

CENSUS ADVISORY GROUP

AG (10) 15 Follow-up Surveys

Surveys Following the 2011 Census

ONS included the option of a limited number of follow up surveys in E&W in the business case now with HMT for 'finishing off' Census 2011. We had legal advice that the best way of doing this is to use the ONS Field Force. Census Team would draw the required samples from the E&W Census data and issue to Field. For similar legal reasons, we do not recommend attempting GB or UK wide surveys, involving two or three Census offices. We are not convinced that the benefits of what is quite a restricted opportunity would outweigh the costs of negotiating all the necessary agreements and protocols.

The cost of any such survey in E&W would of course depend on the size of the sample and the number of questions asked. As a rough estimate, a face to face interview restricted to a limited number of questions, with a sample of approximately 10,000 people, could cost in the order of £750,000. This would be an 'all in' cost, to cover drawing the sample, undertaking the fieldwork (using CAPI) and preparing a clean, anonymised data set. It would not include any analysis or report writing.

Expressions of interest are on the table from WAG, with two potential follow-up surveys (on ethnicity and on Welsh language), and from DASA (for follow up surveys and cohort tracking).

We appreciate it has been difficult to discuss further or to put proposals together without further information from ONS to inform this process. We have not reached a firm view on the timing of when any follow-up surveys would be undertaken. Clearly there is an imperative to follow up as quickly as possible, before the Census data gets out of date, but we also need to programme the work to select the sample(s) and to negotiate appropriate fieldwork slots with our Social Data Collection Division.

We have not yet produced a timetable for the decision making process. One contributing factor is that we would want to make some public announcement (e.g. through an arranged PQ) about what follow-up surveys are being planned, ahead of the Census itself. Earlier than that, there is also a timetable for bidding for funding to be drawn up, both of the ONS role and of work departments will need to do to prepare for and to analyse and publish the survey findings.

CGAG members are invited to:

- comment on this aspect of the census analysis programme;
- indicate whether or not they wish to propose any other follow-up surveys.

PAUL ALLIN, Deputy Director: Societal Wellbeing
Office for National Statistics
Tel: 01633 455 841
email: paul.allin@ons.gsi.gov.uk

Issue

ONS needs to decide whether to undertake any post-census surveys, using the 2011 census as a sampling frame. Discussions to date have identified a potential interest from WAG and DASA.

Any such plans need to be announced to Parliament before census day on 27th March 2011, thus final decisions, including funding commitments, are required by December 2010.

Action requested of Central Government Advisory Group

Advisory group members are asked to take steps to determine whether their departments wish to commission any post-census surveys from ONS, and **respond to ONS by 31st July 2010** with firm expressions of interest.

Background

The 2011 Census White Paper, *Helping to Shape Tomorrow*, included the possibility of using the 2011 as a sampling frame for post-census surveys.

This would involve using the 2011 census data to identify a subgroup of individuals with particular characteristics who could then be interviewed to ask further questions.

For example, after the 1991 census, the census was used to identify nurses who were no longer working in the nursing profession, to understand the reasons for their departure and explore how retention could be improved in future.

As specified in the White Paper, any such surveys would need to be announced to parliament before census day, March 27 2011. There is no specific method set down for this, but there is a mechanism that could be used.

Any surveys would need to be explained to the public, in line with the National Statistics Code of Practice.

A small number of government departments have expressed an interest in commissioning a post-census survey. The purpose of this document is to initiate a final round of discussions to determine:

- whether there is a demand for any such surveys
- which should be taken forward
- how they will be funded.

Legislative issues

Legal advice indicates any such post census surveys in England and Wales should be implemented using the ONS Field Force. Using census field staff is one option as they will already have signed confidentiality undertakings as prescribed in the Census Regulations. However, the timing of follow-up surveys may act against this. ONS has an established Field Force trained on household surveys (and winning survey work on tender from government departments, such as the Adult Dental Health Survey).

ONS would draw the required samples from the England and Wales Census data and issue to the Field Force for action. Any other options would require personal census data to be shared with other organisations, which is neither straightforward nor desirable for ONS.

For similar legal reasons, we would not envisage ONS conducting GB or UK wide surveys, involving two or three Census offices, as the benefits would outweigh the costs of negotiating the necessary agreements and protocols. It would potentially be possible, however, for departments to commission similar surveys from the separate UK offices.

These would be voluntary surveys, like the Census Coverage Survey, with no legal requirement on households to respond.

Indicative costs

The cost of any such survey in E&W would of course depend on the size of the sample and the number of questions asked. As a rough estimate, a face to face 30 minute interview with an achieved sample of approximately 10,000 people could cost in the order of £750,000. A sample size of around 4,000 people would cost around £350k. This would be an 'all in' cost, to cover drawing the sample, undertaking the fieldwork (using Computer Aided Personal Interviewing) and preparing a clean, anonymised data set. It would not include any analysis or report writing.

The cost of telephone interviews would be lower, at around £400k for an achieved sample of 10,000 people.

Interest to date

To date interest has been expressed by the Welsh Assembly Government, with two potential follow-up surveys (on ethnicity and on Welsh language), and from the DASA (on the health, economic and social outcomes of ex-service personnel).

Survey timing

Clearly there is an imperative to conduct follow up surveys as soon as possible after census day, before the Census data gets out of date, but we also need to programme the work to select the samples and to negotiate appropriate fieldwork slots with ONS' Social Data Collection Division.

The earliest possible date is likely to be Spring 2012. This would be based on raw, unedited census data, prior to coverage assessment or adjustment. The sample at this point could not therefore be guaranteed to be representative. There would however, be considerable risk at this point of delays from census data processing

A fully adjusted census database would not be available until September 2012.

Risks

ONS regularly undertakes surveys, and the operation risks of choosing to undertake such post census surveys are minimal.

The key risk for consideration is the public perception that could result from using census data in this way. ONS is careful to maintain at all times the confidentiality of census data, and communication around potential use of census data as a sampling frame for follow on surveys would need to be carefully handled.

Keeping the number of surveys relatively small would therefore be desirable

Decision-making timetable

We have not yet agreed a decision making timetable or process within ONS. However, there is a strong desire to coordinate census-related policy across the UK. UK wide Census related decisions are discussed at the UK Census Committee prior to formal decision making in each separate census office.

Given the need to make a public announcement about what follow-up surveys are being planned ahead of the Census itself, decisions will be needed by December 2010, including firm commitment of funding from the commissioning organisations.

UK wide agreement would therefore ideally need to be reached at the October meeting of the UK Census Committee

In order to manage this timetable, ONS would like to receive firm expressions of interest by the end of July 2010. Whilst organisational budgets may not be clear, any potential surveys would still require notification by this point.

Next steps

For further discussion, please contact Paul Allin, Deputy Director: Societal Wellbeing, Office for National Statistics, tel. 01633 455 841