

**Scotland's Census 2021  
Fairer Scotland Duty  
Impact Assessment  
v1.0**

**January 2020**

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## 1. Title of Programme

Scotland's Census 2021.

## 2. Summary of aims and expected outcomes

### What is the census?

The census is the official count of every person and household in Scotland. It is held every ten years and provides the most complete statistical picture of the nation available. It also provides information that central and local government need to develop policies and to plan and run public services.

Scotland's census is taken by the [National Records of Scotland](#) (NRS) on behalf of the Registrar General for Scotland. The NRS is a non-ministerial department of the Scottish Administration, established on 1 April 2011, following the merger of the General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) and the National Archives of Scotland (NAS).

NRS's main purpose is to collect, preserve and produce information about Scotland's people and history and make it available to inform current and future generations. It holds records of the census of the population of Scotland from 1841 and every 10 years after that. The one exception was the wartime year of 1941 when no census was taken. Census records are closed for 100 years under the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002.

The plan for Census 2021 is that it will take place on Sunday 21 March, subject to Scottish Parliament approval, and will be conducted predominantly online. The last census was conducted mainly on paper (80%), and 20% online.

### The Census Act 1920

The Census Act 1920 ("the 1920 Act") provides for a census to be taken not less than five years after the previous census. The 1920 Act applies to England, Wales and Scotland. In Scotland it is the duty of the Registrar General to undertake the census, in accordance with the 1920 Act and any Order in Council or regulations made in terms of the 1920 Act, under the direction of Scottish Ministers. In England and Wales, the responsibility for the census rests with the UK Statistics Authority and it is conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). In Northern Ireland it is conducted by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA).

Section 1 of the 1920 Act provides the enabling power which underpins the taking of the census. It allows the making of an Order in Council ("the Census Order") which directs that the census be taken; the date on which it is to be taken; the persons by, and in respect of whom, returns are to be made; and the particulars which are to be stated in the returns. The form (or forms) used in the census are prescribed in regulations ("the Census Regulations") under section 3 of the 1920 Act. This is where the census questions, as they will be seen by individuals completing the forms, are legally set out. The questions must, of course, solicit the particulars set out in the Census Order.

A similar process will be followed in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, reflecting the importance of harmonisation and of carrying out the Census on the same day across the UK.

If a person refuses to answer a census question, or gives a false answer, they are liable to a fine not exceeding £1,000. Currently, the only exceptions to this are the voluntary questions on religion and on sexual orientation and trans status or history, which were added by the Census (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2000 and Census (Amendment) (Scotland) Act 2019 respectively. Together, both Acts specifically exclude penalising non-response to these questions.

### Why have a census?

For over 200 years, Scotland has relied on the census to underpin local and national decision making. Around 200 countries worldwide now undertake a regular census under the [UN census programme](#). The census is the only survey to ask everyone in Scotland the same questions at the same time. It is unique in the provision of comprehensive population statistics. It is used by central and local government, health boards, the education sector, the private sector, and the voluntary sector to plan and distribute resources that match people's needs. The information collected must be "authoritative, accurate and comparable" for all parts of Scotland, and down to very small levels of geography. Only the census can consistently provide such information.

Basic information on population size, age, sex and location are crucial to work on pensions, migration, economic growth and labour supply. Other information gathered helps governments to:

- identify housing demand and create housing supply including information on household size and family make-up. which are crucial to policies on local housing demand and planning, and poor housing and overcrowding.
- identify areas of deprivation, enabling them to target services
- gather data on equality groups, enabling them to tackle discrimination
- gather information on housing,

Census information is also used for a range of social and economic indicators:

- population estimates
- employment and unemployment rates
- birth, death, mortality, and fertility rates
- equalities data, such as age, sex, ethnicity, religion/belief and disability.

Census data is also used by local public services to meet local needs in health, education, transport, planning, and community care services.

NRS calculated the cost to health board funding allocations if the census was not carried out in 2011. If census figures from 2001 had been used to make population estimates and allocate funding to health boards, in 2014/15 there would have been misallocations of between £30m and £40m. Some health boards would have received more, some less, than their appropriate share.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>[Scotland's Census 2011 General Report](#)

Following the 2011 Census, NRS, in conjunction with the other UK Census offices, explored alternative ways to produce population statistics. NRS had an open mind in identifying potential options and examined and compared various approaches to counting the population, both here and overseas, engaged with a diverse group of users, commentators and public bodies, and undertook qualitative and quantitative research into attitudes to the census and population statistics. More information on the work which was done can be found in the [Beyond 2011](#) section of the NRS website.

Having considered all the [evidence](#), in March 2014, NRS recommended that a modernised 'traditional' census was the best way to meet users' needs. Specifically, NRS announced its intention to focus on planning for a census in 2021 which will be primarily online, while offering alternative modes of completion where necessary, and also aiming to make best use of technology and administrative data in its design, building on the online approach used successfully in the 2011 census.

The main objectives of Scotland's Census 2021 are:

- to produce high-quality results;
- to generate outputs that meet the needs of our users;
- to maximise online response rates for the census;
- to produce timely outputs to maximise benefits;
- to protect, and be seen to protect, confidential information;
- to do so in a cost effective way; and
- to make recommendations for the approach to future censuses in Scotland.

The census is for, and about, everyone in Scotland. In conducting it, an objective is to gather as wide a dataset as possible. It is recognised that people in Scotland have a wide range of needs therefore our designs have to take account of these diverse needs. These needs may be influenced by them having one or more of the protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010, or by the experience of poverty which the Fairer Scotland Action Plan commits us to addressing. NRS is therefore trying to make sure that firstly people are able to access the census in order to fulfil their legal obligation to participate and secondly to enable their access to the anonymised statistical outputs derived from the data collected from them, which in turn enable them to reap the benefits realised.

The census is the only survey to ask everyone in Scotland the same questions at the same time. It is unique in the provision of comprehensive population statistics. It is used by central and local government, health boards, the education sector, the private sector, and the voluntary sector to plan and distribute resources that match people's needs. The information collected must be "authoritative, accurate and comparable" for all parts of Scotland, and down to very small levels of geography. Only the census can consistently provide such information.

The numerous uses made of census data outlined above represent a key benefit and a positive impact of the census which is shared by all.

There are a number of barriers and challenges which can potentially limit or hinder participation in the census. These include lack of awareness, lack of understanding,

privacy concerns, language, mistrust in/lack of engagement with officialdom, impairments such as physical or learning disabilities, and known limitations around the 'reachability' of communities and groups. Some relate specifically to digital participation, such as digital access or connectivity issues, lack of digital skills or confidence, data security concerns and mistrust of digital systems. In support of its objectives the programme is taking steps to address and overcome all of these challenges. Significantly, whilst the 2021 census will be predominantly online, paper questionnaires and materials will also be available. This represents a major mitigation against the risk of negative impact through digital exclusion.

### Data Collection

Respondents will be able to complete the census questionnaire online, or can request a paper questionnaire for return by post. Enumeration processes include the use of a robust address list to ensure everyone can have a fair chance of completing a census return. This is complemented by deployment of a large field force who will seek to ensure every household and communal establishment is able to participate in the census. The Census Coverage Survey, which follows up a sample of the main operation, assesses the extent of coverage across the whole population.

### Data Processing and Statistical Outputs

Statistical data processing, and the methodology underpinning it, will seek to ensure that all characteristics captured by the census are processed appropriately and consistently to best meet the identified user needs, and are considered throughout the data lifecycle. Statistical Disclosure Control policies and processes protect individuals, particularly those who hold certain protected characteristics, from being identifiable from census outputs.

### Publicity, Communications and Engagement

The census website will feature the online data collection instrument and a wide range of help and guidance. Specifically, this will include a general content portal, the online census questionnaire engine, and specific questions guidance.

Extensive user research has been conducted to support and inform the development of the online collection instrument.

A free-to-use dedicated Contact Centre will be established for 2021 and promoted to handle all census enquiries, fulfilment requests and complaints. It will be operated by fully-trained staff and will offer translation services, telephone data capture and other support functions.

Publicity, marketing and communications will seek to raise awareness and maximise motivation to participate amongst all groups and communities. Messaging will be tailored to a number of different audiences using a range of platforms, including social media and will seek to educate and reassure whilst highlighting the benefits of the census, and allaying concerns around security of data.

NRS will seek to maximise response amongst those groups who are considered to be at most risk of non-participation, by building relationships through direct

engagement with their representative and support organisations, and local authorities. This engagement will seek to identify, explore and maximise our understanding of the motivational, attitudinal and circumstantial barriers of relevance to each group. Community engagement activities will seek to develop knowledge and intelligence at local levels to inform messaging and tactics, including local and regional prevalence of target populations and the communications channels and networks they use.

Work to establish working stakeholder relationships to support this approach is already well underway and will grow and intensify moving forward towards 2021.

### Digital participation

The public sector in Scotland is committed to respond to the changing expectations of customers by realising the opportunities that technology provides and delivering an increasing proportion of services online. Part of the [Scottish Government's Digital Strategy](#) is to increase digital participation in order to enable social mobility and tackle persistent inequalities. The online delivery of public services will also provide services which are easier, quicker and more convenient for people to use, and at a lower cost than other methods allow. The UK Government's Digital Efficiency Report suggests that transactions online are 20 times cheaper than by phone, 30 times cheaper than by post and as much as 50 times cheaper than face-to-face.

In general terms Scotland can be considered a digital nation. The 2018 Scottish Household Survey (SHS) reports that home internet access has increased steadily over time, reaching an all-time high of 87 per cent of households in 2018<sup>2</sup>. Previously, other sources have shown 40 per cent of people are reported to have a tablet computer (SCVO, 2015) and 63 per cent use a smartphone (Ofcom, 2015a).

While this information is a useful indicator of internet availability it is not necessarily indicative of potential response to a requirement to use the internet for a specific task such as completing a census form. A report published by the Carnegie UK Trust (Carnegie UK, 2014) highlights this fact noting that the barriers to getting online are multiple, varied and complex. They state that "being digitally connected is not the same as being digitally included". The same point was also made in a report outlining research looking at links between digital and social disengagement (Helsper, 2008) which notes "simply providing access to these platforms is not enough – digital disengagement is a complex compound problem involving cultural, social and attitudinal factors and in some cases informed 'digital choice'".

It is important therefore to have a full understanding of all factors influencing internet use before any assessment of potential digital participation can be made.

Everybody has their own individual set of circumstances and their own reasons for not being online. There are 4 main kinds of challenge people face: access (accessibility, location, cost, technology, infrastructure, language); skills (literacy, digital, security, confidence); motivation (risks, necessity, financial benefits, social benefits, health and wellbeing benefits); trust (identity, security, standards, reputation). The first two, a lack of access or skills result in 'Digital Exclusion' while

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<sup>2</sup> [Scottish Household Survey 2018: Annual Report](#)

the latter two, lack of motivation or trust may be best grouped with those situations where individuals have access and make use of the internet but will choose not to complete an online census as 'digital choice'.

Both exclusion and choice could have a significant impact on online response rates therefore it is important that a focus for Scotland's Census 2021 is on promoting online participation and not just tackling digital exclusion.

We are also keenly aware of the demographics and infrastructural aspects of the digital connectivity landscape in Scotland. Households with higher income are more likely to have internet access. Households with lower incomes and households in Scotland's most deprived areas were less likely to have home internet access than higher income households and those in less deprived areas, but the gap has narrowed in recent years. Internet access varies by tenure of households. Ninety per cent of households who owned their home and 91 per cent of those in private rented housing had home internet access compared to 75 per cent of those in social rented housing. The vast majority of households with internet access at home had a broadband connection in 2018 (99 per cent), and 46 per cent had access via a superfast broadband subscription, an increase from 30 per cent in 2017.<sup>3</sup>

The option of submitting census questionnaires online was introduced for the first time in 2011 to those living in households; those living in communal establishments were only able to complete on paper.. Around 20 per cent of all returns were submitted online. The 2021 Census is being designed under the principle of '[Digital First](#)' with a target online completion ratio of 80%. Development of the online collection instrument has incorporated a programme of user research to understand accessibility issues and therefore to inform an online delivery that is accessible. The move to a primarily online census, including a change in enumeration strategy (e.g. post out of contact materials instead of enumerator hand delivery), will reduce the direct contact between householders and field staff. Public assistance channels and services together with publicity and marketing, will have a critical role in compensating for this and encouraging and enabling maximum response. Public assistance services will be designed to encourage and enable those who can use digital self-service to do so, whilst helping those who cannot use self-service. NRS will also provide a range of non-digital access channels but will encourage the public to use our digital channels. NRS will support this channel shift by ensuring quality, ease and efficiency of our digital services and by providing assisted digital support. Online services will be promoted through a number of different routes, such as community engagement activity, publicity initiatives, websites, contact materials and information leaflets. To reflect the steep rise in the use of social media in recent years, there will be a much greater emphasis on the use of social media as part of the programme's marketing and publicity activity, to satisfy increased customer demand and expectation. We are monitoring broadband roll-out initiatives overseen by the Scottish Government and Highlands and Islands Enterprise which have set ambitious targets for broadband coverage across Scotland. We will continue to track progress against such initiatives to develop and maintain knowledge of those localities where digital access presents the biggest challenge, so we can best channel our support and assistance efforts.

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<sup>3</sup> [Scottish Household Survey 2018: Annual Report](#)



## Field Operations and Recruitment

The field force which supported Scotland's Census 2011 was in the region of around 7,500 staff who were responsible for hand-delivery of paper census questionnaires to the vast majority of Scotland's households. In 2021 initial contact with households will be by letter and field force responsibilities will focus on following up non-response. Field force is expected to be around half the size of that in 2011.

Recruitment and employment practices will be strictly in accordance with relevant employment legislation.

## Census Rehearsal

As part of our preparations for Scotland's Census 2021, NRS undertook a public rehearsal in parts of Scotland.

NRS is aiming to make the 2021 Census more digital and accessible, available for completion online, as well as on paper. The rehearsal helped us to test our systems and processes as we get ready for the Census.

The rehearsal took place during October and November 2019. People living in households in parts of Glasgow City, and in Dumfries and Galloway, and Na h-Eileanan Siar were asked to help by taking part, and received a letter in early October with more information about the rehearsal and how to participate.

Unlike the Census itself, participation in the rehearsal is not a legal requirement. Householders in these areas were asked to take part on a purely voluntary basis to help ensure things go smoothly for the main Census in 2021.

Communal establishment enumeration operations were not included in the rehearsal activities.

## **3. Summary of evidence and assessment findings**

### **Statistical Outputs**

Evidence from the Scottish Household Survey 2018 indicates that households with lower incomes and households in Scotland's most deprived areas are less likely to have home internet access than higher-income households and those in less deprived areas<sup>4</sup>, although the gap has narrowed in recent years. As such, socio-economically disadvantaged individuals may be more likely to have difficulties in accessing census outputs that are made available online.

Census outputs will be made available in a variety of accessible formats both online and in hard copies on request. This will ensure that all data users, regardless of their internet access or proficiency will have access to census data.

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<sup>4</sup> [Scottish Household Survey 2018: Annual Report](#)

Evidence from the Scottish Government's Scottish Social Attitudes 2017<sup>5</sup> survey indicates that those in the most deprived areas of Scotland have lower confidence in the Scottish Government and Scottish Local Authorities generally than those in the least deprived areas. This suggests that those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds may be more distrustful of outputs from Scotland's Census 2021. There is therefore a risk that non-completion may be higher amongst these groups. The consequence of this scenario is two-fold. Firstly there is a higher likelihood of incurring non-compliance penalties, and secondly the quality of data collected could be impacted resulting in under-representation of inequality levels, arguably in those very areas where there is a greater need for quality and accuracy of data.

This risk drives the need for enumeration and fieldwork policies to take any necessary steps to build public confidence and maximise response from these groups and areas.

As in previous censuses, data<sup>6</sup> from Scotland's Census 2021 will be used to derive the [National Statistics Socio-economic Classification \(NS-SEC\)](#) which provides an indicator of socio-economic position based on occupation. Stakeholder engagement revealed a strong user need for the NS-SEC and related census outputs, particularly in relation to service planning/provision for socio-economically disadvantaged groups and equality monitoring.

During the Beyond 2011 programme consultation process, evidence received from many users of alternative and supplementary data sources which included components actually derived from the census, such as for example, Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (SNS) (now superseded by the Open Data Platform) and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD), emphasised<sup>7</sup> how useful these sources had been for their purposes. SNS, formerly, and SIMD are considered by some to be the main drivers for planning in council areas, and particularly useful for investment regeneration.

SIMD, which is available on the Scottish Government website, is extensively used by a range of stakeholders for in depth analysis on the underlying causes of deprivation and targeting areas for support and intervention. SIMD has used census data<sup>8</sup>, in addition to a range of other sources of information, to calculate a measure of deprivation within small data zone areas. Each data zone area has roughly the same population. Local authorities use SIMD to identify small area concentrations of multiple deprivation.

There is recognition amongst users that the SIMD<sup>9</sup> has issues in areas with a low population density. For instance, in the Highland area, because of the population

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-social-attitudes-attitudes-government-economy-public-services-2017/>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/census2021/Labour\\_Market\\_Topic\\_Report.pdf](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/census2021/Labour_Market_Topic_Report.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/beyond-2011-the-future-of-census-statistics/reports-and-research>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/0050/00504822.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/files//census/2021-census/Stakeholder-Engagement/user-require-analysis-report.pdf>

density being low, often there are two or three areas with completely different demographics joined together. This can result in a data zone that can skew the apparent deprivation and 'hide' very deprived areas.

SNS was the Scottish Government's on-going programme to improve the availability, consistency and accessibility of small area statistics in Scotland. SNS developed the systems to enable statistics across policy areas including information about benefits, education, health and the labour market to be brought together across a range of geography levels, and has since been superseded by the Scottish Government's Open Data Platform, which enables users to explore, visualise and download over 250 datasets from a range of official statistics producers.

## Digital Exclusion

There are a number of barriers and challenges which can potentially limit or hinder participation in the census, particularly given the Digital First approach for Scotland's Census 2021. These include lack of awareness, lack of understanding, privacy concerns, language, mistrust in/lack of engagement with officialdom, impairments such as physical or learning disabilities, and known limitations around the 'reachability' of communities and groups. Some issues relate specifically to digital participation, such as digital access or connectivity issues, lack of digital skills or confidence, data security concerns and mistrust of digital systems. It is recognised that socio-economic factors can significantly influence many of these barriers and challenges. In support of its objectives the programme is taking steps to address and overcome all of these challenges. However, whilst the 2021 census will be predominantly online, paper questionnaires and materials will also be available. This represents a significant mitigation against the risk of negative impact through digital exclusion. Paper questionnaires will be available via the Contact Centre which can be contacted free of charge, as well as from field staff following up non-responding households. Initial contact materials will clearly highlight the paper option and direct respondents accordingly, as will the census website and publicity content. Paper questionnaires requested via these channels will be sent by post and returnable by post, free of charge. All of these measures carry a cost to the public purse but the benefits of enabling free access to facilitate participation for all considerably outweigh that cost.

The common factors that are associated with digital exclusion are:

- **Skills** and the confidence to use them
- **Access** to infrastructure
- **Cost** of equipment and service
- **Motivation/Interest** and the personal aspiration that makes gaining digital skills relevant and important.

Digitally excluded groups are more likely to be:

- Those aged 75+
- Those in areas of multiple deprivation
- Those who are most vulnerable in society
- Non-working single adult households
- Households without cars
- Households in social rented accommodation

- Lower income households
- Lower education level.
- Households in remote locations

These are the groups where greater encouragement to complete online may be needed or greater awareness of support available or the alternatives may need to be generated.

Digitally excluded people will need assistance of some form to respond to the census and in order to best provide assistance NRS must determine who these people are and which areas of Scotland they live in. This will enable Public Assistance workstreams to plan appropriate services which can be targeted towards areas that are most affected.

Older people, people with disabilities or young people may be more likely to have poorer digital skills and/or confidence/and or be unwilling to complete the Census<sup>10</sup>.

Those on high income are likely to have more money to spend on services like the internet while those on lower incomes might forego the cost of an internet connection and the associated costs of the equipment like computers or tablets, as a limited budget won't allow for them.

Working-age adults in DE socio-economic group<sup>11</sup> households are more than three times as likely as those in non-DE households to be non-users of the internet (14% vs. 4%).

Households in the 20 per cent most deprived areas in Scotland were less likely than those in the 20 per cent least deprived areas to have access to the internet at home (82 per cent and 94 per cent respectively in 2018<sup>12</sup>). The gap in home internet access between households in Scotland's 20 per cent most and 20 per cent least deprived areas has decreased gradually over time from 36 percentage points in 2006 to 12 percentage points in 2018. Nineteen per cent of adults living in the 20 per cent most deprived areas in Scotland reported not using the internet in 2018, compared to seven per cent in the 20 per cent least deprived areas. Twenty-three per cent of adults in social rented housing reported not using the internet in 2018, compared to only five per cent of those in private rented housing and 12 per cent of those that owned their own homes.

In 2018, 69 per cent of households with an income of less than £10,000 had internet access at home. In comparison, almost all (99 per cent) households with an income of 40,000 and over had home internet access. Since 2003, the gap in home internet access between the lowest income group (£0 - £6,000) and the highest income group (over £40,000), has decreased from 69 percentage points to 30 percentage points in 2018. Among those that have internet access, a lower proportion of adults in social

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<sup>10</sup> <http://oxis.oii.ox.ac.uk/reports/>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0024/149253/online-nation-summary.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/149253/online-nation-summary.pdf)

The DE social grades comprise semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers (D) and state pensioners, casual and lowest grade workers, unemployed with state benefits only

<sup>12</sup> [Scottish Household Survey 2018: Annual Report](#)

housing were confident in their ability to use the internet than those in private rented housing and those who own their own homes.

In 2018, around 87 per cent of households have home internet access, but this means that about an eighth of all households would not be able to complete online in their own home.

Clearly some of these will be able to complete without broadband, via smartphone or using public or a friend's internet access. However, there will also be people with home internet access who do not have the capability or inclination to complete online. Cost has been identified as a barrier, as in 2018. About 3 in ten households (31 per cent) with an income less than £10,000 per annum did not have home access to internet compared the national average of 13 per cent.<sup>13</sup>

We are exploring what assisted digital support can be provided to the public to enable them to get online and complete their census questionnaire.

The programme has undertaken research around the production of a Digital Exclusion Index (DEI) to identify and analyse those communities and localities in Scotland most at risk of non-participation in census due to digital exclusion factors. This work will provide valuable background on a range of operational aspects.

## **Field Operations and Data Collection**

The DEI will provide a valuable evidence-base to inform field force operations, including resourcing, follow-up policies and logistics.

People on low incomes are most vulnerable to the financial impact of any penalty imposed in respect of non-compliance with the census.

Contact Centre and Field Force staff will be able to provide assistance to respondents to aid completion of the questionnaire, including scripts to help best respond to enquiries appropriately.

Field Force staff will carry a language card covering the top 24 community language translations, and signposting to where assistance is available. The Contact Centre will feature a live interpretation service covering over 200 languages. Translated questionnaire guidance will be available in the top 15 community languages.

All staff will receive equality and diversity training and all operations will align to the provisions of the Equality Act 2010.

Many groups who may experience socio-economic disadvantage may be resident in communal establishments such as care homes, halls of residence, detention and asylum establishments. This can include older people, people with disabilities, students, prisoners, refugees and asylum seekers.

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.ofcom.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/113222/Adults-Media-Use-and-Attitudes-Report-2018.pdf](https://www.ofcom.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/113222/Adults-Media-Use-and-Attitudes-Report-2018.pdf)

There have been recent changes to the communal establishment approaches to simplify the operational process. The new approaches are very similar to 2011 where the majority of establishments will be given paper questionnaires, though some will receive initial contact letters to encourage self-response online. Where possible, depending on the type of establishments and its residents, there will be the ability to complete online with an internet access code available on the paper product.

This is a change from the approach where field staff would attend care homes and similar establishments for 1 day to sit with residents and capture their census response on a mobile device.

While this was less respondent burden for the manager the burden on vulnerable and elderly residents was agreed too high to consider an effective method of collecting census data.

With this change the manager of the establishment will be involved similarly to 2011, where they will be asked to issue, encourage completion and collect from residents.

#### Online Collection Instrument: Research

Extensive research has been conducted to support and inform the development of the online collection instrument, which will host the online census questionnaire and the associated portal containing information, guidance and content, and specific help for answering the census questions. The following strands of research have been undertaken: -

- Information Needs User Research
- Usability and Accessibility Testing Research
- Online User Testing Research
- Audience Discovery Research

This work has specifically targeted potential users from a wide range of backgrounds and capabilities, providing valuable insights into the needs and motivations of different groups and communities. These include people with skills limitations, low literacy, reading impairments, English language limitations, ethnic minorities and care home residents. It is unknown to what extent respondents had experienced socio-economic disadvantage. Whilst not targeted as a specific category, many of the groups involved are likely to have included people experiencing poverty, although it cannot be assumed that the least well-off will have taken part.

Summaries of this work and its outcomes can be found at [Annex A](#).

### **Communications and Stakeholder Engagement**

It will be important to address all barriers to census participation although those related to lack of awareness and negative perceptions are more likely to need broader targeting while lack of skills, impairments and digital barriers will apply to more specific groups of the population.

While these are for the most part practical barriers, beyond these, if there is no engagement with either the process or the outcome – a state of apathy is likely to

take over. With no particular incentive or motivation to complete, it is easier to find reasons and excuses for not doing so. This makes clear that any communications need to ensure that the target audiences see the relevance and are motivated to respond in a timely manner.

There is much commonality in terms of the groups that are less likely to respond based on previous censuses in Scotland as well as recent research and experience internationally. These are the groups where specific efforts and communications are likely to be needed to boost response. In past censuses targeted efforts have been made towards ethnic minorities and young people/students. For 2021 there is evidence for extending activities specifically towards those in higher deprivation areas and those with chaotic lifestyles.

For many, the smartphone is an important route to internet access. For some this will be because this is the only way they have of doing so privately and therefore completion of the census questionnaire via smartphone and communication of this possibility are critical.

It will also be necessary to offer communal places where people can complete free of charge and in private and again, this will need to be communicated.

Stakeholder engagement activities and events, for example relating to outputs and question development, have struggled to engage individuals and groups from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who have therefore been under-represented. This could mean that the specific needs and views of individuals and groups from deprived backgrounds are not being adequately captured through engagement processes.

NRS will continue to reach out to stakeholder groups and will look to build and develop relationships with contacts from a broad range of backgrounds to inform planning and operations.

In respect of communications, publicity, enumeration and fieldwork, specific focus will be given to groups including older people, young adults, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities, people with chaotic lifestyles, students, people with mental health issues, people with literacy problems, low earners, parents of young children, homeless and rough sleepers, and prisoners.

Based on evidence from the 2011 census, migrants, asylum seekers, refugees and gypsy/traveller communities have lower engagement. Stakeholder engagement is underway with key stakeholders to raise awareness of the census and strengthen relationships.

Engagement with local authorities is ongoing in the lead up to 2021 to understand the barriers affecting different groups across different localities and how best to communicate and engage with these groups.

Advanced contact with communal establishments such as care homes will enable us to understand and prepare for specific resident needs in designing bespoke enumeration processes.

NRS has already established good working relationships with a number of stakeholder organisations who represent the groups listed above.

Moving forward towards 2021, NRS will look to work closely with national and local organisations and suppliers to develop the most effective ways of engaging with these key audiences.

NRS undertook a period of consultation throughout September for each of the Impact Assessments accompanying the Census Order. Impact Assessments have been updated to reflect feedback where appropriate. A report on the consultation has been published on the [Scotland's Census website](#).

## **Evaluation**

The census rehearsal will enable the testing of a number of aspects of the programme prior to the live operation in 2021. The experiences, learnings and findings from the rehearsal will be of the utmost importance as we refine our plans and prepare for the main event. This assessment will be refreshed and updated to take account of this knowledge. In addition further research, evaluation and engagement will help towards making the 2021 Census as inclusive and as accessible as possible.

## **4. Sign off**

  
**Signature:**

**Name:** Paul Lowe

**Job title:** Registrar General



## **Annex A - Online Collection Instrument: Research**

### **Accessibility Testing Research Summary**

The Online Collection Instrument (OCI) delivers the core question set for the census. There was a need to conduct some initial accessibility testing on the early version of the site to identify any early issues. The User Centred Design UCD team conducted a round of accessibility testing with 10 participants with a variety of disabilities.

Around half of the participants were visited in their home in order to allow for the use of any specific assistive technology such as screen readers and magnifiers and to help make them more comfortable.

From the OCI, we tested:

- On-boarding – entering Internet Access Code (IAC), setting up a password and password recovery.
- Questions H1-5 – details of who is in the household

Participants ranged from 20 to 61 years of age and had a range of disabilities and assistive technology needs, including dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism, blindness, arthritis, detached retina, macular degeneration, Friedreich's ataxia.

#### **Key findings**

The majority of participants found it relatively straightforward to get through the on-boarding and H1-5 sections of the prototype. They were very positive about the idea of completing the census online as it meant they would be able to complete it in a format best suited to them, save progress and complete it in their own time.

However, there were a number of overarching issues that affected all types of users. These were predominantly usability issues, but some assistive technology specific issues were encountered as well. Usability issues will cause problems for all users, but they are heightened for people with disabilities and users of assistive technology. Causing confusion, frustration and being slowed down can have a significant impact on these users. In some situations it can cause stress/anxiety and lead them to seek support with completion or make them feel like they don't wish to continue. Many of the participants had to stop to ask the moderator what was meant or required and some needed to be told how to progress to the next step.

Additionally, while the questions in this version of the prototype were not the final 2021 question set, a number of usability issues were uncovered that will be important to consider independent of the question content and can be worked on and resolved for subsequent rounds of usability testing.

The key issues identified included:

- Unclear error messaging when creating a password
- 'Set up password recovery' usability and error messaging
- Users having difficulty understanding what's being asked for in the 'temporarily away' question

- Users having difficulty understanding what is being asked for in the 'visitors' question
- Confusion caused by the 'dashboard' when users land on it for the first time
- Unclear or missing instructions or supporting text – e.g. needing to use capitals and hyphens in the IAC code
- The IAC code was challenging for many

Findings specific to assistive technology were identified:

- Zoomtext issues: participants who used screen magnifiers appreciated the amount of space on each page and having single questions per page. However, a number of issues specific to using ZoomTextScreen reader issues: participants who used screen readers had very different experiences. This could be for a number of reasons such as version of software, device used or level of users' experience with assistive technology.

Additional findings:

- Some users may not be able to read the letter, the service needs to consider how blind people living on their own can be supported.
- Some users will require a large print letter to be able to read the IAC number, consider how they can be easily identified and provided with the right information. Is there any way of knowing about this need before sending the letters out.
- When the initial letter will be sent out to give citizens enough time to get right version of information that they need, and also how any reminder services may come through to them (i.e. reminder letters are inappropriate for a person that is blind).
- Some users will misplace or lose the letter and so how they can still access online without the IAC code will need to be considered and made clear to users.

## Information Needs User Research Summary

This research, to understand whether the digital version of the 2021 Census meets the needs of citizens, comprised of multiple rounds of usability and accessibility testing from December 2018 – March 2019, conducted by the Scottish Government Digital Transformation Division's User Centred Design team. While these sessions predominantly focussed on the use of the digital components (i.e. the website portal and the 'online collection instrument' (OCI)), we also discussed what information participants expected or felt they would need in order to take part in the census at various points, including showing a version of the letter to set context.

The main findings from these sessions are regarding usability and accessibility, which have been reported via the 'OCI User Testing' strand of work, but broader insight around information needs have also been uncovered. In order to further understand information needs for citizens we utilised a number of sessions to explore the following objectives:

- Understand what information is required by a user to support them in their census experience.

- Understand what channels users expect to be able to access information to support them in their census experience
- Review of the current language and terminology to determine whether it supports the user's understanding of the information they need in order to complete the census
- Understand how the user's need for information changes over their census collect experience.

Key findings:

- Standard patterns for question pages: reduces cognitive load which may quicken response.
- Explanation and narrative to set expectations and orientation users within the form would benefit some users.
- In a small number of cases there was misunderstanding of the questions
- Type ahead functionality for industry and occupation questions caused particular problems in choosing an answer.
- Hard validation meant users got stuck in a loop where they could not answer a question and so could not submit their census response.
- Problems accessing Help and Support while in the questionnaire
- Age related question routing meant some questions are asked of children within the household that are not relevant for a child.
- Misunderstanding of questions or uncertainty about how to answer.

Findings are informing further development of OCI and the question engine to maximise respondent ease and minimise respondent burden.

**Audience Discovery Research - Qualitative research among 'seldom heard' audiences**

- To investigate their needs and inform the design of the process and website for Scotland's Census 2021.
- Research to provide a deep and robust understanding of user needs – with a specific focus on those users who have specific situations for Census collection or who require Assisted Digital support.
- The purpose is to ensure that these users' needs are accurately represented in the design of the OCI: -
  - Flat / House Sharers
  - Communal Establishments
  - Halls of Residence
  - Care Homes
  - Communities with Reduced Links
  - Ethnic Communities (sample included Somali, Roma, African, Romanian, Kurdish)
  - Religious Communities (sample included Sikh, Muslim)
  - Other Communities (Camphill)
  - Skill Limitations
  - Digital Disengagement

- Low Literacy Skills
- Reading Impairment
- Supported Applications
- English Language Limitations
- Gaelic Speakers

With a focus on exploration and discovery, the detailed research objectives were: -

- Develop a deep knowledge of who the service users are in terms of their circumstances, situations, attitudes, skills, abilities (as appropriate)
- In relation to officialdom generally; in relation to the Census specifically
- To what extent information and support are/are not accessed
- Understand motivators and barriers to completing the Census
- Comprehension of the Census; its (perceived) importance
- Personal obligations
- Identify the support and interventions that would facilitate participation in the online Census
- Information needed, support needed, enumeration needs
- Explore perceptions of and reactions to the OCI design
- Aspects that help and hinder completion
- Identify how the above should be reflected in the OCI, and in general, to ensure a successful Census

#### Situations and skills

- Broad spectrum of situations: some people have thrived in Scotland, some have struggled.
  - Positive experiences can inspire appreciation of Scotland / its government, and willingness to comply with officialdom.
  - But some feel let down by the system and less willing to comply.
  - Others fear the authorities and sharing personal information.
- Broad spectrum of skills and skill levels across Digital, English Language, Reading Impairment, Literacy.
  - Low skills don't seem to necessarily correlate with a less positive life experience.
  - Key factor seems to be whether the family or household unit perceives it's 'doing well'.
  - Possible exception: low Literacy Skills might have a stronger correlation with feeling let down by the system, that life has been impoverished (unnecessarily).

#### Support

- People with lower skills tend to have an established support network
  - Family, friends, Community Leaders and Organisations etc they trust and turn to for help / advice.
  - Many need 'hands-on' support with officialdom in general, English translation, reading and writing, or digital activity.
- Hands-on support is likely one of the most important success factors for the Census
  - Providing the skills that are missing...and also overcoming low motivation / mistrust / scepticism.
- Reaching out to Community Leaders and Organisations is vital

- They are close to their communities, strong advocates of the Census, and very keen to help.
- Like the general population, some people have stronger skills and will do well with 'self-serve' support available from their network or on the website.

#### Attitudes to the Census

- A spectrum of engagement with the Census.
  - A few 'evangelists', e.g. Community Leaders and Managers of Community Establishments.
  - Some people are mistrustful or resistant, likely due to personal experience.
  - Most seem to be around the mid-point: willing to carry out their legal obligation, but might not perceive the value of the Census.
- Opportunity to improve engagement for the greater success of the Census – quality of experience for the public as well as quality and accuracy of information.
  - Many simply don't know much about it – what it's for, what it stands for, the difference it can make.
  - Improving understanding tends to improve engagement.

#### The letter

- The letter presents significant difficulties for people with lower skills
  - What's it about? What does it mean? What do I need to do? Do I have to?
- Indeed, for many, the letter is 'daunting' to read – many won't see it through to the second page and will seek help.
- It conditions expectations that participating in the Census will be difficult – too difficult to attempt.

#### The website

- By contrast, when people see the design for the website, confidence builds.
- Some now feel they will 'have a go' under their own steam, seeking help if needed, and look forward to a sense of achievement.
  - So, it's important to make the process (seem) easy in order to optimise autonomous participation.
- The website design creates a pleasing and reassuring atmosphere.
  - Excellent use of colour, space, imagery (people), and nuggets of text to increase engagement and reduce cognitive effort – and suggest it's easy.
  - Wears its official credentials lightly.
  - Surprisingly and positively different from the letter and much official communication; should play a central role in shaping engagement.

**Overall, there is enough evidence to suggest that, with sufficient and appropriate support and communication, these 'seldom heard' audiences are very likely to engage with Scotland's Census 2021.**