

Census Delivery Options Assessment – Summary

This short paper summaries the options assessment carried out by National Records of Scotland (NRS) to help inform planning for Scotland’s Census. The impact of Covid-19 necessitated this assessment, which took place during April and May 2020.

Options assessed

Option	Approach	Census Date	Scope	Sub-Option
1	Current Plan	March 2021	Full Scope	
2A	Reduced Scope A	March 2021	No Field Force	Online and paper completion
2B	Reduced Scope B	March 2021	No Field Force	Online completion only
2C	Reduced Scope C	March 2021	No Field Force	Paper completion only
3	Move Census date	March 2022	Full Scope	
4	Cancel	N/A	N/A	

Approach and Conclusion

Each option was assessed against the following set of criteria - Objectives and Long Term Benefits, Statistical Validity, Operations Delivery/Collection Customer Experience, Statistical Outputs Delivery/Dissemination, IT Delivery, Supplier Delivery/Contract Implication, Overall Programme Level Delivery/Resourcing, Programme Level Budget, Legislation and Comms, Marketing and Stakeholder Engagement, Supplier view.

The work drew on the skills and knowledge of colleagues across NRS and the advice and experience of other Census Organisations and key stakeholders. The various options create different risks and opportunities across the Programme, and on balance the conclusion of NRS was to recommend Option 3.

Conclusion of Options Assessment work

#	Option title	Headline positive impacts	Headline negative impacts
1	Same delivery date, same scope Census – Mar 2021 1st outputs – Mar 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> maintain original plan alignment with rest of the UK maintain contractual arrangements deliver outputs to scheduled timescale. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> very significant risk of partial or failed delivery - making this option undeliverable. programme plan requires significant work with no contingency available to absorb delays being caused by COVID-19 options for mitigation including sharing of resources and methodology with ONS, and additional budgets to bring in additional people and alternative solutions, insufficient
2A	Online & paper completion, no field force Census – Mar 2021 1st outputs – Mar 2022 (but at risk of delay)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduce operational and IT implementation requirements reduce the risk of field force procurement delays create the ability to increase focus on other operational areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> significant risk to data quality due to low response rate and accompanying bias redesign required would exacerbate pressures on delivery timelines access to other data sources and statistical methods would need to be developed (including overcoming legal constraints) to improve quality of Census data - increasing risk of delay to outputs requirement to develop a new Census Coverage Survey solution
2B	Online completion, no field force Census – Mar 2021 1st outputs – Mar 2022 (but at risk of delay)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduce operational and IT implementation requirements reduce the risk of field force procurement delays create the ability to increase focus on other operational areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> significant risk to data quality due to low response rate and accompanying bias removing all mitigations for digital exclusion would marginalise hard to count groups affecting the quality of results, extensive replanning and redesigning required to understand how to capture responses from those who would complete on paper would exacerbate pressures on delivery timelines. requirement to develop a new Census Coverage Survey solution
2C	Paper completion, no field force Census – Mar 2021 1st outputs – Mar 2022 (but at risk of delay)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduce operational and IT implementation requirements reduce the risk of field force procurement delays create the ability to increase focus on other operational areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> significant risk to data quality due to low response rate and accompanying bias increasing paper responses from 20% to 100% would require paper scan, capture and coding to be scaled significantly would require printing, post out and post back volumes to be increased to 100% with associated high risk and costs substantial costs for increase in data processing, manual coding and scanning also expected. Requirement to develop a new Census Coverage Survey solution
3	Extended timeframe, no change in scope Census – Mar 2022 1st outputs – Mar 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> delivers quality outputs using planned design and methodologies mitigates risks to running Census posed by Covid-19 delays enables a full Census to be delivered March date provides 'time in the year' consistency with previous Census. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> delay outputs by a year challenge to alignment with UK wide statistics and time series data potential costs from extending resources and suppliers
4	Cancel Census	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> mitigate the risk and of delivering a partial or failed Census. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> user needs not met Census benefits not delivered incur costs already committed