

Census 2001 Review and Evaluation

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Data Collection Development: Executive Summary

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ONS is carrying out a review and evaluation of the 2001 Census in England and Wales which will culminate in a Data Quality report and a General Report being published.

Plans for individual reports on specific aspects of the Census operation and a timetable for release have been published.

Each report is written in isolation and is subject to amendments as processing progresses and further information comes to light.

Reports will be released on the ONS website in the form of a high level Executive Summary and a more detailed Evaluation Report.

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Project Objectives

To conduct the enumeration of the population of England and Wales by delivering Census forms to every household and collecting them for processing.

Background

The aims of Data Collection Development were to ensure that:

- the plans for enumeration helped to meet the strategic aims of the 2001 Census - in particular to minimise differential coverage of the population;
- Census materials were designed, produced and distributed to the field force;
- Census forms were delivered to every household and collected for processing so as to achieve a high level of coverage;
- the field force was instructed, trained and managed;
- field operations were managed and public enquiries handled.

This executive summary is written in isolation from other evaluation reports. The lessons learned so far from data collection will need to be reviewed against the final outcome of the results of processing the data collected.

Methodology

A key change in 2001 was the introduction of postback following tests which established the willingness and ability of the public to return forms by post.

The Census was carried out by 70,000 field staff compared with 105,000 in 1991. The field staff comprised 103 Census Area Managers, 2,000 Census District Managers, 6,000 Team Leaders and 62,500 Enumerators. The advent of postback helped to reduce unit costs and enable resources to be targeted on difficult to enumerate areas.

Enumeration

Enumerators were given a computer-generated map and a pre-printed list of addresses, as well as their instructional material. Forms were delivered to all households by enumerators in two phases during the three weeks before Census day (Sunday 29 April). The public was asked to complete the form and post it back in a distinctive yellow pre-addressed envelope. Local Census management teams received and checked completed forms.

A period after Census day was allowed for the posted forms to reach the local field management teams and for them to log in and check the returns. Flexibility was allowed as to when enumerators could begin the Follow-up phase to collect non-returns and resolve queries, and managers were able to re-assign enumerators between areas. Follow-up (9 - 18 May) consisted of at least two visits by enumerators, and a Mop-up phase carried out by team leaders and managers. A non-compliance routine was then followed where necessary. Completed Census forms were collected under secure conditions from 2,000 managers and transported to the processing centre.

Additional arrangements and modifications to the enumeration procedures applied to the Armed Forces, prisoners, students, shipping personnel, persons sleeping rough and travellers.

Wales

ONS appointed a Census Manager for Wales to manage field staff, to help in public relations and in dealing with agencies and communities in Wales. All householders in Wales had the option of completing a Census form in Welsh or English. For the first time other materials were made available in bilingual format.

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Field Checks

New or streamlined checks were introduced:

- for reconciling the numbers and types of forms received;
- a focused geography check of districts prior to enumeration which helped identify potential problems during the enumeration and assisted with the allocation of and support for enumerators;
- for coverage and quality.

Teamworking and Field Staff Learning

Much greater emphasis was placed on teamworking, recognising the skills of the workforce and the need to work more flexibly to target the difficult to enumerate areas. The most senior field managers were directly trained by ONS with assistance from specialists. Field managers trained their own managers who in turn trained their teams. Comprehensive instructions, guides and videos and a special pocket guide and workbooks for enumerators were prepared.

Technology

New applications were:

- the use of sophisticated software to design Census forms, and the latest print and barcoding technology for printing of forms. The design process took account of the use of scanning technology for processing whilst recognising the important aspect of public acceptability of the form;
- e-mail and a Field Management Information System for communications between the Census Area Managers and ONS;
- Call Centre technology for public Helplines;
- On-line stock control information for logistics management purposes;
- On-line editing processes to speed up production of training videos.

Outsourcing

Outsourcing was used to a greater degree, including handling postback; telephone helplines; designing and printing of forms, and other documents and materials; distribution and collection of forms and other materials and subsequent disposal; planning and producing field staff training videos.

Foot and Mouth

Modified enumeration procedures were quickly developed to conduct the Census during the foot and mouth outbreak. Close liaison was maintained throughout with other agencies to ensure that the Census would not compromise the work being done to manage the outbreak. Special methods of delivery and collection were arranged to ensure that as complete an enumeration as possible was achieved.

Assessment and Lessons Learned

Initial Assessment

The final post-back response was estimated to have been 88 per cent, far exceeding expectations. Field staff in the follow-up exercise collected a further 7 per cent of returns. An estimated 3 per cent of forms were delivered to addresses that were either vacant or second homes. On the basis of these figures ONS estimates that the final overall response will be similar to the 1991 Census. Response in Wales was estimated to have been slightly better than in England.

Enumeration

Pre-printed address lists for enumerators, although not universally acceptable, were largely a success from an operational perspective. The two-phase delivery appears to have worked well. Most forms were delivered by 27 April but delivery had to be extended in some inner-city areas.

As a result of the high postal response there were fewer forms to collect at follow-up than planned. However, in

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some parts of the country the postal flow was uneven, so that the start of follow-up had to be delayed and the period extended to allow time for the non-returns to be collected. The postal flow problems and the effect on follow-up resulted in many calls to the Helpline. Nevertheless, overall the follow-up strategy seemed to have worked with teams being used appropriately.

The Field Checks appeared largely to have worked, but their true effectiveness cannot be measured until processing is complete.

Field Staff

Teamworking appears to have worked well. The field staff teams worked hard to achieve their goals, very often in demanding circumstances. The greater flexibility to work in teams helped enormously, but senior managers were critical of the level of bureaucracy and the number of different forms required. Census Area Managers were particularly effective in setting up and fostering networks of contacts, dealing with the media and resolving local issues.

Census District Managers and Team Leaders had to cope with heavier than anticipated workloads, particularly in cities, where there was also a higher turnover of staff. Shortcuts may have been taken with some procedures but this cannot be substantiated, nor is it yet known if there has been any effect on quality.

The instructions and training programme was considered successful.

Regional Management

The ONS Regional Management Team provided excellent support throughout field operations despite unrelenting pressure. The Team was able to provide considerable and timely amounts of intelligence to help the monitoring of field operations, but senior managers in the field would have benefited from greater involvement in and information about the overall picture. The Field Management Information System, intended to provide up to date communication between the field and HQ, suffered from intermittent malfunctioning and did not fully meet expectations.

Foot and Mouth

Liaison with the former MAFF, National Farmers Union and the National Assembly for Wales was excellent. The special arrangements involving the delivery and collection of supplies and completed Census forms worked particularly well. There is no evidence to date that response was seriously affected by the outbreak. There were few reports of complaints from members of the public and the farming community.

Public Enquiries

The Helpline had been planned on the basis of the US experience in 2000, when the US Bureau of the Census received around 2 million calls. In England and Wales over 2.5 million calls were received, including 250,000 on the busiest day. Many of the calls before Census day were requests for Census forms; some calls might have been avoided if there had been more publicity about the form delivery timetable. After initial difficulties of access to the Helpline, the number of call centre operators was expanded to over 1,000. There were very few complaints about the content of the form itself or about the Census.

Forms Design and Logistics

The public form design and production processes were very successful. Design and print quality were met to new and exacting quality and technical standards. The huge supply and distribution programme enabled supplies to reach the field staff efficiently. Timing problems were encountered and reprints needed, but all in the context of dealing with many thousands of tonnes of materials. All completed Census forms and materials were collected from over 2,000 points and transferred safely to the processing centre or disposed of.

Some teams shared field offices or storage facilities to cope with shortages of space to deal with the postal returns or where there were severe recruitment problems. The facilities were also used for training, supplies distribution and as local command centres. Many were arranged very speedily with the co-operation of existing contracted suppliers and local authorities. This approach worked reasonably well, although there were control problems in some offices.

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Outsourcing and Contract Management

Significant, and appropriate, resource is required to build and manage partnerships with service providers, ensuring that the services are delivered in a sometimes unpredictable and fast-moving Census operation. The procurement approach used - i.e contracting services rather than systems - was appropriate and welcomed by service providers.

Conclusion

The challenges which the 2001 Census has had to deal with and the large amount of change taken on board, amid a foot and mouth outbreak and the prospect of a General Election, made data collection one of the most difficult of modern times.

Inner city enumeration needs an even more tailored data collection approach. Robust management information systems are critical for ONS and the field force, and must be improved.

In hindsight the timing of follow-up was perhaps too soon after Census day. Predicting the number of calls to the Helpline was never going to be easy. While additional publicity might have helped to alleviate calls about non-availability of forms, the awareness and willingness of the public to be involved was reflected in the number of calls.

Detailed planning is essential, and even then events differ from Census to Census. The basic framework and data collection methodology must be carefully developed to deliver data needs, but always with regard for the practicalities of carrying out the enumeration of a population who, including the people recruited for the field force, are involved in this exercise only once every ten years.

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Census Topics	Target Dates for Release
Legislation	Published
Non-Compliance (Executive Summary Only)	Published
Data Needs	Published
Geography	Published (Executive Summary)
Publicity	Published
Data Collection Development	Published
Data Collection Support	Published
Census Coverage Survey	Published
Processing	Published
Annex: Quality of Data Capture and Coding	Published
Downstream Processing	Published (Executive Summary)
Data Quality	
- Question non-response rates	Published
- Disclosure Control (Executive Summary only)	Published
- Data Validation (Executive Summary only)	Published
Edit & Imputation	Published
One Number Census	
- Quality Assurance	Published
- Lessons learnt (Executive Summary only)	Published
Output Policy	Published (Executive Summary)
Output Production	
- Part 1:Review of Output Released to date	Published (Executive Summary)
- Part 2:including Sample of Anonymised Records (SARs)/Origin Destination Matrices	Published
Census Access	Published
Programme Management	Published (Executive Summary)
Quality Report	Published
General Report	Published

Please note that the dates for release of individual evaluation reports noted above are target dates, and therefore subject to change. For the latest information please visit www.statistics.gov.uk/census2001/reviewevaluation.asp