

SCROL - Project Update

Introduction

This paper provides an update on SCROL and progress on developing an operational system for disseminating results from the 2001 Census. Members are asked to note the developments and note the small change in the SCROL acronym from Scottish Census Results Output Library to Scottish Census Results On-line.

Background

The 2001 Census will provide the most important single source of information about the number and characteristics of Scotland's people. SCROL is a project that will deliver the results of the Census in an unrestricted and user friendly way to all users. It seeks to ensure that access to the output from the 2001 Census meets the needs of both public sector organisations and private organisations and citizens in the most efficient way, and in a way which will facilitate wide use of Census data for the benefit of all. Strong support for such an approach to meet the needs of joined-up government is apparent from consultation with Census users.

The Project has been initiated to ensure that the benefits of the investments in the 2001 Census are realised through widespread, timely and co-ordinated application of results to help inform decision making and improve the quality and effectiveness of services delivered to the public.

Similar projects to the SCROL project are being carried out within the Census offices for England and Wales (Office for National Statistics) and Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)). GROS and NISRA have decided that because of the commonality of requirements between the two Census Offices, the development of the SCROL pilot into an operational system for each office will be done in parallel. The additional development work for the Northern Ireland Census Access (NICA) project should be minimal as the majority of the functionality and architecture will be common.

SCROL Pilot

The pilot phase of the development which made available a website and CD to users for testing and evaluation in December has been completed. The website is still available at www.scrolpilot.org.uk and copies of the CD can still be obtained from GROS customer services if anyone is interested.

The response to the proposals tested in the pilot has been favourable and I thank all users who provided feedback, which has been valuable. In general, users thought that the pilot would be a valuable tool to improve the use of and access to Census results. The other main points to arise from the feedback were that:

Website

- The performance was worryingly slow, and in some instances was inaccessible;
- It wasn't compatible on different browsers
- It wasn't necessarily intuitive;
- More help was needed to guide users through the SuperWEB tool.

CD

- More assistance was needed to maximise the use of the SuperTABLE software;
- Better instructions for the installation and cross-platform compatibility;

After evaluating the responses from users and carrying out some further in-house evaluation, GROS decided that the pilot should be developed into an operational system building on the lessons learned from the pilot. GROS has also decided that in-house developers would undertake the bulk of the development work. However, GROS recognised that some support is required from consultants with expertise in web development and web mapping to improve the effectiveness of our development team and enable us to significantly reduce the project risk. After a tendering exercise, a consortium led by GeoWise was awarded the contract for IT support.

Operational SCROL

The development phase of moving the pilot system into an operational system is now in full swing with development progressing well.

Requirements/functionality

A user requirements document is being completed and this is largely based on the functionality provided in the pilot, the feedback to the pilot, and the functionality provided in other similar solutions (US Census, ONS Neighbourhood Statistics etc.). This requirements document is driving the functionality that will be provided either on first release or as post release improvements.

Essentially the high-level requirements that the development team is working towards delivering are:

Website

- ❖ Delivering access to all of the area statistics for the relevant geographies over the web;
- ❖ Delivery of a website to coincide with the release of the RG's Report to Parliament (by March 2003).
- ❖ Creating area-of-interest reports very simply with relatively few interactions.
- ❖ Selecting a specific pre-defined census table, specify the area of interest and generate a report.
- ❖ Using a thematic map or chart to illustrate patterns in data.
- ❖ Using an interactive map to find a specific area (using a gazetteer), select an area of interest (either a specific area like 'Cumbernauld' or aggregations of areas like 'EH1 6' and 'EH1 5') as a basis for a report.
- ❖ 'Profiling' an area of interest based on common geographic search criteria (postcode, place).
- ❖ Saving information for use in other software;
- ❖ Searching capability to find census reports or other content in the site;
- ❖ Provide an intuitive link between the tables and the metadata.

CD

Delivering access to all of the area statistics for the relevant geographies via a CD with a bundled suite of software (SuperTABLE) which gives users the tools to analyse large amounts of data simply. More specifically:

- ❖ Rearrange the tables using simple drag and drop methods;
- ❖ Easily construct calculations and derivations;
- ❖ Present the results as charts;
- ❖ Export the tables for use in other software;
- ❖ Present metadata about the data and tables in an easily accessible manner.

User consultation

It is recognised that one of the keys to meeting the aims of the project and delivering a successful website is the regular involvement of a wide variety of users. To ensure that this user involvement occurs, the development plan has been designed around releasing a number of prototypes which would each be subject to some form of user consultation.

The plans for user consultation are being finalised at the moment, but the plan will follow a number of key principles:

- Users from a wide variety of backgrounds will be consulted, such as school children, traditional Census users, policy makers, researchers, voluntary workers, etc. to ensure that the products mainly fulfil the requirements of the less experienced user.
- Users will be asked to provide input in a number of different ways to maximise their input, such as workshops with a limited number of users, by correspondence and possibly one on one discussions.
- A pool of users from all backgrounds will be established and each prototype will draw on a subset of the users depending on the objectives of the particular prototype.

The first prototype will be the look and structure of the website, which will form the template to which the back-end technical development will fit. As the aims of the project are to increase the use of and access to the Census results it is imperative that the website is easily navigable for those new or relatively inexperienced Census users. The following prototypes will seek to build on this with relevant functionality being included in each new prototype as it is developed. As the prototypes become more functional and these can be tested remotely then the user involvement will widen. However, it is expected that the first prototype will involve a limited number of users providing feedback at either one or two workshop sessions where proposals for the look and feel will be presented. The first prototype is scheduled for early June with the consultation expected to be conducted in the first half of June.

Anyone wishing to be involved in user consultation and joining our “User pool” should register with Raymond Evans on 0131 314 4660 or by email at raymond.evans@gro-scotland.gov.uk.

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