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# SARS NEWSLETTER

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Samples of Anonymised Records from the 1991 and 2001 Census

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## THE SARS FOR 2001

### Update on the 2001 Samples of Anonymised Records

This is a short Newsletter to provide an update on the 2001 SARs, written by Angela Dale on 3 February 2004.

### Production of Individual and Household SARs

A further delay within ONS means that the Individual SAR will not be delivered to CCSR until June 2004 and the Household SAR will not be delivered before October 2004.

The specification for the **Individual SAR** (<http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/sars/2001/request/IndSAR2003-10-28.pdf>) is currently being checked for disclosure risk.

The Individual SAR has already lost sub-regional geography. It is likely that there will be further loss of detail by comparison with the specification above. In particular, industry will almost certainly be reduced to 15 categories and work hours will be recoded to the five categories used in the standard tables. However, there may be additional recoding before the final step of perturbing a small number of particularly risky records.

The specification for the **Household SAR** is available at <http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/sars/2001/request/HHold2003-11-04.pdf>. The disclosure work on this file will not start until May 2004. There is likely to be further loss of detail in this file before release.

The **Small Area Microdata** are progressing and will follow after the production of the Household SARs. The SAM will have local authorities as the lowest level of geography.

### SARs for Scotland

The last Newsletter described the difficulties over the production of SARs for Scotland. CCSR is working with GRO (Scotland) to identify the risky records in the Scottish SAR. This will mean that Scottish data will be available at the same time as the SARs for England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

### Four recommendations to ONS

In the last Newsletter (November 2003), in the light of the delays to the release of the SARs and concerns over loss of detail in the datasets, I proposed four recommendations to ONS and asked for your response. The four recommendations were:

- That ONS provide in-house access to the Individual SAR as soon as it is extracted (mid November) for those researchers who have an immediate and pressing need;
- That ONS allow access to a more detailed version of the SARs in a safe-setting;
- That ONS urgently implement a 'research' version of the SARs that recognises the safeguards that can be implemented through an institutional setting;
- That ONS and ESRC work together to explore the scope for harnessing e-science and Grid-related developments to secure remote access to microdata.

Generally there was support for all four of these and I have pursued them through a series of meetings with ONS. I report on each below.

**That ONS provide in-house access to the Individual SAR as soon as it is extracted for those researchers who have an immediate and pressing need**

In principle this has been accepted by ONS but at the moment it is only feasible to implement for a small number of users. I emailed users who had expressed an urgent need to access the Individual SAR and four proposals have been sent to ONS and GRO(S). If accepted, these users will be given access at ONS to the Individual SAR for 2001 as specified on the CCSR web site. I hope that this will get underway by mid-February. However, this is an ad hoc, stopgap solution before release of the file.

The delay in the production of the Household SAR means that we will want to request access to that file on a similar basis.

**That ONS allow access to a more detailed version of the SARs in a safe-setting**

A paper setting out the principles behind this proposal is currently being developed within ONS. I hope that in principle agreement will be reached for access to UK-wide data at Census Office sites in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Although there is no agreement yet, this is being very actively pursued. If agreed, the next steps will be to work out the practicalities.

**That ONS urgently implement a ‘research’ version of the SARs that recognises the safeguards that can be implemented through an institutional setting**

On 23 February we are holding a meeting at ONS at which we will discuss the confidentiality requirements of ONS against the safeguards that could be implemented in a research setting. We will report the outcome in the next Newsletter.

**That ONS and ESRC work together to explore the scope for harnessing e-science and Grid-related developments to secure remote access to microdata**

This is a longer-term solution but may, in the long run, provide the most satisfactory solution for all. There are precedents in other countries that provide valuable models. CCSR is developing plans to bid for funding to develop this further and will be involving ONS and other colleagues in these developments.

## **The bottom line**

The 1991 SARs were widely acclaimed for their research value and have provided publications which have been very influential. In the evaluation of the ESRC 1991 census programme they were described as the ‘star in the crown’ of the 1991 Census outputs.

We are currently facing a situation where much of the research conducted with 1991 data cannot be replicated for 2001 using the data files that are likely to be released into the public domain. Thus we lose the ability to understand how society has changed and much of the policy value of the 1991 analyses is lost. We are working very hard to try to find a way to retain the research capacity of the SARs. We will keep users informed through the web site ([www.ccsr.ac.uk/sars](http://www.ccsr.ac.uk/sars)) and through this Newsletter.

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