

Minutes of Census and Deaf and Deafblind People Meeting Ladywell House, 31 May 2007

Attendees: Doug Bradley, RNID
Marian Fletcher, Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters
Lilian Lawson, Scottish Council for Deafness
Drena O'Malley, Deafblind Scotland
Andrew Thomson, Deaf Connections
Grace Bannan, Interpreter
Linda Donnelly, Notetaker
Brenda Holliday, Notetaker
Linda Thomson, Interpreter
Duncan Macniven, Registrar General, GROS
Valerie West, GROS
Kirsty MacLean, GROS
Ailie Clarkson, GROS

Welcome, Purpose and Census Consultation

1. **Duncan Macniven (Registrar General, GROS)** welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for coming to Ladywell House. The meeting forms part of a consultation being carried out on the next Census and the points raised will be written down and taken as part of the consultation. Additional written responses will also be welcome.
2. **Duncan** noted that we are aiming for the best Census ever in more challenging circumstances. The Census should provide high quality population statistics which are geared to user needs and accurate for small areas and small population groups. Duncan noted the need to open up consultation with deaf, deafblind and other special communities across Scotland and that this meeting would be just the start of discussions with these groups. He highlighted that GROS needs the help of these communities to achieve a very high response rate and ensure that everyone receives a Census form they are able to fill in. It will also be important to publish Census information in an accessible format and so GROS is keen to identify issues that need to be overcome for specific groups.
3. **Lilian Lawson (Scottish Council for Deafness)** asked whether deaf people had been involved in the 2006 Test and whether there had been any problems in conducting it. Duncan confirmed that, since it covered 50,000 households, it was inevitable that the Test would have been filled in by some deaf people. However, although there were problems, none of these specifically concerned deaf people.

Topics and Questions for the Household Questionnaire

4. **Kirsty MacLean (GROS)** presented information on the current working assumptions for household and individual questions in the 2011 Census, including questions which are likely to be included, under consideration and not likely to be included.
5. **Duncan** expanded on this by drawing attention to p49 of the consultation document which, at question 36, includes a question on language which was included in the 2006

Test. This is a matrix style question which asks about respondents ability to understand, speak, read and write English, Scottish Gaelic, Scots and Punjabi (tick boxes) and other languages (write in boxes). This did not work particularly well in the Test, perhaps because people didn't see the option for ticking 'no ability'. The write in box for other languages includes British Sign Language (BSL) as a suggestion and Duncan noted that this was there, partly in order to identify those conversant in the language, and partly because otherwise respondents may not have realised our interest in the option. Duncan highlighted that, although the question did not work well in its current form, GROS will be persevering to develop and improve it. We are aware of the user demand for information on the numbers of speakers of different languages; the number of people who don't understand English; and the numbers conversant in BSL, among other needs. There is also a demand for this information at a small area level.

6. **Lilian Lawson (Scottish Council for Deafness)** noted that she had considered the draft language question and appreciated Duncan's explanation of the 2006 Test result. Now that draft 2011 questionnaires are being proposed, she was anxious to ensure that the language question, including BSL, is kept. Deaf organisations receive a lot of queries from policy planners and persons involved in service delivery, who are keen to find out information on the numbers of BSL users. However, Lilian felt that the matrix style and volume of tick boxes was difficult to understand especially since BSL is not like English in the sense that you do not 'speak' or 'read' it. She proposed simpler questions along the lines of 'Do you use British Sign Language?' with tick boxes to indicate whether it is used as a first or second language. Persons using it as a second language could include persons who sign for family members or who use it at work, for example. Lilian stressed that the inclusion of BSL would make life easier for many deaf organisations.
7. In response, **Duncan** agreed that the Census could, subject to having enough space on the form, be used to provide small area figures on BSL to help target resources. **Valerie** drew attention to the Spring 2007 Test in England and Wales where a question is being tested which includes a tick box for the ability to 'sign' BSL rather than 'read or write' it and this may give better results.
8. **Drena O'Malley (Deafblind Scotland)** echoed the comment that the current tick box style is too complicated and that it needs to be made easier. In its current format, she noted that the deafblind are entirely excluded and that it does not pick up on other communication methods either. She suggested the question could be reframed to ask 'What is your preferred language or communication method?' with two write in boxes for first and second preferred options since tick boxes are restrictive. Drena stressed that respondents will have preferred languages and more accurate results would be achieved by letting them write in their own. She also noted that other languages and communications should be treated equally to gaelic and suggested that giving examples of possible languages would be demeaning.
9. **Duncan** outlined the difficulties surrounding free text answers. Without prompts respondents may not realise the type of answers required and when faced with a write in box respondents often simply don't bother to fill it in - there is a known decline in response rates when write in boxes are provided instead of tick boxes. It is also practically difficult to code such answers in comparison to tick boxes, writing is not

always legible and people use many different names for the same thing. This makes it difficult to meaningfully aggregate responses to write in boxes and there is therefore a lower level of accuracy with free text. However, Duncan noted that there is the provision of an 'other' write in box and GROS are keen that the deaf community should emphasise the importance of ticking or writing in answers whatever the final question looks like.

10. **Drena O'Malley (Deafblind Scotland)** also recognised that BSL users are important but wondered where information would be obtained on the rest of the deaf community (around 90%). There is no mention of 'communications' in the question and, at the previous consultation in 2004, there had been some discussion of including a question on communication methods if it was not possible to include one counting deaf people.
11. **Duncan** pointed out that the language question was not designed to count deaf people and drew attention to question 16 on page 45 of the consultation document which is designed to pick up information on disabilities. **Lilian** queried where deafblind persons would be recorded in this question and **Duncan** indicated that they could tick both boxes for deaf and blind. Similarly if they had any other physical conditions this could be ticked too.
12. **Marian Fletcher (Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters)** asked about BSL as a write-in language and wondered why, since it is an indigenous Scottish language, it is not being given its own tick box. **Duncan** noted that the question is not final and GROS will be monitoring the 2007 Test in England and Wales where such a tick box is available. The proposed questions are intended to encourage debate and for users to put robust cases forward for their preferred options and we will note the point about BSL being given its own tick box. **Marian** responded that for a question on 'signing', people may tick this but might in fact use other sign systems, such as Makaton.
13. **Andrew Thomson (Deaf Connections)** noted that he was confused about the other languages included in the question and suggested that a better question might be around 'communication support needs'. He supported Lilian's suggestion that information be collected on first and second languages and noted that there are more BSL users than gaelic so queried why BSL did not have an earlier tick box. He also wondered why there was interest in 'understanding' of these languages. On the 'nature of disability' question, he indicated that this would also capture persons who are hard of hearing and everyone would be counted together.
14. **Duncan** agreed that Andrew's query on gaelic and BSL illustrates the difficulties in deciding upon final Census questions and noted that one of the main considerations is the limited space available. He highlighted that GROS's role is to devise the best practicable set of questions and does not have preconceived views on what questions should be included. Instead it reacts to user demand and the final decisions will be taken by the Scottish Parliament. However, questions must be methodologically sound. GROS is aware that the current question was a 'near miss' and the results from this consultation will help to inform the next iteration. As a bit of background, he drew attention to the fact that the SNP have a manifesto commitment to include a question on Scots on the Census. **Kirsty** stressed that a strong user need for statistics on Scots language had also been identified in addition to the SNP commitment.

15. **Drena O'Malley (Deafblind Scotland)** strongly suggested a move to a question on 'preferred language or communication method' as she'd proposed earlier. This would respect both language and communication and take away the subjective decision as to how well a respondent reads, writes, speaks and understands a language. She felt the current question was not methodologically sound and that the accuracy of its results must be in doubt. However, 'preferred' would actually give people what they need to know and be useful to both government and user groups.
16. **Lilian Lawson (Scottish Council for Deafness)** noted that the Schools Census asks each parent to fill in a form with a question about 'preferred language' and BSL is one of the options to write in. Valerie agreed that GROS would take this point on board and consider the Schools Census question.
17. **Marian Fletcher (Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters)** noted that the current question would group users and interpreters of BSL. For policy development and resource allocation it is necessary to separate the two. For example, the previous administration had a commitment to double the number of interpreters. Although the number of interpreters is known there is little information on the number of users and this needs to be captured. **Duncan** responded that one of the key features of the Census is the ability to cross tabulate known BSL use with other questions on disability which should help to derive this information.
18. **Doug Bradley (RNID)** drew attention to the fact that many deaf respondents would be unlikely to tick a 'disability' box and **Duncan** agreed that the more publicity the better to promote completion.
19. There was a discussion of the 'nature of disability' question and the tick box for 'deafness or severe hearing impairment'. **Lilian** and **Andrew** queried the use of severe and how this would be defined. It was felt that the term severe should be removed and the tick box be labelled 'deaf and hearing impaired' since severe excludes mild hearing loss. **Duncan** noted that the term was intended to exclude persons with slight disabilities where we are trying to identify those with impairments that actually limit their activities. However, it was felt that this didn't work as intended.
20. **Marian Fletcher (Scottish Association of Sign Language Interpreters)** suggested that information on the deaf community could be collected under the ethnic group question which could be re-phrased as 'What is your ethnic group and / or culture?', as per the current note under the question. The supporting note could then be removed and a 'deaf culture' tick box added. **Andrew** supported this by asking who made the decisions around the ethnicity categories as he noted that BSL and deafness is a culture. **Lilian** agreed that deaf people represent an indigenous UK culture dating back to the 13th and 14th centuries whilst many of these other ethnic groups are relatively new to the country. She suggested that it was time the deaf culture was included.
21. **Duncan** outlined that GROS had decided upon the current groups but that the Scottish Parliament will make the final decision on our recommendation. He suggested that ethnic group may not be the right place to count deaf people and that a bigger step could be made in the language and disability questions. In response **Marian** suggested that most 'hearing' people would not view deafness as a culture but that

most deaf people would expect to see it included. **Andrew** and **Drena** noted that it was an insult to deaf people to suggest they were ill or disabled. They felt that 'culture' concerns sociological perspectives and applies as much to deaf persons as to other groups such as Chinese and Gypsies. **Duncan** accepted this demand but re-iterated that the ethnicity question may not be the best place to record it. **Doug** suggested and it was agreed that everyone should raise this point in their written response to the consultation.

22. **Valerie West (GROS)** showed the England and Wales language question from their 2007 Test to Lilian and Andrew who both indicated that this format was preferable.
23. **Doug Bradley (RNID)** noted that deaf organisations would help to publicise questions in the run up to the Census and some flexibility was therefore possible as they would be able to help communicate requirements.
24. **Lilian Lawson (Scottish Council for Deafness)** asked whether a question had been considered on households with adaptations and the persons who live in them. **Duncan** drew attention to the 2006 Test question on repairs and adaptations but noted that this hadn't worked well and would need to be reviewed. **Lilian** stressed that it would be better to have a question such as 'is your house adapted for...?' rather than that on repairs.

Carrying out the Census

[Please note that Drena was unable to stay for this section of the discussion and that Doug Bradley had to leave mid-way through.]

25. **Valerie West (GROS)** presented information to the group on the issues around carrying out the 2011 Census including: population bases, the date of the Census, community liaison, communal establishments, address registers, internet completion, gaelic and geography.
26. **Lilian Lawson (Scottish Council for Deafness)** outlined the 2001 Census position on support for BSL users. The deaf community had asked for a textline on the Census helpline but this was not possible. Instead a video was made available but only one copy was provided. The deaf community therefore had no access arrangements unlike gaelic users who received a translation leaflet. Lilian hoped there would not be a repeat of these mistakes in 2011 and asked about current plans in this area. She also expressed the fact that deaf organisations would be keen to become involved in community liaison, working collaboratively or setting up surgeries and specific events to help deaf people access the information to allow them to complete the Census. **Duncan** noted that GROS would be happy to take up this offer – the approach seems very constructive and the current meeting would hopefully be a starting point for closer liaison.
27. **Andrew Thomson (Deaf Connections)** expressed a degree of concern around the community liaison since it is easy to say that access will be provided but often it comes down to funding availability. **Duncan** agreed that funding was a concern but need not be an obstacle and that he would be surprised if it wasn't possible to agree a reasonable and affordable solution.

28. **Lilian Lawson (Scottish Council for Deafness)** suggested that deaf persons could be trained as enumerators since deaf organisations will have address lists for their members and will know where their communities are. They would also have a clearer understanding of deaf needs and be cheaper than an interpreter service. She also suggested that GROS think seriously about a BSL option, for example a signed version of the form on the internet. **Duncan** agreed that deaf enumerators are a good idea and noted that this is also being explored in ethnic communities.
29. There was some further discussion of the internet idea and **Andrew** noted that he would be able to provide advice in this area. He felt that by 2011 technology would be available and well equipped to offer such a service. Indeed, some technology is currently available which offers signing online e.g. through video conferencing. In addition, he felt that internet use was widespread amongst deaf users and that internet protocol TV (IPTV) might be a good, less costly way of allowing deaf persons access to guidance information. Andrew re-iterated that he would be happy to discuss this further on another occasion.
30. **Lilian Lawson (Scottish Council for Deafness)** outlined the needs of deafblind respondents. These would require Braille, the Moon system (a series of raised symbols rather than dots – more information available on the Deafblind Scotland website) and physical assistance. **Marian** noted that, in addition, deaf and deafblind users will have similar issues to the rest of the population including age factors and learning disabilities. This should be factored into any decisions on how to handle these issues.

Conclusion

31. **Duncan** thanked everyone for attending and for their valuable contributions. He noted that this is just the start of the process and that GROS would take forward the suggestions made today and circulate a list of action points for comment. We'd also welcome consultation responses in addition to those recorded at the meeting.

Actions

GROS to consider:

- option for BSL tick box in language question;
- other suggestions for language questions proposed including 'Which is your preferred language or communication method?';
- whether first and second languages can be collected e.g. a matrix which collects this information rather than whether it can be read, written or understood;
- the question currently being asked in the Schools Census;
- removing the term 'severe' from the tick box 'deafness or severe hearing impairment' in the 'nature of disability question';
- whether 'deaf culture' should be included within the ethnicity question;
- how to arrange access for deaf persons to the 2011 Census, perhaps via the recruitment of deaf enumerators (Deafblind Scotland would be happy to help but would need financial assistance with travel expenses etc.);
- Duncan to contact Andrew Thomson at Deaf Connections regarding internet BSL completion.