



CENSUS ADVISORY GROUP

AG (07) 13

EVALUATION OF INCOME QUESTION: HIGH LEVEL PLAN

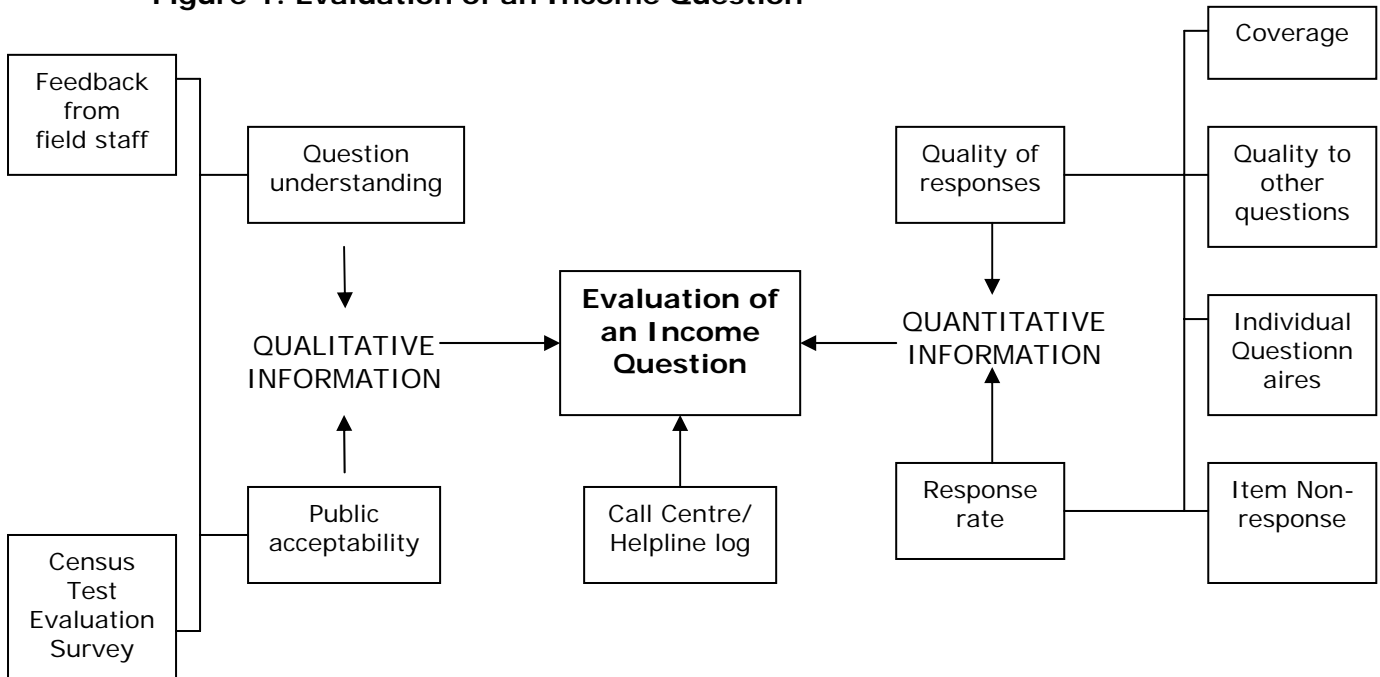
Background

- 1 Paper AG (07) 05 notes that one of the main objectives of the 2007 Census Test was to assess the effect on response of the inclusion of a question on income. The evaluation of this effect will inform the decision on including such a question in the 2011 Census.
- 2 However, as also noted in paper AG (07) 05, the final decision on the inclusion of an income question will be dependent not only on the results of this evaluation but also the strength of user requirements in comparison to other topics and in relation to the space available on the questionnaire.
- 3 This paper provides an overview of the assessment criteria and evaluation process.

Assessment criteria

- 4 The evaluation will be complex, with the analysis using both quantitative and qualitative data. The impact on response rate is an important factor, although final decisions will depend upon on a number of inter-related factors such as:
 - public acceptability and understanding of the income question;
 - item non-response to the income question;
 - item non-response for all other questions due to the inclusion of an income question;
 - impact on coverage of people within households;
 - quality of data provided by the income question;
 - extent of additional requests for Individual questionnaires for privacy reasons;
 - feedback from field staff; and
 - impact on the volume of call to the Contact Centre.
- 5 An overview of the information which will be used to evaluate the income question is displayed in Figure 1, with each criteria explained below.

Figure 1: Evaluation of an Income Question



Feedback from field staff: to assess feedback from field staff on any public reaction to an income question.

Census Test Evaluation Survey: to assess respondents' acceptability and understanding of the income question.

Question Understanding: to assess whether the income question is understood by the public; will be measured by comments on questionnaires, public feedback, calls to the contact centre and analysis as to whether anyone has answered the question differently in the CTES. Further analysis will be conducted through item non-response and all multi-ticking of the question.

Public Acceptability: to assess whether the income question is acceptable to the public; will be measured by item response rate, respondents' reactions to the questions and the Census Test Evaluation Survey.

Contact Centre/ Helpline log: to assess whether there is an increase in the number of calls to the Contact Centre for help in answering the income question, and whether respondents objected to the income question.

Quality of responses: a comparison will be made between the number of discrepancies on questionnaires which included an income question with those that did not, such as incidence of incorrect multi-ticking.

Response rate: to compare response rates for questionnaires with and without an income question to give an indication of public acceptability. It is fairly likely that the outcome of the Test will be a difference which is not significant, but large enough to be of concern. In this case a judgement call will be needed.

Coverage: to evaluate the effect of the income question on coverage of households. The Census Test Evaluation Survey aims to assess whether the number of individuals missed from completed questionnaires was different for those with the income question. It is accepted that this will rely on sparse data.

Quality of responses to other questions: to assess the completeness of response to questions on questionnaires with the income question compared to those without. Measures include item non-response and data consistency.

Individual questionnaires: to assess whether there is a measurable increase in the number of individual questionnaires requested and number of returns.

Item non-response: to evaluate of the number of questions wrongly omitted per income without income questionnaires. If respondents skim the questionnaire and see the income question, it may affect their attitude to completing the remainder of the questionnaire.

Primary and supplementary questions

- 6 The evaluation will seek to answer some primary questions:
 - Does an income question result in a significant drop in response?
 - What is the impact of an income question on the quality of response?
 - What are the cost differences for an income question – including the requirement for additional I forms and calls to the Contact Centre?
 - What are the views of the public on an income question, including field staff?

- 7 The answers to some supplementary questions will also inform the decision making process:
 - Does an income question result in more people being missed from households that have returned a form?
 - What supporting evidence is there from other surveys with an income question?
 - What supporting evidence is available from the GROS evaluation of the household income question in its 2006 Test?
 - What supporting evidence is available from NISRA's evaluation of the income question in its 2007 Test?
 - What supporting evidence is available from the results of the 1997 Test regarding the income question?

- 8 A decision on the final selection of questions to be included in the 2011 Census is expected to be made in spring 2008.

**ONS
October 2007**