

**REPORT ON THE CENSUS STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME
WORKSHOP HELD ON 28TH MARCH 2003**

Introduction

1. ONS has instigated a new research programme to consider the future of the census and the development of small area social statistics in general. The first phase of this research will result in a detailed cost-benefit analysis of the options for future collection of information that has traditionally been provided by the census. This workshop formed the initial stage of consultation with key users of census information.
2. There were two aims for the workshop: to promote the Census Strategic Development programme and ensure that users are aware of the timetable and their opportunities to have input; and to get initial information from users about their requirements, and the relative importance of each.
3. The workshop was attended by 44 people, drawn from the academic, health, local government, central government and business sectors, together with representatives from the Statistics Commission and the General Register Office Scotland and the Northern Ireland Statistical Research Agency. Attendance was unfortunately lower than anticipated due to a strike affecting a number of regional rail networks.
4. **Advisory Group members are requested to note the information with this report and are welcome to send comments on this report to jennet.woolford@ons.gov.uk.**

Summary of Findings

5. A number of possible approaches to collecting census information were discussed. These are summarised in the table below.

	Traditional Census	Rolling Census	Population Register & Admin Sources
Coverage	Variable	Variable	Variable
Quality	High	High	Dependent on sources
Timeliness	Every x years	Every year	Every y years
Topics	Limited	Limited, but can be varied	Only limited by admin sources
Small area/population data	Yes	Yes but less comparable	Yes, but some modelling may be required
Respondent burden	High	High	Low
Snapshot	Yes	No	Yes
Multivariate analysis possible	Yes	Yes	Possible

6. The key messages from the workshop were as follows:

- The census is still the key source of information for a wide range of uses;
- Key features of census data are snapshot, small area, small population and multivariate data
- Most uses require usually resident and household populations, but daytime and visitor counts also feature.
- There is a requirement for income information to be collected in future
- A five-yearly collection of information would be preferable - there is no clear requirement for information to be collected more frequently than this
- Results within one year of collection would be preferable - but there is no clear requirement for information to be available more quickly than this
- Quality, coverage and geography are more important than gains in frequency or timeliness.
- There was general unease about a rolling census

More Detailed Analyses

7. An analysis of the information collected at the workshop has produced the findings detailed below. Information was collected both by questionnaire and by discussion. Central to the questionnaires and discussions were specific uses of census information identified by the delegates for their organisations. All of the information collected on the day has been treated as qualitative only.

Specific Data Requirements

8. For each of the key uses of census information identified, delegates were asked to consider the specific data requirements. Delegates were provided with the following categories to structure their responses:

- Counting basis
- Timing
- Delivery
- Geography
- Content, assuming that age, sex and marital status will be available.

For each use, delegates were asked to indicate whether specific aspects of census data were essential, important, nice to have, or not needed. For the analyses below, these were scored as follows: essential = 3; important = 2; nice to have = 1; not needed = 0.

Counting Basis

9. A usually resident population was required as the base for most of the uses identified, with the household population also scoring highly. Many uses also required the daytime population and visitor/second homes populations.

Counting Basis	Mean Score
Population present	1.4
Population usually resident	2.8
Households	2.4

Timing

10. Overall data collected every five years was identified as important. There was no overwhelming indication of a requirement for data to be collected more frequently than this.

Timing	Mean Score
5 yearly	2.1
Yearly	1.6
6 monthly	0.4

Delivery

11. Data to be available within one year was identified as an important requirement. There was no clear indication of a requirement for data to be available more quickly than this.

Delivery	Mean Score
Results within 1 year	2.2
Results within 6 months	1.2
Results within 2 months	0.6

Geography

12. Output for all levels of geography were seen as equally important.

Geography	Mean Score
National	2.0
Regional	1.9
Local Authority / Health Authority / County	2.2
Ward	2.0
Output area / postcode	2.1

Content

13. The table below shows the topic content requirements identified most frequently. This suggests that many census users would like some measure of income or wealth to be included, which has not been the case in any previous census. Another topic that had not been previously included in the census was language (currently only asked for Welsh speakers).

Content	Percentage
Income / wealth	13
Ethnicity	8
Employment / business	6
Household relationships	6
Health	5
Education	4
Language	4
Migration	3
Social 'status'	3
Economic status	3

14. It should perhaps be noted that the topics identified will reflect the particular interests of the respondents.

Key Aspects of Census Data

15. Users were asked to rank the above five aspects of census-type information for each of the uses they had identified. The table below shows the mean and mode ranking.

	Mode Rank	Mean Rank
Content	1	2.2
Geography	1	2.4
Counting Basis	1	2.8
Timing	4	3.5
Delivery	5	3.9

16. For the uses discussed at the workshop, it is clear that content, geography and the counting basis are the key requirements. The timing and delivery would appear to be secondary to these requirements.

17. The other key features of census data, identified during the discussions are:

- the census provides a snapshot of the country
- the census provides consistent information for small areas and populations which is not available from any other source; and
- the census allows multivariate analyses.

Action

18. **Advisory Group members are requested to note the information with this report and are welcome to send comments on this report to jennet.woolford@ons.gov.uk.**

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