

Scottish Census Steering Committee

Lessons from Rehearsal: Part II

September 2009

Early Lessons From The General Register Office for Scotland (Gros) Census Rehearsal: Part II

Introduction

1. This note is a follow-up to the report given at the June meeting. It includes updates on the way forward on some of the issues mentioned previously, together with some new issues that have emerged.

Evaluation – General

2. Though we are now more than 5 months past Rehearsal Day it still feels quite “early” in terms of the rehearsal evaluation process. Since April the teams working on the various work packages have been refining their evaluation conclusions and firming up on details of changes that are to be considered for 2011. So far they have come up with a total of about 160 possible changes. These are being reviewed and prioritised as part of the quality review process, and dependencies are being examined.

Preliminary Evaluation: Topic By Topic

Internet Data Collection

3. We have noticed that the more “sexy” content within the internet public assistance material on the census website at <http://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/en/>, such as the video clips and the Census Timeline, attracted considerable interest during the rehearsal period. (It appears for example that the video clips showing the rehearsal questions in British Sign Language drew much wider interest than could be accounted for by the size of the primary user group at which they were aimed.) This is undoubtedly a positive, but brings with it demand management issues. It may be that we will have to consider moving some of this content off the main internet data capture site, at least once we are into the prime data collection period, in order to protect the performance of the site.
4. Our original plan was that, to keep things simple, our internet capture system would be made available only to households and not to communal establishments. We are now considering extending availability to certain types of communal establishment, in particular student residences, in order to encourage response from this important group. Our contractors have confirmed that this design change would not add insuperable complications, it would amount to treating these communal establishments in many respects as (very) large households. But it would bring in a number of significant implications for remodelling of processes and, giving the tight timing, could introduce more risk. So we will need to look at this matter carefully.
5. We are continuing to examine the valuable feedback that we got from those who submitted their rehearsal returns online, and how best to respond to criticisms of the handling of text fields, “stupid” questions (e.g. is your 1 year old married and does he speak Gaelic?) etc.

6. Our continuing examination of the rehearsal evidence has confirmed our intention to push the internet option hard in 2011.

Field Services

7. We are clear on the need to enhance and better integrate a number of our field IT systems e.g. payroll, management information, and are currently sizing the task and planning how to handle it. Reducing the number of passwords that field staff have to remember is part of this!
8. Our problems with providing Broadband facilities for field management staff have led us to explore a solution involving 3-G cards in laptops rather than fixed connections. For the Census Quality Survey, 3-G connections have already been used for the uploading of data to HQ.
9. In the light of the rehearsal experience we have decided to do the “picking and packing” of census materials for delivery to enumerators in-house, using temporary staff, rather than contracting this task out.
10. Similarly we plan, following our experience at the rehearsal, to run our own helpline/contact centre (also picking up back office fulfilment tasks) in 2011.
11. Boxes used for field supplies need to be stronger.

Fieldwork

12. Enumeration of communal establishments is a continuing concern and we have more work to do to decide how to respond, e.g. how far our procedures should be adjusted.
13. The use of group exercises in field staff recruitment was clearly a success, and will be part of the 2011 approach.
14. On-line application forms worked well in the rehearsal, we will sharpen up aspects of this part of the operation.
15. We will tweak our recruitment adverts to ensure that the physical aspects of the role are made clearer, some enumerators reported that they had not been aware of these in advance.
16. It was convenient in the course of the rehearsal to engage some enumerators to undertake double workloads. Better mechanisms for handling these cases in the field are needed.
17. More emphasis will have to be given in training to the IT aspects of the field staff roles.
18. It is decided that we will put field offices (22 in Scotland overall) in place in the census for the first time in 2011.

19. We are likely to increase the % of forms that are posted out, from 6% in our initial design, perhaps to about 15%, thus bringing in most of the really rural areas in Scotland. Follow-up in post-out areas is unlikely to include a telephone element, as this proved problematic in the rehearsal.
20. We need to review the extent and nature of the completeness checks that we require enumerators to undertake on “completed” forms.
21. Field staff handbooks are very bulky, partly because of the amount of material on security aspects. We are considering moving some of this to the field services website.
22. The number of late returns received has caused us to plan to extend the follow-up period by a week.
23. The advance leaflets issued to households in the rehearsal were well received where they were read: we are likely to distribute them along with the form in 2011, rather than delivering them in advance.
24. The rehearsal confirmed the need to have large print questionnaires available for those with sight difficulties.

Questions

25. We expect the first rehearsal outputs to become available shortly, allowing about a month for analysis of the key questions issues which are critical for the Census Order (notably in relation to the income and language questions). The second analysis phase, directed at second order-, but still important, issues impinging on the finer detail of questions, will then run up to Christmas, ahead of finalising of the Census Regulations.

Conclusion

26. The rehearsal continues to provide us with masses of valuable experience and lessons. Evaluation work will continue for the rest of this year, although as indicated above the early findings have already led to a number of key decisions on changes to our census plans being made with 2011 in mind.

**General Register Office for Scotland
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