The Newsletter for SIR UK Users

SIR REPORTER

Contents

- Editorial
- Note from the Chair
- Events
- SIR Conference - The Changing Face of SIR Applications, June 28 London
- Annual General Meeting
- 1996 International Users Conference, Bremen
- Suits you SIR, a Beginner's Perspective
- SIR UK Users Group Survey
- Profile: Margaret Ward
- Forvus News
- Tips and Tricks
- Committee Members
- Forvus Training

Editorial

Welcome to the Spring 1996 issue of Reporter. As I pen these lines, basking in the dappled sunlight which streams into my office in central London, I extend wishes for a fertile Spring and Summer renaissance to all our readers.

The main event on our horizon is the forthcoming one-day Conference this June, which is kindly being hosted by Forvus at their London premises. The User Group has decided that for the time being we will arrange two or three one-day Conferences per year, rather than the pattern of a single three-day Conference as in the past. This will make these Conferences more accessible to a greater number of SIR users, and increase communication between the product developers and agents and us, the users. We on the User Group feel very enthusiastic about this change, and are arranging an extremely interesting programme for the first of these Conferences, more details of which appear elsewhere in the issue. We hope to see many of you there.

Many of the people using SIR have been using it for several years now, and so expert in its use have us old hands become that we forget how things seemed when we were new users, freshers, neophytes, or whatever we liked to call ourselves. We have a contribution from just such a new user, and would be extremely interested to hear from others who have come only recently to SIR. This is of course something which will interest the owners of SIR very much. How quickly a package can be picked up, by people approaching it for the first time, is an important factor in selling the package.

Featured in the Tips and Tricks section is an article demonstrating the use of external files for selective data retrieval. There is nothing advanced about the techniques used in the example given. On the contrary, the use of an external file is simple, but its use in this fashion may not be something that comes readily to mind. Each of us has our own way of working with SIR, using approaches which have come to seem obvious to us. Often, though, it may not have occurred to other users to use quite such an approach, and it could be just what they need. It is always interesting to pick up new ways of working, and we would love to hear from other SIR users about techniques which they use.

Michael Staley

Note from the Chair

I don't know about you, but I've always found spring an invigorating experience: new buds on the trees, the sound of the bees ... if it wasn't for the friends I'd lose, I'd break out in song. Attendance at the International Conference has made this year particularly so (there's a fuller report from me later in this issue), as have a few, nasty data derivation problems which cropped up back here at the homestead. As usual, however, SIR looks set to turn them into mere 'challenges' once I get stuck in.

As I note in my International Conference Report, we're still waiting for definite news on the release date of 4.0. However, a recent communication from Tony Reardon, Technical Director of SIR Pty Ltd, shows how seriously the developers are treating the issue and, more particularly, promises the recruitment of additional staff to expedite development. By the time this reaches your desk, SIR Pty's WWW site should also be up (URL: http://www.sir.com.au).

On the home front, your committee has fully taken on board your views on our Conferences and has organised two, one-day, non-residential events this year (and has probably upset any sense of time/space reference you once had in the process). Our summer conference will take place this year on June 28 at New Forvus House in London while we move to Edinburgh for a second on November 13. Full details of the former are supplied in this issue with more on the latter to appear in a later Reporter. So don't forget to make a note in your diaries now and send back the June booking form ASAP; Kathy and Hilary have put together an excellent programme, and, as Bill Shatner (Captain Kirk to all you non-Canadians) used to say, "By gosh, the price is right!"

Hope to see you there.

Randy Banks

Events

June 28	**SIR Users Conference** London. A combination of training, tips and tricks and user papers. To be held at Forvus House.
September 11-13	**ASC Silver Jubilee International Conference** London. Details from Diana Elder, ASC, PO Box 60, Chesham, Bucks, HP5 3QH. Phone, Fax: 01494 793033 Email: asc@essex.ac.uk
November 13	**SIR Users Conference Edinburgh** A combination of training, tips and tricks and user papers.

SIR Conference The Changing Face of SIR Applications June 28, London

Book now for the June 28 Conference in London! The Conference will be concentrating on the changing face of SIR applications, and specifically how it is used with, and compares to other software, with an emphasis on new SIR applications. We are starting with registration at 10.00 to give some travelling time for people outside London, and finishing with a Wine and Cheese Party to encourage you all to stay and meet other SIR users and Forvus staff. Though it won't be the usual fancy-dress conference dinner, we promise music and dancing for the truly determined. The programme timings are as follows:

10.00	Registration
10.30-12.30	Training and User Papers
12.30	AGM
12.45	Lunch
13.45-17:00	Training and User Papers
17.00	Wine and Cheese Party

The following people will speak:

Stuart Mitchenall	DSS	Scene setting
Dan Adams	University of Southampton	Perceptions of SIR compared to Other DBMS
Mike Campbell	DfEE	Application linking SIR and Staffware
Margaret Ward	Essex Data Archive	Links from SIR to other packages at the Archive

Training sessions include:

SIR Systems Management	Role of DBA, managing files, using SYSPROC and alternate procedure files, running Master, umbrella forms
Transferring data and results to other systems	Concentrating on Microsoft Excel, Access and Word

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the SIR UK Users Group will take place on Friday 28th June 1996 at 12.30pm at Forvus House, 53 Clapham Common South Side, London SW4.

The Agenda will be as follows:

1. Apologies for absence
2. Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting
3. Matters Arising
4. Chair's Report (Randy Banks)
5. Treasurer's Report (Dave Doulton)
6. Elections

The committee currently consists of:

Hilary Beedham and Charlie Owen who were elected at the 1995 AGM and continue in office until 1997 (Bylaws article 6(b);

Randy Banks (Chair), Dave Doulton (Treasurer), Toni Moulin, Peter Ritchie, Michael Staley (Secretary) and Barbara Stowe and Bill Powton (joint members) who were elected at the 1994 AGM and are therefore retiring (Bylaws 6(b));

Kathy Brooks who is the *ex-officio* member appointed by the SIR distributor (Bylaws Article 5(b)).

There are thus up to seven vacant positions to be filled by election (Bylaws Article 5(a)).

Randy Banks, Dave Doulton, Toni Moulin, Peter Ritchie, Michael Staley and Barbara Stowe and Bill Powton (joint members) are all eligible to restand for committee membership (Bylaws Articles 5(b) and 6(d)) and have indicated their willingness to do so. Other nominations for committee membership will be received by the current chair up to 12.30pm Friday 28th June 1996.

7. AOB

1996 SIR International Users Conference March 14/15, Bremen, Germany

Bremen, as I recently discovered, has many claims to fame. More than 1,200 years old, it is a hub of commerce, home to an intricate web of narrow streets comprising its beautiful Old Town and, as followers of Inspector Maigret will know, a city whose influence extends far and wide. More recently, Bremen added another feather to its cap as host to the 1996 SIR International Users Conference.

Organised by IQBAL EDV-Systeme GmbH, the German distributors of SIR, the 1996 Conference took place in the Bremen Novotel located in the outskirts of the city with twenty-four participants from seven countries taking part. The UK made a strong showing, with four delegates (Kathy Brooks, Dave Doulton, Toni Moulin and yours truly as the official SIR UK Users Group representative) providing three presentations - the full list of papers is provided below.

In Ahmad' s opening address, he very favourably referred to the conferences which the UK User Group has previously organised, a complement which I can now officially reciprocate. The organisation was faultless and the facilities excellent; more generally, a perfect environment was provided, in Ahmad' s words, "to talk to each other ... [to] exchange our experiences with SIR ... [and to] show the benefits of SIR but ... also

highlight its shortcomings in order to keep the system topical." In this regard, I should also make particular note of the contribution of Elvira Wilbrandt, also of IQBAL EDV, who gave us all a lesson in how to be both effective and charming in the chair.

The presentations themselves covered a wide range of topics, offering both case studies and considerations of a more general nature. What struck me in particular, was how well in combination they demonstrated the generic power and capabilities of SIR. Many participants, like myself, use SIR as the processing and analytical engine fronting a research database. Demonstrations by Nick Gawrit (of Heartbase) and Hartmut Paulke (of a medical thesaurus), and papers by Kathy Brooks (on the DfEE performance tables) and Dave Doulton (of Southampton University's SIR/HOST based user accounts system) illustrated, however, that SIR can more than adequately deal with transaction and free text processing needs as well.

Which is not, of course, to say that things can't get better, which brings me on to ...

Maureen ('Mo') Reardon, managing director of SIR Pty, represented the developer at the Conference and provided the 'top and tail' for it. In her opening remarks, she gave an abbreviated view of SIR's history to the present day, quite properly emphasising the important product achievements - stable, robust code; a single version on all supported platforms - that SIR users now take for granted. Also of note were her remarks on the SIR's current marketing strategy, which appears to be having the desired effect in Australia. A new advertising campaign, emphasising SIR's strengths and targeting the research market (something which the UK Users Group has been urging for quite some time) was top of her list, with the result that SIR has increased its profile and made SIR Pty one of the top 10 Australian software exporters; let's hope that all distributors will follow this lead to the same effect !

Unfortunately, I also have to report that while the development of SIR 4.0 is well underway, it is still ... well underway; Mo could not commit herself to a definite release date. This disappointment was more than offset for me, however, by two extremely crucial and positive points.

First, SIR Pty has obviously been thinking very hard about its post-4.0 plans. While Mo indicated that the user-driven Special Interest Committees (SICs) would play an increasingly important role in the future, plans are already in place to develop a screen-painter, integrate PQL and the Windows Development Language (WDL) which will appear with 4.0, replace SIR/FORMS (about which I'm sure a lot of users will have something to say!), replace SIR/Master and integrate databases and tabfiles.

Secondly, the Conference once again proved that SIR Pty does listen to its user base. Mo's last, official Conference task was to summarise and speak to the previous two days' papers, a role which, as anyone who has been cast in it will know, is unenviable in the extreme. Jet lag, temperamental computers and a German version of MS/PowerPoint notwithstanding, she carried it out with aplomb and elegance and homed in on the critical points which had been raised. Two, in particular, deserve mention.

On the one hand, performance degradation between 2.X and 3.X is something about which many users complain (and have complained) and Mo emphasised that SIR Pty is treating this issue as a 'bug' rather than an 'improvement' as far as version 4.0 is concerned. She provided comparative performance figures by way of illustrating how seriously SIR Pty is treating the problem.

On the other hand, in the current age of 'open connectivity', SIR's ability to interface to other products is something in which we all have an interest, and the value of ODBC was stressed throughout the conference. Mo agreed to take this issue on and in a recent fax to all conference participants proved that she had:

"I confirm my commitment to providing additional resources as a top priority to incorporate ODBC into SIR, hopefully for release 4.1. We first need to define exactly what our users need from the facility to ensure that it is useful for as many SIR clients as possible. I have asked David Baxter to set up a Special Interest Committee. He will be contacting you shortly to see if you are willing and able to assist and we will also advertise for interested participants and input to the group in our next newsletter."

In sum, the conference was interesting, engaging and, dare I say, entertaining. It provided an excellent forum for SIR users from across the world both to share experiences and confront the future, and I can only conclude by congratulating both organisers and participants on an extremely successful event.

List of Papers Presented in Bremen

Keynote	Ahmad Iqbal	Iqbal EDV Systeme GmbH
Status of SIR	Mo Reardon	SIR Pty
Benchmarking SIR	Randy Banks	BHPS, Essex University
Volkswagen Accident Database	Robert Zobel	Volkswagen AG
Tabulate: How	Niels	NSIR

to create output files in different formats	Veldhuijzen	
Searching and Coding of Drugs and Diseases	Hartmut Paulke	IFSN GmbH
Time Series Data of Apprentices	Rudolf Werner	Bundesinstitute f. Berufsbildung
Using Host in a User Management System	Dave Doulton	University of Southampton
User-friendly Windows Office Front-End	Ahmad Iqbal	Iqbal EDV Systeme GmbH
Heartbase	Nick Gawrit	SIR USA
SIR and Minitab	Elvira Wilbrandt	Iqbal EDV Systeme GmbH
School and College Performance Tables	Kathy Brooks	SIR UK
The Need for a Screen Painter or the Enduring Love of Forms	Jacob Mohrs	University of Amsterdam
Relations between SIR and MS Office	Ralf Behnke	Iqbal EDV Systeme GmbH

Randy Banks

Suits you SIR
A Beginner's Perspective

As a complete newbie to SIR, and not exactly highly proficient in databases methodology as a whole, it was with some trepidation that I set out on the 6th February 1996 to the four day Introduction to SIR course at Forvus House, Clapham Common. Accompanying me were two colleagues from the Computing Services Department at the University of Southampton, Margaret Davis and Opkar Hans.
On arrival at Forvus, we were greeted with hot coffee, perfect for fending off the wintry weather outside. After a brief introduction to the course Tutors, Kathy Brooks, Bernie Enlander and Janet Dyson, and fellow tutee, Andy Barber from the Planning Inspectorate, we got started into the thick, daunting ringbinder that contained the course notes.

Being a moderately knowledgeable user of Paradox, I was hopeful that I would be able to get to grips with the concepts behind SIR without too much trouble. This proved to be the case. Although I have learned the SSADM methodology of database creation (i.e. every table should have a single original key field, and composite keys are frowned upon), the Company Database seemed logical and, thankfully, manageable. The first thing that struck me about SIR was its intuitive way of working. It seemed a very logical system and I was interested in the use of cases to link tables to create case structured databases. Without having to spend large amounts of time with my nose in literature I was able to create simple but efficient searches using fairly familiar SQL procedures. This also lead to some familiarity with the Company Database, which proved to be crucial.

Having experimented with SIR SQL for a while, the course moved on to one of the main SIR features, PQL. Not having had much experience of programming of any kind, I was slightly worried at the thought of having to attempt to learn a new, complicated language from scratch. It soon became clear that these fears were unfounded as we started to get to grips with PQL. Although we only scratched the surface, it turned out to be a simple yet powerful way to conduct database searches and extract data. Soon we were carrying out calculations on extracted data and writing short programs that requested input of search criteria.

Although PQL procedures formed the majority of the course, there was still time to investigate data entry, schema definitions, application development, user menus and SIR Easy. Of

course, if we had known about SIR Easy from the start we could have completed the workshops in one day!

Having now been able to transfer the knowledge gained on the course to our database at work, I have formed the opinion that although SIR doesn't give the initial impression of being the most user friendly system available, it soon proves to be an extremely flexible tool that, with a little experience, can become a very powerful application.

Dan Adams
University of Southampton

SIR UK Users' Group User Survey: 1995

Last year a SIR User Survey questionnaire was distributed with SIR Reporter, via the FORVUS mailing list and via the sir-users mailing list on Mailbase. The survey this time concentrated more on the activities of the User Group and how effective it was, rather than on SIR itself. Users were asked about SIR Reporter, about the e-mail mailing list, about SIR-Exchange and about user events, such as conferences and training. Overall the responses suggest that User Group activities are useful, but that not enough people know about them.

Seventy-nine replies were received: almost half came from people employed in education (plus a few students), 40 per cent from the public sector and just five per cent from the commercial sector. Most respondents were experienced in their use of SIR, with 40 per cent having used the package for more than five years. There were also a number of new users: 15 per cent had used SIR for less than one year. So a range of experience was included. People were asked if they received SIR Reporter, the newsletter of the SIR UK User Group. Not surprisingly, most said they did: those who did not have already been added to the mailing list, if they gave an address. We then asked if people actually read Reporter. Just two people said that they didn't: a third said they always read it and a half usually. We asked which bits were the most interesting, and the Tips and Tricks came out as a favourite. We also asked which bits people did not read, but not many people answered that.

Next we asked people if they had heard of SIR-Exchange: this is an e-mail archive of useful bits of code. People can deposit things they have done or retrieve things others have done before: it can save re-inventing the wheel. It is a very useful facility, but it is not much used. Just 25 per cent of respondents said they had heard of it, and only eight per cent had ever used it. All of those had contributed, and most said they found it useful. These answers indicate that SIR-Exchange needs better promotion by the User Group, since few people use it but those who do find it useful. Next we asked if users knew of the sir-users e-mail mailing list on Mailbase. Thirty per cent said they did, and 23 per cent subscribed. Only half the subscribers said they found it useful. This probably reflects the fact that only a little e-mail is posted to the list. Again, the mailing list needs promotion by the User Group, and more use needs to be made of it.

In the final section of the questionnaire users were asked about attendance at User Group events, such as conferences and training workshops. Only just over a third of respondents had ever attended an event of any kind. Most of those had attended a national conference or a one-day conference or workshop. Of those who had attended, just over half said they had found it useful. We asked who paid for attendance at such conferences: over 80 per cent said the employer, but 10 per cent paid for themselves, with the rest sharing the cost.

The preferred format was for one-day, non-residential events, with slightly more preferring general meetings to technical workshops.

For such a one-day event people said they would be prepared to pay between £25 and £150, with an average of £64. For a three-day, residential conference people said they would be prepared to pay between £250 and £500, with an average of £340. A large majority wanted training as part of any conference. And where should these conferences and workshops be? We offered London and Edinburgh as choices, as that is where our events have tended to be in the past. People were fairly evenly split between those two, but nearly half wanted somewhere else - although there was no consensus as to where.

Taking the different sections together the replies seem to indicate that where some User Group activity has been encountered, it has generally been well received - be it SIR Reporter, SIR-Exchange, the sir-users e-mail list or a conference or workshop. But too few SIR users actually do encounter the various User Group activities. We should all try to bring things that we have found useful to the attention of other SIR users. In that way we will support each other, we will support SIR and we will be a useful User Group.

Charlie Owen

Profile
Margaret Ward
ESRC Data Archive

I am married with two sons aged 8 and 5 who obviously keep me very busy. However I manage to find time to read the odd novel, organise my collection of bookmarks and study with the Open University.

My career in the Data Archive started in 1982 in the data delivery section. But three years later in 1985 I decided to move on and left the Archive to join British Telecom. Here I was employed as a Senior Data Processing Officer working on a Help Desk dealing with their internal computing problems. Although this job taught me a great deal I realised that I enjoyed the work of the Archive more.

So after my first son was born in 1988, I returned to the Archive early in 1989. This time as a part-time Computer Officer on a nine month contract which has since evolved into a permanent three-quarter time contract.

Initially I was processing some data the Archive had which needed transferring from old seven track magnetic tapes (which I'm sure many of you remember) to the Archive's new storage system. However it soon became clear that someone was needed to take responsibility for the increasing number of datasets the Archive was receiving in SIR format.

Hilary Beedham, who many of you know, was already busy dealing with the large government datasets we received as SIR files and so I was asked to take on this task. I have thoroughly enjoyed learning about SIR although the Archive's use of it is somewhat limited. However I have found that the 'Introductory course' I attended some years ago at Forvus, and the 1994 conference in London, have both been very interesting. They have given me a greater insight into the many features that SIR has and the variety of applications for which it can be used.

Margaret Ward
Email: wardm@essex.ac.uk

Forvus News

Forvus have just started a SAS consultancy project for The Court Service in London. Crown and County Court data held in DataFlex databases needs to be transferred to Excel, unfortunately not as straightforward an exercise as it should be. Forvus will write systems to automate the transfer between DataFlex and Excel, by providing prompts for the user to enter appropriate parameters for data selection, store the output data in SAS and reformat as necessary to get it into Excel. Part of the exercise will be the transfer of skills necessary to allow Court Service staff to carry out these processes themselves.

In their ceaseless quest to provide the best and fastest service to their clients, Forvus have decided to transfer the UK Trade Data into QuickTAB. While the data will still be initially loaded and aggregated in SIR, the decision to then move it to QuickTAB was made for a number of reasons. Firstly, the storage space required on our systems is dramatically reduced. Using QuickTAB allowed non-IT oriented people (i.e. me and the sales team) to produce some of the more routine tabulations, thus reducing the burden on the poor overworked techies (or tetchies). Finally, QuickTAB enabled tabulations to be produced at a fraction of the time that they took in SIR, so that we are able to despatch reports to our customers more quickly.

Forvus have just engaged the services of a new consultant. Kwok Hung joined on the 22nd April and will be working on the development of QuickTAB. Kwok has an Msc in Advanced Information Technology, and a BSc 2.1 in Computing and Statistics. He will be working under the QuickTAB Development Manager, Philip Truscott.

Philip, however, was not able to greet Kwok on his arrival. This was because Philip had generously taken some of his leave in order to accompany an aid convoy to Bosnia. On arrival he intended to spend some time entertaining children and in the preceding weeks Philip could be seen wandering around Forvus House, translation book in hand, translating children's' stories into the local language. He was also trying to get a grip with useful phrases such as 'Don't shoot, I'm British' and 'Are you sure this isn't a minefield?'.

The Sales Team now have their own EMAIL address which can be used to get information on any of our services. This is sales@forvus.demon.co.uk. Don't forget - it's good to talk!

Steve Flack

Manuals

If you have been delaying buying manuals because you thought they would be reprinted for Version 4, we have good news for you.

Version 4 will be released with new versions of Getting Started and the Environment Reference; and an Update Summary. The other 5 version 3.2 manuals will not be reprinted. Forvus is offering version 3.2 manuals at a special discounted price.

Usual price	£100
Now	£60 (including postage and packing).

Please call Suzanne Moore on 0171 498 2602 to order your set.

Retrieval using External Files

The use of external files in SIR programming - first introduced in 2.2 - is a very powerful tool. One of my favourite ways of doing this is the construction of a retrieval which reads from an external file, finding a record, and processing accordingly.

A recent problem I had concerned two separate datasets from a panel survey, each held in its own database. Partially responding households at Wave 1 had been dropped from the Wave 2 sample on grounds of cost. Nevertheless, our client wished to know how many potential interviews had been lost in this way - in other words, how many of those people in discarded households would have been 16 or over at the time of the Wave 2 interviews, and thus would theoretically have been eligible. One way to extract this information would have been to combine the datasets, renumbering some of the record types in the process, and running a retrieval over the combined dataset. However, due to serial number changes and consequent changes to case structure, this would have been a messy job. The easiest way seemed to be to run a job in the Wave 2 dataset, detecting those households which had been dropped, and writing their serial numbers to an external file. Then, working in the Wave 1 dataset, each household could be accessed and the relevant counts extracted.

The first step was straightforward enough. The following retrieval was used:

```
retrieval
integer num07   | count of dropped households
set num07 (0)
process cases
. process rec 30
.   ifnot (numbr(W2resid) eq 7) next record
.   compute num07 = num07 + 1
.   write quota(i4) addhh(i5)
. end process rec
end process case
write /
   "Number of cases where W2resid = 7 : "
   num07
end retrieval
```

The Wave 2 string variable W2resid was set to 7 where a household had been dropped from between waves. Setting the above retrieval to an output journal, a listing was produced of those households which we need to examine - always one to use meaningful names where possible, I called it w1drelig.lis.

Crossing the conceptual divide to the Wave 2 dataset, I then set in motion the second part of this operation. It was now necessary to construct a retrieval which would read the household serial numbers, and examine each person record in that household to determine whether or not that person was of an age eligible for interview at Wave 2. The following retrieval was dreamt up after a feast of pickled walnuts and cheese:

```
retrieval
c
c     Determines how many of the persons c
c     dropped after Wave 1 were
```

```
c     potential responders. Count of those 16 and
over as at Wave 2.

integer oelig selig nelig oinelig sinelig ninelig
   fnd xquota xaddhh workint
set oelig selig nelig oinelig sinelig ninelig (0)
string iname oname company
set iname ("w1drelig.lis")
open infile / dsnvar = iname / read

loop

read (infile, error = eof) 1x xquota(i3) xaddhh(i3)
set fnd (0)
case is xquota

. set fnd (1)
. ifthen (xquota ge 571)
       | quota collected by XX
.   set company ("xx")
. else
.   compute workint = amod (xquota,2)
      | is quota odd or even?
.   ifthen (workint eq 0)
.     set company ("yyy")
.   else
.     set company ("zzzz")
.   endif
. endif

. write /
. process rec 32 with (xaddhh)
.   ifthen (numbr(W1year) le 1978)
.     write xquota(i3) xaddhh(i3) recno(i2)
        3x W1year 5x company
.     ifthen (company eq "yyy")
.       compute oelig = oelig + 1
.     elseif (company eq "zzzz")
.       compute selig = selig + 1
.     elseif (company eq "xx")
.       compute nelig = nelig + 1
.     endif
.   else
.     ifthen (company eq "yyy")
.       compute oinelig = oinelig + 1
.     elseif (company eq "zzzz")
.       compute sinelig = sinelig + 1
.     elseif (company eq "xx")
.       compute ninelig = ninelig + 1
.     endif
.   endif
. end process rec
end case is

ifthen (fnd eq 0)   | case not found
. write xquota(i3) xaddhh(i3)
     " - case not found on W1 dataset"
endif

pool

eof:

write // "Eligible from W1 dataset: "
write
  "====================="
write /  "YYY: " oelig 5x "ZZZZ: " selig 5x
   "XX: " nelig

write //  "Ineligible: "
write     "==========="
write /  "YYY: " oinelig 5x "ZZZZ: " sinelig 5x
   "XX: " ninelig

end retrieval
```

The data for this survey had been collected by three co-operating companies, and a breakdown of the counts at company level was required. This was differentiated on the basis of the identity of each quota. The variable w1year holds the year of birth of the person, upon the basis of which the potential eligibility was to be assessed. Those amongst us blessed with the eye of the eagle will notice that a quota of 4 characters at wave 2 becomes 3 at wave 1; this is the case restructuring referred to above. This retrieval took only a couple of minutes to run, and output the breakdown of statistics required. SIR is extremely quick at data retrieval organised in this manner. No fuss, no mess!

This example is a simple one, outlining the principles involved. I have got to be very fond of this sort of approach, of presenting SIR with a list of serial numbers and extracting data accordingly. I find it especially useful when I have transferred data from one database management system to another, but where the datasets are not identical. SIR is useful here because of its power as a programming language, which need not be restricted to using it only within the database.

Michael Staley

Simple Help Screens

Have you ever wanted to produce a help screen for users, without going in for templates or tailored help? There is a very easy way - just type the helpscreen text (as you want it to appear) and save it in a member in the database. In the following example the helpscreen text is stored in Menus.Help1txt, and the program which displays it is in Menus.Help1. Menus.Help1 calls a member called Menus.OK which displays an ‘OK’button. All three members are shown here, together with a dump of the generated help screen.

```
c -------------------------------------------------------
   Program : MENUS.HELP1
   Reads a text member MENUS.HELP1TXT and
   isplays it on the screen with an '  OK'   button
c -------------------------------------------------------
program noendprompt
. open infile dsn='  menus.help1txt'
    /read/member
. erase screen
. box at 1,1,22,80
. set n(2)
```

```
. loop
.   compute n=n+1
.   read (infile,end=eof) aline (a75)
.   display text aline at [n],3
. pool
eof:call menus.ok(33)
end program


c ------------------------------------------------------------
  Program : MENUS.OK
  Parameters:  Row/Column where prompt will
appear
  c ------------------------------------------------------------
horizontal menu [<1>+1], <2>     , [<1>+1] ,
[<2>+7]
   box <1>, [<2>-1] , [<1>+2] , [<2>+8] , 1 ,7936
   list ('   OK   ') , 7936
```

```
MENUS.HELP1TXT contains

COMPANY Database Menu Options        (Last Updated : 29 March, 1996)
==============================       ================================

Utilities     :    Database Statistics
                   Database Schema
                   Verify  File

Reports       :    Employee List
                   Review List

Tabulations   :    Position by Gender
                   Position by Education

Other         :    Backup
```

The screen appears as:

```
+-------------------------------------------------------------------------------+
|                                                                               |
|                                                                               |
|  COMPANY Database Menu Options        (Last Updated : 29 March, 1996)         |
|  ==============================       ================================        |
|                                                                               |
|  Utilities     :    Database Statistics                                      |
|                     Database Schema                                          |
|                     Verify  File                                             |
|                                                                               |
|  Reports       :    Employee List                                            |
|                     Review List                                              |
|                                                                               |
|  Tabulations   :    Position by Gender                                       |
|                     Position by Education                                    |
|                                                                               |
|  Other         :    Backup                                                   |
|                                                                               |
|                                                                               |
|                                                                               |
|                                                                               |
|                                                                               |
|                                                                               |
+-------------------------------------------------------------------------------+
                                +--------+
                                |   OK   |
                                +--------+
```

Bernie Enlander

SIR UK User Group Committee Members

1995/96

Randy Banks
British Household Panel Survey
University of Essex
Wivenhoe Park
Colchester CO4 3SQ
tel 01206 873067
fax 01206 873151
email randy@essex.ac.uk

Hilary Beedham
Economic and Social Research Council
Essex University
Wivenhoe Park
Colchester CO4 3SQ
tel 01206 872570
fax 01206 872003
email beedh@essex.ac.uk

Kathy Brooks
Forvus
53 Clapham Common
South Side
London SW4 9BX
tel 0171 498 2602
fax 0171 498 1939
email kathy@forvus.demon.co.uk

Dave Doulton
University of Southampton
Computing Services
Highfield
Southampton SO9 5NH
tel 01703 593541
fax 01703 593939
email D.C.Doulton@soton.ac.uk

Toni Moulin
BBC, C307
Woodlands
80 Wood Lane
London W12 0TT
tel 0181 743 8000 ext 62350
fax 0181 743 0906
email Toni.Moulin@bbc.co.uk

Charlie Owen
Thomas Coram Research Unit
Institute of Education
27 Woburn Square
London WC1H 0AA
tel 0171 612 6942
fax 0171 612 6927
email Owen@ioe.ac.uk

Peter Ritchie
Institute of Occupational Medicine
8 Roxburgh Place
Edinburgh EH8 9SU
tel 0131 667 5131
email:P.Ritchie@ed.ac.uk

Michael Staley
OPCS
St. Catherine's House
10 Kingsway
London WC2B 6JP
tel 0171 396 2382
fax 0171 405 3020
email:OPENET!C!StaleM@opcs.attmail.com

Barbara Stowe/Bill Powton
Department for Education
Mowden Hall
Staindrop Road
Darlington DL3 9BG
tel 01325 392 313/445