

## **The 2011 Census: users' comments on the proposed design**

### **Background**

The ONS Discussion Paper *The 2011 Census: a proposed design for England and Wales*<sup>1</sup> sets out a proposed design for a census in 2011 in England and Wales, as part of the ONS' proposed future population statistics system. The design drew on experiences from the 2001 Census and reflected changes in available technology. It highlighted the statistical and operational strategic aims and the major changes proposed from the 2001 approach.

The Paper acknowledged that there were both benefits and risks to the census in the proposed design, and set out those that had been initially identified. Users were invited to comment on the proposals generally and to identify, from their own perspective, any additional risks and benefits. Additionally, local authorities were invited to suggest means by which liaison with the ONS on the census could be best managed at the local area level, learning from the experience of the 2001 Census.

This present Paper notes many of the specific comments that were received, particularly those which were common to a number of users. They are grouped where they refer to particular issues covered by the recent consultation exercise and discussed at the joint ONS/RSS Conference in November 2003, but, inevitably, they stray on to some aspects of census planning not specifically covered by the Discussion Paper, but which will be the subject of future consultation. These also have been noted here.

A list of those organisations and individuals who made responses to the proposals for both the 2011 Census design and/or the accompanying Paper on the proposals for an Integrated Population Statistics System<sup>2</sup> are listed in Annex A. The ONS are most grateful to all those who took the trouble to respond.

### **Overall comments**

Users generally expressed strong support for the overall proposals for the 2011 Census, which they felt were sensible if, perhaps, a somewhat optimistic, but there was some concern that there were no alternative proposals or contingencies set out. However they provided, at least, an excellent starting point for further discussion, and users feel that a vital role exists for co-operation to ensure success. It was felt that the Discussion Paper presented both a good analysis of the issue to be addressed and a useful and structured way forward for developing more detailed proposals.

Users thought it was sensible to focus on maintaining and, ideally increasing, response rates given the trend to a more mobile population and associated difficulties in achieving high response. They noted that early research into a number of aspects of census planning would be necessary if some of the difficulties experienced in 2001 were to be avoided.

The proposals were particularly welcome since they attempted to deal with difficulties that have been growing in the past 20 years, but users expressed some concern that the proposals are high-risk in that:

- they envisage a move from a traditional approach, losing the benefits of tried and tested methods;
- they require commitment of resources at an early stage; and
- the changes may achieve simply an alternative set of results with the no better quality but less accumulated knowledge about the nature of that quality.

For these reasons, users urge that the consultation and research should continue, organised over the next year explicitly and intensively around the major risks and benefits, involving where possible resources outside the ONS. Only then should plans be finally set.

### **Specific areas commented on**

#### ***Maximising response rates***

- The basic requirements of Local Authorities (LAs) will continue to be for small area, residence-based, population statistics on a range of topics that are consistent across the country. In order to achieve this response rates must be maximised across all areas so that outputs relates to actual ‘counts’ and that estimation is reduced to a minimum. Furthermore, ONS should ensure that improvement in ‘hard-to-count’ areas is not at the expense of any deterioration in response in those that are traditionally more ‘easy-to-count’.
- More research is required into census/survey processes generally, and on improving enumeration lists specifically, in order to maximise response in a dynamic society and at a time when response rates are declining worldwide. Research should focus on: improving the timeliness of lists; better understanding of household structures; and the motivation of field staff, particularly in hard-to-count areas.
- More generally the ONS (and other departments) should be alert to the risk of ‘survey fatigue’ resulting from an ever-increasing number of surveys.

#### ***Understanding and measuring coverage***

- Some users feel that there is a need to return to the 1981/91 population base approach which captured everyone present, but definitions of usual residence and the concept of visitor would need to be clear, particularly in relation to immigrants and asylum seekers. Other users take the view that, though some efforts must be made to incorporate a count of visitors, it is not necessarily the case that this requires a return to the 1991 approach.
- There is potential for commissioning sample studies, possibly in conjunction with benefit fraud authorities, to establish the extent of deliberate evasion of both the census and any follow-up survey.
- In order to produce accurate measures of the population it is evident that it will be necessary to identify where they are and for them to be comprehensively enumerated. Hard-to-count groups were targeted in the 2001 Census but it is overcoming real or potential gaps and deficiencies in address lists or residential property registers that need to be the priority in 2011. To that extent a reduction in doorstep enumeration could be a retrograde step.

- It will be essential to have a strategy to deal with under-enumeration, and this needs to be planned into the operations and timing from the start. In 2001, the Census Coverage Survey strategy was a success but could still be improved through research into achieving more timely data on hard-to-count areas and into the coverage of complex households. The One Number Census methodology was not adequately equipped to deal with the most extreme circumstances, thus the focus given to targeting hard-to-count areas must be a priority. The accuracy of the final results will depend upon how well the ONC modelling can be achieved.
- Critical to understanding coverage will be research into the definitions of households which must reflect the dynamics of societal change, particularly to tendency towards: group living; weekly commuting; ‘shared’ children; second homes; and global living and employment patterns (that is, short-term migration). A particularly critical factor is a better understanding of the issues surrounding migration generally at a time when this is an ever-changing concept.
- It should be borne in mind that most people will continue to live in traditional, stable, nuclear households, and that the fluidity of societal change only applies to a small minority of the population. The focus of attention must therefore be given to these hard-to-count groups which are not necessarily geographically identifiable, but are dependent on the changing ‘household’ definitions.
- The data matching and estimation processes worked well in 2001 as assessed against the specification of what it was required to do. However there should be further estimation evaluation work on: the measures of robustness: the characteristics of imputed persons; and on reducing errors as opposed to bias at the small area level. In this respect the value of good quality ‘dummy’ information must be stressed. Research is also needed into increasing the scale of matching from the 2001 base if ONS is to pursue the National Statistician’s agenda of focusing on getting a reliable headcount of population and households.

### ***Multiple population bases***

- There was widespread support given to the importance of providing outputs for different population bases such as ‘day-time’, ‘weekday’ and ‘service’ populations, particularly for regional centres and inner urban areas, though this may be difficult to reconcile at the Output Area level with current disclosure control implementation. However, until further research is complete, it is difficult to establish whether such a fundamental definitional switch is practicable. Some users are concerned that definitional changes could affect the conduct of census and coverage survey to such an extent that the valuable experience gained from the 2001 Census will be lost. The collection of data on a ‘persons present’ basis may be appropriate (though not all commentators necessarily think so) but it seems that the ‘usual resident’ base will remain the one that is most used.
- There should be more flexibility and planning for several population bases. Therefore other addresses should be collected on Census forms for all persons present - both residents and visitors – including, for example information about individuals not currently at an address because they are abroad, but who have no other usual address in the UK. A simple age and sex count would be useful. However, there is risk of reducing response by

asking detailed questions on alternative residence; this may best left to a coverage survey assessment or a statistical correction from national survey results.

- Some users feel, however, that developments in measuring multiple bases should not detract from the main purpose of the census, which is to focus on ‘usual residents’, and that only ancillary outputs need provide simple statistics on other population bases. In particular there is no requirement for a ‘persons present’ count to be published at an early stage (as was the case in 1991) as this leads to confusion. The first count published should be a ‘main’ count, with others following later as has been the case in 2001. Some users see no requirement at all for returning to a ‘persons present’ base.
- The census should, perhaps, be treated more as providing merely ‘benchmark’ population data rather than as a means of collecting a wide range of variables. Users hope that other developments will provide an expanded range of data - via NeSS – but even with good progress on population-register type developments, there is likely to be a paramount need to establish population size accurately down to Super Output Area levels and not just at the local authority level. However, that, in turn, begs the question of what is the correct definition of ‘the population’ for any area and, this is where the 2011 Census will be fundamental to providing coherent measures on different definitions. Concepts and wording need to be researched as soon as possible, so that debate can start both on what is possible to measure, and what the ‘main’ concept should be - something as close as possible to ‘usual’ residence. It is important to have such a ‘main’ definition for general use, as the adoption of several definitions will confuse non-specialist users. This main concept should be that used for local authority revenue allocation. To that end, the 2011 Census should approach enumerating the population not on the basis that it is pre-defined (such as where it is resident but, rather, in such a way that it enables alternative measures to be derived - according to pre-agreed criteria - from the more open-ended information collected. That in turn will, of course, necessitate more information to be collected on individual and household ‘residency’ characteristics. However, it also needs to be recognised that address coding is costly, and that the details take up quite a bit of space on forms, so it will be unlikely that more than one extra address per person could be collected.
- A count of persons present would be increasingly useful in any move towards an integrated population statistics system, but recording these people will not always give a true picture of the ‘usual’ situation. In areas with large number of armed forces, for example, the count will depend on the occurrence of military exercises, which might give rise to undercounts and could mislead utility services.
- The anomaly of the treatment of students should be resolved by adopting different bases but the suggestion of a different timetable to enumerate students is not widely welcomed, and would need careful scrutiny to ensure that there is no double counting. Welsh users commented that the way students are enumerated gives an unbalanced picture of resident Welsh speakers in some parts of Wales, such as in Aberystwyth.

## *Delivery*

### *Post-out*

- It seems to many users that the most accurate method of enumeration would still be delivery and collection by hand in face-to-face contact, but it is acknowledged that resource constraints put a limit to what can be achieved. Some users are not persuaded that the proposed reduction in the local field force will achieve improved coverage and quality through efficient post-out and post-back. Reliance on a larger field staff would allow for some contingency if one part of the operation were to fail, but in 2001 there was not enough 'slack' in the system to cope with loss of an senior-level manager at crucial times.
- Though delivery would be less dependent on enumerator recruitment, which has traditionally been problematic in particular areas, enumerators should nevertheless be used in all areas identified as having high multiple occupation or are otherwise hard-to-count. Face-to-face interviews should be considered as the prime means of enumerating some groups, such as the elderly and people with poor literacy or language skills, preferably with trained interviewers. In more rural areas, however, reduced doorstep contact is not regarded as necessarily being so critical.
- Lack of face-to-face contact may also compromise a proper count of dwellings. Local authorities would wish to work with ONS/ODPM and others to develop a strategy for estimating dwellings.
- Some users feel that it would be impractical to visit all hard-to-count areas to identify multi-occupancy, and that it would be better to enumerate these areas traditionally rather than rely on post-out/post-back. The checks will rely on good advance information about the geographical location of these problem addresses. Thus the minimisation of under-coverage will depend upon the successful identification of areas requiring pre post-out checks and the extent of such checks. This is identified as an important area for further consultation and assessment of options.
- Undercoverage resulting from changes in the form delivery system could mask any further decline in response rates. This emphasises the need to consider undercoverage and non-response holistically in the design of both the Census process and the follow-up coverage survey as well as estimation procedures. The post-out strategy could also affect the ability to identify and correctly account for overcoverage - specifically, addresses that were sent a form but where no-one is currently living.
- There are concerns that not mailing out forms in some areas might make people feel untrustworthy or second class in some way, and any such arrangements would have to be handled sensitively.
- Post-out has the advantage that delivery to known addresses would be at a single controlled point in time but this, in turn will put a huge burden and reliance on the Royal Mail. The ONS must ensure that they would be able to cope with more double the volume of mail that was involved in 2001. The experience of the 2001 Census does not offer

some users much confidence for that the exercise could be completed successfully once let alone twice.

- A suggestion was made that forms could, perhaps, be posted out over a period month or more so as to reduce the workload for postal staff. Also the future of Royal Mail and the wider postal service is uncertain; the ironic scenario could be envisaged where ONS would contract the work out to a postal service who might then subcontract it out to specialist local field workers equivalent to enumerators. A further potential risk identified is that postal staff could use the opportunity of the high profile census operation to take industrial action.
- The current proposal puts the onus on reporting non-delivery of a Census form with the intended recipient. This may result in it taking longer to identify housing not on the initial address list (and to thus deliver all census forms) than by using knowledge gained via a doorstep delivery. A related issue is the identification, tracking and recording of missing addresses. The delivery service will thus be reliant on timely feedback from the field as well as relying on public response to call centres.
- Addresses would need to be standard and envelopes of a size that will fit through letterboxes and clearly branded to distinguish them from junk mail. This branding would need to be carried through all postal stages. There is a fear, otherwise, that envelopes addressed just to the 'Householder' may be automatically binned. Dedicated census post boxes in strategic locations were suggested in high-density areas.
- In the 2001 Census there was a major problem for persons who had not been delivered a census form and could not readily obtain one. A local alternative for access to forms (paper copies and perhaps by phone or internet including through local libraries) should be considered, although phone and Internet should not be the only mechanism, as some hard-to-count groups may not have ready access to these services.
- A post-out strategy may decrease the response rate to an extent that ONS may find areas that they had regarded as 'easy' to enumerate having lower than expected response rates. Such an issue may stretch resources taking them away from the identified hard-to-count areas.
- A post-out and post-back strategy may dilute the idea of a unique Census day with many people returning the form straight away before Census day itself.

#### *Address lists*

- It is clearly imperative that lists are accurate and up-to-date. A comprehensive address list must underpin any census count. Though some users are confident that a post-out/post-back methodology can achieve a response from a good majority of the population, many users expressed concern about the sufficient accuracy such lists to form the basis of a post-out strategy. Experience suggests that post-out alone might not achieve sufficient coverage. For example it will not cover rough sleepers and a wide range of others without a permanent address. It is difficult to be confident that any address list could achieve satisfactory coverage of these groups. This seems like a major risk in itself, but,

in addition, use of mail-out seems to weaken a link in the chain, and is based on an assumption that postal services will be operated in their current format in 2011.

- Call-centres, a pre-post-out check in areas of high-multi-occupancy and the coverage survey would help to mop up missed addresses but this would leave significant gaps, unless the original address list is extremely good. Further research needs to be conducted to improve enumeration listings and to assess how this fundamental change of approach is likely to affect coverage.
- Even with a new address register following the ODPM-led work, commentators believe are likely to be problems in an important minority of cases, such as multi-occupied dwellings and omitted addresses. It is therefore unrealistic to assume that all addresses as at Census Day would be listed on an address register despite the assistance and diligence of local authorities and the efficiency of other advance checks. It is also unrealistic to assume that all missing addresses would be located during Census distribution. The importance of validating address lists by (i) physical verification (ii) use of local knowledge, and (iii) use of multiple national/regional lists cannot be over-emphasised. The validation process needs to allow for cleaning to add unrecorded addresses and also the elimination of duplicates.
- It would not be possible to overcome the shortcoming of a poor enumeration listing with a coverage survey, unless the missing households are uniformly distributed throughout an area. If such households tend to be clustered in an area then any coverage survey would only catch them if it include the area in the sample.
- ONS would need to work closely with local authorities/Local Government Association/Improvement and Development Agency to ensure completeness and accuracy of address lists and to identify all communal establishment. LAs can identify new housing before it is recorded either by Ordnance Survey or the Post Office. Resulting lists should be tested and evaluated in the 2009 Rehearsal. Feedback would give LAs the opportunity to adjust their databases and provide ONS with their most up-to-date list of addresses by postcode as close as possible to Census Day. Help from LAs would be particularly vital for identifying new developments; in many areas new estates are easy to identify but new urban development is often mainly in-fill of a small number of houses at a time; local council tax and electoral register lists would assist in identifying new developments.
- The proposal to liaise with local authorities to make the best use of their local knowledge is both commendable and essential, particularly in the light of the 2001 Census, which prompted many LAs into further analysis of their housing stock. In particular. LAs urged ONS to share address list information for the purposes of quality assurance.
- The National Land and Property Gazetteer (NLPG) and the Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) should be used as the prime source of address data. These are comprehensive and would provide unique reference numbers that could be the basis for form IDs. But it was noted that a list of addresses is not necessarily a list of households, and though property information would improve due to NLPG initiatives these would not necessarily improve postal address information.

- ONS should assess the minimum level of accuracy needed in an address list, and be assured that current developments meet that requirement. This element alone would need a large resource to achieve.
- In 2001 enumerators were key in identifying additional addresses and vacant properties but much more could have been done in areas such as Manchester. Concerns expressed about address lists were ignored. A record of the status of each address should be made.
- There is likely to be a need for an enumerator of some sort to check each area for completeness of the address list; this person could then assist in hard-to-count areas and help identify the need for door-to-door interviews. Users feel that there is no substitute for an individual armed with an address list and map.
- ONS should seek other data sources such as utility companies, credit referencing agencies, etc.

#### *Communal establishments*

- Enumeration of communal establishments would not be effective with a post-out strategy, and special arrangements would be necessary. Almost certainly this would mean coverage by an enumerator. Local authorities in particular recognise the need to identify communal establishments before the census so that they can be recorded accurately. They will usually have lists of such establishments and travellers' sites and knowledge of local branches of the Refugee Council.
- Local authorities with high numbers of students in academic and educational establishments should work together to produce lists of halls of residence and expected occupancy rates on Census night. Educational establishments should be encouraged to produce lists of students term-time addresses, while council tax registers could be utilised to identify wholly student households. Organisation along these lines would be more efficient at capturing students than enumerating them on a different timetable. Similar processes of partnership should be possible for other clearly defined establishments such as prisons (Home Office), military camps (MoD) and hospitals (DH). These arrangements should be clearly defined and mutually understood, backed, if necessary by legislation.

#### *Non-receipt of forms*

- Users feel that it may be unrealistic to expect to put the onus on households who do not receive a form to advise the Census Office accordingly; there would be a real danger that such households would be missed altogether and no allowance made in imputation.
- Not mailing out forms in some areas might lead to a deluge of helpline calls by people requesting forms (see also Call centres below).

#### **Collection**

##### *Post-back*

- It is evident that though post-back was the correct strategy in 2001, what was not so successful was the post post-back phase of the enumeration. Research is therefore

necessary to ensure that the field work process is managed in a way that will reduce the effort put into sorting out the difficulties with the Royal Mail so that more resource is given to the main function of following up non-response.

- If the field force is large enough, sufficiently well trained and informed about non-response quickly enough, the strategy has the potential to make post-out a viable and indeed successful option, but the ONS must ensure that the Royal Mail will be able to cope with more than double the volume of mail that was involved in 2001. In 2001 post-back caused a loss of control over the flow of forms and their content. A more accurate prediction and real-time assessment of the flow of forms must be made for 2011.

#### *Form checking*

- Users feel that some level form checking should continue and there were concerns expressed that the ability to check for form completion will be reduced with post-back. It is not clear how the follow-up for forms that are returned incomplete will be effected if post-back is to one centre, since there may be a lack of knowledge of local situations and difficulties.
- There are concerns that form completion rates will deteriorate with lack of doorstep collection and checking.

#### *Alternative collection methods*

- It is recognised that the burden on the householder should be reduced if at all possible and that information should be collectable at the time and place to suit respondents.
- The benefits of Internet capture are also generally recognised, particularly as high uptake would speed-up processing, but hard-to-count populations (particularly the elderly) are not likely to have high take-up and there should be no over-reliance on this medium. Such people may even be more difficult to count as a result of perceived social exclusion.
- ID validation via telephone and Internet may be a problem, but effective verification procedures could be developed to deter people from sending in incomplete Internet returns. There must be reservations about its use until full testing has been undertaken, particularly in respect of security issues and the comparability of the quality of data collected via other means. Also, a thorough pre-Census testing of Internet and telephone collection methods against the post-back method is vital to (i) ensure that they are viable methods, (ii) estimate their effect on response rates, and (iii) estimate as accurately as possible the final mix of responses by method (to aid capacity planning).
- Internet forms would need to conform to Bobbie standards and would, in general, have to be much simpler. Large forms are not suitable for Internet completion and standard VDU screens would not give a clear enough overview of the form. The delivery system must be robust and have the ability to save and review partly completed forms until final submission. It would assist the formfiller if such a system was interactive and acknowledged receipt of a complete return.

- Telephone capture is welcomed but would need good publicity and management to be effective. There may be problems relating to security and ID verification as well as misunderstandings through accent and dialect.
- The needs of people whose first language is not English (and who, in some cases may not be literate, even in their mother tongue) should be considered and appropriate telephone and visitor support should be developed.
- The key to successful on-line response would be extensive web information - with lots of examples - which should also be well publicised for everyone to use, even if they would rather post back a form.
- The costs of completing a form on line or via the telephone as opposed to filling in a paper form should be assessed.
- Some users feel that the proposal for complete face-to-face enumeration in inner-city areas is unconvincing without knowledge of the particular difficulties with post-back that are foreseen in inner-city areas but that are felt not to be a problem elsewhere.

#### ***Form tracking***

- Users appreciate that a form tracking system would underpin the process of targeting enumeration resource at poorly responding areas. It should also quickly provide information on the overall response rate. Given the importance of this data and short time frame over which it is actionable it is essential that the system should be completely reliable and provide consistently quick response times to those accessing it. If this is not the case then efforts to target resource at hard-to-count areas could be severely hampered or even grind to a halt. It is therefore essential that any systems considered are fully scalable and that their performance has been thoroughly evaluated and tested in advance of selection.
- Though welcomed generally, some users are unsure how this would work in practice, particularly in such scenarios as a form being destroyed
- It was suggested that pre-addressed bar-coded forms should be considered with or without post-back as Optical Character Recognition systems cannot always read hand-written copy. But some users felt that, unless clearly explained, bar coding might arouse suspicion and resistance particularly among those with a propensity to want to evasion.
- It was further suggested that dummy forms should be created for all no-response addresses; this would help update the address lists, ensure accurate assessment of real response rates and assist in linking with the Coverage survey.
- A danger was foreseen of resources being wasted by sending in teams in areas where post-back is affected by post delays. Early discussion with Royal Mail is necessary to develop a system whereby forms can be tracked at soon as they enter the postal system.

- Form tracking must also address the a risk of double counting where multiple response routes are available such as where an individual household members choose to file a return online while the rest of the household completes a postal return.

### *Enumerating the elderly and the less abled*

- Older people are not a homogenous group and their diversity is set to increase even more as the overall population ages. Thus the 2011 Census needs to be structured in such a way as to encourage as much participation from older people as possible and to capture information which reflects the richness of their experiences and lifestyles. The various solutions proposed to address under-coverage among ‘disadvantaged’ groups, such as personal interviews or the ability to complete forms by telephone as well as in writing, should be extended to residents in care homes and other communal establishments where there have been particular concerns about under-enumeration.
- People aged 75 and over should not be excluded from certain sections of the 2011 Census form, in such areas as employment, educational qualifications and transport usage.
- Post-back caused some problems among the elderly in 2001. These may be more significant in 2011 due to the ageing of the population and there is a need to consider how the ONS specifically address their needs. Local authorities will have lists of people for whom they provide care and/or specialist equipment and services (such as mobile library books). This might provide the basis of a list of addresses where face-to-face interview would be more appropriate. It would be helpful if LAs could liaise with field staff to arrange home visits as not all elderly people will have access to a telephone to contact a call centre.

### *Public relations*

#### *Publicity*

- Better liaison with local authorities is seen as crucial to success. Particularly, there is a role for the Local Government Association to play through their website and in their regular communications with LAs, LA publication officers and Statistical Liaison Officers. Local authorities would also wish to be consulted on the design of publicity materials (specifically the selection of languages) as well as the overall publicity campaign.
- ONS should make the most of knowledge and connections with local newspapers, radio and community centres. The publicity drive should aim to increase public awareness of the direct link between the census and the grants awarded to LAs. Linking the census to the quality of local services and availability of local funds would create more of an incentive to complete the forms. Also, stronger assurances about the confidentiality of census data might help to encourage participation.
- It will be essential for LAs to understand clearly what enumeration strategies will be carried out, and when, in the local area in order to support call centre and avoid confusion.

- Simple plain English guidance should be provided for local councillors, schools, religious groups and community workers, etc who have direct contact with the public telling them how best to promote the census. Their collaboration may be an important factor in improving response rates.
- The benefits of the census and the incentives to the general public to participate should be emphasised to encourage them to complete a census form. Research might be considered into why people did not complete their census form or participate in other surveys. There needs to be a well-considered balance between the emphasis given to benefits in complying and penalty for not doing so. But less direct contact with the large majority of people would reduce the capacity to explain to people why the census matters and what it is for.
- Reliance on the media to help improve the enumeration is risky, as past experience suggests that they are often more willing to report only negative stories than to provide a civic duty. Critical pre-census publicity relating to identity cards and record linkage, for example, could result in the public being generally less willing to respond

#### *Local community liaison*

- There is a great deal of scope for re-evaluating liaison with the community to ensure the greatest possible engagement with local people and enhance the response to the Census. The characteristics of each community and, in fact, each local authority area, vary a great deal. It is unlikely that it would be possible to have a ‘one size fits all’ approach. This suggests that discussions with each local authority will be very important.
- The programme must start earlier and involve more input from both LAs and ONS. LAs should be urged (or even required through legislation) to appoint officers to act as Census Liaison Officers (or even as CAMs).
- Good contact between local authorities and Area Managers should build on the existing goodwill. LAs need to be convinced they would have a clearly defined role stakeholders at an early stage, and the importance of each authority having a Census Liaison Officer needs to be stressed. However, some small local authorities may find it difficult to provide the resources to even suggest how to manage local liaison.
- Local authorities should invest their expertise, local knowledge and staff resources in working towards a successful census as it is clearly in their interests to do so. It may be better if the ONS clearly defined what is required of LAs. The ONS should, however, be aware that local communications that are regarded as being concerned with LA business might elicit different public reaction from those from central government.
- Local authorities should be better placed to assist in contacting hard-to-reach groups than they were in 2001. A post-out strategy will need early contact from ONS with *all* local authorities to identify any local issues. Given sufficient lead-time it will be possible to work with the LGA (and the Welsh LGA) to identify appropriate lead people who can develop local networks. The 2001 Census process was far too rushed.

- It is vital to involve local authorities in the classification of hard-to-count areas while recognising that not all such groups can be identified geographically. Some may be identified only in terms of characteristics that are not geographical and do not tend to cluster geographically to a large degree. Efforts should be made also to engage with such groups, through existing networks, organisations, specialist media and by other means.
- Contact should also be made with groups such as the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and Local Authority Research and Intelligence Association (LARIA). LAs could distribute materials via libraries, schools, council-run homes, housing offices and social services. LAs could also help with community groups, voluntary groups and charitable organisations, and with the recruitment of field staff.
- There should be an agreed format and programme for local liaison, with adequate time and resource for training and preparation, and also for follow-up after the census. While it is recognised that there may be a need to vary the programme according to local needs, the general details should be the subject of consultation and agreement with local organisations. Local authorities could take a lead on this as a development of the key Census Liaison Officer role.
- The ONS should take the lead in partnership with LAs/LGA to provide guidelines on how LAs can improve their administrative address-based databases and to produce nationally consistent and comparable methods of data cleaning and formatting address databases.
- Some concern was expressed, however, about the possible adverse effect on response rate of increased involvement by local authorities. This would have to be assessed in the light of market research about non-response advocated above.
- The ONS should engage with Housing Associations as well as local authorities. They have a lot of experience with helping tenants with forms. As the decade proceeds health authorities will be increasingly important in managing the social housing stock, particularly for vulnerable groups.
- Liaison with some authorities was perceived as poor in 2001, and many LAs felt that their comments were ignored both centrally and by local field managers. LAs need to be closely involved in the process and their comments taken seriously as effective partners in the enterprise.
- In need for more liaison with community groups in hard-to-count areas is recognised. Local Strategic Partnerships could assist in co-ordinating the involvement of local groups, with potential to act as local Census Managers, and Primary Care Trusts and associated voluntary groups are a further potential source of local knowledge, coupled with the Health Service and Integrated Care Record Service. The ONS should ensure that it engages in dialogue with LAs other than those with whom it has long-standing contacts, who probably need the least amount of help and support.
- ONS should also consider offering to train appropriate LA staff to give presentations and provide back-up information. It is suggested that holding a series of seminars or

roadshows on community liaison, similar to the Census consultation, would help define what support is needed to manage local resources. Involving the Government Offices for the Regions in helping in local co-ordination may also take the pressure off ONS.

- Many local authorities run one-stop shops and call centres; these could provide an advice service that might not be available from field staff or a central call centre.
- There is the potential for students to act as enumerators for universities and colleges; this might help towards ensuring that students are enumerated

#### *Call centres*

- These would assist local authorities that often have enquiries from the public; but they need to be dedicated and should not be based abroad. They must be capable of meeting maximum demands particularly the demands for additional forms if the extent of missing addresses and/or respondent understanding of the form is under-estimated, and of handling calls in a wide variety of languages. A single centralised call centre should be avoided as this may suffer from lack of local knowledge. Consideration should be given to LA-based call centres.
- Accurate capacity planning for the number of call centre operatives will be vital. If there is too much resource then budget will be wasted whereas too low a resource could be difficult/impossible to rectify in the short timescale available leading possibly to:
  - (i) difficulty in recording non-recipients of forms from first post-out and in delivering forms to them;
  - (ii) inability to increase response rates significantly by physical follow-up; and
  - (iii) fatigue amongst those employed.
- Recruitment of call centre staff should be given the same attention as the recruitment of enumerators. As they would not necessarily have local knowledge they need good quality training and pay rates.
- Many elderly people would have difficulties in coping with negotiating the complex technology involved with touch-tone telephones and would prefer an operator-based service.

#### *Follow-up*

- Some users are not convinced that follow-up letters will be effective in hard-to-count areas; resources would be better targeted at sending follow-up teams into low-return areas initially.
- It is felt that follow-up staff must visit all non-responding addresses to record type of household space; then these should be logged onto a database to allow targeted secondary follow-up of those that are thought to be occupied. Follow-up should be done in teams and not left to individual enumerators, particularly in hard-to-count areas.

- Experience has suggested that there may be no effective substitute for enumerators for recording vacant properties, and that to identify whether such properties are truly vacant or are second/holiday homes would require call back visits where there is no response.

### ***Field force recruitment and management***

- The proposal for two-way communication with field force is welcomed. Some users feel that the 2001 Census did not put enough weight into the Enumeration Record Books and Dummy Forms, and that it would be essential to record this information electronically. Enumerators must also be able to determine where there were errors in the address lists due to non-recording of closures and demolitions; this information could then be fed into the tracking system to avoid wasted field resources.
- Lack of up-to-date information and lack of flexibility to meet problems head-on was seen as a big problem by local fieldwork management in 2001. But a nationally co-ordinated information system would help only if it was used to give flexibility to local managers not used to restrict and control them.
- Earlier recruitment, rigorous training, longer contracts and better pay rates for field staff would all be essential for success. The ONS should consider paying bonuses to field staff for contacting previously 'unknown' addresses and for getting high response rates in hard-to-count areas. If possible a greater use of professional interviewers, including the contracting out of some of the enumeration to market research companies in hard to count areas should be explored.
- Any outsourcing of field staff recruitment and training would have to be closely scrutinised and quality assessed by ONS. The quality and motivation of field staff are paramount to success and these may be more difficult to instil at a step removed from ONS. Some local authorities with large hard-to-count areas feel they may be able to offer their own staff for assist in field training. Others view the prospect of outsourcing the field force as a recipe for disaster. Commentators feel that outsourcing generally in 2001 involved a loss of quality control by ONS, a loss of focus on the main needs of the census, and above all inflexibility in dealing with unforeseen circumstances. Outsourcing tends to give 'consistency without understanding', whether in call centres with scripts, enumerator training, or pay administration. Experience suggests that achieving high coverage involves a high degree of understanding of the census aims to give a flexible and committed response to circumstances.
- Accurate capacity planning for the number of follow-up enumerators/mop-up teams and will be vital. If there is too much resource then budget will be wasted whereas too low a resource could be difficult, or even impossible, to rectify in the short timescale available leading possibly to: (i) difficulty in recording non-recipients of forms from first post-out and in delivering forms to them; (ii) inability to increase response rates significantly by physical follow-up; and (iii) fatigue amongst those employed. It should be recalled that in 2001 post-back entailed the use of fieldstaff for many more days than expected, incurring additional costs.
- More weight should be placed on enumerator's observations on occupancy rates than in statistical formula, and even if Triple System Estimation is used as part of the 2011

coverage survey this should not be at the expense of the information provided by the enumerators' records.

- As proposed, the field force will mainly be dealing with the 'problems'. Experience has shown it may be difficult to motivate staff to do follow-ups after they had a break following the delivery of the forms. It was also difficult to convince staff they should be looking for addresses other than those in the record books.
- There is a need for contingency planning in 'no go' areas that may arise for some reason – such as those in 2001 where there were Foot and Mouth restrictions.
- Dealing with non-response needs to be thought through more carefully. Preparing evidence for possible prosecution was just one job too many for Census District Managers and the training for this was inadequate. Consideration should be given to using dedicated and specially trained squads.
- Local authorities feel that although ONS should set the guidelines for standards, the authorities themselves should be more involved in the recruitment of CAMs and field staff, possibly adopting methods similar to those used to recruit election canvassers from council staff and from the community through known community groups. LAs are best placed to recruit people that know local areas and fit the social and ethnic profile.
- Post-out/post-back will result in the elimination of many of the more 'easy' routine tasks previously done by enumerators. Consequently, enumerators will need much more extensive training and better pay.
- Hand-held electronic recording of interviews by enumerators would be expensive in some ways, but would save on paper and processing if carried out on a 100 per cent basis in whole areas.

#### ***Data capture and release***

- Measures to speed-up data capture and release were widely welcomed and perceived as being readily achievable with current technology. As important, however, is a reliable output timetable rather than vain promises of better things to come.
- Though the possibility of earlier results was, of course, generally welcomed users were concerned that timeliness should not be achieved at the cost of data quality. Quality assurance earlier in the processing schedule should, however assist both timeliness and quality. Local authorities in particular see output design and access to the outputs as a key part of their contribution to the Advisory Group process. If LAs were to be told by ONS when the first estimates of their population derived from 2011 data were to be made available to them, prior to this date the authorities could accumulate the relevant data required to validate the estimates provided by ONS and report back on their views of the accuracy and completeness. Any authority not providing a response could then be considered to support the estimates.

- In 2001, not enough advance effort was put into output formats, disclosure control, estimates of the accuracy of the output, and geographical aids to the use of census data (though in many other ways users acknowledge that the output is better than ever before). The emphasis of the 2011 proposals on changes in collection methods should not sideline the considerable resources needed to produce useable results from the excellent data collected.
- Census Access has been welcomed, but one ambitious suggestion for 2011 was for ONS to attempt to release *all* data at one time.
- Output delivery via the Internet is welcomed in principle, but some users would need fast and efficient means of downloading vast quantities of census data.
- There is mixed support for the use of Output Areas as a fixed geography to facilitate better demographic comparability. Some users find it difficult to see how 2011 OAs would match 2001 in all areas if they were required to reflect inter-censal development and conform to changing ward boundaries. Level 1 Super Output Area may be a better level for such comparisons. Some authorities, however, are more concerned with making sense of communities ‘on the ground’ and see SOAs as making less sense in sociological and economical terms than do wards, for which output should continue to be produced.
- It is important to give users the ‘right information for the right areas’. The Census proposals largely do that in that they address a wide range of data and geography issues on collection and processing. Though users note that these issues are still up for review, there appears to be a presumption that data will continue to be published for Output Areas, the implication being that OAs are fixed for 2011 and perhaps beyond. Given that everything else seems to be under review, it is unfortunate that this seems to be the case since there is much potential for flexible approaches on this issue, especially if a less rigid approach to disclosure control can evolve over the coming years. Not all users were happy about the nature of the boundaries of the 2001 Census OAs, which, in some areas, are seen as an obstacle to achieving good information for local areas and neighbourhoods.
- Essential that SASPAC (or equivalent) is fully integrated with data release. SuperTABLE software is not appropriate for drawing off single cell data.
- A range of users will require output at GB and UK levels and this will require better co-ordination between the Census Offices. It is not clear from the proposals that this would be a statistical objective of the model.
- The 2001 coverage survey provided a rich data source whose value would be increased if it were available for research under suitable controlled conditions, as has been done in Canada, for example.

***Data quality***

- The lack of any specific reference to a post-enumeration quality check was noted by some users with the suggestion that this might be incorporated into the coverage survey. Measures of reliability need to come from a post-enumeration quality check rather than from Test and Rehearsal data.
- Census output estimated for the complete population is seen a success in 2001. Without it, census output would have been much more biased at national, regional and LA District levels. It was felt, however, that commitment to this aim for 2011 should be stated more clearly in the proposals.
- The question of how accurate were the 2001 census-based population for small areas has not been answered, but it would seem to be essential to create targets for the completeness of the 2011 enumeration and the coverage survey, by comparison with the requirements.
- Post-back created a loss of quality in the response in 2001. There were lower proportions of forms returned than would have been achieved with traditional collection, and higher proportions of missing items on returned forms. The idea of post-back to a central point may entail a further loss of contact between field force and public, with further loss of quality compared to 2001. Post-out and post-back should not be pursued unless a realistic financial balance is considered against the impact on quality, and that the same balance is considered for alternative methods.
- Users need to be assured about the accuracy of imputation of missing items.
- It was noted that, although the quality assurance processes for 2001 were carried out as fully agreed with local authorities before the Census, nevertheless improvements could still be made to data quality if more time were to be allocated to the process. The critical factor, however, is the use of improved administrative records to provide a reliable check on the census results. Local authorities should be involved in all stages of the QA process.
- It will remain necessary for any dependency adjustment to be made at the end of the data processing operation, and critical to this will be the accuracy of address lists for comparison purposes. Improvements could be made if more time were allocated and if additional administrative records could be used to provide triple-, quadruple- or even quintuple-estimation systems. A better understanding of household dynamics is also key. But an independent estimate will not necessarily come directly from administrative records as even those that are best in their own terms will not measure the population; it will be necessary to research the accuracy of the best administrative register(s), prior to the census. This is the approach taken for the 2001 use of address-list calibrated by LFS.
- The suggestion of including census questions that would allow closer comparison with administrative records was welcomed but it begs a solution to translate a census-with-administrative count into the population count, and could quickly become intrusive and make it apparent that census operation has access to administrative records that are otherwise confidential.

- Ethnographic approaches to measuring the quality and coverage of the census collection should be attempted in tests in the next few years, aimed at understanding the nature of the people who do not respond to censuses and surveys.

#### *Census questions and form design*

The Discussion Paper did not set out any proposals relating to particular topics or questions to be included in the 2011 Census or to form design since these matters are not yet critical to the 2011 Census design, as the collection methodology can still be influenced by what information is to be collected. Consultation on the data needs for questions for the 2011 Census will be the subject of separate consultation, which will commence later in 2004.

Nonetheless, almost inevitably, a number of comments on question content and form design were included in the responses. These are included here for completeness, and will, no doubt, form a starting point for future discussion.

- Users feel that debate on question set should again be conducted through Census Advisory Groups. The criteria used for choosing questions for 2001 – where the data had to be widely required at a small area level and not be available from any other source - were sensible. In addition, questions had to be understandable and acceptable to respondents. Users felt that the problem in 2001 was that though these criteria were applied carefully in the early stages, some questions crept in at later stages that perhaps did not conform so well.
- Consultation of question content should start immediately because of the need to include trials of questions in major surveys in order to integrate survey research with census research. An improved understanding of dynamics of changing household structures, for example, could be addressed through questionnaire design. Particular consideration needs to be given early in the process to ensure that there is consistency across the UK. It would be helpful if users were invited to indicate any particular difficulties that have arisen with the interpretation of results of the 2001 Census across Great Britain/UK. This could give a clearer idea of the scope of the consequences of carrying out slightly differing censuses in Scotland and N Ireland.
- Central government research on the respective merits of allocating more resources to improving response rates or to processing extensive question sets will go ahead before consultation get under way, and users would thus like to be reassured that by 2005 a decision will not already have been made to reduce the question set before the data needs for questions have been more widely considered.
- When considering the availability of data from other sources ONS should focus on the geography at which that data is available. Work on rural issues, for example, necessitates data at small area geographies, in particular at Output Area level.
- Research into form design and whether forms may be available in other languages is widely welcomed. The provision of multi-lingual explanatory material should be retained. If possible alternative font sizes should be considered, and the explanatory leaflet should note the availability of the form in alternative formats.

- The most serious omissions from the 2001 Census were seen to be the questions on income, mode of travel to school (in England and Wales) and disability. The 2011 Census should attempt to establish a common approach to standardising the definitions of disability that are currently used in surveys by replacing, for example, the question on limiting long-term illness with a definition of disability consistent with the Disability Discrimination Act.
- In Wales, the requirement for a 'Welsh' tick box has not diminished, and users feel that further consideration should be given to asking a Welsh language question in England, where it is claimed there are more Welsh speakers than in Wales. Furthermore, a choice of bilingual forms is necessary for all households, and any communication with households should be carried out in the language of the householder's choice.
- A more general language question is also required to reflect the range of languages spoken, including British Sign Language.
- More definitions and explanatory notes may be necessary on the form if there is to be reduced face-to-face contact with enumerators, in order to avoid systemic errors such as the 'living rent free' issue. Research is required into the understanding of the concept of the 'householder' which may not be consistent among different cultural groups.
- More use of pre-coded questions would help reduce costs of processing. However, there is the possibility of more address coding being required, which could have significant cost implications.
- Although it is important to keep the form reasonably short, research has shown that respondents may treat a substantial form as more 'important' and would actually be more likely to respond. This attitude should be examined in early tests and an assessment made of when the response burden become too much. Considerable research was done on form design in the mid-1990s, but much of this seemed to have been ignored, in some cases, when the needs of reducing the amount of paper to minimise printing and scanning costs were considered to be more important than good design.
- In effect, in 2001 the only core question, recorded by enumerators, and used in imputation of whole households, was their address. Commentators feel that enumerators could do better than that and suggest that that the 'core questions' approach for imputing hard-to-count people and households is extended. Information on age and sex and, and thereby, family composition, would help a great deal.
- There is a need for more transparency in the decision-making processes regarding the final selection of questions.

## **Annex A List of respondents**

### **Organisations**

Bath and NE Somerset; Bristol City; North Somerset; South Gloucestershire; Joint Strategic Planning and Transportation Unit (joint submission)

Blaenau-Gwent Local Authority

Caerphilly Local Authority

Cheshire County Council

Central and Local Government Information Partnership (CLIP) Census Sub Group

Centre for Census and Survey Research (CCSR) - Ludi Simpson

Demographics User Group

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

Department for Rural Affairs (DEFRA)

Department for Transport (DfT)

Derby City Council

Disability Rights Commission

Economic and Social Research Council - Ian Diamond

Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)/Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) 2001 Census Programme - David Martin, Co-ordinator

General Register Office Scotland

Greater London Authority

Help the Aged

Herefordshire Council

Hertfordshire Census Users Group (Hertfordshire Police, Public Health Intelligence and Hertfordshire Health Informatics service representing the Primary Care Trusts and Strategic Health Authority, Learning and Skills Council and Hertfordshire University).

Home Office

Institute for Social and Economic Research

Leicestershire County Council

Liaison Group for Population Statistics (LA Side)

Local Government Data Unit – Wales

Luton Borough Council

Manchester City Council

Market Research Society - Census Geodemographics Group

Medway Council

National Centre for Social Research

National Housing Federation

Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB)

Stoke on Trent City Council

Suffolk County Council

Tees Valley Local Authorities – (Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar and Cleveland, Stockton-on-Tees)

Welsh Assembly Research Network

Welsh Assembly Government – Statistical Directorate

**Private individuals**

Philip Redfern

Stefan Webb

The ONS are most grateful to all those to took the trouble to respond.