

CENSUS ADVISORY GROUP
Advisory Group Paper (08)01

2007 Census Test Evaluation – Key Lessons Learned

Introduction

- 1 This paper presents a high level summary of the key lessons learned from the 2007 Census Test. The key areas of the Test covered in this paper are:
 - Address Checking
 - Field Work – delivery and follow-up
 - Recruitment
 - Training - delivery and follow-up
 - Pay
 - Coverage
 - Public Interface
 - Publicity and Communication
 - Operational Intelligence
- 2 A more detailed report summarising evaluation of the whole Test is to be published later in the spring.

Action

- 3 Advisory Group members are invited to note the key finds and comment at the forthcoming round of meetings

Background

- 4 Paper AG (07)05 presented the emerging findings from the 2007 Test for three key aspects of the Test: the delivery method (post-out compared with hand delivery); the effect of an income question; and the outsourcing of recruitment, training and pay. AG (07)05 also identified the decisions that Census had already taken based on those results, namely that:
 - the majority of questionnaires will be delivered by post in 2011; and,
 - that the services of recruiting, training and paying the field staff for 2011 will be outsourced as a single bundle.
- 5 Further detail on the delivery method and income evaluation will be published shortly.

- 6 The timetable for publishing the evaluation reports, as presented in AG (07)05 has, however, been delayed as the result of focusing effort on more pressing Census priorities, namely:
- the completion of the procurement for the main data collection processes in time for the development of key systems and services to be in place for the 2009 Rehearsal;
 - questionnaire development;
 - Address Register development; and
 - the procurement of services to recruit, pay and train the field staff.
- 7 Although the diversion of resources from evaluation is unfortunate, it means that these critical sub-projects are now back on track and scheduled to deliver on time. Key aspects of evaluation have been completed and have contributed to the development of these priorities and other key aspects of the Census design.

Address Checking

- 8 The Census design requires an accurate and up-to-date list of household addresses; this is even more important given the proposals for post-out, central post-back and questionnaire tracking. Therefore, an address checking exercise was included in the Test to supplement and assess the address list provided by address suppliers.
- 9 The key findings for the address checking exercise are:
- The quantity of addresses found, especially in the full contact areas provides evidence that there is a need for address checking.
 - The address check did not produce a high enough quality address list. However, the method employed in 2007 Test is considered appropriate for address checking in principle.
 - The main type of addresses found were multi-occupancy subdivisions, the majority of which would have been long-standing deficiencies in address products.
 - The keying and quality assuring of the addresses found was more time-consuming and difficult than had been anticipated. The timescales and resources allocated for both keying and geographical matching of addresses after the field exercise needs to be reviewed for 2011.
 - The main aim of the address check should be to deal with long-standing deficiencies in the address list. It would, therefore, be sensible to conduct an address check over a longer period (say 6 months). Furthermore, it is thought that such an approach would present many operational advantages.

Field Work – Delivery and Follow-up

- 10 During the Test, half of the areas were delivered questionnaires by an enumerator and the other half were delivered via post. During follow-up, all areas received follow-up visits to preserve the statistical integrity of the Test and the ability to compare post-out and hand delivery.
- 11 The key findings are:
- The calling strategy employed (at several different times of day/week to make contact) proved successful.
 - Although the methodology for estimating workloads is likely to differ from that for the Census itself, it was sufficiently accurate for the purposes of the Test and will also provide valuable information to feed into the workload estimates for 2011, particularly in terms of visits per hour in different types of area.
 - Organisation and management of field staff worked well, but continued development of doorstep interaction is required to convince prospective respondents.
 - It is important to get a good start to the follow-up phase. Thus, the procedures for starting follow-up and the field work schedule should be reviewed to ensure that field staff hit the ground running.
 - There needs to be a shift in enumerator culture away from 'ownership' of an area to maximising response in the assigned area.
 - The use of IT and Management Information (MI) in the Test were not utilised by the field staff to the extent that had been planned.
 - The use of MI needs to be improved in order to fully utilise field staff resources in areas with the lowest response. A review of the field procedures, training and position profiles are required ahead of the Rehearsal.
 - The deployment of IT equipment was hampered in the Test and the take-up and use of the systems provided was variable. Recruitment and training needs to be reviewed to ensure that people are recruited as Census managers have applicable IT skills and enthusiasm.

Recruitment, Training and Pay

- 12 Recruitment, pay and training of the field staff for the Test was outsourced to a specialist recruitment agency. Paper AG (07)05 outlined the findings of the evaluation of the outsourcing. This

section looks specifically at the actual recruitment, not the performance of the supplier.

13 The key findings are:

Recruitment

- Although all five test areas were close to achieving the full compliment of field staff, this was only fully achieved in Stoke. No geographical location within the Test managed to build or maintain a reserve pool of staff.
- The overall attrition rate, inclusive of non-starters and actual resignations, was higher than ONS expected at around 38 per cent.
- Local Authorities provided good candidates for field staff positions, but the take-up was less than expected and more should be done in 2011 to encourage LA staff to consider field staff positions.
- Some candidates were put off by the computer work involved and the amount of effort required to complete the e-learning. Clearer communication as to the roles and responsibilities of the positions is required when advertising and interviewing for positions.
- There needs to be a more efficient interface between the agency recruiting field staff and the handover to the Team Manager. At times this process was lengthy, resulting in confusion, and sometimes, in resignations of field staff.

Training

14 The purpose of contracting out training for the 2007 Census Test was to assess whether or not training could be delivered centrally, to ensure that all field staff were trained to a sufficiently good and consistent standard. An additional objective related to training was to test the feasibility of using a blended approach, which included E-learning and classroom-based sessions.

15 The key findings are:

- The blended approach to training proved to be successful with consistent information being disseminated to all levels of field staff.
- This approach was well received by the field staff, with the E-learning providing the basics supplemented with the instructions and the class-room sessions.
- The focus of the training should be reviewed, with particular consideration given to the doorstep routine and avoiding refusal, facilitated by an increase in role play scenarios.

Pay

- 16 In previous Censuses the field force was paid a fixed fee at set dates during the operation. For the 2007 Census Test, it was decided to trial paying staff an hourly rate plus a terminal bonus. The move to hourly pay was intended to provide a system that was simple to administer and understand, particularly given the more flexible approach to fieldwork planned for 2011. It also was felt to be a fairer method of pay for areas where workload size differed significantly. The terminal bonus payment was introduced to help reduce attrition rates and encourage field staff to complete the full term of employment. Payment of the bonus was dependent on the successful completion of work to a satisfactory standard and the return of all equipment.
- 17 The key findings are:
- Overall, the system for paying field staff was considerably simpler than that used in 2001, though the numbers of field staff were clearly significantly less.
 - The use of hourly pay worked very well and supported the flexible hours that the field staff worked.
 - There was minimal criticism from the field staff about the level of pay, suggesting that it was, on the whole, a fair rate for the job.
 - The management and control of the pay was very successful. Field managers were diligent in their approval of hours worked and used the expected hours worked per week per area as a useful tool for monitoring and approving pay.
 - In general, the bonus was well received and well administered. The criteria for awarding the bonus could, however, have been made clearer and this should be reviewed ahead of 2011.
 - The payment of expenses was cumbersome and some refinement is required for 2011. In addition, it was clear that the mileage rate, particularly in rural areas, was felt to be too low, and further consideration is required for 2011.

Coverage

- 18 The 2007 Test analysed the coverage of residents in responding households to see if there are visible differences in undercoverage from 2001 and to gather information about overcoverage of residents. In addition, the Test looked into the coverage of visitors and analysis of non-responding households, to look for ways to improve coverage in the 2009 Rehearsal and the 2011 Census.
- 19 In order to measure coverage, it was assumed that the true residents in the household were those named as such in the Census Test Evaluation Survey (CTES). Thus, if there were any additional persons in the CTES they were as an undercount in the Test;

conversely, if there were residents in the Census who do not appear in the CTES they were considered as an overcount¹.

20 The main findings are:

- Undercoverage of residents within households was 2.7 percent, which was found to be statistically significantly different to the 2 per cent that is estimated to have been the corresponding value in the 2001 Census, and with similar patterns.
 - Undercount, may have been overestimated because only one form per household was used to create the list of names used to feed into the CTES questionnaire.
- The corresponding value of overcount, excluding all duplicates, was 0.86 per cent, which is more than twice the value estimated for overcoverage with households in 2001 (approximately 0.4 per cent).
 - However, difficulties with the software used for the Census Test Evaluation Survey (CTES) may have been responsible for increasing the overcount.
- When looking at individual factors affecting the coverage of residents, the number of residents affects undercount, while delivery method, the income question and Enumeration Targeting Categorisation (see Paper AG(07)05) did not create any significant differences
- The analysis of non-responding households in the CTES showed that 18 per cent of the households did not receive a Census form. For the households that confirmed having received the questionnaire or were unsure whether or not they had, the three main reasons given for not responding were: (a) being busy; (b) a set of categories that can be best classified as 'apathy'; and (c) lack of willingness to disclose information.

Public interface

- 21 The purpose of the public interface role was to offer a range of help facilities to support the 2007 Census Test, in order to ensure fullest coverage and quality of data. The specific objective was to encourage the full participation of householders and to provide them with the necessary tools to complete the questionnaires.
- 22 The importance of this support system was even more critical in 2007 due to the move to a largely post-out enumeration strategy, as very few householders would have direct contact with enumerators.

¹ It is likely that this approach will overestimate the overcount (as there will be some recall errors in the CTES) and will underestimate the undercount (as not all missed people will be in the CTES).

- 23 The key findings are:
- The total numbers of calls received was nearly double the forecast, but there was sufficient leeway in the shift patterns to enable Contact Centre to cope with the increased volumes.
 - The service provided by the Contact Centre was successfully supported by a comprehensive and updated database of Frequently Asked Questions.
 - A 'mystery shopping' exercise that was conducted to assess the effectiveness of the Contact Centre was beneficial, as those problems and issues that were identified could be acted upon.

Publicity and communication

- 24 Due to the selection of widely geographically dispersed location of the Test areas, it was not possible to develop blanket publicity to encourage response as this would have created confusion among households not included. The only publicity that was practicable was in the form of an advance card which was issued to every household selected for inclusion within the Test. The aim of all other 'publicity' materials produced for the Test was specifically to support the associated enumeration procedures.
- 25 Analysis of the 2007 CTES indicated that the advance cards had a positive impact on encouraging response.

Operational Intelligence (Questionnaire Tracking)

- 26 The concept underpinning Operational Intelligence (OI) in 2007 was quite simple. As a questionnaire was associated with a particular address so a link was made within the OI database that allowed subsequent activities associated with questionnaire and address to be logged.
- 27 Information recorded on the operational system reflected status changes associated with:
- addresses
 - questionnaires; and
 - requests for further information or support.
- 28 The key findings are
- The information held on the OI system gave Census HQ a far better picture of the progress of field activities than had been possible previously.

- The OI created a clear picture of where response rates were below expectations and allowed decisions to be taken about where to concentrate follow-up through either the use of extra staff or by extension of the follow-up window.
- The information recorded on the OI system effectively supported the back office.
- The interfaces between field, Contact Centre, the back office and the processing work operated effectively throughout the period; the system was updated with receipting information the day after it happened. This was sufficient for the purposes of the Test and supported essential field processes effectively.
- In order to make it scalable for 2011, ONS will need both to reduce the amount of information collected to just the level that is essential for understanding the progress of collection; and to reduce the possibility of error by developing new ways of recording field outcomes which rely less on verbal communication need to be considered.

Action

- 29 Advisory Group members are invited to note the key finds and comment at the forthcoming round of meetings.

Office for National Statistics

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