

2009 Census Rehearsal Evaluation Census Helpline

December 2009

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2009 Rehearsal – Census Helpline

1. Definition and scope for rehearsal

The primary function of the census helpline is to provide support and advice to the public on any aspect of the 2011 Census.

For the rehearsal, the helpline was provided in-house through call management; telephone data capture (TDC) and the electronic contact facility (ECF) services. Five temporary census helpline advisors provided front line support to the public, led by a Team Leader role filled by a permanent member of staff from Field Operations Branch (FOB).

What was tested:

- Automatic Call Distribution (ACD) telephone system;
- telephone numbers;
- helpline staffing & recruitment;
- staff training;
- operational period & hours of opening;
- call volumes;
- services for the deaf;
- Gaelic language services;
- other language support;
- telephone data capture (TDC);
- interfaces with ECF;
- interfaces and use of Internet Public Assistance (IPA);
- interface and use of Zimbra mail box;
- interface with field staff;
- types of calls received – ‘contact record’ facility; and
- call escalation process.

What could not be tested:

Everything we planned to test was tested except outsourcing of the service and the anticipated call volumes for a full census.

2. Evaluation findings

Pre – determined evaluation points

Description	Success Criteria	Outcome against success criteria	Recommendation(s)	Timeframe
1) Interface with field staff	Accurate information to be provided within reasonable timescales.	<p>Partially achieved:</p> <p>a) The ECF was straightforward to use for requesting questionnaires. We were unable to notify enumerators of requests where the household was not listed on the geography database as the ECF system would reject any such requests.</p> <p>b) Requests for a field staff visit (whether made by the public or by helpline staff) did not allow entry of a reason for the visit and therefore this facility was not used by the helpline.</p> <p>c) We encountered an issue with advisors entering more than one ECF request in one session – this was part</p>	<p>a) A revised process should be engineered to allow the helpline to circumvent the geography database check within the ECF in cases where we know an address to be correct but it is not listed on the geography database (either at all or in the correct way).</p> <p>b) Enhancement to ECF</p> <p>c) If the ECF is to be utilised again we will need to consider how to overcome the flood protection measures limiting</p>	The solution must be tested and implemented by Jan 2011 at the latest.

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		<p>of the 'flood protection' measures in the ECF. A workaround was quickly introduced.</p> <p>d) We agreed a workaround to notify field staff of fulfilment requests or additional information where the ECF could not be used. This was not effective. For security reasons, we were limited in the information we could send via email and even if we could use email the Census District Manager (CDM) was our only point of contact as these (as well as the Census Regional Manager (CRM)) were the only email addresses we held. Contact via mobile telephone was also ineffective as seldom were we able to contact enumerators without repeat calls having to be made. Escalation to CDMs via telephone encountered</p>	<p>users to one submission per session.</p> <p>d) We need a secure, electronic method of passing additional information to enumerators e.g. extra address details, reason for visit request, telephone numbers, access or absence information. The workaround used in the rehearsal would be too labour intensive for a full census.</p>	

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		similar problems. Neither of these field grades were full time employees for census work.		
2) Breakdown of call information	Meaningful statistics to inform 2011 solution.	<p>Achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A detailed record of all calls and electronic contacts received during the rehearsal was kept using the contact record facility (described in other evaluation points, item seven below) as well as the ACD system. This includes both call statistics and call content information. • This information was used during the rehearsal operation to identify helpline staff training needs and to allow those responsible for questionnaire development to assess the types of questions being asked. • Of the calls received 86.1 per cent were received during the hours of nine to five; with 2.2 per cent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The spread of calls in the early morning and during the evening points to quieter periods which would allow any backlog of call messages and fulfilment requests to be actioned. • We will undertake more detailed work to present call statistics in a meaningful way. These figures will also assist us in modelling the spread of calls anticipated in 2011. From this we can produce a staffing model to match demand. 	Call statistics will need to be produced by Sept/Oct 2009.

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		<p>received between eight and nine; 11.7 per cent of calls were received after five pm. The average length of call was around two minutes and 17 seconds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We received fewer than 50 enquiries via the ECF. 		
3) Use of ECF	Low number of manual interventions necessary	<p>Partially achieved: The ECF of our website allowed members of the public to contact us electronically instead of via the telephone. We received fewer than 50 ECF requests. For security reasons this was not integrated with Scottish Office Technical Strategy (SCOTS) but hosted on a secure remote server. This was slow to load and access. We were required to cut and paste the enquiries from the remoter server into our own ECF mailbox on SCOTS. All</p>	<p>It is accepted that the remote server was a workaround solution to address the security issues presented by this method of communicating and was put in place for the rehearsal only. Its performance was apparently constrained by SCOTS related issues. We will need a faster, more efficient solution (both system and processes) to manage ECF enquiries in a full census.</p>	<p>As the ECF may go-live in Jan 2011 it will need to be developed and thoroughly tested during 2010.</p>

Description	Success Criteria	Outcome against success criteria	Recommendation(s)	Timeframe
		further action (escalation and reply) was then taken via this SCOTS mailbox.		
4) Interface with IPA	IPA system availability. Low number of system changes required.	<p>Achieved:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The IPA was not developed to provide a 'script' for use by the census helpline but was intended as a web based source of information/advice for the public to access. Helpline staff were asked to use the information contained within the IPA as the basis for their answers. In general this worked well. However, for some questions, particularly with longer answers, or with multiple overlapping strands, the wording of the IPA content did not easily lend itself to be used as a verbatim response. The IPA was designed to be read, not to be read out. The search facility of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will consider introducing scripts. Contingency plans will need to be revisited to ensure access to 'scripts' in whatever form we choose. This is likely to be in the form of paper copies of the 'script', as in the rehearsal. We will need to develop an 	Development activity should begin as soon as possible

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		<p>the IPA, while not ideal, was nevertheless sufficient for our needs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The IPA was available for the vast majority of time and contingency plans to use paper copies of the IPA content were activated for a short time only. This contingency plan worked well but the call volumes and the time at which they were invoked meant that Helpline Advisors were already confident with their answers to many of the questions asked. 	improved search facility and consider things like using keywords for example.	
5) Complaints	Response and resolution within 20 days (standard Scottish Government service level)	Achieved: No complaints were received about the census helpline operation.	Implement the same response and resolution performance target for the full census.	Processes and procedures must be in place for the go-live of the ECF in January 2011

Description	Success Criteria	Outcome against success criteria	Recommendation(s)	Timeframe
6) Telephone Data Capture (TDC)	System availability Ease of use	Achieved: We undertook three TDC calls, all using the Internet Data Capture (IDC) facility. Advisors found it relatively straightforward to carry out TDC using the IDC. Internet IDs were supplied by the Team Leader using the geography database. Calls lasted about 20 minutes for a one or two person household and about 35 minutes for a household with two adults and a young child.	We will offer this service again in 2011. TDC will again be targeted at those who really need this help and the solution will use the IDC facility. We will however require paper questionnaires as a contingency should the IDC service be unavailable for any length of time.	Work will take place in the latter part of 2009 to develop this service.
7) Use of language support services	Helpline Interpreters provide a valuable 'real time' service for non English speakers	Partially achieved: a) We engaged with a translation service provider to provide a three way simultaneous translation service. We received only three calls to the helpline that required a translation service, two in Polish and one in Mandarin. Calls were connected to the translator quickly and efficiently. The translator did all that was required, quickly and	a) The services of an external translation service will be used for the 2011 Census.	Autumn 2010 for procurement of translation services.

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		<p>efficiently.</p> <p>We undertook a number of training calls to test the process and allow each of our advisors at least one opportunity to undertake a call using the translation service. Again, the trial went smoothly.</p> <p>b) As the rehearsal area included a large number of Gaelic speakers within Lewis and Harris, we had anticipated that calls in Gaelic would be received. Attempts to recruit a Gaelic speaking helpline advisor to cover these calls were unsuccessful; however no requests for a Gaelic translation were actually received.</p>	<p>b) The helpline will endeavour to recruit at least one bi-lingual advisor to answer calls in Gaelic, either in real time or on a call back basis depending on availability.</p>	<p>January 2011 for appointment of bilingual advisor.</p>

Other evaluation points

Description	Outcomes/issues	Recommendation(s)	Timeframe
<p>8) The ACD system was untested for census activities.</p>	<p>The ACD system was available with appropriate messages prior to the go live date of 9 March 2009. The system was capable of directing calls to the next available operator, was simple to use and allowed management to monitor and control staff log on.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will have the system in place to allow staff to become familiar with the functionality prior to training of the advisors. • We will develop an Interactive Voice Response (IVR) system to allow more effective call management and directing of calls using pre-recorded messages. This will be particularly useful in dealing with large volumes of calls on a single topic to avoid tying up advisor resources. The IVR should be developed in tandem with a 'back office' function. 	<p>Ongoing work to develop an effective and efficient IVR system. The system should be tested, signed off and available by January 2011, ahead of advisor training.</p>
<p>9) Use of 0845 telephone number.</p>	<p>No calls were received regarding our use of an 0845 telephone number.</p> <p>The issue of the provision of a Freephone number for the census helpline was raised a number of times by members of the public and other interested bodies, via our field staff. However, whilst we are sympathetic to the arguments raised for the use of a Freephone number, the problems this might create in encouraging hoax or time wasting calls outweigh such arguments. We do provide a call-back service should any caller request this.</p>	<p>Consider Office for Communications (OfCom)/government guidance on the use of 03 numbers for the public to use when contacting Government departments</p>	<p>December 2009</p>

Description	Outcomes/issues	Recommendation(s)	Timeframe
<p>10) Helpline staffing and recruitment via service provider</p>	<p>a) The service provider was provided with the job specification for the census helpline advisor and were asked to fill five posts. The specification asked for customer service and call handling experience, preferably in a contact centre environment. However, candidate details were not passed to us until two days before the start date with no element of choice given. The late sourcing of staff gave us little room for manoeuvre should we have deemed any of them unsuitable.</p> <p>One post was to be filled by a Gaelic speaker but the contractor was unable to source a candidate. See point seven above.</p> <p>b) The majority of staff had the required skills, to varying degrees, but only one had worked in a contact centre. As a result we had to introduce some additional training to enhance their skills.</p> <p>c) While the service provider was able to quickly source a new recruit to replace an early leaver, only one candidate was put forward, with no</p>	<p>a) More stringent adherence to the person specification / job role is required with early notification given to the service provider to ensure that our requirements are properly fulfilled. We would prefer a degree of choice from a potential pool of candidates. Having said that, the nature of the contract to supply candidates to fill temporary, short term posts means they are unlikely to source staff well ahead of time.</p> <p>We will aim to recruit a bi-lingual English-Gaelic advisor(s).</p> <p>b) We will build in call centre skills training for staff recruited who do not have relevant experience.</p> <p>c) We will review the rehearsal service with the service provider, but also look at other sources of recruitment.</p>	<p>Explore Scottish Government (SG) contract framework for additional guarantee for suitable staffing by December 2009.</p> <p>Concurrently explore possibility of alternative sources of staffing.</p>

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	alternatives offered.		
11) Staff training on census information and required systems.	<p>The timetable for staff training was revised during its delivery due to some delays in deploying the Information Technology (IT) and telephone systems / equipment and obtaining SCOTS access for our temporary staff. Feedback from helpline staff indicated the pace of training delivery allowed information to be absorbed and gave a good understanding of the census. Staff found the DVD and CD-ROM particularly effective to give a good visual understanding of what field staff would be doing and how this could impact on calls.</p> <p>System training by Information Technology Operations and Change (ITOC) and Census and Statistics Information Technology (CaSIT) was clear and explained the system well.</p>	<p>Develop training plans to tie in with planned systems and equipment deployment.</p>	<p>To be developed during planning stages to ensure all required systems are available for training.</p>
12) Evaluation of the suitability of the operational period and hours of opening (to	<p>a) No negative feedback from the public on the opening hours offered for the service. Operation was open from 9 March</p>	<p>a) Helpline to go-live on 07 March 2011. No change to hours. Any quiet periods could be filled with catching up with any call</p>	<p>To be included with plans for operation by end Sept 09.</p>

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include Census Coverage Survey (CCS))	<p>2009, with a slow build of calls to a peak around census week, these fell back and increased again around follow-up.</p> <p>b) Census operation ceased on 30 April 2009 with CCS taking over on 1 May. Evaluation of CCS calls has still to be completed, but early indications are that very few relating to CCS were received. Four CCS calls were received prior to 1 May and these related to CCS property listing activities taking place while census follow-up was still ongoing.</p>	<p>backlogs or back office functions.</p> <p>b) There will be a separation between CCS and census calls to avoid confusion by helpline agents and the public.</p>	
13) Suitability and use of services supplied to assist the deaf and hard of hearing and those with speech impediments.	<p>A textphone service was advertised on questionnaires and alongside advertising of the census helpline telephone number. The textphone was operated independently from the ACD system although calls were still answered by helpline staff. The number was identified by a textphone icon on questionnaires. The functionality was rehearsed during training. No textphone calls were received during live running. The phone did receive 12 calls, but no text enquiry followed. As calls were received on the helpline number immediately after these textphone 'calls' we assume the incorrect number had been dialled previously.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> As no live calls were received, further work is required to ensure we continue to cater for the needs of the client group who have previously used a textphone service. There may now be a preference to access an operator supported telephone service or simply to communicate via text messaging or email. We will continue to offer a textphone service for the 2011 Census to aid accessibility. 	<p>Early investigation work into the use of textphones or alternatives to be completed by October 2009.</p>

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14) Contact record facility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> This was previously referred to as the 'call logger' but the name has been changed to 'contact record facility' to avoid confusion with the term 'call logger' used as part of the telephone system records. A series of excel spreadsheets was used to record details of calls and electronic contacts. To aid questionnaire development we manually recorded details of each question asked and the ACD system recorded call statistics. Each advisor's contact records were copied into a master spreadsheet accessible only by team leaders. This activity was time consuming but one that was manageable for the volumes experienced during the rehearsal. 	A more robust and comprehensive solution, accessible by multiple concurrent users will be developed for the 2011 Census, possibly through the use of a database. We aim to record appropriate details of each call / request made to the helpline to improve customer service	January 2011.
15) Call / enquiry escalation process where information was not available on the IPA site.	a) In general, General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) colleagues were able to provide answers to enquiries relayed by Helpline staff for us to then pass on to the caller. Similarly, ECF enquiries requiring escalation were in general dealt with promptly.	a) An IT helpdesk function to be set up to handle calls escalated from the census helpline where they clearly relate to the operation or performance of the IDC system.	January 2011.

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	<p>b) We did encounter some issues with the time taken to receive responses for a very few ECF enquiries. This tended to be where a response had to be agreed with colleagues in Office for National Statistics (ONS) or where it was not obvious from the enquiry that a response was expected. The helpline had anticipated a reply to all enquiries to at least acknowledge or note what had been said.</p> <p>As far as calls were concerned we encountered some serious problems (on a few occasions) when helpline advisors thought it more appropriate for GROS staff to speak directly with callers. The staff involved refused to speak with the caller as they did not think it part of their job to do so. The worst example of this was a caller who waited for 12 minutes to have his call escalated only for him to give up just as we had found someone willing to take his call (we did offer to call him back but he refused to leave a number).</p>	<p>b) Roles and responsibilities need to be more clearly defined to ensure an effective and efficient service is provided to the public for calls/enquiries that need to be escalated. We will consider the introduction of service levels.</p>	