and straightforward, comprising a wholly online system with no need for paper licences and counter-signatures.

• It is Athens-authenticated, meaning that users will simply have to input their Athens usernames to access the data. This does, of course, mean that users will have to have Athens usernames before approaching the system; however, this is a straightforward process. In fact, many users will already have Athens identities for use with other resources.

• The CRS verifies users’ email addresses using a simple procedure. As soon as the user has completed the online form, a message is sent to the email address they entered. The email contains a URL which they must visit. Once they have successfully completed this, they will have registered to use the census data. There are two reasons for undertaking this email check. First, it confirms the user’s email address and, second, it checks that the email goes to the person who completed the registration form.

• The system has a facility for users to update their own details; for instance, if an undergraduate becomes a postgraduate, his or her status may be altered accordingly online.

• An online feedback area exists, where users may submit enquiries to the CRS team.

• There is a facility for inputting the details of publications which have arisen from use of the census data. One of the conditions of the End User Licence is that the user agrees to inform the CRS about these publications. In order to make this easy for the user, the CRS has established a centralised area of the Web site where this may be completed online.

• The system offers registered users the opportunity to sign up for the UK Data Archive as well, removing the need for them to complete additional online forms.

• The site also contains other informative pages, containing news and useful links.

Obstacles and lessons
Few obstacles were encountered during the service’s development, but those that did arise were complex. These have now been overcome and the relevant issues addressed. The obstacles essentially fell into two categories: licensing issues and technical issues.

Tracking down all the previous licences, including those for the digitised boundary data which were owned by different organisations than the rest of the census data, proved time-consuming. Additionally, the CRS had hoped to be able to bring other census-related datasets into the registration system in time for its launch, but this proved to be impossible due to time constraints.

The technical obstacles with which the CRS had to grapple related primarily to the different levels of access control that each Data Support Unit required for their data. For example, some units were clear that, should the service
be opened up outside the UK HE/FE community, it would not be possible for their data to be disseminated to these additional users. The CRS was intended to be a one-stop shop but, because of this access issue, it has also been developed with flexibility in mind. This flexibility was achieved through use of the Athens profile system.

The Athens system allows each of the services to be treated differently; each can be set up as a separate ‘resource’ in the Athens terminology. Each user who is granted access to a resource has an electronic ‘profile’, to which information may be written and from which information may be read. The census system has been established so that, once a user registers with the CRS, the expiry date of his or her registration is written to the user’s profile. When the user logs into one of the DSUs the Athens software reads the profile and assesses whether or not the user is entitled to access the data. This system can be extended to include other information regarding the user’s status to allow or disallow access to individual DSUs. For instance, should a user work outside the HE/FE sector, a fact which can be determined from the Athens username, information about access rights can be included in the user’s profile, preventing him or her from using some units and allowing them the use of others.

Lessons about how not to re-invent the wheel were learned early on in the project. The use of externally established systems of communication and authentication assisted the CRS enormously. One of these was Athens, while another was the JISCmail closed discussion list. This allowed all parties involved to reflect on changes to the system and to suggest the best solutions. It also resulted in agreement among all four of the DSUs.

Support has also been forthcoming from many quarters. The DSUs have encouraged the service’s development and given ideas and advice all the way, as have users in the field. Colleagues in the UK Data Archive have been on hand to discuss various options whenever needed. This has supplied the CRS team with a rich and varied body of experts from whom to take advice.

The launch and the future
The service was launched on 2 August 2002. From this point onwards, all UK HE/FE census data users have registered with the CRS. Previous users have had to re-register with the service for legal reasons. The UK Data Protection Act 1998 means that the CRS cannot simply transfer users’ details from one service to another; however, the bonus that exists in re-registration is that the process should be short, simple and straightforward. Most importantly, filling in one online form entitles users in the academic community to use all four of the Census Data Support Unit services and the UK Data Archive.

The CRS is now entering Phase 2 of its life and is gearing up to enhance and improve the service. The developments planned include a search interface to the database and more links. The CRS team will also be listening carefully to its users’ suggestions. If additional changes take place, they could well be a result of comments made by those whom the CRS values very highly — the people using the data.

Footnotes
1 Athens (http://www.athens.ac.uk) is a system used throughout UK HE/FE which supplies students and staff with just one username and password to access many different databases. It works with the education – and other – sectors and with database producers. HE/FE institutions must negotiate access for their user communities to different databases, after which the database producers inform Athens which institution’s members may use their services. The institutions are then granted access to these databases by Athens. Athens has over 1.8 million user accounts. All UK HE/FE institutions and the Research Councils have already been granted access to the census services, as these are the audiences for whom the services have been funded.

2 JISCmail (http://www.jiscmail.ac.uk) is a service based on LISTSERV which allows UK academics and support staff to join, create and manage electronic discussion lists.

*Paper presented at the IASSIST Conference, June 2002, in Storrs, CT, USA. Lucy Bell, UK Data Archive, lbjbell@essex.ac.uk

Appendix A: Email to class tutors, sent to 48 people via email on Tuesday 4th December 2001

Dear Dr ~

The Census Registration Service at the UK Data Archive (http://www.data-archive.ac.uk) is in the process of setting up a one stop shop Census Registration Service, providing a user-friendly and simple registration system for access to all the varied census resources from the 1971, 1981, 1991 and 2001 decennial censuses. This means that, soon, just one registration per person will be required to access all census materials from 1971, no matter where the data are located (MIMAS, UKBORDERS, Centre for Censuses and Survey Research etc.). The service is expected to be ready in the summer of 2002. For more information on the project, please follow the link to the UK Data Archive’s projects web pages (http://www.data-archive.ac.uk/home/CensusRS.asp).

My role is to coordinate this process and one of the first things I am trying to do is to canvas opinions on the ideal design and functionality of the new service. Colleagues at MIMAS mentioned your name as a tutor who uses the class registration procedures to access census materials.
with your students and suggested that you may have extremely valuable views on how the new system should be developed in this regard. If you had five or ten minutes to answer the questions below and email them back to me, I would be very grateful. Indeed, any comments about the current and/or future registration systems in relation to the needs of class tutors would be gratefully received. If at all possible, it would be helpful to have all responses back by Friday 21st December.

Many thanks.
Lucy Bell
Service Coordinator
Census Registration Service
UK Data Archive. University of Essex
Wivenhoe Park Colchester Essex CO4 3SQ
Tel: 01206 873950
Email: lajbell@essex.ac.uk

**** Questionnaire: Access to the Census Datasets ****

1. On a scale of 1 - 5, where 5 is the greatest, how familiar do you feel with the current systems of class registration required to access the 1971-1991 census datasets? PLEASE MARK.

1 __ I don’t know how the system works at all
2 __ I know only a little about how it works
3 __ I know some of it quite well
4 __ I am fairly sure how most of it works
5 __ I know exactly how it works

2. On a scale of 1 - 5, where 5 is the easiest, how easy do you find the current census registration systems to use? PLEASE MARK.

1 __ Impenetrable
2 __ Quite difficult
3 __ Middling
4 __ Easy
5 __ Very easy

3. On a scale of 1 - 5, where 5 is extremely satisfied, how satisfied are you with the current registration procedures? PLEASE MARK.

1 __ Extremely dissatisfied
2 __ Dissatisfied
3 __ Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
4 __ Satisfied
5 __ Extremely satisfied

Please give the reason(s) for your answer to question 3:

4. What would make you, as a class tutor, view the new census registration system as a success?

5. Which aspects of an online registration system would discourage you, as a class tutor, from using it?

6. If there are any anonymised suggestions or complaints you have picked up from students using the current census registration system and which you feel you can share, please describe them below.

7. Any other comments:

If you would like to express an interest in the beta testing of the new service in 2002, please just let me know.

Many thanks for your time in answering these questions.

Lucy Bell
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Legal Disclaimer: Any views expressed by the sender of this message are not necessarily those of the UK Data Archive. This Email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual(s) or entity to whom they are addressed.

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Appendix B: Online questionnaire for site representatives

Census Registration Service Questionnaire

Many thanks for taking the time to visit this page and complete the questionnaire (below). The results will be stored in a database held at the UK Data Archive. The information is being gathered to help inform the development of the new one-stop Census Registration Service for UK higher and further education.

This new service will provide an integrated, seamless, user-friendly and simple registration system for access to all the varied resources from the 1971, 1981, 1991 and, when they are ready, 2001 decennial censuses. This means that, soon, just one registration per person will be required to access all census materials from 1971, no matter where the data are located (MIMAS, UKBORDERS, Cathie Marsh Centre for Census and Survey Research, CIDS or the UK Data Archive). The service is expected to be ready in the summer of 2002. The answers you give to the questions below will help to determine its final design.

1. How familiar do you feel with the current system of registration required to access the 1971-1991 census datasets?
   - I don’t know how the system works at all.
   - I know only a little about how it works.
   - I know some of it quite well.
   - I know, reasonably well, how most of it works.
   - I know exactly how it works.
   - I have never used the system (please go to question 4).

2. How easy do you find the current census registration system to use?
   - Very difficult.
   - Quite difficult.
   - Neither difficult nor easy.
   - Easy.
   - Very easy.

3. How satisfied are you with the current census registration procedures for UK higher and further education?
   - Extremely dissatisfied.
   - Dissatisfied.
   - Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.
   - Satisfied.
   - Extremely satisfied.

Please give a brief summary of the reason(s) for your answer for question 3:

4. If usage statistics for this service for your institution were available, which level of breakdown would you find most useful?

By which category of user? (tick all that apply)
   - I would not need the results to be broken down by category of user.
   - Educational type (staff, postgraduate, undergraduate etc).
   - Department.
   - Subject area.

By which time period? (tick one)
   - Annual figures.
   - Quarterly figures.
   - Figures produced more frequently than quarterly.

5. What would you, as a user, like to see in an ideal census registration system? (tick all that apply)
   - A single interface for logging on to all services.
   - Nothing to sign.
   - The functionality to be able to jump from one service to another without logging on again.
   - Immediate access to the data after registration.
   - Helpdesk facility for registration problems.
   - Step-by-step online guidance on how to register.
   - Something else (please specify).
6. Additionally, please indicate on a scale of 1-5 where 5 is the most satisfied, your satisfaction with the following aspects of the UK Data Archive registration system:

- The registration process 1 2 3 4 5
- Logging in on subsequent visits, once already registered 1 2 3 4 5
- The email instructions 1 2 3 4 5
- Resolution of registration problems 1 2 3 4 5

7. Any other comments relating to the UK Data Archive or the census registration systems:

Your details
Full Name
Department
Email Address
Telephone Number
Which service(s) do you represent?
- MIMAS
- UK Data Archive
- UKBORDERS
- Athens
- CCSR (SARs)
- None of these

If you would prefer your contact details not to be included in the database of respondents to this survey, please tick this box.

The new service will be beta tested in 2002, please indicate below whether or not you would like to be involved in this process.
- Yes please
- No thank you
- Not sure, please contact me again later on in 2002.

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JoAnn Dionne
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☐ $50 (US) Regular Member
☐ $25 Student Member
☐ $75 Subscription (payment must be made in US$)
☐ List me in the membership directory
☐ Add me to the IASSIST listserv

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Organization:
Address:

City: State/Province:
Postal Code: Country:
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