

1997 GB CENSUS TEST

The Test was held on 15 June in eight different local authority areas covering about 97,000 households. Field operations have been completed and processing of the data for evaluation purposes is currently underway. A full Test Evaluation report is to be produced in March 1998.

Advisory Group members are asked to note:

- a. An early indication of response rates and field highlights;
- b. The situation on the processing trial;
- c. Progress on evaluation, and;
- d. An invitation to a presentation of Test findings.

1997 GB CENSUS TEST**Introduction**

1. The Test was held on 15 June in eight different local authority areas covering about 97,000 households. The areas were chosen to provide a varied cross-section of the population and types of housing. Field operations have been completed and processing of the data for evaluation purposes is currently underway. A trial of innovative data capture and coding technology is due to commence shortly. Evaluation will concentrate on the Test's key drivers of enumeration methodology and form style and content, plus the results of the processing trial and the geographical systems used in England and Wales, and Scotland. A full Test Evaluation report is to be produced in March 1998.

Field operations

2. Preliminary Response Rates

To date preliminary response rates to the 1997 Test have been aggregated as:

Standard Collection		Postback	
Brent A	53%	Brent B	31%
Birmingham A	52%	Birmingham B	44%
Thame	77%	Alton	71%
Bridlington	65%	Craven	67%
Glasgow B	52%	Glasgow A	50%

There were 2 EDs in Birmingham B where, for operational reasons, the forms were posted out and back. For these the response rate was 55%. No figures are available for SW Argyll to date.

3. Highlights

- A full post out/back procedure had to be used in 2 Birmingham EDs because of Enumerators' refusal to continue. Indications are that response was higher than in some other similar EDs where the conventional collection method was used.
- The number of direct returns sent to the Census Offices (5,200+); the reasons are not yet clear.
- 1,100 enquiries were dealt with by the Public Enquiry Units (telephone) in England and Wales (Titchfield) and Scotland (Edinburgh).
- Debriefing sessions with all Census Officers and a sample of Enumerators have been held.

Processing trial

4. One of the Test's objectives is to improve the efficiency and cost effectiveness of processing census information. This is being done by testing the use of automatic data capture and coding technology; scanning; optical mark reading (OMR) and optical character recognition (OCR) techniques; and automatic and computer assisted coding of write-in responses. The Census Offices, in common with other statistical agencies around the world, are addressing these issues and will be developing strategies to procure systems which will for the first time in census history, remove the paper form from processing once an electronic image has been captured. Research over the last 2-3 years, some of which is still continuing, has confirmed that, technologically, such processing approaches are viable. The 1997 Test will provide valuable information on not only technical aspects, but also crucially whether using the new technology is financially viable. A key aim is to process 100% of the information collected in 2001 thus providing users with full data for those topics previously processed at 10% level. The new technology will hopefully provide the savings to offset the increased cost of 100% processing.

5. Test processing started in July with the scanning at DfEE's Runcorn Office and this is still underway. One third of the census forms (c. 30,000) are being dealt with in this way. The electronic images generated from the scanning process, are being passed through a prototype data capture and recognition system - developed jointly by ONS and a private UK developer. Much of the data on the completed Test forms is being captured by OMR and OCR techniques, but some data is also being keyed from image where a write-in response occurs. As much of this data as possible is being coded automatically using software being developed by ONS and for the more complex classification by UK and Australian providers. Tests so far have shown that at least 60% of occupation and industry codes can be assigned automatically with 90% accuracy, the balance will be coded using computer assisted coding techniques.
6. Processing is expected to finish in early 1998 and a full evaluation report produced. Procurement of a 2001 system will start in summer 1998 and this will be tested in March 2000 on data collected during the 1999 Dress Rehearsal of field operations. This will provide the Census Offices with the opportunity to refine the system for 2001.
7. To help the whole strategic process, close liaison with the international statistical agencies, who have embarked on similar paths, is being maintained with exchange visits between the GB Census Offices' staff and colleagues in other countries.

Evaluation

8. GRO(S) have created a 'key to disk' database to be used for the evaluation of the 1997 Test. Data is currently being captured from all test forms and other field materials using a keying system of the type used in the 1991 Census. This will also be used for comparison with results of the processing trial.

9. Progress

Census Test Evaluation Survey (CTES)

Fieldwork is currently underway with the CTES. This will be completed in mid October. First results, focusing on the key drivers, will be included in the December Evaluation Report.

Coverage of Addresses and Households

The field work has now been completed for this survey. Part of this work was to validate the address listings used by fieldstaff to ensure that there was no differential coverage of addresses which might affect the comparisons between postback and standard collection procedures. The findings from this work are currently being evaluated.

Follow-up of Communal Establishments (CEs)

A sample of CEs enumerated in the 1997 Test will be selected for follow-up to be carried out by Census HQ Staff. Managers of the sampled CEs will be interviewed to assess the burden of identifying residents. Timing for this is dependent on provision of the GRO(S) database.

10. Key remaining dates

October 97	End of field work for Census Test Evaluation Survey
December 97	Evaluation report on test key drivers
March 98	Evaluation report on other test activities and production
	of final report

Presentation of findings

11. Following the successful one day seminar held on 23 April at the Forte Posthouse, another is to be organised (April/early May 1998) to cover the results and conclusions of evaluation. Invitations will be issued more widely within the GB user community, including to all Advisory Group members.
12. An accessible venue will be chosen and ideas from Advisory Group members would be most welcome.
13. **Advisory Group members are invited to note:**
 - a. an early indication of response rates and field highlights;
 - b. the situation on the processing trial;
 - c. progress on evaluation, and;
 - d. an invitation to a presentation of Test findings.

Linda Street
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