



Advisory Group Paper (99)12

REPORT ON ONE NUMBER CENSUS WORKSHOPS, APRIL/MAY 1999

1. This paper reports on the One Number Census Workshops which were held in April/May 1999 as part of the Census Output Roadshows.
2. **This paper is issued to Advisory Group members for information only.**

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Report on One Number Census Workshops

1. One Number Census (ONC) Workshops, April/May 1999

- 1.1 As part of the Census Output Roadshows, four One Number Census (ONC) Workshops were held in Manchester, Cardiff, London and Glasgow. (In Northern Ireland, a session on the ONC was included in the Census Output Roadshow.) The workshops consisted of a presentation of the key areas of the ONC methodology followed by a structured Question and Answer session. This provided Census Users with the opportunity to discuss the ONC methodology in greater depth and to question members of the Project Team.
- 1.2 The Workshops were well attended by a broad range of Users, approximately 240 people in all. The booklet 'A Guide to the One Number Census' was distributed to all attendees at the Workshops and has also since been made available on the ONS Website. This twenty-page document provides an overview of the ONC methodology and includes an annex of 'most frequently asked questions'. A two-page ONC summary document was also sent out with the documentation for the Census Output Roadshows.
- 1.3 The ONC was well received, with Users acknowledging that a lot of work was being undertaken to address the issues of underenumeration and adjusting the Census counts prior to 2001. It was recognised that this new approach is a major improvement on the 1991 Census methodology, and that it was underpinned by a sensible, thorough approach aimed at improving the final output. There was a general feeling that this was vital to ensure confidence in the quality and reliability of the 2001 Census outputs, and that the ONC would provide a definite advantage over 1991, when the lack of consistency between the different population counts and estimates caused problems.
- 1.4 Users welcomed the opportunity to discuss the ONC methodology and to question the Project Team, and agreed that the Workshops provided a worthwhile platform for this. A summary of the questions raised at the Workshops is presented below, along with comments received as part of the User response to the Census Output Roadshows. Some Users said that they would welcome further details of the ONC methodology, particularly following the 1999 Census Rehearsal when the 'fine-tuning' of the process has been completed.

2. Summary of Questions asked at ONC Workshops and Comments Received

- 2.1 Although the response to the ONC Workshops was overwhelmingly positive, attendees took the opportunity to ask a broad range of questions. This section outlines these, focussing on the questions asked most frequently. It should be stressed that the issues detailed in paragraphs 2.8 to 2.17 were only raised by a small number of attendees, but these have nonetheless been recorded here for completeness.

General Census Issues

- 2.2 A number of attendees took the opportunity to ask more general questions about the Census itself. It was suggested that the Census Offices should put more resources into finding missing people in the first place. Some form of community liaison targeted at specific groups that are hard to enumerate was suggested, and this is an initiative already being taken forward by ONS. Users also asked if there were any initiatives to measure over-enumeration due to second homes etc.
- 2.3 There was a general concern that the inclusion of the income question in the Census might result in a reduced response rate that could affect the ONC estimates. One respondent asked whether the impact upon ONC estimates of each one per cent drop in Census response rate beyond the 1991 response level had been investigated.

General ONC Issues

- 2.4 A wide range of general questions was asked about the ONC methodology. In general, attendees wanted to know if a final decision would be made after the Census Rehearsal (CR) whether or not to implement the ONC in 2001.
- 2.5 There was general concern that the ONC might result in a possible delay to output, and Users requested a timetable for the release of data.
- 2.6 In Scotland, the Local Authorities (LAs) asked for information on the differences between the application of the ONC methodology to Scotland and to England and Wales, and the reasons for these differences. They were keen that any such differences were kept to a minimum to ensure comparability across countries.
- 2.7 Users felt that it was important that ONS be 'transparent' regarding the ONC so that the process could be fully understood and Census Users could have full confidence in the results. Some were concerned that any release of unadjusted figures would cause confusion, whilst other felt that not publishing Census counts would deprive researchers of the opportunity to make their own judgements regarding underenumeration within their areas and the efficiency of the methods being adopted to correct this. One respondent stated that the ONC would confound any measurement of change between 1991 and 2001.
- 2.8 Users also wanted details on how the ONC would cope with Communal Establishments (CEs) and Persons Sleeping Rough (PSR). Of particular concern was how the ONC would deal with migration in the time between Census Day and the Census Coverage Survey (CCS), especially amongst students living in CEs as the CCS would be being conducted close to end of term.

Census Coverage Survey (CCS)

- 2.9 With regard to the design of the CCS, several people attending the Cardiff Workshop were concerned about postcodes straddling the England/Wales border. Work is currently underway to estimate the number of postcodes that straddle the

England/Wales and England/Scotland borders so that the size of this potential problem can be assessed.

- 2.10 Users at the London Workshop were worried that the CCS design would not cope with the substantial differences between postcodes in the same area. There was some concern that the Hard to Count (HtC) index would be based on 1991 data, and some Users from Local Authorities (LAs) wanted to know if they could help with this process by providing current information on pockets of difficult areas known to them, such as areas of new build upon brownfield sites.
- 2.11 Attendees were puzzled as to why interviewers would be recruited with similar characteristics to enumerators, instead of using extra resources to employ better quality interviewers. There was also a concern that the CCS interviewers might obtain better quality answers to questions than the Census, and that this might adversely affect the matching process. One respondent stressed the importance of training interviewers to hunt down all addresses within a postcode by calling back at different times of day, consulting neighbours, etc.
- 2.12 Users wanted assurance that the CCS would find the people the Census missed. They were interested to know how likely it was that the CCS would find 2/3 of people the Census missed, and how the CCS would address the problem of finding those people who do not want to be counted. Some attendees felt that the proposed length of the fieldwork period was not adequate, whilst others felt that as the CCS is voluntary it too would be prone to problems of bias through non-response. Users were interested to know what the fallback position would be if the CCS did not work.

ONC Matching, Estimation and Imputation

- 2.13 Some attendees wanted to know the expected proportion of matches at each of the four stages of the matching process. There was also an interest in whether a similar matching system was used in other countries.
- 2.14 Some Users asked if the Design Groups had already been decided upon and if LAs would be consulted as to their composition. A paper outlining the proposed Design Groups for England and Wales was circulated to the Central and Local Government Partnership Census Advisory Group in August, and comments received from this consultation have been taken on board when constructing the final Design Groups. GRO(S) will be consulting the Scottish Census Advisory Group in October as to the composition of the Design Groups for Scotland.
- 2.15 Some attendees asked if confidence intervals would be available for estimates when they were released. One or two respondents suggested that a quality report detailing confidence intervals down to a LA level should be provided, and that including confidence intervals within Census tables would only cause confusion to Users.
- 2.16 There were many questions about the ONC imputation process. Users asked if a measure of the extent of imputation in the Census output would be given, and whether a table of the levels of adjustment in 1981, 1991 and 2001 would be presented. They also wanted to know if the questions not included in the CCS would be imputed.

There were some Users who expressed a preference for weighting rather than imputation.

Quality Assurance of ONC Estimates

- 2.17 On the quality assurance of estimates, Users asked if experience had been gained from other countries, and whether the LAs, County Councils, and Armed Forces would be asked for input.
- 2.18 There was some interest in the strategy for resolving any major discrepancies between the mid-year population estimates and the ONC estimates, and whether this scenario would define the CCS as a failure. One respondent wrote that although they supported the adjustment of the Census counts to reflect the findings of the CCS, they objected to further modification using techniques of demographic comparison or data from other sources.

3 Actions arising from the Workshops

- 3.1 The Census Offices were very grateful for all the comments and questions it received in response to the ONC Workshops and the Census Output Roadshows. Many of the issues raised are still being looked at as part of the ongoing development of the ONC methodology. The next stage in this process will be the evaluation of the 1999 Census and CCS Rehearsals. Once this evaluation is complete, the Census Offices will be in a position to produce an update on the detailed ONC proposals for 2001, addressing the many questions that were raised by Users in the course of this consultation exercise.

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