

Questions regarding Scotland's Census move of date:

Why is Scotland's Census moving to March 2022?

In light of the unprecedented disruption caused by COVID-19, Scottish Ministers have decided to reschedule the census to ensure that the unique and high quality results can continue to be achieved.

The twelve months leading up to the census collection and the intense preparations required are vital to its success. As in many areas of public life, COVID-19 disruption has significantly impacted on these vital preparations, these put the collection planned in March 2021 at risk.

National Records of Scotland has been monitoring the impacts of COVID-19 on the delivery of the census and has provided advice to Ministers. Ministers have decided to move Scotland's Census to March 2022 to ensure that a full and successful census is undertaken.

How has COVID-19 impacted on vital preparations for census?

The census collection is a huge logistical operation involving the recruitment and deployment of thousands of staff, including a large field force team who engage with the public on their doorstep.

The twelve months leading up to a census are vital in planning and testing the effectiveness and safety and security of census systems and collection processes to ensure these are ready.

COVID-19 restrictions over recent months have prevented these key activities from progressing. These impacts have occurred in a number of areas, from progressing recruitment, being able to undertake comprehensive testing, from contacting care homes and hospitals to establish their requirements for questionnaire delivery to engaging with third sector and community groups to encourage participation from everyone in Scotland.

The impact of COVID-19 on our ability to engage with communities to enhance response rates means it would not have been possible to achieve this without moving to 2022, in order to provide the unique data required inform a range of decisions on our future schools, hospitals and roads.

Will this impact on the quality of data available to users?

No, moving Scotland's Census to 2022 allows us put in place a full census that will produce the rich data Scotland need for years to come.

We will work closely with stakeholders and partners to ensure that appropriate data is available to support work that was expecting to make use of Census 2021 data.

Will NRS change the 2021 questions?

No, the Census 2021 questions were developed through rigorous and comprehensive consultation and testing which has taken place over some years and were agreed as appropriate by the Scottish Parliament through the Census Order and Regulations.

NRS is extremely grateful for the contribution made by stakeholders to develop the final question set and associated materials and looks forward to continuing to work with all stakeholders to maximise participation in Scotland's Census 2022.

Will Scotland's census follow the same format in March 2022?

Yes, the census in March 2022 will follow the same model and question set as planned for March 2021. NRS will also continue to plan for online responses to make up the majority of Census returns and in order to provide credible results, the highest possible return rate is required.

The impact of COVID-19 on our ability to engage with communities to enhance response rates means it would not have been possible to achieve this without moving to 2022, in order to provide the unique data required inform a range of decisions on our future schools, hospitals and roads.

Will you continue to engage with stakeholders in the lead up to March 2022?

We will continue to build relationships and maintain links with our stakeholders and partners across Scotland, including local authorities, community groups, charities and other third sector organisations.

How does moving the census impact on UK data?

We will continue to work closely with colleagues in the Office of National Statistics (ONS) and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) to ensure the needs of our data users in Scotland and across the rest of the UK will be met.

What are the next steps?

We will progress work to ensure our readiness for Scotland's Census 2022. This will include planning activities, our ongoing procurement of services, plans to build the field force and take forward further community engagement in order to deliver a high quality census to meet users' needs in March 2022.