

Census Strategic Development Programme: update

Introduction

Advisory Group Paper AG(02)04 reported that beyond the specific programme of evaluation of the 2001 Census, ONS would need to consider, for the longer-term, the need for, and then if necessary, examine the options for, the future production of census-type information. That paper set out the ONS's first thoughts on a number of separate streams of work being proposed together with a working timetable. This paper reports further.

Advisory Group members are invited to note the paper, and are asked:

- **to endorse a proposal to expand the scope of the Advisory Group to cover the new research programme on census and small area social statistics; and**
- **to indicate interest in attending a proposed one-day joint meeting of all current Census Advisory Groups specifically to discuss the future of the Census and small area social statistics in March 2003, as part of a wider programme of consultation.**

Background

1 A number of streams of work relevant to the future of the Census currently exist within ONS:

- 2001 Census evaluation;
- 2011 strategic development;
- The 2006 Census review, which proposed greater use of administrative records; and
- Proposals to develop linkage of administrative data at an individual person level, within a secure environment.

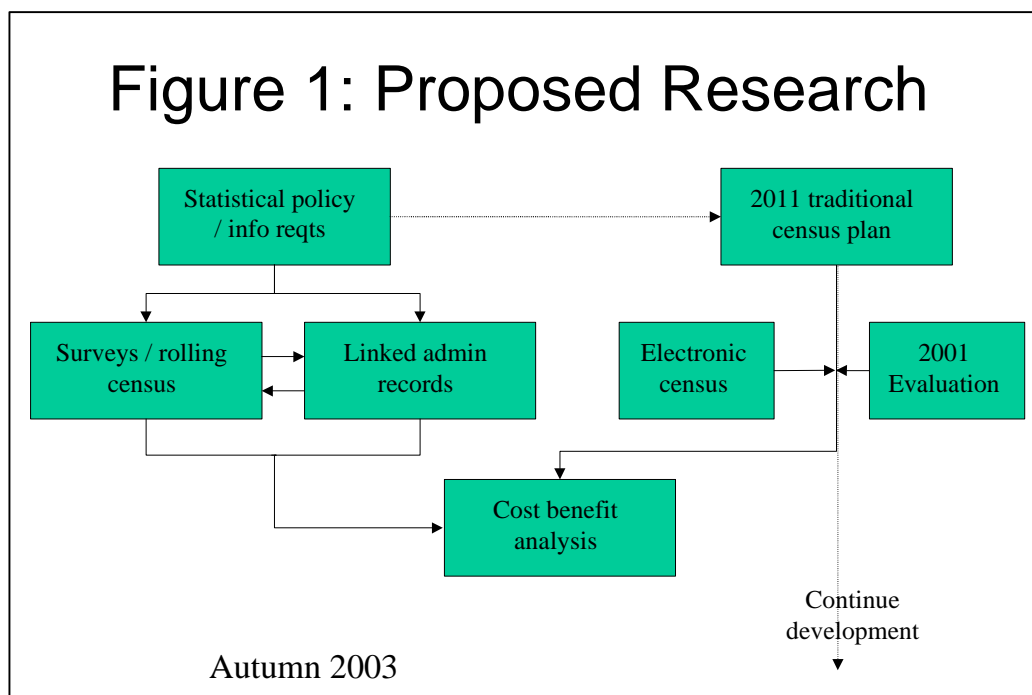
New Research Programme

- 2 The ONS Executive has approved the establishment of a new research programme to co-ordinate this development activity. It will encompass the future of the Census, and the future of small area social statistics in general, and will address the following key questions:
 - What information will be required in 2011?
 - How should we meet this need?
 - Where will we be by 2006?

- 3 The first phase of the research will result in a detailed cost-benefit analysis of the options for collection of the required information and a recommended way forward, including a testing and development strategy. It is hoped that this will be complete by the Autumn of 2003. The second stage will be the implementation of the testing and development plan.

- 4 Production of the cost-benefit analysis will require:
 - a re-assessment of the requirements for information and the statistical policy underpinning its collection;
 - an assessment of the national information context (for example, developments in the Office of the e-envoy); and
 - a review of possible alternative collection methods, including the use of government administrative records, a rolling or sample census, or modifications to a traditional census (including collection via the internet).

- 5 The proposed research work is illustrated in Figure 1. This shows that development of a traditional census for 2011 will need to continue until any alternative proposals have been demonstrated to be viable.



Key interfaces and dependencies

- 6 Separately from this development work, the Government is examining the scope for linking public databases on the resident population to improve efficiency and joined-up public service delivery.
- 7 In particular, the Government is examining the feasibility of developing a high-quality common population register, holding core data and a unique identifier on UK residents that could be used across the public sector. This was announced in the Home Office's green paper on entitlement cards.
- 8 Clearly, developing strong links with developments in this area will be extremely important for research into the linkage of administrative records.
- 9 Other interfaces include:
 - other government departments, both as potential users of statistics and potential providers of administrative data;
 - the work of the Office of the e-Envoy;
 - ONS population and migration statistics reviews;
 - ONS proposals for an integrated social survey;
 - General Register Office for Scotland (GROS);
 - Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA);
 - Welsh Assembly; and
 - HM Treasury

Programme organisation

- 10 A new programme board will be established, reporting to the ONS Executive and chaired by the new ONS Director of Sources and Surveys. GROS and NISRA will be represented on the programme board.

Role of Census Advisory Groups

- 11 It is proposed that the well-established Census Advisory Groups should be expanded to become 'Census and Small Area Social Statistics Advisory Groups', to cover the entire remit of the new research programme.
- 12 A one-day joint meeting of all current Census Advisory Groups specifically to discuss the future of the Census and small area social statistics is proposed in March 2003, as part of a wider programme of consultation.

Action

- 13 **Members are asked to endorse the proposal to expand the remit of the Advisory Group and to indicate interest in attending the proposed joint meeting of Advisory Groups in March.**

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ONS
30th October 2002