

2001 Census output: arrangements for bulk release

Introduction

- 1 ONS have been considering the ways to meet the requirements of users who wish to receive 2001 Census data in bulk, either with viewing and manipulating software or in a form suitable for loading into their own systems and databases. This paper notes the consultation and development that has taken place to date and seeks to views of Advisory Group members on how standard outputs may be delivered directly to known users.

Consultation

- 2 Following an initial meeting with users in February 2002, a set of sample material was provided for comment and to identify common requirements. A meeting was held at City Hall in London on 31 July 2002 between Census Output and invited representatives of Advisory Groups. Whilst, in general, the proposed formats for delivery of geographic material and metadata were considered acceptable, it was agreed that the delivery formats of the data themselves required further examination.
- 3 ONS is particularly aware that some customers may not wish to use SuperTABLE (the free viewing and manipulating software to be supplied with the tabular output), but will require a set of flat files with a row for each geographic area and a column for each census table cell. However, this is not a format that can be created easily from the planned standard tabular output held in SuperTABLE files, and the Census organisations are therefore considering how the requirement for flat files can best be met.
- 4 As the majority of Census data that are to be made available via the Internet will be supplied through the Neighbourhood Statistics Service, Census Division at ONS are investigating whether the delivery of material to this system provides an opportunity also to supply data to customers in a non-tabular way and in formats that are acceptable.
- 5 It was proposed at the 31 July 2002 meeting that ONS convene a small group of specialists to agree the detail of the flat files. Subsequently, those with a particular interest contacted Census with suggestions for these files. A specification has now been drawn up, agreed by the group, and circulated to participants in the July meeting. ONS are now developing a program to convert SuperTABLE files to a CSV format that is compatible with other user dissemination packages such as SASPAC and CASWEB.

SuperTABLE

- 6 The prototype CD using SuperTABLE to view and manipulate 2001 Census counts in tabular form, that has been showcased at previous Census roadshow meetings, continues to be enhanced.
- 7 Development of the latest version of the CD has concentrated on providing an ONS corporate 'look and feel', easy navigation, and ready access to census counts without using spreadsheet or tabulation software. Further development has taken place to incorporate SuperTABLE and to facilitate its use within the context of the CD. Trials of the CD interface were conducted in October using volunteers including those from local and central government, and independent usability trials are currently being conducted by a specialist employed by ONS Communications Division.
- 8 Contact chris.ashford@ons.gov.uk for further information.

Dissemination strategy

- 9 One aspect of dissemination for which ONS has not yet developed a strategy is whether it should be proactive or reactive in meeting users' requirements for the direct supply of census output. ONS would be interested to hear the views of users, for example, on whether there is likely to be a requirement for standard 2001 Census outputs to be delivered electronically as a matter of course to particular registered users within authorities or organisations, or whether it would be sufficient to supply data only on request. Alternatively, users would be advised automatically of the release of particular products, as and when each was published, and sent a link to the appropriate website address.

Action

- 10 **Advisory Group members are invited to note the developments on the arrangements for bulk delivery of 2001 Census output, and to indicate the means by which they would prefer to access products.**

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