

The Conduct of the 2011 Censuses in the United Kingdom (UK) Statement of Agreement of the National Statistician and the Registrars General for Scotland and Northern Ireland

The passages in italics are a commentary on progress at February 2011.

Introduction

1. This is a statement of agreement between the National Statistician and the Registrars General for Scotland and Northern Ireland about the conduct of the 2011 Censuses which it is the intention to conduct simultaneously throughout the UK in 2011.
2. A Census is taken by the Statistics Board (UK Statistics Authority) and the Registrar General for Scotland under the Census Act 1920 and by the Registrar General for Northern Ireland under the Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969. The necessary subordinate legislation, relating to the specific arrangements for the Census in each country, requires the approval of the UK Parliament in Westminster for England and Wales the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively. Welsh Ministers are consulted on the Census for England and Wales, and are responsible for making Census Regulations for Wales. *The Census Orders and Census Regulations for the respective Censuses were all put in place in 2010.*

Principles

3. Each country will be autonomous, with the final decision lying with the relevant Registrar General, Ministers and legislature.
4. Subject to that autonomy, the National Statistician and Registrars General agree that the three Census Offices (the Office for National Statistics (ONS), General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)) will aim to work in unison to ensure that the 2011 Censuses are a success in providing high quality population and housing statistics, meeting the needs of data users and reflecting UN-ECE and Eurostat requirements.
5. In particular, the National Statistician and the Registrars General have agreed that the three Census Offices and the Welsh Assembly Government will work together and will reach mutual agreement wherever possible on the points in this Statement of Agreement, which will facilitate harmonisation where that is in the interest of Census users. Other points may be added over time where that would facilitate harmonisation.

Harmonised Aspects

6. The National Statistician and Registrars General have, subject to the need for approval where appropriate by the relevant legislatures, agreed the following aspects of the Census where they will aim to achieve harmonisation:-

- **Date.** The three Censuses should be carried out on the same date in 2011. *The Census will take place on 27 March 2011.*
- **Population Base.** A common population base should be agreed. *A common population base (usual residents plus visitors) has been agreed.*
- **Topics and Questions.** Common questions should be agreed wherever possible, diverging only in response to clear user needs, with such divergences minimised and the scope for cross-comparison maximised. *Extensive consultation has been carried out with users and other interest groups by each of the three Census Offices and a good degree of harmonisation has been achieved, helped significantly by the decision to include a fourth page of questions per person. The questions have been approved by the relevant legislatures. There are 65 questions asked in at least one of the census questionnaires. These include questions relevant to only one country, such as knowledge of Welsh or proficiency in Gaelic. There are 43 questions which are asked throughout the UK and in 33 of these the wording of the question and the response options are identical. Of the remaining ten where the question wording or response options differ, seven can be aggregated to provide consistent statistics across the UK.*
- **Census materials.** The design of the Census forms and other materials should be co-ordinated. *A common design has been agreed for census questionnaires. Field support materials have been developed as required for each country.*
- **Definitions.** Common definitions and classifications should be agreed and published. *Key definitions were published alongside the proposals to the UK legislatures on census topics in December 2008.*

- **Disclosure Control and Estimation Methodology.** Common methodologies for disclosure control and for estimation should be evaluated, tested and agreed in advance of the Census. *A disclosure control policy has been agreed by the National Statistician and the Registrars General which has been received well by users. The policy statement forms an Annex to this agreement. Record swapping has since been agreed as the primary method of statistical disclosure control and the detailed methodology is now largely complete.*
- **Publicity.** A common approach to publicity, tailored to local needs, should be agreed. *Publicity for the Census Tests and Rehearsals was approached separately, but a coordinated strategy has been developed for 2011.*
- **Procurement of Systems and Services.** The different scale of the Census Offices may dictate different procurement solutions but a common strategy should be adopted and a common approach generally taken where that maximises value for money, operational effectiveness and (especially) consistency of outputs. *A single contract, with core elements and variations for each Census Office, for the key operational services for England, Wales and Northern Ireland was awarded to Lockheed Martin UK in August 2008. A separate Scottish contract was awarded to CACI (UK) Ltd. in June 2008.*
- **Outputs.** The final product should be consistent, coherent and accessible statistics for the UK and for each component country, a joint database (and/or a common data schema) being a desirable way of facilitating that outcome, with a common approach taken to output specifications, quality, data format and timing of releases. *A joint statement on Output Aims has been agreed by the National Statistician and Registrars General and forms an Annex to this agreement. An output strategy has been published for England and Wales. All countries have now started consultation on the detailed content of the census outputs, including the content of a set of UK outputs, which will be produced and published by ONS from a single unit record file to ensure harmonisation.*

Cost Sharing

7. The costs, both contractor and Census Office, of systems and services will normally be shared between the Census Offices on an actual cost basis, where appropriate, or apportioned according to the population totals (2001 Census). Differences in approach will be kept to a minimum.

Governance and dispute resolution

8. To promote UK harmonisation, every effort will be made to reach agreement through the cross-working mechanisms of the three Census Offices and any differences of opinion will be discussed and resolved at the UK Census Committee.

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General Register Office for Scotland
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