

Terms of Reference – International Steering Group

International Steering Group and Scotland's Census

Background – as of 20th May 2022

1. Scotland's Census is currently drawing to the close of its Collect phase. The original plan had been to finish Collect on 1st May, but return rates nationally [79.2 %] and locally [only 1 LA > 85 %] were considered by National Records of Scotland (NRS) and Scottish Government Ministers to be too low. This assessment was informed by the likely perception of users – given the KPIs were 94 % national response and all LAs achieving at least 85% response - and the impact of low returns nationally and in socially deprived areas.
2. A decision was taken by Ministers to continue Collect for the rest of May. This has driven up returns which with 5 days left are close to 86 % nationally. Of Scotland's 32 Local Authorities, 25 LAs > 85 % (of which 3 LAs > 90 %,) and 2 LAs < 80 % (lowest being 79.0 %). NRS is confident that the census returns, census coverage survey, and administrative data will provide the basis for high quality Census Outputs which meet the needs of users.
3. The decision to close Collect has not been taken, and will be a combination of factors such as the practicalities associated with continuing to run Collect, costs, return rates and impact on Census Coverage Survey (CCS) and processing. However, following discussion with Sir Ian Diamond (National Statistician), NRS and the Scottish Government have agreed that an International Steering Group should be formed that would help provide context (including to the public) for the decision to close Collect, and then help steer the focus of NRS's work through the CCS, use of administrative data, and processing work.

Timescales

4. The current working assumption is that Census Collect will close at the end of May. Irrespective of whether this happens there will be a need for the Scottish Government and National Records of Scotland to make a statement regarding the progress being made with Scotland's Census and the plans for delivering high quality Census outputs.
5. The first meeting of the Steering Group should take place before the end of May. Subsequent meetings will be decided by the Steering Group, but it is likely that one will be close to the date of the 1st meeting and then another at the end of July – to hear about progress with the Census Coverage Survey. With a further one in October – to hear about initial modelling and administrative data.

Purpose of International Steering Group

6. The Panel is being established at the request of the Registrar General for Scotland and the chair will report the groups findings to him. The Steering Group will provide two inter-dependent functions. The first is to provide a broad assessment of the position of Scotland's Census at the end of May. This is likely to be the point at which Census Collect is closed, and as such the Steering Group will be asked to agree a statement which can be used in public on the status of the Census.

7. The statement will be high level, based as it will be on the discussion and papers from the first Steering Group meeting, and will answer the question 'Can Scotland's Census continue with confidence to move from Census Collect and into the next stages of the Census Programme'. In reaching its conclusion the Steering Group will wish to consider the current return rates, the plans for the Census Coverage Survey, the opportunity to adjust the CCS methodology, the plans for using administrative data, and the opportunity to adjust the use of administrative data.

8. The second function is to steer the work of NRS – over perhaps the next year – as NRS works to draw on the census results, the results of the CCS and administrative data to create a statistical database ready for the production of Census Outputs.

9. In fulfilling these functions it is likely that NRS will look to draw on the methodological / statistical skills of Group members and their wider organisation, and also on their capacity to help unlock key administrative data.

Group Members

10. Membership may evolve as required to address issues, but the first meeting will invite

Professor James Brown – University of Technology, Sydney (CHAIR)

Professor Sir Ian Diamond – UK National Statistician

Professor David Martin – Southampton University

Abby Morgan – Stats New Zealand

Professor Andrew Morris – Health Data Research UK

Owen Abbott – Office for National Statistics

Alistair McAlpine – Chief Statistician, Scottish Government

Roeland Beerteen - Chief Statistician, Statistics Flanders

NRS Lead Representative to the Panel

Pete Whitehouse – National Records of Scotland

The NRS lead representative will provide advice, information and support to the Panel in relation to the existing design of the census and the methodological

approaches being used. They will act as the key conduit between the work of the Panel and NRS and ensure that the panel are provided with the necessary information and resources to conduct their work.

Logistics

11. Meetings will take place via TEAMS and due to the location of members, will take place either early to mid-morning (GMT) or mid to late evening (GMT).

12. NRS will organise meetings, and share necessary papers. NRS will also take a note of the actions and outcomes agreed. There will be no detailed minute taken. Papers provided, minutes taken and recommendations made will likely be subject to FoI requests. NRS will consider the ordered release of material.

13. There is no requirement or expectation that Group members should arrange a substitute if they are unable to attend.

14. Expenses will be available in line with standard Scottish Government arrangements regarding advisory groups.

Confidentiality

15. It is likely that some detailed Census data will be part of the discussion. Given this and the sensitivity of the discussion, all Group members will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement which will essentially mean that details provided and discussed as part of the work of the Group are Restricted – Confidential. Participation in the Group is on the basis of agreement to treating the content of meetings and associated discussions as Restricted – Confidential. Where public statements falling from the work of the Group are made, they will be agreed by the Registrar General.

26th May 2022