SASPAC - a 30-year success story!
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Abstract

With Census day almost upon us (27 March) this article provides a brief overview of SASPAC's history and modern plans to prepare the application for the delivery of 2011 data to its many users.

What is it?

SASPAC is a specialist software package designed to store, interrogate, and analyse the large quantity of statistics produced by the UK Census Offices. It is a 'User Club' initiative that allows users to search, analyse, manipulate, present and export data from the 1971 to 2001 Censuses. Additional datasets such as ONS mid-year population estimates, CLG Indices of Deprivation and data held on the Neighbourhood Statistics website are also available via the new online Web Services Wizard. New sources and online methods are currently under development.

A public sector project

SASPAC's development is funded entirely through its users' annual licence fees as members of the support scheme. Following the 2001 Census there were over 380 organisational members across the UK, including users from local, central and regional government, the health sector, academia and the private sector along with the Census Offices themselves. The software is owned by the Local Government Association (LGA), supervised by a user Advisory Panel and managed and developed by the Greater London Authority (GLA). It is a 'not-for-profit' initiative and all income received supports its continued development and maintenance.

The Past

SASPAC's origins date back to the 1981 Census and a project led by David Rhind of Durham University, with the programming undertaken by the University of Edinburgh. This built an application that operated in a mainframe environment and provided access to the 1981 Census Small Area Statistics. Keith Dugmore from LAMSAC (Local Authorities Management Services and Computing Committee) was the first SASPAC Project Officer.

Building on the project's success, the software was ported to a personal computer (PC) in 1988. This breakthrough meant that SASPAC was able to deliver both mainframe and PC versions for users to access the 1991 Census outputs. A new 1991 development was delivered under contract and managed by the project officer Hywel Davies at the London Research Centre, (LRC). Among the developers, Hugh Neffendorf, Dudley Morrell and David Vallance remain involved to this day.

During the late 1990's, the LRC and its contractors continued to develop the software in preparation for the 2001 Census. This included migration to a Windows environment, integrated mapping, web output and access to double geography migration and workplace datasets. The first version of the software to access 2001 outputs was delivered to users in 2003 in a project that continued to be managed by Hywel Davies but now based at the GLA – the body to which the LRC was transferred to in 2000. Alan Lewis joined the project in 2003 and now manages the project and is leading on 2011 developments.

The Present

Today SASPAC has over 200 organisations that continue to support the software through annual support fees. As indicated by the timeline below, the 'spike' in membership has historically been two or three years following Census day as the National Statistics Offices publish the outputs – a trend that we hope will continue following the 2011 Census!

The current version of the software (v9.25) comes complete with data and provides full access to all 2001 (and earlier) Census outputs including double geography data and almost 500 Commissioned Tables. Alongside standard formats such as CSV, XLS, HTML and tabular output, more recent developments have seen the software evolve to incorporate a Web Publishing tool (InstantAtlas for SASPAC), GoogleTM Maps and, most recently, the online query and retrieval of ONS NeSS datasets via its Data Exchange Application Programme Interface (API) service.

SASPAC activity is much wider, including dialogue with users and the Census Offices on requirements, training and specialist advice on using the data.

The online retrieval of data has been the focus of SASPAC's recent development work which has seen close co-operation with ONS as 2011 Census Partners to help test the modern technical systems under development to deliver the next Census outputs.

The Future

Although Census day is in March 2011 the excitement of receiving the results will have to be contained until the first outputs arrive in July 2012. However, the next 16 months will be a very busy time for SASPAC as we continue to work with the Census Offices to ensure the delivery systems meet user requirements. To this end, SASPAC has begun a period of significant development to prepare the software for the 2011 outputs and provide the services that user require.

SASPAC 2011 will build on the strengths of 30 years of experience and requirements identified through the user survey, to deliver a new online interface that will not only cover the 2011 outputs but also provide opportunity for integration with other online applications together with access to many more data sources. In order to make sure we continue to meet user needs the development will be overseen by the Advisory Panel and tested through user forums. Please see the Web site for more insights and feel free to contact the SASPAC team if you would like more information or to get involved in the 2011 developments.

SASPAC would like to take this opportunity to thank its users for continuing to support an important public sector initiative, and we look forward to providing the tools you need to make best use of the 2011 outputs.

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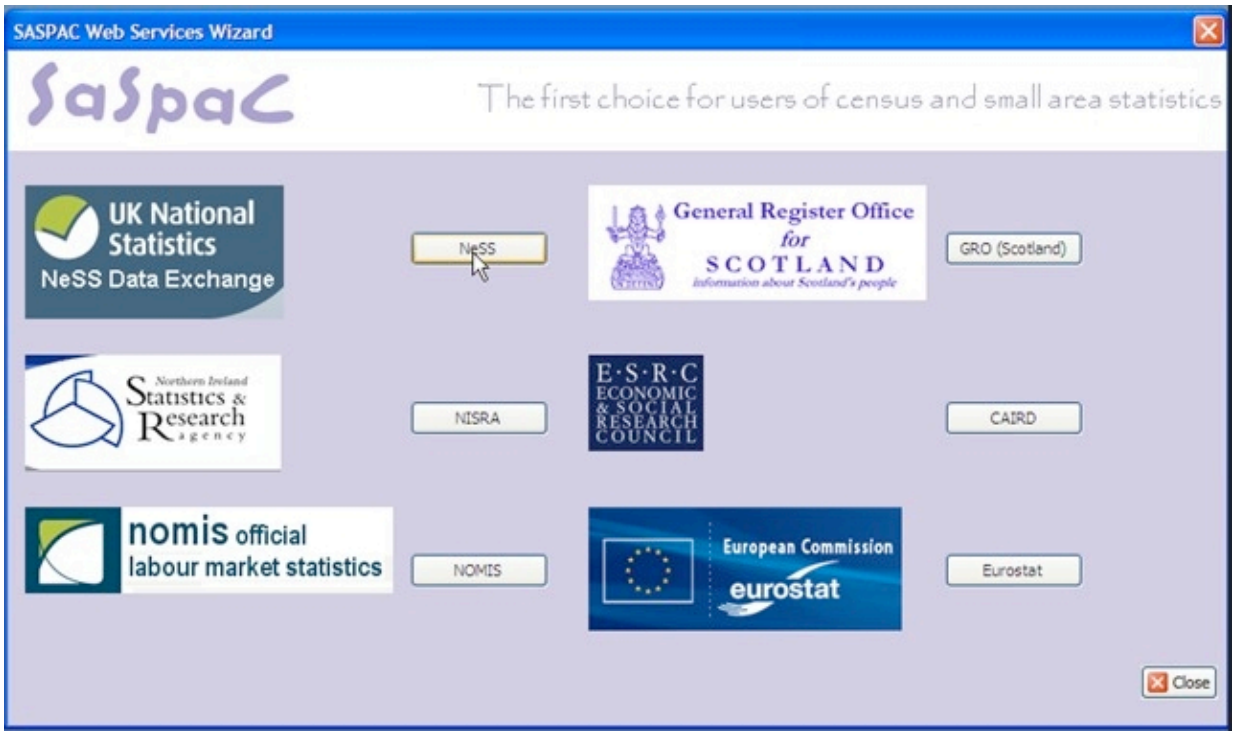
SASPAC Web Services Wizard
SaSpaC
The first choice for users of census and small area statistics
UK National Statistics
NeSS Data Exchange
NeSS
General Register Office for SCOTLAND
GRO (Scotland)
Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency
NISRA
E·S·R·C ECONOMIC & SOCIAL RESEARCH COUNCIL
CAIRD
nomis official labour market statistics
NOMIS
European Commission eurostat
Eurostat
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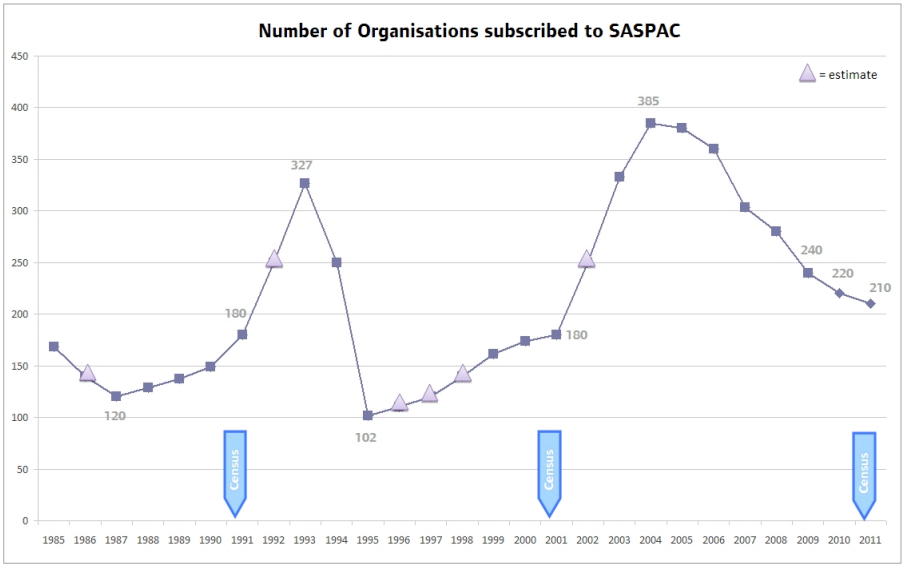
Number of Organisations subscribed to SASPAC
= estimate
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327
240
220
210
180
180
120
102
Census
Census
Census
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400
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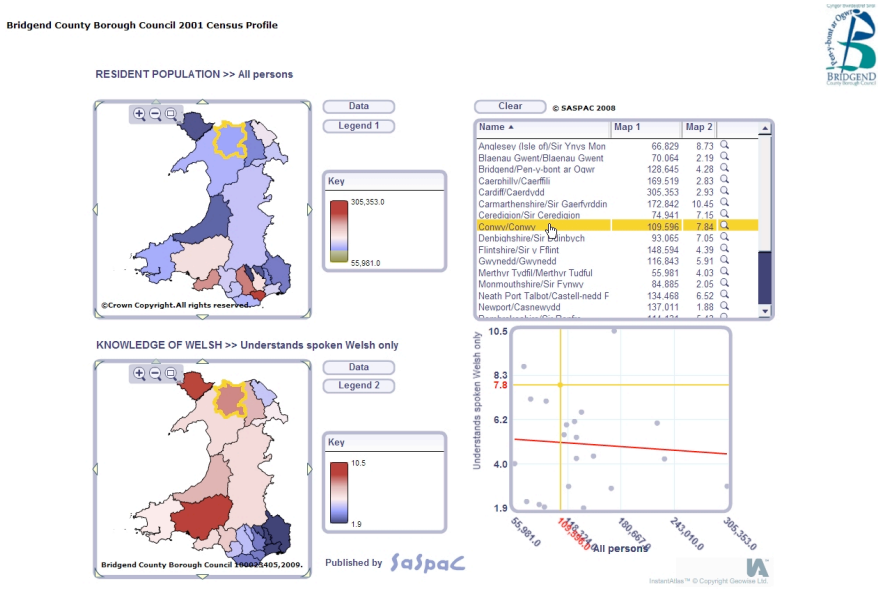
300
250
200
150
100
50
0
1985 1986 1987 1988 1989 1990 1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011


Bridgend County Borough Council 2001 Census Profile
RESIDENT POPULATION >> All persons
Data
Legend 1
Key
305,353.0
55,981.0
©Crown Copyright.All rights reserved.
Clear
© SASPAC 2008
Name
Map 1
Map 2
Anglesey (Isle of)/Sir Ynys Mon 66,829 8.73
Blaenau Gwent/Blaenau Gwent 70,064 2.19
Bridgend/Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr 128,645 4.28
Caerphilly/Caerffili 169,519 2.83
Cardiff/Caerdydd 305,353 2.93
Carmarthenshire/Sir Gaerfyrddin 172,842 10.45
Ceredigion/Sir Ceredigion 74,941 7.15
Conwy/Conwy 109,596 7.84
Denbighshire/Sir Ddinbych 93,065 7.05
Flintshire/Sir y Fflint 148,594 4.39
Gwynedd/Gwynedd 116,843 5.91
Merthyr Tydfil/Merthyr Tudful 55,981 4.03
Monmouthshire/Sir Fynwy 84,885 2.05
Neath Port Talbot/Castell-nedd P 134,468 6.52
Newport/Casnewydd 137,011 1.88
KNOWLEDGE OF WELSH >> Understands spoken Welsh only
Data
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Key
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1.9
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Published by SaSpaC
Understands spoken Welsh only
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8.3
7.8
6.2
4.0
1.9
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180,667.0
243,010.0
305,353.0
All persons