

**Scottish Census Steering Committee
Consultation on 2011 Census Outputs**

January 2010

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1. Introduction

A third formal consultation round on the 2011 Census is due to be launched on 4 February. It will run for three months and provide users with an opportunity to help shape the main set of statistical outputs. This paper outlines the aims and content of the consultation; describes additional consultation activity underway or planned; and notes some other relevant issues.

2. Background

2.1 General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) has staged two formal consultation rounds to date on the 2011 Census, in:

- Autumn 2004 – which sought views on the 2001 Census and initial plans for 2011; and
- Spring 2007 – which sought views on key topics, including questionnaire content, methodology and outputs

2.2 The Spring 2007 consultation asked users about their views on a number of specific points about census outputs. These were; (with a summary of responses shown in brackets):

- a) top three priorities in the aims on outputs set out in the Register Generals (RGs) harmonisation agreement;
(outputs free at point of delivery flexible table generation on-line;
a facility for comparing 2001 and 2011 results;
effective and flexible approach to output geographies;
on-line facility for mapping and graphing of standard and user-defined outputs;
joining up of census and other government statistics;
joined-up and comparable UK outputs; and
outputs better tailored to different types of users.)
- b) preference for on-line versus paper-based outputs
(clear preference for output to be released on-line)
- c) preference for a flexible on-line table generation system vs pre-defined outputs
(flexible table generation identified as important, but in tandem with rather than as a replacement for pre-defined outputs)
- d) views on adopting the same approach to geography as was taken in 2001
(strong support for repeating the approach taken in 2001;
comparability and continuity with 2001 was a high priority; and
consistency with geographies from other sources such as England & Wales and Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (SNS) seen as desirable)

- 2.3 These findings were largely borne out by the UK-wide online consultation about users' high level requirements for 2011 Census outputs which ONS ran in 2008 on behalf of all the UK census offices.
- 2.4 Our current proposals for the 2011 Census outputs have been informed by an initial online user consultation and seek to build on the positive initiatives introduced through the 2001 Census. In summary, we envisage:
- the production of a core set of standard census tables;
 - the production of data “hypercubes” (essentially aggregate datasets that allow flexible table generation);
 - the provision of data for intermediate geographies built up from aggregations of census “output areas” (the smallest building block used in census outputs – averaging around 50 households and 100 individuals);
 - making available 2001 census data alongside 2011 results to facilitate comparison;
 - a greater emphasis on the dissemination of census information via electronic media, with the web being the primary dissemination platform;
 - the provision of comprehensive and integrated metadata that are released along with the outputs;
 - an interface between Scottish census results and the Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics website; and
 - easy access for users to the census results for other parts of the UK.

3. Aims of February 2010 consultation

This consultation is intended to provide the basis for developing, over the course of 2010, an agreed set of final specifications of the main outputs from the 2011 Census that meet the needs of a majority of users and make the best use of data collected. It will also seek feedback from users on a number of issues relating to census outputs, including output geographies, 2001 to 2011 comparisons, UK-wide comparisons, access to census microdata and the timetable for the release of census outputs.

4. Content of consultation

- 4.1 The main content of the consultation will be focussed on seeking feedback from users on initial proposals for a standard set of 2011 Census tables. The starting point for these is the outputs from the 2001 Census, modified to reflect changes in the census questionnaire. Users will be asked for feedback with respect to 2001 comparability and table usability, and for suggestions on possible amendments. In particular, they will be asked to identify which tables they most want or don't want, and why, as well as suggestions for change

(particularly in relation to tables based on questions that will be new for 2011 or changed significantly from 2001).

4.2 An iterative web-based approach will be taken to consulting users about the definition of statistical outputs for the 2011 Census. The objectives of this will be to:

- clearly define the specification for tabular outputs that will be produced;
- define the relationships between 2001 and 2011 outputs – important for comparability;
- define the geography at which the outputs will be produced; and
- allow for easy amendment/ re-specification in line with user needs

4.3 A consultation pack to issue to users is currently being developed. The main tool for obtaining detailed feedback from users will be an excel spreadsheet containing the following items for each proposed standard tabulation:

- table title/ topic;
- table number in 2011;
- corresponding table number in 2001;
- description of difference (if any) between 2001 and 2011, including links to the relevant questions in the census questionnaires; and
- a link to an example of how the table might look like in 2011.

Users will be asked to indicate, for each proposed table

- whether they need it?
- what priority they attach to it?
- the nature of any change they would propose to it?
- the reason for requesting any such change?

The spreadsheet will be supported by a glossary of proposed standard and derived variables.

4.4 The consultation will also cover a number of more general points in relation to census outputs, including:

- geography – including intermediate geographies required and demand for workplace zone statistics;
- requirements for metadata;
- 2001 to 2011 comparisons;
- UK-wide and international comparisons (incl Eurostat requirements);
- requirements for an interface between a Scottish census results system and the Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics website; and
- timetable for release of outputs.

- 4.5 The consultation document will also provide users with updates on a number of issues relating to census outputs, including:
- statistical disclosure control;
 - population bases;
 - technical delivery mechanisms under development;
 - metadata;
 - plans for data quality assurance procedures; and
 - revisions and corrections policy.
- 4.6 As with previous consultation rounds, this one will be designed for online dissemination and feedback. All those on the GROS census consultation database and registered on the Scottish Government's SCOTSTAT consultation network, will be emailed to notify them of the launch of the consultation. The email will provide links to the detailed consultation material on the GROS website. It is also planned to include links to the consultation documents from the ONS and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) websites.
- 4.7 Following closure of the consultation around the end of April, GROS will digest the responses received and prepare an analysis reporting the outcome. The intention is to present this at one or more 'roadshow' events, likely to be held in late spring/ early summer, as well as publishing on the GROS website.

5. Other consultation activity

As well as the general consultation round described above, GROS Census Division is currently engaged in consulting users about our plans for census outputs through a number of other channels.

Scottish Government Analytical Services Divisions

We have embarked on a series of bilateral meetings with Scottish Government Analytical Service Divisions (ASDs). Among other things, these meetings will seek to explore:

- ways in which the data collected in the census could be useful to ASDs in policy analysis and in enriching their existing or planned statistical publications;
- the potential for involving ASD topic experts in quality assuring census results;
- the potential demands ASDs may have for making other analytical uses of census data (e.g. in terms of commissioning studies to link census and non-census data and in assessing non-response bias in statistical surveys); and
- interest in producing topic analytical reports using data from the 2011 Census

- ASD views on the initial set of proposed standard outputs from the 2011 Census, particularly in relation to suggestions for tables based on questions that are being asked for the first time in 2011
- requirements for comparing Scottish 2011 Census results with those for other parts of the UK or with 2001

Population and Migration Statistics (Scotland) Committee – (PAMS)

This committee acts as the Census Advisory Group for Scotland. There will be a greater emphasis on census issues at its meetings over the next few years.

Census Outputs Geography Working Group

This working group of relevant experts was established by the PAMS Committee to review and comment on geographical issues relating to census outputs. It first met in August 2009, is due to meet again in the next couple of months, and has the aim of reporting back to the PAMS Committee in the spring.

2011 Census UK Outputs Working Group

This working group provides a forum for all three UK census offices to provide updates to, and receive advice from, key census expert users about their plans and preparations for producing and disseminating the 2011 Census results.

Office for National Statistics (ONS) consultation website (blog and wiki)

This provides a mechanism for the UK census offices and users to have an ongoing dialogue about specific issues concerning census outputs. It has not been heavily used to date, being accessed only by a relatively small number of specialist users.

Other UK census outputs consultations

On 14 December, ONS launched a user consultation about its initial proposals for the main statistical outputs for England & Wales from the 2011 Census. Further details can be found via the link below:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/consultations/open-consultations/2011-output-consultation---main-statistical-outputs/index.html>

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) plans to launch a similar consultation at some point over the next few months.

While these consultations are aimed primarily at census users in England & Wales and Northern Ireland respectively, there are likely to be many points raised and issues identified by users which will have a read-across to Scotland. The feedback obtained from them will therefore have a bearing on plans for Scottish census results as noted above an important aim for the 2011 Census is to produce outputs that are harmonised across the UK as far as possible, and to provide Scottish users with easy access to census results for other parts of the UK.

6. Other issues

There are currently some unknowns which will have to be taken into account when considering how we can best meet the requirements of census users (and on which we may need to manage expectations). These include:

- Parliamentary process – final approval of the content of the 2011 Census questionnaires will not be available until the spring, and so the consultation on outputs will have to be premised on the current recommended question set.
- Technical solutions for output production and dissemination – a successor to the existing SCROL system (which was used to disseminate the 2001 Census results) has still to be procured, installed and tested.
- Access to UK-wide data – ONS is developing a technical solution for providing users (and web application developers) with flexible access to summary census data, but further work on this is still required and also depends to some extent on resolving some statistical disclosure control challenges (see below).
- Disclosure control methodology work is currently underway in relation to defining “safe” hypercubes – this will be a key challenge to providing users with flexibility to define and generate their own tabulations of census data.
- Funding for the census is not currently formally approved for years after 2010-11 - the scale of resources available for 2011-12 and beyond will be a consideration in terms of how ambitious our plans for system(s) to disseminate the census results can be.

GROS Census Division
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