

CENSUS ADVISORY GROUP

AG (09) 18 Outputs Consultation

2011 Census output consultation for England and Wales

This paper has been produced in order to inform Census Advisory Group members of the progress to date on consultation regarding outputs for Census 2011 and to advise of the proposed plans for further major consultations to take place over the coming 12 months.

Action requested of Advisory Groups

The paper is for information only, but questions and comments will be welcome as contributed at the meeting or sent within three weeks to:

**Joe Traynor
Office for National Statistics
Segensworth Road
Titchfield
Fareham
Hants
PO15 5RR
Email: Joe.traynor@ons.gsi.gov.uk**

2011 Census output consultation

1. Introduction

The central objective of the 2011 Census is to provide high quality population statistics as required by a broad spectrum of users including policy makers, service providers, academics, commercial enterprises and the general public. In order to achieve this aim, the ONS plans to consult widely with users on a range of topics including:

- Main statistical outputs
- Census geographies
- Population bases
- Microdata samples
- Technical delivery mechanisms
- Disclosure control
- Licensing

Often it is the interdependencies between these topics which will have the greatest impact upon the range and type of outputs that will be produced following the 2011 Census. Therefore these interdependencies need to be a primary focus when consulting with users. The extensive documentation that is being used to consult with all users on the main statistical outputs differs greatly from that produced for the 2001 Census. It has been developed to assist ONS in evaluating the broad spectrum of user requirements and to guide ONS in achieving the correct balance between statistical disclosure controls, the level of detail required in the outputs and the flexibility offered by hypercubes at each layer of geography. The documentation will also enable clear user-defined specifications for the production of outputs.

2. 2009 Regional consultation event

To publicise the launch of the consultation on 2011 Census outputs, six regional events were held in October in England and Wales. These were attended by over three hundred users from a variety of backgrounds including local and central government, academia, and public and private sectors. Presentations were given regarding the future programme of consultations, Census geographies, disclosure control, delivery mechanisms, output strategy and funding mechanisms. The presentations were well received and are available online for download¹.

Questions raised at the event, and responses to those questions, will be available for download from the same location in the near future.

3. Timetable

The timetable for user consultation in relation to the main statistical outputs has recently been updated to reflect the complexity of assessing user requirements and the principles laid down in the National Statistics Code of Practice Protocol on Customer Service and User Consultation². The current timetable for the key areas of consultation is provided in Table 1 (Annex A).

¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/consultations/index.html>

² <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/ns-standard/cop/protocols/cust-serv.pdf>

4. Main statistical outputs

Over the past six months a team of researchers has been employed to develop a baseline specification that defines the set of tabular outputs on the main residency base. The baseline specifications were developed from the outputs produced following the 2001 Census, incorporating changes to questions, classifications and response categories for 2011. This has several advantages:

- Clearly defines the specification for tabular outputs that will be produced directly or via hypercubes allowing ONS to explore and define the complex relationships between statistical disclosure control, flexibility using hypercube dissemination, and the amount of detail that users require.
- Defines the relationships between 2001 and 2011.
- Defines the geography at which the outputs will be produced.
- Allows for easy amendment/re-definition of specifications in line with user needs.

The baseline specification documentation has now been through several iterations. Initially topic-group leads were consulted on the specifications relating to their area of expertise. This was followed by consultation with the Census Output Working Group (COWG), which is made up of key interested parties, and with distributors of Census data. The principle was to ensure that an optimum set of definitions would be created for consultation and that users would be provided with comprehensive documentation that would allow them to identify their requirements for 2011 outputs, in terms of what was produced in 2001. Users will be able to suggest new outputs, request amendments to existing outputs and ask for particular commissioned tables to be included as part of the standard outputs from 2011. Furthermore, users will be provided with clear and detailed descriptions of changes between 2001 and 2011 (due to changes in the Census questionnaire as well as variable classifications) and possible comparability issues identified to date have been included.

The baseline set of specifications, along with user guidance and evaluation material will be made available on the ONS consultation website web in December 2009³.

Users will be given until the end of March 2010 (fifteen weeks) to respond to the initial consultation in accordance with the National Statistics Code of Practice on user consultation. Once feedback had been received, ONS will evaluate the responses and decide the level of statistical disclosure necessary to meet the level of detail required by users at each level of geography. ONS will also evaluate the degree of flexibility that users will be offered through the delivery of hypercubes and/or tabular outputs. The time required to evaluate such a complex set of relationships is at present unknown. Initial estimates for such an evaluation range between 12 and 24 weeks. Once the evaluation process has been completed, a second round of consultation will take place (Summer/Autumn 2010) to ensure that an acceptable balance has been achieved and that user requirements have been satisfied to the best of ONS' ability, bearing in mind the possibility of competing priorities.

Following the second round of consultations, it is expected that minor revisions will be made to the specifications and a set of planned 2011 Census outputs on the main residency base will then be issued to users.

³ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/consultations/index.html>

5. Census geographies

Consultation relating to Census geographies will be conducted alongside the consultation on the main statistical outputs. The consultation exercise is in relation to three developments. These are

- **Need for an Upper-layer Super Output Area (USOA)**
Although Lower and Middle SOAs were created for the 2001 Census, Upper-layer SOAs were not deemed necessary. ONS geography is consulting on whether this policy reflects user needs.
- **Workplace Zone requirements**
Output areas (OAs) have been designed on the basis of where people live rather than where they work and therefore can be unsuitable for workplace statistics. Some OAs contain no or few businesses whilst others contain many businesses or large employers e.g. business parks, City of London. The Workplace Zones project has been instigated to look at splitting/merging OAs for a new geography to assist in generating workplace statistics. ONS geography is consulting users on their requirements in this regard.
- **Instances of OAs/SOAs that are unfit as a statistical geography**
Following the 2007 ONS consultation on geographies, some users took the opportunity to submit examples of output areas that they considered unfit for the statistical purpose for which they were designed. ONS geography will be requesting users to submit requests for amendment to output areas that are unfit for statistical purposes. ONS geography will then assess these submissions but will balance the request for change against the requirement for stability.

6. Secondary population-based outputs

Additional data to be collected on short-term migrants and second residency will mean that outputs in 2011 could be produced on populations other than the main residency base. The potential for confusion due to publication of results on multiple population bases cannot be ignored, particularly among less-experienced users of Census data.

In order to distinguish between the two consultations, the consultation with regard to alternate population bases will be conducted separately to that on the main residency base, and will be launched in Spring 2010 (see Table 1). The consultation process will be similar to that conducted on the main residency base; however subsequent iterations may not be required. ONS will initiate the process by developing a baseline set of specifications and a range of products associated with them. Users will then be asked to comment on or re-define these specifications.

7. Disclosure control

Although agreement has been reached between Census offices in relation to the method of statistical disclosure control, the details of how disclosure control will be applied and its effect on defining the outputs is still in development. ONS intends to update users on the wide-ranging impact of this work via the web – publishing regular bulletins as the work progresses. Topic Groups, Advisory Groups and Working Groups will also be regularly updated on progress over the next 12 months.

8. Microdata samples

Following the 2001 Census a range of microdata samples (SARS) were made available for research. Discussions on the requirements for microdata samples following the 2011 Census are underway. A SARS user group meeting was held at the RSS in earlier this year, at which Keith Dugmore presented a report on the business case for 2011 microdata. Subsequent to the meeting, the Centre for Census and Survey Research has issued a summary specification for consideration by the ONS. All aspects relating to microdata samples will need to be reviewed, including disclosure control, access arrangements, licensing issues and new developments in dissemination such as the Secure Data Service (SDS).

Consultation with users on Census 2011 microdata will mainly be to keep users advised on the developments towards providing a range of microdata samples via the web – giving regular updates as the work progresses. Topic Groups, Advisory Groups and Working Groups will also be regularly updated on progress over the next 12 months.

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ANNEX A

Table 1: Main consultation activities 2009/2010

Topic	Method	Detail	Dates
Main statistical outputs	Regional consultation events		Oct-09
	Direct consultation	Baseline specification issued Consultation closes after 15 weeks Assessment of user requirements Revised specifications issued & report Consultation closes after six weeks 2nd assessment of user requirements Proposed specification issued & report	Dec-09 Mar-10 Apr-10 Summer/Autumn 2010 Autumn 2010 Autumn 2010 Winter 2010 Winter 2010
Census geographies	Regional consultation events		Oct-09
	Direct consultation	Baseline specification issued Consultation closes after 15 weeks Assessment of user requirements End of consultation report	Dec-09 Dec-09 Mar-10 Summer 2010
Alternate population-base outputs	Regional consultation events		Oct-09
	Direct consultation	Baseline specification issued Consultation closes after 12 weeks Assessment of user requirements Proposed specification issued & report	Mar-10 Mar-10 Jun-10 Sep-10 Winter 2010
Technical delivery mechanisms	Regional consultation events		Oct-09
	Periodic updates	Users updated and informed of key developments via: Topic groups, Advisory groups, Working groups, ACD, MRSCGG, web pages	
Disclosure control	Regional consultation events		Oct-09
	Periodic updates	Users updated and informed of key developments via: Topic groups, Advisory groups, Working groups, ACD, MRSCGG, web pages	
Microdata samples	Regional consultation events		Oct-09
	Periodic updates	Users updated and informed of key developments via: Topic groups, Advisory groups, Working groups, ACD, MRSCGG, web pages	
	Regional consultation events		Winter 2010