

**Scotland's Census 2021  
Strategic Environmental  
Assessment  
Pre-screening notification**

**June 2020**

## SEA PRE-SCREENING DOCUMENT

**Responsible Authority:**

National Records of Scotland (NRS)

**Title of the plan:**

Scotland's Census 2021 programme

**What prompted the plan:**

(e.g. a legislative, regulatory or administrative provision)

For over 200 years, Scotland has relied on the ten yearly census to underpin national and local decision making and the Census Act 1920 enshrined it as a function of the Registrar General (RG) for Scotland (NRS Chief Executive). Each census is underpinned by a Census Order and Census Regulations.

**Plan subject:**

(e.g. transport)

Socio-demographic statistical information

**Brief summary of the plan:**

(including the area or location to which the plan related)

The 1920 Act requires the Registrar General for Scotland (RG) to determine the arrangements made for the taking of the census.

The Scotland's Census 2021 objectives are to:

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

The programme has two main strands. Firstly, the aim of the programme is to conduct a successful census operation in 2021 to produce statistical data on Scotland's population to the agreed levels of accuracy. Secondly, the programme wants to explore the use of administrative data in the conduct and production of this and future censuses.

Conducting this and future censuses enables National Records of Scotland to fulfil its stated purpose to "to collect, preserve and produce information about Scotland's people and history and make it available to inform present and future generations."

### Summary of Operations

The 2021 operation will be predominantly online. This and other design modifications are expected to achieve substantial reductions in paper and logistical requirements compared to 2011.

Our aim is that every household in Scotland will receive a letter by post containing an internet access code which respondents will use to access the online census questionnaire. Respondents will be able to request a paper version of the questionnaire which will mostly be printed on demand. Whilst in 2011 the vast majority of questionnaires were hand-delivered in paper form by field staff, in 2021 it is proposed that letters will be issued containing internet access codes enabling respondents to access the online data collection system

Field staff will directly follow-up non-responding households only, using supplied mobile devices. This represents a significant change from the 2011 Census and reflects a reduction in the size of field force whilst also anticipated to reduce field staff travel and paper usage. Any environmental impact as a result of this is expected to be none or minimal.

### Census Rehearsal

As part of our preparations for Scotland's Census 2021, NRS undertook a public rehearsal in parts of Scotland. 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 was 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. Field force and communal establishment enumeration operations were not included in the rehearsal activities.

The rehearsal highlighted that the majority of the approaches NRS are proposing to use to contact citizens and collect data were feasible and worked as expected. It also provided further evidence that there are a relatively small number of aspects of our approach that require additional improvements, the majority of which were already known to us and are tied into our post-rehearsal work schedule.

	<p>The rehearsal also provided further reassurance that our chosen approaches in many respects worked well. For example, initial contact materials and reminder letters worked well to increase returns, elements of our local engagement and marketing strategy tested strongly, and the overall design and functionality of the online and paper questionnaires allowed the public to complete returns and deliver usable data for our systems.</p> <p>The rehearsal did importantly identify some new areas of improvement for NRS to take forward. These included the need to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• make improvements to how we collect address information;</li><li>• make improvements to some online question routing;</li><li>• review the timing and tailoring of reminder letters; and</li><li>• improve the provision of management information.</li></ul> <p>The rehearsal evaluation report can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p>
<p><b>Brief summary of the likely environmental consequences:</b> (including whether it has been determined that the plan is likely to have no or minimum effects, either directly or indirectly)</p>	<p>In completing this section we have sought to address each of the criteria set out in Schedule 2 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005.</p> <p>Whilst users, such as local authorities, have evidenced that Census data is a key component in decision-making around resource allocation for the provision of a vast array of public and commercial services, the programme itself plays no part in resource-allocation processes. In addition, the programme carries no influence over other plans, programmes and strategies, although the statistical data outputs from the census will in many cases influence the location, size and nature of projects and initiatives.</p> <p>Operations, which are ten-yearly, are designed to reach the whole of Scotland's population, centering around Census Day 2021 with no scope to repeat the process or parts of it in the event of issues with delivery.</p> <p>With reference to the criteria specified within Schedule 2 of the Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 we conclude that the environmental effects of the programme's operational aspects are anticipated to be no or minimal and therefore a Strategic Environmental Assessment is not required.</p> <p>This assessment reflects the current plans for Scotland's Census 2021, following the Census Rehearsal in October 2019.</p>

NRS undertook a period of consultation throughout September 2019 for each of the Impact Assessments accompanying the Census Order (Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Impact Assessment, Data Protection Impact Assessment, Fairer Scotland Duty Impact Assessment, Human Rights Impact Assessment, Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment, Business Regulatory Impact Assessment, Island Communities Impact Assessment). Impact Assessments have been updated to reflect feedback where appropriate. A report on the consultation has been published on the [Scotland's Census website](#).

**Contact details:**

Scotland's Census 2021  
National Records of Scotland  
Ladywell House  
Edinburgh  
EH12 7TF  
+ 44(0)131 314 4391

[scotlandscensus@nrscotland.gov.uk](mailto:scotlandscensus@nrscotland.gov.uk)

**Date of opinion:**

June 2020

When completed send to: [SEA.gateway@scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:SEA.gateway@scotland.gsi.gov.uk) or to SEA Gateway, Scottish Government, Area 2H (South), Victoria Quay, Edinburgh, EH6 6QQ