



Advisory Group Paper AG (02) 04

2001 CENSUS EVALUATION PROGRAMME AND WIDER STRATEGIC REVIEW

Introduction

- 1 This Paper outlines the ONS' thoughts to date on the tasks of evaluating the 2001 Census and the wider strategic review of future requirements for census-type information. It is important to note that these are evolving thoughts, and the ideas are still preliminary and likely to change.

Action for Advisory Groups

- 2 **Members are invited to:**
 - **note the general direction of ONS' approach;**
 - **note the timetables for evaluation and wider strategic development, and plans for user involvement; and**
 - **comment at the forthcoming round of meetings.**

Purpose of the 2001 Census Evaluation Programme

- 3 The purpose of any evaluation defines its approach, scope, final content and publication format. The main purposes currently identified for the Census 2001 evaluation are:
 - (a) to inform users when interpreting the data of the issues surrounding its collection and processing;
 - (b) public accountability;
 - (c) to identify methods and processes that could be changed for any future census; and
 - (d) to point to lessons for the wider ONS and for National Statistics generally.
- 4 The main proposed features of the current evaluation are:
 - individual project-based reports;
 - cross-project themes;
 - production of a General Report;
 - production of a Quality Report;
 - static (paper) and interactive (web) publication;
 - a programme of user involvement; and
 - defined timescales.

- 5 Evaluations will be as open and honest as possible. There will be separate evaluation reports for ONS, GROS and NISRA.

Project-based reports

- 6 The aim is that individual project-based evaluations should be consistent in style, format and content. The first versions of the evaluation reports produced had very different structures and this held up publication. A consistent structure has now been defined.
- 7 The reports will highlight project-specific issues and will attempt to assess how well the census achieved its key objectives. The scope of the project evaluations was set out in Advisory Group Paper AG (01)09. A full list is available via the NS website www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001. This will be revised regularly to update timetables and indicate which evaluations have been completed.
- 8 Full reports for Data Needs, Publicity and Legislation are already on the website. In addition there are Executive Summaries for Data collection Development and the Census Coverage Survey.
- 9 Other reports will need to evaluate the themes which span projects, such as:
- Security and confidentiality;
 - Contract management;
 - Risk management;
 - User consultation;
 - Cross-project interfaces and communications; and
 - The involvement of external expertise.
- 10 Responsibility for producing each project report rests with the respective Census Project Managers. Clearly this is appropriate in the sense that it is the project managers who have the most knowledge of the project operations, but this should be complemented with the views of other stakeholders (there will be different sets of stakeholders for different projects), including groups such as:
- field staff (views of field staff have already been gathered through debriefings);
 - contractors;
 - internal team members; and
 - user groups such as the Census Advisory Groups.
- 11 Options on how to engage users and other stakeholders to get their views include:
- interviews;
 - structured workshops; and
 - questionnaires.

- 12 ONS will need to balance the time, effort and resources needed to do this work with the benefit that will be gained. The most cost-effective method may be structured workshops.
- 13 **One possible approach that ONS are considering is to host an initial workshop at Titchfield to provide an opportunity for Advisory Group members to discuss issues with the Census Office and to determine how users might be involved in the evaluations.**
- 14 It is this area of work that should identify the real issues that users will want to see reported openly and honestly in the evaluation reports.

General Report

- 15 A General Report on the 2001 Census operation will be produced and laid before Parliament. ONS will draw heavily upon the project evaluations to compile the General Report. It is currently planned to be published in hard-copy form in December 2003.

Wider Strategic Review

- 16 Beyond the specific evaluation of the 2001 Census, in the longer term ONS will consider the need for, and then if necessary, examine the options for, the future production of census-type information. Three separate streams of work are proposed:
- (a) researching alternative ways of collecting census-type information;
 - (b) researching modifications to the way we undertake a 'traditional' census (meaning a one-off collection of information directly from members of the public); and
 - (c) researching methods of undertaking a traditional census electronically (such as via the Internet).
- 17 Work will be undertaken by a range of people across ONS. The thoughts outlined here are again preliminary and will need considerable further discussion and modification.
- 18 At some point all three Census Offices across the UK will also need to consider how to work together in future.

Researching alternative ways of collecting census-type information

- 19 This may involve the following stages: *Stage 1* would identify the alternatives for the future. This will require discussion with experts, including international experts, and the main users of the census information. Options are likely to include:
- do no census and only use existing information for decision making (only to establish a baseline from which the costs and benefits of other options can be measured);

- do no census and analyse information already collected in administrative records or surveys;
 - do no census and enhance administrative registers to meet the information requirements and facilitate creation of a linked database;
 - do no census and establish new or enhanced surveys to meet the information requirements;
 - do another census, including partial electronic (web based) response;
 - conduct annual rolling censuses, covering 10 per cent of the population each year; or
 - a combination of the above.
- 20 ONS is planning a literature review of alternatives, which will include revisiting the 1994 Policy and Evaluation Appraisal Review (PEAR), international publications and other reports
- 21 *Stage 2* would identify the front runners and ONS will plan more detailed evaluations and cost-benefit analyses for each.
- 22 Evaluation and cost-benefit analysis of options would be undertaken in *Stage 3* and can be divided into two parts:

(i) *Evaluation of data availability/collection processes, and associated costs.*

This would involve discussion with key users about:

- their requirements for information;
- what information is already available;
- the additional work they would need to do for each of the options under evaluation; and
- the associated costs of additional work

(ii) *Evaluation of the benefits of the resulting information*

- 23 Finally, *Stage 4* would be the production of a final report and recommendations.
- 24 A possible timetable for these stages might be:

Start Stage 1	June 2002
Start Stage 2	October 2002
Start Stage 3	January 2003
Start Stage 4	August 2003

A firmer plan and timetable will be established and communicated in due course

Researching modifications to the way we undertake a traditional census

25 This is likely to involve the following stages:

Stage 1: Mapping the 1992-2003 census plan to the 2002-2013 time-frame;

Stage 2: Identifying the areas where changes might be required;

Stage 3: Identifying the time by which decisions on possible changes would be required; and

Stage 4: Planning and undertaking the evaluation of possible changes in a Census Development Programme, if required.

26 ONS is currently developing a plan for Stages 1-3 and these stages may be complete by October 2002.

Researching methods of undertaking a traditional census electronically

27 Electronic data collection (for example via a website) would be likely to reduce costs significantly, but the reduction would be dependent on the proportion of the population who would use a web-based approach. This option would therefore need testing with the public, at least including a survey and possibly including actual web testing. Clearly public opinion now will be different from that in 2011, but it would at least give a baseline of the web-based response rate.

28 The first stage of this would be to review literature on what international experience there has been to date on undertaking surveys via the Internet and other electronic means, particularly focusing on the issues of authentication and security.

29 A review of this nature was undertaken prior to the 2001 Census, and this would be revisited. Beyond this, further work may need to be commissioned to test possible techniques.

Interfaces

30 Both the 2001 Census evaluation and the wider strategic evaluation will need to take place in the context of any requirements of:

- Work already done on alternatives to the census (for example the review of the requirement for a census in 2006);
- Treasury Select Committee recommendations;
- Statistics Commission Report;
- Neighbourhood Statistics;
- Eurostat and United Nations; and
- GROS and NISRA.

Action for Advisory Groups

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- **comment at the forthcoming round of meetings.**

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27 May 2002