

Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme Board (CDCTP PB)
Pre Go Live Assessment for Census 2021 Collection phase
Tuesday 19 January 2021 – 14:30 -15:30

Attendees	Presenting	Apologies
Iain Bell (IB) - Chair	Jason Zawadzki (JZ)	Philippa Bonay
Nicola Tyson-Payne (NTP)		Simon Sandford-Taylor
Pete Benton (PB)		Jen Woolford
Sarah Tayler (ST)		
Chris Penner (CP)		
Kate Davies (KD)		
Nick Bateson (NB)		
Liz McKeown (LM)		
Sarah Henry (SH)		
Jason Zawadzki (JZ)		
Owen Brace (OB)		
██████████ - Wales		
Megan Cooper (MC)		
Viv Hamilton (VH)		
Susan Mangles (SM)		
Fahad Aleem (FA)		
Darren McCarthy (DMc)		
Caroline Rogers (CR)		
Lincoln Blair (LB)		
██████████		
██████████ - Secretariat		

1. Pre Go Live Assessment for Census 2021 Collection Phase (JZ)

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss readiness, key risks and identify potential decisions that Programme Board members may face prior to, and during, the main 2021 Census Collection Operation phase. It was recognised that there were some areas where complete assurance could not be given, particularly during a pandemic. However, the focus was to ensure that the right mitigations and contingencies were in place to maximize success and achieve critical success factors.

A formal Go/No Go Decision for the main Collection Operation was due to take place on the 9 February with a formal CCS/Non-Compliance Go/No Go Decision due on 21 April 2021.

The Board discussed the pre go live [assessment](#) for the Census 2021 Collection Phase. This will form the basis for the final go/no report and followed the same format as that used in the 2019 Rehearsal. The paper was a culmination of previous Board papers, decisions and approaches.

The Board recognised the hard work carried out by all teams to get to this position and noted the areas that were not on list as they had made good progress and were not a key concern. The board felt that all Critical Success Factors (CSFs) could be achieved and whilst there were challenges, in comparison to 2011 there was a higher use of reminder letters, communications and community engagement. CSFs would be monitored during live operations. The big concerns were mainly

around inability to deploy field staff at all and mapping between non-response and key groups resulting in a less inclusive Census. This in turn would cause reputational damage. There were mitigations in place, playbooks ready to deploy and strong and additional data sources to support concerns. It was also noted that there was a balance to be managed between operational and Programme objectives.

Whilst the external outlook had changed since a change in covid-19 variant and National Lockdown, scenarios and contingencies had been tested and adjusted accordingly. Processing and Outputs would remain a challenge to QA some Population Estimates and identify hard to count groups. However, mitigation plans continued to be worked through.

The focus of the Board was on the key challenges and concerns.

1. Field Recruitment

This was potentially the biggest operational risk and currently remained a silver command issue. Tranche 1 recruitment was not a concern. The pre-pandemic model for applicants felt a high estimate. However, increased communication efforts were underway.

A meeting with [REDACTED] (UK Chief Executive) identified 5 key points:

- CE Manager recruitment was a tougher process and boosted an additional 3k high quality applicants
- The sift process was possibly too stringent and overly filtered
- Flexibility was needed to tailor adverts accordingly and language needed adjusting (such as use of 'Officer')
- Pre-employment checks duplicated those who were already DBS checked
- Pay rates were slightly low but more precautions were taken with PPE and safe doorstep routines

ONS would continue to meet with Adecco who were monitoring MI and reviewing impacts on hard to count areas. The applicant journey was under review for optimisation and DWP contacts within job centres were being fully utilised. Other sources for contingency recruitment were also being assessed. External expertise had been brought in to assess the marketing and publicity carried out to date to see if further options and channels could be used and what costs this may incur. This work remained a priority with clearer outputs expected by 22 January.

2. Virtual Community Engagement and Completion Events

These will remain virtual until COVID-19 restrictions allow for change. It was recognised that this was a challenge but would be mitigated as much as possible via primary and secondary campaigns, expanding virtual networks and targeting groups that had moved online.

3. HQ Staff Capacity – General

This remained a challenge and continued to be managed and priorities were to be re-assessed.

4. HQ Staff Capacity – Field Parallel Processes

CFO parallel processes such as back office, induction, training, recruitment, and logistics, amongst others were stretched. Work was underway to secure further resource from across the business. This would have a big impact on the Field Operation so a robust plan was being worked through with a hope to oversupply in this area.

5. Cabinet Office and COVID-19 Task Force discussions

- A ministerial meeting with Chloe Smith was due to be held after the meeting to walk through the preparations for Census and obtain a recommendation from Government.
- Professor Chris Whitty had been consulted and advised that capability should be built in to delay the start of Field Operations by a few weeks if required. However, a new variant could change the risk assessment.
- HM Treasury have provided a steer to continue with the Census Field Operation as planned. Should there be a delay there was currently no additional funding allocated from the £906m.
- The Chief Medical Officer in Wales had been contacted with a response due back

Action (21) 14: PB and JZ to review the capability to contact 50% of addresses via telephone should the Field Operation be delayed and doorstep visits unable to be carried out.

6. Impact on the ability to manage the field operation due to need to descope MI to protect RCA development

There have been challenges to deliver MI across multiple business areas. The significant challenges remained around understanding the Field Operation and multi variate analysis. Outputs and efficiency can be managed but cross tabulation would be a challenge. A lone worker solution was available but MI was required to ensure compliance. A work around was in place to show the days that Field Staff logged on to the system. Work continued to cross check this with working days. Currently manual work arounds were available to produce MI to assess mass changes to the Field Operation and apply interventions.

7. LA, Community and Public Perception

Whilst there remained numerous questions from Local Authorities, there was also a lot of support being offered. As much leverage as possible was being used to tie in with virtual and local social media channels. Whilst the ability was there to tap into groups and leaders it remained a challenge to reach individuals compared to face to face contact. All possible mitigations were in place, with messages from government to Local Authorities promoting the Census and encouraging participation. Real time information would be available from Local Authorities and checked for gaps. This would provide more real time information than previous Censuses.

8. Impact of restrictions on Census Support Centres

Up to 90% of Census Support Centres had been recruited to date. Where the support centres were unable to open other channels, such as the public support centre, were available to provide support.

9. Respondents not at their usual residence – Students, People at Second Homes, Changed Usual Residence, People Overseas

This was a known issue that continued to be worked through. Guidance was being prepared and impact to downstream processing and population estimates were being assessed. The Board were content with how this was progressing.

10. Sex Question Guidance

Work was continuing in negotiations to resolve this issue.

11. Lockdown impact on Field mobility

To manage variability and under recruitment it was a requirement to be able to move field staff from one area to another. This was a known requirement impacted further by potential local lockdowns. All mitigations were in place such as potential extension to field operations, critical worker status, PPE and social distancing measures.

12. Ensuring media plans are adapted to meet coronavirus constraints

Media plans had been adapted to meet constraints from COVID-19. Due to some longer lead in times assumptions and adjustments were made early on to pre-empt restrictions whilst building in flexibility. The main flexibility was around digital channels. There was less flexibility around print and out of home media.

13. Student campaign coronavirus impact

There had been most uncertainty around where students would be on Census day. The two main areas were guidance on what address to fill out on Census day and reduced campus spend. The filming of the creative and photos were complete. Investment was key to reduce undercount.

Test Metrics

Good work had been made on the build by DST. SAT testing had shown low levels of defects which was also visible in end to end testing. There was high confidence in the systems being used for the Census.

Visibility against testing would be needed for both assurance to the Programme Board and ARAC.

Action (21) 15: KD to work through how best to present testing metrics to the Programme Board and ARAC.

Security

Security mitigations were being worked through via scenario exercises across business teams. The security landscape was continually being monitored and controls were in place to respond appropriately. Therefore, in terms of preparation for go live this was not a concern.

2. **Governance decisions & Key Messages (IB)**

a. **Summary of key messages:**

- i. The Board concurred on the amber status areas and felt there were no red areas of concern to prevent a successful Census. Therefore, the go live assessment

was accurate with mitigations to be carried out in readiness for the go no go decision for the main field operation on the 9 February 2021.

b. Summary of actions:

Action number	Action
PB Action (21) 14	PB and JZ to review the capability to contact 50% of addresses via telephone should the Field Operation be delayed and doorstep visits unable to be carried out
PB Action (21) 15	KD to work through how best to present testing metrics to the Programme Board and ARAC.