

Alastair McAlpine
Chief Statistician
Saughton House
Broomhouse Drive
Edinburgh
EH11 3XD

By email only:
Alastair.McAlpine@gov.scot

25 May 2023

Dear Ally

As you know statistics from the 2022 Census sit at the heart of the statistical system in Scotland. I am writing to you in your capacity as Chief Statistician for Scotland to assist me to review and build further confidence in the first outputs from the census published later this year.

The statistics will be used directly to inform decision making across our economy and society. They will also be used as the basis for updating annual population statistics and for weighting social surveys. Through data linkage, government and academic users will be able to derive new insight into Scotland's population, and the information will support the provision of effectively targeted, person-centred services.

To have confidence in the decisions our users make, they must have confidence in the statistics we produce. My team are undertaking a comprehensive quality assurance and validation exercise as part of our planned production of the estimates.

The importance of these statistics means we must go further. My intention is to be able to demonstrate my confidence before we publish in three ways:

- 1) National Statistics accreditation.
- 2) Sound statistical methods.
- 3) Coherence with other published statistics and data.

As the census forms such an integral part of the statistical system in Scotland the statistics must be published as National Statistics. Earlier this year the Office for Statistical Regulation (OSR) published its second assessment of the 2022 Census.

This found we were making good progress but highlighted the importance of our plans to inform stakeholders about the quality of the statistics ahead of and at the time of first outputs. My team will continue to engage with OSR ahead of first outputs.

Last year the then Registrar General established an International Steering Group (ISG) tasked with providing external advice on the quality of the census and planned statistical methods. I am grateful that you have been an active participant in the group. In September 2022, ISG stated the data collected were a 'solid foundation' on which to build.

I am aware that in partnership with ISG my team have developed ground-breaking enhancements to our methods making far greater use of administrative data than originally planned. I would like ISG to give me (as Registrar General) confidence that the statistical methods and their implementation also provide a sound basis for census statistics.

Coherence between published census estimates and other statistics and data is complex. Even the mid-year population estimates produced by NRS and which have broadly the same definitional basis as the census will contain an element of error. Indeed, re-basing of the mid-year estimates is one of the many important uses of the census. Likewise, there are limitations with administrative data sources which are not complete in coverage and are only current if an individual keeps their record up to date.

We are working in partnership with Local Authorities under the strict pre-release conditions of the code of practice so they can directly contribute to our quality assurance. Ahead of publication, we will send aggregate estimates for their area so they can validate against other locally held sources. We will investigate all inconsistencies to understand whether there is evidence that revisions are required.

In your role as Chief Statistician with oversight of the broader statistical system in Scotland, I would like to commission you to review the coherence assessment that my team are making of the first outputs ahead of publication in the early autumn. This will cover census population estimates by five-year age group and the estimated number of households at both Scotland and Local Authority levels.

I encourage you to draw on expertise of Scotland's population, the broader UK demographic landscape and key users within Scottish Government as you see fit.

Yours sincerely



Dr Janet Egdell
Interim Chief Executive
Registrar General for Scotland and Keeper of the Records of Scotland

Email: RG-Keeper@nrscotland.gov.uk