

# **Scottish Census Steering Committee**

## **Minutes of Meeting**

11 June 2009

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Minutes of the inaugural meeting held on Thursday 11 June 2009 in General Register Office for Scotland (GROS), New Register House, Edinburgh.

**Present:**

Duncan Macniven	GROS, Registrar General
Peter Scrimgeour	GROS, Director of Census
Shirley Cameron	GROS, Census Programme Management (Minutes)
Alan Dickson	Capability Scotland
Grahame Smith	Scottish Trade Union Congress
Ros Micklem	Equalities and Human Rights Commission
Rosemary Ward	Bòrd na Gàidhlig
Prof. David Martin	The University of Southampton
Prof. Michael Anderson	The University of Edinburgh
Ian Lees	Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
Bashir Maan	Scottish Council for Muslims
Ken Macdonald	Information Commissioner's Office
Jennifer Wallace	Consumer Focus Scotland

**Apologies:**

Jon Harris	COSLA
Dr Eric Baijal	NHS Highland
Ranald Mair	Scottish Care
Ann Moises	Scottish Government

## 1. Welcome and introductions – Duncan Macniven

1.1 Duncan welcomed everyone to the inaugural meeting of the committee and asked individual members to introduce themselves and their specific interest in relation to the census.

1.2 The purpose of the committee's first meeting was to introduce the members to the census programme and, as each member had different knowledge about the census, to bring everyone's expertise up to the necessary level.

1.3 The organisations have been brought together with the purpose of utilising their knowledge and experience to enhance the 2011 Census. Although plans for 2011 are formulated, final decisions have yet to be taken, with all members encouraged to ask questions on any matter and to propose solutions as they see appropriate, from their experience.

1.4 Duncan explained that he would meet with all absentees bilaterally to explain the purpose of the committee and to allow those absent the same access to the information presented at the meeting.

## 2. Terms of Reference/ Charter Statement – Duncan Macniven

2.1 Duncan asked members to approve the Charter Statement which briefly describes what the census is and what GROS perceives is the purpose of the Committee. Duncan explained that, as the members were invited as representatives of their organisations and not in a personal capacity, they were free to send a stand-in should they not be able to attend a meeting. The organisations were intended to be representative of people who complete the census, who use census information or are interested in protecting the security of census data. Others might be invited to join the committee if members were aware of a significant interest which had been missed.

2.2 There were no comments on the Charter Statement.

## 3. "Scotland's Census 2011: A Government Statement" (summary) – Duncan Macniven

3.1 Each member was given a copy of the published document which was laid before the Scottish Parliament in December 2008. Duncan presented a summary of the statement, highlighting the content to the committee.

3.2 The statement is available on the [GROS website](#).

3.3 Members were invited to ask questions and to pass comment as appropriate.

3.4 Timing – Grahame Smith asked why the census was held in Spring rather than Autumn. Duncan explained that research pointed to more people

being at their usual residence in the Spring, although Autumn had been considered also. Spring was also better because it allowed direct comparison with previous censuses. Michael Anderson noted also that the 1921 Census was held in June, when many people were on holiday, which had devalued the comparison of data with the previous and the subsequent censuses.

3.5 Response rate – Alan Dickson asked how the 96% response rate of 2001 was calculated. Duncan explained the statistical sampling technique used to identify the response rate and the methodology of the coverage survey which would be carried out after the census to allow this to be done. Grahame Smith asked if there was a steady response rate in general from census to census. David Martin, as an expert in this area, commented that in general there was a tendency to a decline in participation, although the 96% rate in 2001 was good in comparison with other comparable countries at that time. Moreover, more work had been done in 2001 than ever before to correct for the missing 4%, which had increased the quality of the results. Michael Anderson agreed that in 2001 the quality of results was higher than it had been in 1991. Bashir Maan commented that the response rate was likely to be lower from members of the ethnic community who were limited in their ability to understand the relatively complex English in the questionnaire. Duncan explained that this is of great concern to GROS, as gathering information from ethnic and other minority groups was a key purpose of the census. Liaison with groups such as the Equalities and Human Rights Commission and ethnicity community leaders was a key policy with the aim of achieving a better response rate in 2011.

3.6 Consultation – Jennifer Wallace asked if there was consultation directly with the public. Duncan explained that we tried to do this when we published a consultation document, by publicising the launch via the media and publishing the consultation information on the GROS website for comment. It had proved difficult to get the public engaged – perhaps not surprisingly for a consultation in 2004 which related to a census to be held in 2011. In practice GROS rely more on special interest groups to respond on behalf of their members. Ken Macdonald commented that the 2009 rehearsal could be seen as a way of consulting with the public and Duncan agreed there had been an increase in comment received from the public.

3.7 Population base – Michael Anderson commented that the population base definition of usual residence referred to the time a person was resident in the UK or Scotland and not just the time spent at a particular address. David Martin commented that the population base definition was being used in a different way in Scotland compared to the rest of the UK. Duncan explained the reasons for this and how GROS would ensure that the outputs across the UK would nonetheless be comparable.

3.8 Communal Establishments – Rosemary Ward asked who would be responsible in a communal establishment for completion of the questionnaire. Duncan advised that the manager of each establishment would be statutorily responsible for completion on behalf of residents.

3.9 Language ability – Ken Macdonald enquired how “language ability” could be established. Duncan agreed that this was difficult. The topic was still under consideration, although the current thinking would be to include 3 questions around language and from this ability could be established. British Sign Language and Scots would be included as possible responses to one of the questions.

3.10 Size of Questionnaire – Bashir Mann commented that the 28 page size of the questionnaire could be a barrier to completion by some people. It would be important for enumerators to offer help, and for more attention to be drawn to the fact that each person only had to complete 4 pages.

3.11 Visitors – Michael Anderson explained that it would be useful for visitors to have the option of completing a separate form to allow the confidentiality of their information to be protected, in a similar way to the individuals who could request a separate household questionnaire to allow completion in confidence.

3.12 Security – Ken Macdonald commented that the Registrar General could be fined a proportion of the census budget under the Information Commissioner’s new powers, should there be a serious breach of the Data Protection Act in relation to a loss of confidential census information. Duncan noted that a fine would be less significant to GROS than the loss of reputation and damage to public perception that a serious information breach would bring.

3.13 Anonymised outputs – David Martin explained that a good way to ensure that no person could be identified in a sample of anonymised records was to limit the geographical information published with the data. By doing this, it would be possible to provide anonymised records within a large geographical area.

3.14 Gaelic language – Rosemary Ward asked if Gaelic language was included in the language support leaflet. Duncan explained it was and that people also had the opportunity to complete their census rehearsal questionnaire on line in Gaelic as well as English, with census guidance also available in English and in Gaelic on the [Scotland’s Census](#) website.

#### 4. Census Rehearsal March 2009 (emerging lessons: Peter Scrimgeour)

4.1 Peter Scrimgeour presented information to the committee on the census rehearsal which had been held in March 2009.

4.2 Peter explained the high level objectives of the rehearsal:

- To test that the complex processes required for the census will work in 2011.
- To test aspects of the questions, although most of the work had been done previously.

- To rehearse the enumeration procedures to establish if these work and give the required result.
- To measure the quality of data provided.
- To give practical experience of census activity for GROS staff and contractors.

4.3 The early indications point to a successful rehearsal with the overall response rate, and the response rates in each rehearsal area, broadly in line with expectations. Peter explained that so far this was an initial assessment with a more detailed evaluation - including the final response rate - coming later in the year, when examination of the questionnaire results would provide data on types of responses received. In general it was expected that the evaluation would point to only slight refinements required; it could be risky to introduce major changes to plans at this stage.

4.4 The rehearsal covered around 40k households in Edinburgh West and 10k in Lewis and Harris.

4.5 The initial assessment suggests that internet response rate was 11% of the overall returns received by GROS. These online questionnaires were returned despite it being difficult to publicise the internet option widely as the rehearsal was limited to specific localities. Two per cent of the internet responses used the Gaelic version of the internet questionnaire. Peter explained that this channel would be promoted more heavily in 2011. In general, there would be a public expectation to have the option of completing their census questionnaire online.

4.6 The helpline was run in-house for the rehearsal with temporary staff. The volume of calls was as expected, with 25% of those received regarding the questionnaire, 10% enquiring about the compulsory/voluntary nature of the rehearsal, and 65% covering other general questions about the census.

4.7 Recruitment of field staff had gone well, after a slow start. Recruitment had to start early to allow sufficient time for recruits to obtain basic Disclosure Scotland clearance, a requirement for all government staff. For the 2011 Census, around 7500 staff of a suitable quality would be recruited. Rosemary Ward asked if interviews were conducted. Peter replied that this was the case and that they were carried out largely by field staff management, a process which is typical of census operations due to the large numbers of field staff required.

4.8 Training was carried out in a similar cascade method to recruitment. This had to be carried out in a tight timescale due to the short-term nature of the employment of field staff.

4.9 Access to blocks of flats which had an intercom proved to be an issue for the rehearsal. Increased publicity in 2011 could ease this and field managers would try to identify ways of access.

4.10 The rehearsal was also an opportunity to test local promotion tactics (leaflets, posters, press adverts, news stories and speaking to groups in communities to explain the benefits of census data). It was also an opportunity to test GROS's response to negative interested in the census. During the rehearsal this covered: the civil partnership and national identity questions and the contractor appointed to provide back office services. Overall, the initial assessment suggests that the positive coverage generated during the rehearsal vastly outweighed negative or neutral coverage.

4.11 Opinion had been sought from focus groups on the publicity leaflet following the rehearsal. Feedback pointed to inclusion of a clear message to emphasise the householder's legal obligation to complete in 2011.

4.12 Leaflets were delivered by post ahead of the questionnaire. On the negative side, some householders indicated they had not received their leaflet, perhaps because some were delivered with other mail shot products and could have been missed. Those who had read the leaflet had been motivated to complete the questionnaire.

4.13 A further rehearsal communications lesson is that field staff needed to be kept informed of the publicity campaign and given advice on how to handle any doorstep questions that relates to it.

4.14 Questionnaires were posted out to rural areas in Lewis and Harris. The address lists were evaluated by enumerators as part of the field operation. The list in Edinburgh West was of a good quality, while the list in the Western Isles appeared to be less good due to issues around property names in rural areas. Phone follow-up was tested in the Western Isles for post-out areas and, although this was still being evaluated, there were initial indications that it had not been well received by the public or by field staff. Window return envelopes had caused a problem because people had inserted the questionnaire incorrectly.

4.15 This was the first time the option to complete a census questionnaire online had been given in the UK. Feedback on the whole had been positive and valuable. In general people found the questionnaire easy to complete and easy to tailor to suit the number of people within each household. As a result of feedback, enhancements would be made. The internet option will be publicised more heavily in 2011.

4.16 The rehearsal questionnaire was tabled and can be accessed through the [GROS website](#). Peter explained that this was a good indication of how the final 2011 questionnaire could look, with some work on the messages on the front page still to be done e.g. to make the internet option more visible. Bashir Maan suggested that a message on the front page, to highlight ease of completion, would encourage response. Michael Anderson suggested including text in a different colour to identify this.

4.17 Grahame Smith asked if the voluntary questions would be identified. Peter explained that all questions in the rehearsal had been voluntary. In the 2011 Census, only the question on religion would be, and this would be made clear on the questionnaire.

4.18 Some members criticised the colour of the questionnaire. Peter explained that work had been done with the RNIB to identify, from the colours which would allow scanning, the most appropriate colour for those with vision impairment - but this could be re-examined to check that the best possible colour is used.

4.19 Ken Macdonald asked why there was a difference in the occupation information asked of Local Authority employees compared with Civil Servants. Duncan explained that there had been a lot of work done over the years to identify appropriate occupation codes and the Standard Occupation Classification has been developed, it was not in his view a problematic topic. David Martin commended the use of this standard coding which provides consistency with other Government surveys, and allows comparisons to be drawn against census information.

4.20 Ken Macdonald suggested that the ways that people could get help and support to complete the questionnaire should be highlighted.

## 5. Any Other Business

5.1 David Martin said that, to his knowledge, there was not an equivalent of this group elsewhere. It gave a valuable opportunity to bring to bear different viewpoints on the planning of the census: other groups focussed more on specific topics or areas. The committee was unique due to the diversity of groups represented.

5.2 Duncan asked all members to consider how widely information from the group could be publicised. Duncan's intention, subject to members' views, would be to publish on the GROS website the agreed minutes of the group, together with the Charter Statement (including membership). All members, including absent members, were asked to consider if this would be acceptable. Ros Micklem requested that it was made clear that there may be some decisions which could be made about the census by the committee which not all member organisations would agree with. Duncan agreed that this would be useful to include in the Charter Statement and would circulate it to members for further comment.

**Action: All members – to review the revised Charter Statement**

**Action: All members – to indicate if they are in agreement that the Charter Statement (including member details) and the agreed minutes of meetings are to be published on the GROS website.**



5.3 Duncan said that, reciprocally, he was happy for members to refer in their organisation's publications to their membership of the committee.

5.4 Ian Lees commented how interesting and useful the meeting had been. Ian asked Duncan to identify the topics on which members' comments would be particularly helpful. Duncan said that the next meeting would focus on further lessons from the rehearsal, and on outputs, with members invited to identify any other areas worth discussing. Bashir Maan had already identified "encouragement to complete the questionnaire".

**Action: GROS – to prepare a paper for the next meeting detailing further lessons from the 2009 Census Rehearsal.**

5.5 Duncan invited members to advise him if there were any groups that may be interested in receiving a talk about the census. Rosemary Ward suggested a tie up with the Scottish Parliament's education department. Duncan explained that GROS was running a project, piloted in the rehearsal, to involve schools in the census. Peter explained that this was small scale in the rehearsal areas but it would be worth approaching the Scottish Parliament directly to discuss future census activities.

5.6 Grahame Smith asked if more information could be provided around publicity which would allow members more insight on how they could support this topic. Duncan agreed this would be useful and it would be appropriate to share this when publicity plans for 2011 were being drawn up.

## 6. Date of next meeting

6.1 Duncan suggested that the meetings may be more frequent than initially intended, with the next meeting in the week beginning 7 September. Possible dates would be canvassed.

6.2 Members agreed the start time of a morning meeting should be 10.30.

6.3 Duncan thanked the attendees for their interest and contribution to the meeting.

General Register Office for Scotland  
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