

# **2009 Census Rehearsal Executive Summary**

**January 2010**

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## Background to the 2009 Census Rehearsal

### 1. Purpose

The 2009 Census Rehearsal was held on 29 March 2009 and included around 52,000 households, 41,324 in west Edinburgh and 11,535 across Lewis and Harris. The locations were chosen because they provided a wide cross-section of Scotland in which to rehearse the census. They included rural and urban locations with a mixture of both households and communal establishments (such as hospitals, student accommodation and care homes), a Gaelic speaking location, and a location with a relatively high proportion of minority ethnic groups.

There were four key areas we wanted to rehearse to ensure these will be effective for the full census in 2011:

- processes and procedures for the delivery and collection of the census questionnaires;
- the systems for processing the questionnaire data and producing census data outputs;
- that the questionnaire is acceptable to the householders filling it in; and
- the new option for householders to complete the census questionnaire online.

Gathering sufficient evidence which would allow us to make key decisions for the 2011 Census was vital. Below is a summary of the number of questionnaires returned during the rehearsal.

- 52,859 questionnaires were delivered and 22,542 were returned, giving an overall return rate of 42%. (Lewis and Harris – 51%, west Edinburgh - 37%)
- Of the 22,542 returns, 11% of these were received through our online completion system. (west Edinburgh – 13%, Lewis and Harris – 7%). Two percent (2%) of the online returns were completed in Gaelic.

Note that the final return figures (taking account of postal re-direction after the field enumeration exercise) will be marginally higher than those provided above.

You can find other background information on our 2009 Census Rehearsal below.

[Rehearsal Areas](#)

[Frequently asked questions](#)

[Census Rehearsal questionnaire](#)

Separate rehearsals of the different census operations in [England & Wales](#) and in [Northern Ireland](#) took place in October 2009.

## 2. Summary of our main evaluation points/recommendations

We tested the viability of delivering some of our solutions in-house for the 2011 Census, as opposed to contracting them out. The rehearsal revealed that, subject to some further development and testing, the following solutions will be delivered in-house for the 2011 Census:

- field staff payroll system;
- census helpline facility; and
- picking and packing of logistical supplies.

We also successfully tested the following new additions to the traditional Scottish census design, which will now be implemented for 2011:

- online completion of census questionnaires;
- online public assistance facility; and
- field offices as a central hub for field enumeration.

Some other key recommendations are to:

- retain hand delivery of questionnaires for over 90% of Scotland;
- retain post out of questionnaires in selected remote/rural areas;
- extend the field Follow-Up phase by a week, to lengthen the gap between first and second follow up visits to households by enumerators thereby allowing householders more time to make a return before the second follow-up visit;
- bring forward the Census Quality Survey(CQS) to May rather than July, as the gap between the census and the CQS operations meant that householders in the CQS sample could not always recall the question responses they provided in the census;
- allocate census team leaders (not enumerators) to enumerate communal establishments, to reflect the difficulty of this operational area and to allow enumerators to concentrate all efforts on household enumeration;
- make improvements to the data capture & coding service, particularly the service specification, testing, coding and quality assurance processes and change the management structure to better reflect the size and complexity of this service; and
- introduce an automated process control system to ensure efficiency of the 2011 Downstream Processing solution.

As expected, data capture & coding was the most complicated operational area to deliver for the rehearsal but the solution did work well. Likewise, the Downstream Processing solution worked well and allowed us to easily validate and quality assure the data.

The census rehearsal provided a further opportunity to gather evidence to help inform final recommendations on the question set for the 2011 Census and to fine tune questionnaire designs. In particular, it acted as a test that questions which were either new or significantly revised compared with the 2001 Census would function effectively and yield reliable information in the full census.

The preliminary analysis of the data obtained from the rehearsal provided confirmation that the new and revised questions performed effectively. There were no serious flaws in the quality of the data obtained, nor any indication that their inclusion had any significant adverse effect on the overall level of response achieved. The information provided by respondents generated sensible looking summary profiles which were in line with expectations and also credible when cross-tabulated with other variables. There was some feedback that respondents were not always aware they had the option to complete their questionnaire online, and this issue will be addressed in the design of the front page of the household questionnaire to be used in 2011.

As an additional measure, General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) commissioned IPSOS MORI to carry out independent testing on the questions and questionnaire. The areas tested were:

- whole of questionnaire;
- national identity question;
- long term health conditions question; and
- language questions.

The [Cognitive Testing Research](#) reports have now been published on the GROS website. The conclusion drawn was that evidence from these tests supported the rehearsal evaluation findings. GROS will therefore use the questionnaire and questions used for the rehearsal in the 2011 Census, subject to minor amendment of wording and presentation and the legislative approval process.

A more detailed evaluation of evidence from the rehearsal in relation to the questionnaire design and content is being carried out. The results of this evaluation will be published on the GROS website in due course.

The full set of [2009 Census Rehearsal Evaluation Reports](#) are held on the GROS website.

### **3. Where does the rehearsal sit with our quality strategy?**

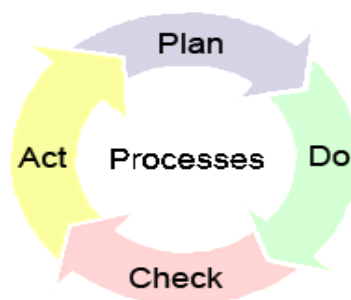
The 2009 Census Rehearsal is a key step to implementing our quality strategy, which is built on the continual assessment and improvement of the processes and procedures for the 2011 Census. To achieve this we use the “plan, do, check, act” methodology:

**Plan** - Decide what to do and identify how we will know if it has worked.

**Do** - Do what we planned to do and measure it as planned.

**Check** - Check the results against expectations and report outcomes.

**Act** - Hold the gains and learn from experience.



Our quality strategy is designed to ensure we can meet the primary objective of the 2011 Census, which is:

“to provide high quality population statistics as required by key users, on a consistent and comparable basis for small areas and small population groups.”

#### **4. Next steps in the 2011 census programme**

The next phase in the census programme will concentrate on 4 key areas:

- fine tuning of the processes and systems that were successful in the rehearsal and re-development of the processes and systems that were not as successful, taking into account the many valuable lessons learned;
- ensuring that the systems can handle the huge rise in volumes from a 52,000 household rehearsal to over 2.5 million households and 5.2 million people in the full 2011 census, through a rigorous and prolonged programme of testing;
- further development of our community involvement strategies, by working together with community leaders in the harder to count areas of the population, and also further development of our wider communication strategy, to ensure that people understand why the census is so important and to encourage everyone to participate in the 2011 Census; and
- a formal consultation process with users to determine how best to provide the 2011 Census results, ensuring that we meet the primary objective of the census as defined in our quality strategy.

#### **5. Security/confidentiality**

The confidentiality of the information provided about individuals and households is protected for 100 years after each census. Until then we only publish anonymised statistics which build a picture of the needs and characteristics of Scotland as a whole and the groups and communities within it.

Access to census data that can identify households or individuals is very strictly controlled. The 1920 Census Act made it a criminal offence to unlawfully disclose confidential census information. The 1991 Census (Confidentiality) Act extended this to people and businesses working as part of the census process. The penalties for unlawful disclosure of census information are a fine of up to £1000, or a prison sentence of up to two years, or both.

Everyone working with confidential census information, permanent staff, the temporary field staff who handle questionnaires, and the staff of any contractors who are working on the census are required to sign a confidentiality undertaking. This re-enforces how important confidentiality is to the census and ensures that all staff understand their obligations and the legal penalties for failing to meet them.

We recognise that people need to be confident their personal information will be held securely. The General Register Office for Scotland will own all personal census information, and will protect it with stringent security measures. We have a long history of successfully protecting the confidentiality of information we collect. We regularly review our security measures, and improve them when necessary.

Information on the security measures adopted in the 2009 Rehearsal can be found in the [2009 Census Rehearsal Evaluation Reports](#) on the GROS website.

Looking ahead to the 2011 Census, we have appointed a Census Security Assurance Group which includes representatives from all areas of the census operation, for both in-house and outsourced services. This group oversees and monitors the provision of all security across the whole programme at a strategic level. It ensures that program wide information security controls fit within the census security strategy and the GROS census confidentiality requirements.

We have also commissioned an independent security review of all systems and services, using an external contractor, for both in-house and out-sourced services.

Furthermore, a UK-wide census security review team has been established to provide additional assurance of the security arrangements across all 4 countries. This review is being led by John Dowdall, the former Northern Ireland Comptroller and Auditor General.

Finally, we will soon publish a paper titled 'Considerations of the Impact on Public Privacy of Scotland's Census' which will look at the processes GROS has already gone through to assess and reduce the impact of the 2011 census on personal privacy.