

The Census organisation

Organising the 2001 Census

A massive human endeavour

Carrying out a census of the population is a huge undertaking. Every household in the land - some 24 million in England and Wales - must be visited and everyone must be counted.

This factsheet gives a glimpse into the organisation behind an exercise on this scale.

Work on the 2001 Census began almost as soon as the last census in 1991 had been taken. The Government office responsible for conducting the Census in England and Wales (the Office for National Statistics) has taken great care in its preparations to ensure that everything will run smoothly.

Census testing - 'trial runs'

In June 1997 a major Census Test was carried out to evaluate new collection and processing methods, alternative styles of census form and to test public reaction to a number of new and revised questions.

As a result of the test several changes were made, including a new form design and the introduction of the post-back method for the return of completed census forms, rather than personal collection of forms by enumerators.

In April 1999 a full Census Rehearsal covering some 148,000 households was held in nine areas across the UK. This tested census form delivery and collection procedures and is also testing the systems for processing data and producing outputs. It was also a final opportunity to test people's reaction to the questions.

Planning and recruitment

For the full Census the first major task is to divide England and Wales into some 15,000 areas known as Enumeration Districts. Each district contains an average of about 200 households (or 500 people). Maps showing the boundaries of each district are produced to help the enumerators (census-takers) plan their work.

About a year before Census Day (29 April 2001) the recruitment of a 70,000-strong temporary field force began. These are at the heart of the operation and comprise Census Area Managers, District Managers, Team Leaders, and roughly 63,000 enumerators. Each Team Leader will be responsible for up to 20 enumerators.

Delivering the Census to your door

The enumerators are the people who take the Census to the public. Up to three weeks before Census Day the enumerators will begin delivering the forms to every household. Enumerators will try to make contact with each householder when they first call. If they cannot, the enumerator will make a second visit. If there is still no response, he / she will post the census form/s through the letterbox.

It is then up to every household to post back their completed form as soon as possible after Census Day. Any household which does not do this will be visited again by the enumerator.

Enumerators can give advice on a variety of situations and will know what to do if, for example, someone is away on holiday, a house is empty, or the property is a communal establishment such as a prison, hospital or school. They will answer queries and help people who may have difficulty filling in their forms.

A telephone helpline (calls charged at local rate) will be open every day during the Census enumeration period to answer public enquiries. Bilingual helpline advisers will be available to answer questions in a number of languages other than English.

A special service will be provided for the deaf community.

A range of other community and voluntary organisations such as Citizens Advice Bureaux may also be able to help people in some parts of the country.

The processing of data

Once forms have been posted back, they are collected by a secure carrier and taken to the Census Processing Office in Cheshire. Here, the massive task of producing census statistics begins. The forms will be electronically scanned, the data captured and the textual responses coded. The images will then be written to microfilm for long-term storage. In England and Wales the paper forms will then be destroyed, saving the £3 million cost of storing some 30 miles of shelved paper records. This phase of the operation is due to be completed by March 2002.

Checking the figures

Once the Census has been taken, a check will be made in May-June 2001 on how well the Census counted people. This is done to ensure that the final count is as accurate as possible. During this exercise - the Census Coverage Survey - interviewers will revisit a sample of 300,000 households across the UK and carry out a doorstep interview. The responses are compared with the returns for the main Census.

Census results

The first results from the Census will be published in late Summer 2002. The main core census results will be published in a series of products over the subsequent year and will largely be electronic based, making use of the internet. Paper publications may also be made available following consultation with users on their requirements.

The proposed outline order of publication or supply is:

- Initial release of populations by age and sex for Local Authority areas;
- Reports with standard statistics concurrently covering all areas in England and Wales;
- Summary publication for the UK as a whole;
- Census Area Statistics (statistics for small areas);
- Statistics on migration and workplace;
- A service for customised output/workplace and migration statistics;
- Topic theme reports, focussing on specific subjects like the labour market or health.

Secret and safe

The information written on a census form is used only to produce statistics and research. The Office for National Statistics and its staff are bound by law to make sure that no personal information which enables individuals or households to be identified is disclosed. Census records will be kept confidential for 100 years and used only to produce information about the population in general.

There is one only one exception to this rule. The Census is compulsory. If an individual refuses to complete his or her form properly, the form could be produced as evidence in court.

The Census timetable - Key Milestones

- **August 2000** Census Area Managers in post
- **End October 2000** Census District Managers in post
- **Mid February 2001** Census Team Leaders in post
- **Mid March 2001** Census enumerators in post
- **Early April 2001** Census forms delivered to all homes
National Census advertising campaign begins
- **April 29 2001** CENSUS DAY
- **May-June 2001** Census Coverage Survey conducted to check on any under - count in main Census
- **June 2001** Electronic scanning of returned forms, data capture and coding begins
- **March 2002** Electronic scanning, data capture and coding completed
- **Summer 2002 to Summer 2003** The main national and local results released to a pre-announced timetable

Other factsheets:

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2. Why We Need
a Census
3. Census 2001
– What's New?
4. Counting Everyone In
– the Big Challenge
6. Census Jobs
7. The Census
and the Law
8. Census Taking
Through the Ages

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