

# Special assessment of the 2011 Censuses in the UK: Phase 1

*Office for National Statistics, the  
General Register Office for Scotland,  
and the Northern Ireland Statistics and  
Research Agency*

## Assessment Report 28

March 2010

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The UK Statistics Authority is an independent body operating at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department, directly accountable to Parliament. It was established on 1 April 2008 by the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*.

The Authority's overall objective is to promote and safeguard the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good. It is also required to promote and safeguard the quality and comprehensiveness of official statistics, and good practice in relation to official statistics.

The Statistics Authority has two main functions:

1. oversight of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) – the executive office of the Authority;
2. independent scrutiny (monitoring and assessment) of all official statistics produced in the UK.

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# **Special assessment of the 2011 Censuses in the UK: Phase 1**

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## **SPECIAL ASSESSMENT OF THE 2011 CENSUS**

Under the provisions of the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007*, the UK Statistics Authority has a statutory function to assess sets of statistics against the Code of Practice for Official Statistics, with a view to determining whether it is appropriate for the statistics to be designated, or to retain their designation, as National Statistics.

The Statistics Authority is carrying out a special assessment, in three phases, of the UK Censuses which will take place in March 2011<sup>1</sup> :

- The first phase - which this report covers - assesses compliance with the Code of Practice in respect of those aspects of the Code for which this was practicable at December 2009 (listed in Annex 1).

- The second phase, which will start in late 2010, will cover compliance with the remaining practices of the Code, to include, for example, provisional assessment of plans for the publication of the various census outputs. This phase will allow the Statistics Authority to decide whether the census outputs may be designated as National Statistics in accordance with the requirements of the Statistics and Registration Service Act.

- The third phase, which will start in mid-2012, will involve an assessment of the outputs in the light of users' views.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/news/special-assessment-of-census-2011.pdf>

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# 1 Summary of findings

## 1.1 Introduction

- 1.1.1 The population Census is the largest and most high-profile statistical operation conducted in the UK. Separate censuses are carried out in England and Wales (by the Office for National Statistics, ONS), Scotland (by the General Register Office for Scotland, GROS) and Northern Ireland (by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, NISRA). In this report we generally refer to 'the Census' to include the three separate censuses. We also refer to ONS, GROS and NISRA collectively as 'the census offices'.
- 1.1.2 The Statistics Authority is required under the *Statistics and Registration Service Act* to re-assess existing National Statistics, including the 2001 Census results, and we regard this special assessment as fulfilling our obligation in that respect. While the planning in relation to the detailed outputs from the 2011 Census is still ongoing, those outputs are likely to be broadly similar in nature to, but further developed from, those in 2001. These included UK-wide estimates of population and housing, geographical and population breakdowns, and research reports on a variety of topics. We understand that there were around 140 primary tabular reports produced from the 2001 Census, as well as many more bespoke outputs, analytical reports and articles.
- 1.1.3 This report was prepared by the Authority's Assessment team, and approved by the Board of the Statistics Authority on the advice of the Head of Assessment.

## 1.2 Summary of strengths and weaknesses

- 1.2.1 In planning for the 2011 Census, the census offices have made improvements in the light of experience gained in the 2001 Census. These include improved procurement processes and revised arrangements for delivering, completing and tracking the census questionnaires. The offices have also increased comparability among some aspects of the three censuses.
- 1.2.2 The offices have carried out extensive consultation with a wide range of users to inform planning for 2011. However, the offices will need to ensure that user engagement continues for areas of the Census where planning is not yet complete. This includes clear communication and explanation of methods and quality assurance processes.
- 1.2.3 The census offices have clear governance structures and apply sound project management processes to census planning. Arrangements for protecting the confidentiality of census data appear to be robust.
- 1.2.4 We recognise that publicity for the Census will increase as census day approaches but early media engagement may help to offset the negative impact of ill-informed public comment. The census offices have developed a plan to engage with the news media to promote recognition of the importance of the Census to society, and to help increase public awareness of - and participation in - the 2011 Census.

- 1.2.5 Budgets for the later phases of the Census, including data processing and publishing outputs, have yet to be allocated. We think it important that the census offices secure these resources as soon as possible to ensure that quality is not compromised, and firm up contingency plans in the event of any shortfall in funding. Principle 7.1 of the Code of Practice for Official Statistics requires that statistical services have the resources to produce statistical work to the standards of the Code.
- 1.2.6 ONS and NISRA are currently developing address lists for the postal delivery of census questionnaires to the majority of households in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Relying on these lists carries an inherent risk due to ongoing problems with missing and duplicate addresses. The development of robust contingency plans should be a priority.

### **1.3 Detailed recommendations**

- 1.3.1 The Assessment team identified some areas where it felt that the census offices could strengthen their compliance with the Code of Practice. Those considered essential to comply with the Code are listed in section 1.4 below. The census offices should implement these enhancements and report them to the Authority by July 2010. Other suggestions, which could help the census offices to improve their planning for the remaining phases of the 2011 Census, are listed at annex 2.

### **1.4 Requirements to comply with the Code of Practice**

<b>Requirement 1</b>	Publish explanations of how the Census estimates relating to the resident population, based on 12-month residency, will be derived from the information collected about three and six-month residency (para 3.20)
<b>Requirement 2</b>	Publish information on how discontinuities (relating to the introduction of the 12 month residency base) between population estimates from the 2001 and 2011 Censuses will be measured and explained (para 3.21)
<b>Requirement 3</b>	Publish plans for how participation in both the Census and the follow-up surveys will be maximised, in the light of the low response rates in the Census Rehearsals (para 3.31)
<b>Requirement 4</b>	Publish estimates, with methods, of the times taken to complete the paper and online versions of the Census questionnaire, based on data from the Census Rehearsals (para 3.40)

## 2 Subject of the assessment

2.1 A Census has been held in the UK every 10 years since 1801, with the exception of 1941. The most recent Census was held in April 2001 and the next one is planned for 27 March 2011. The initial outputs from the 2011 Census are due to be published in autumn 2012, around 18 months after the Census is carried out.

2.2 ONS and GROS are responsible for carrying out their respective Censuses under the provisions of the Census Act 1920. NISRA is responsible for carrying out the Census in Northern Ireland under the provisions of the Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969. The Census is fully devolved in Northern Ireland and Scotland: there is a separate Census Order for each, and for England and Wales combined, with separate regulations in each country. The UK is required, under the EU Census Regulation (2008), to supply Census-derived or equivalent data to Eurostat.

2.3 Census data are essential for many aspects of policy development and democratic accountability. The results of the Census are used by the UK government and devolved administrations, local authorities, the NHS, the business community and the education and voluntary sectors to underpin local and national decisions. These uses include:<sup>2</sup>

- providing definitive estimates of the size and characteristics of the population, and providing a base for population and housing projections which are required for planning front-line services;
- supporting the efficient allocation of billions of pounds across all parts of the public sector, including housing, education, health care, social welfare and transport;
- providing essential information for business to help in product planning, marketing, and in making location decisions;
- providing information to voluntary sector organisations to help with their strategic planning and inform their funding applications to central and local government;
- assessing the effectiveness of policies to address areas of need and disadvantage;
- providing information on small population subgroups, such as ethnic minorities, for which sample surveys cannot provide robust statistics;
- informing and supporting academic research; and
- meeting parliamentary, public and media demand for population related information.

Census data are also extensively used by school and university students and by individuals throughout the UK to learn about their communities.

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<sup>2</sup> Sources: *2011 Census Business Case*. GROS, November 2006 and *Business Case for the 2011 Census in Northern Ireland*. NISRA, February 2008.



- 2.4 Census information, along with other data such as "vital events" (births, marriages, deaths) and health information, is used by the UK Longitudinal Studies. These studies, which are carried out separately in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England and Wales, provide information on a range of issues including occupational mortality, fertility changes, women's occupations, and geographical and social inequalities in health and social mobility.
- 2.5 The 2011 Census will be the most expensive statistical exercise ever carried out in the UK. The cost of the 2011 England and Wales Census - over the 11-year period 2005-2016 - is currently estimated to be £482 million. The corresponding estimated costs of the Northern Ireland and Scotland censuses are £21 million (from 2008/09 to 2013/14) and £60-65 million (from 2005/06 to 2012/13), respectively.
- 2.6 Following the 2001 Census, a number of reviews were carried out by various bodies, including the National Audit Office, the Statistics Commission and the House of Commons Treasury Committee, to identify lessons from the Census and to help the census offices plan for 2011. Some of the more problematic areas were: irregularities with ONS' procurement processes; inconsistencies between Census population counts and mid-year estimates; the recruitment and retention of field staff; the accuracy and completeness of the address list ONS plans to use for questionnaire delivery and the management of non-response follow up; and the harmonisation of outputs between the three census offices.
- 2.7 Planning for the 2011 Census has also been the subject of hearings by the House of Commons Public Administration Select Committee and a series of Gateway Reviews by the Office of Government Commerce. This assessment report builds on the findings of these and other reports.
- 2.8 It is widely accepted that alternative data sources are currently not robust enough to provide sufficiently reliable population estimates. However, various bodies, including the Statistics Commission and the House of Commons Treasury Committee, have called for the 2011 Census to be the last of its kind. These bodies recommend that alternative, less costly administrative sources should be developed to provide census-type information in the future. We understand that ONS is leading a UK-wide programme ("Beyond 2011") designed to look at the data requirements of users beyond the 2011 Census and how they might best be met.

### 3 Assessment findings

#### Principle 1: Meeting user needs

**The production, management and dissemination of official statistics should meet the requirements of informed decision-making by government, public services, business, researchers and the public.**

##### *Engaging with users*

- 3.1 All three census offices have carried out extensive user consultation programmes to inform their planning for the 2011 Census. These programmes covered a number of census issues, including the content of the 2011 questionnaires. Beginning in 2003 (ONS) and 2004 (NISRA and GROS), the user consultations comprised a number of phases, including:
  - initial consultations about broad future information needs to underpin the investigation of alternative collection methods;
  - consultations on topic selection, with information papers published on the relevant websites;
  - open meetings, "information days", seminars and roadshows which were arranged for users and the public at various locations; and
  - regular communication with a broad range of users using existing networks of advisory groups and setting up new groups such as the Central Government Advisory Group (2009).
- 3.2 The census offices published summaries of the outcomes of these consultations on their respective websites. The consultation undertaken by each census office has been well received by users who told us that it was a considerable improvement on the consultation which was carried out before the 2001 Census.
- 3.3 Regular meetings are held with Census Advisory Groups and other groups in each country to discuss and share information about census-related topics. ONS currently has six Census Advisory Groups representing the interests of main user groups, including central and local government, the NHS, the business sector, academics and other groups such as ethnic minorities and special needs groups. Wales has undertaken additional consultation to try to ensure that any specific needs of users in Wales are known. NISRA has one combined Census Advisory Group with various user representatives. In Scotland, the main advisory group is the Population and Migration Statistics Committee of the Scotstat network of users and providers of Scottish official statistics.
- 3.4 There have been a number of additional initiatives in each country to inform and promote the 2011 Census. These include: advice from high-level advisory committees, such as the Northern Ireland Statistics Advisory Committee and the Scottish Census Steering Committee; the use of information sources, such as the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service, to identify users and potential users of the Census; special consultations with hard-to-count populations such as travellers, rough sleepers and ethnic minorities; and web-based consultations on questionnaire content.

- 3.5 The three census offices have developed separate publicity/communications strategies which aim to maximise public understanding of, and involvement in, the 2011 Census. Publicity for the Census will increase during the first quarter of 2011 as census day approaches.
- 3.6 The census offices have developed a plan to engage with the media with a view to promoting the Census. This may help to offset the negative impact of ill-informed public comment and increase public awareness of - and involvement in - the 2011 Census.

#### *Planning and priority setting*

- 3.7 All three offices have published documents which set out their plans for the 2011 Census. ONS and NISRA have both published information papers on the design of the Census, and have regularly discussed planning arrangements with Advisory Groups and users. In December 2008 the Scottish Government published a statement "Scotland's Census 2011" which included proposals for (and the aims of) the 2011 Census. The statement also detailed the uses of census information and lessons learned from the 2001 Census.
- 3.8 All three census offices have developed individual Business Cases which include the case for funding and carrying out the 2011 Census, as well as the costs and expected benefits.
- 3.9 The legislative process for the Census requires that the plans be formally set out in Census Orders which are laid before the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The England and Wales Census Order was approved in December 2009. The Census Order for Scotland was laid in the Scottish Parliament in November 2009 and is expected to be approved in spring 2010. At the time that this report was prepared, the Census Order for Northern Ireland was awaiting approval from the Northern Ireland Executive.

## **Principle 2: Impartiality and objectivity**

**Official statistics, and information about statistical processes, should be managed impartially and objectively.**

3.10 As the planning for the 2011 Census has progressed, the census offices have made changes to the range of census methods and proposed questionnaires in the light of:

- reviews of the 2001 Census and "lessons learned";
- users' views, including their wish for increased harmonisation;
- extensive qualitative question and questionnaire testing; and
- Census Tests and Rehearsals.

In accordance with the Code of Practice, these changes were published in various documents on the census offices' websites.

3.11 The census offices produced clear guidance showing how competing priorities were to be resolved and announced these changes to methods and questionnaires in various publications. These included: ONS and NISRA information papers; the Scottish Government census statement; and the 2008 England and Wales White Paper and recent Census Orders. We suggest that the census offices publicise any further changes to the Census methods and questionnaires and explain clearly the reasons for these changes.

### **Principle 3: Integrity**

**At all stages in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics, the public interest should prevail over organisational, political or personal interests.**

- 3.12 ONS, GROS and NISRA have clear governance arrangements for managing the Census. These arrangements are underpinned by the primary and secondary legislation.
- 3.13 All three census offices have processes in place for informing the National Statistician about complaints regarding the Census, and for dealing with complaints. The census offices informed us that whilst they have received a number of queries about the 2011 Census up to December 2009, they had not received any formal complaints.
- 3.14 Staff working in all three census offices are security cleared and sign a census confidentiality agreement. There are increased clearance levels for staff with access to census data.
- 3.15 All three offices have largely complied with EU regulations in developing their census questionnaires. Where there are exceptions to these regulations - for example, none of the UK Censuses will ask respondents about the age of their dwellings or properties - the census offices have identified alternative data sources for this information. The Assessment team has received positive feedback from Eurostat on UK efforts to comply with the Census regulations, and about UK involvement in the Eurostat Census Taskforce that advised Eurostat during the drafting of the EU Census legislation.
- 3.16 Representatives of all three offices have commented publicly on television, radio and in the press on issues related to the Census. The Director and other representatives of the Census at ONS have appeared before Parliamentary Select Committees to answer questions and discuss decisions that have been made.

## Principle 4: Sound methods and assured quality

**Statistical methods should be consistent with scientific principles and internationally recognised best practices, and be fully documented. Quality should be monitored and assured taking account of internationally agreed practices.**

3.17 The design of the 2011 Census was developed following a review of the 2001 Census and the "lessons learned". The census offices carried out Census Tests in 2006 and 2007, and Census Rehearsals in 2009. The Census Tests were designed to investigate the acceptability of proposed questions and the feasibility of the methods for delivering the questionnaire (hand delivery or postal delivery). The Rehearsals were designed to test all aspects of the system in selected areas within each country. The census design was revised following the Tests, and is likely to be further refined following a review of the Rehearsals. ONS also conducted an international peer review of its proposed Census design in 2005, involving Census directors from other National Statistics organisations.

### *Promoting comparability among the UK censuses*

- 3.18 Harmonisation between the three censuses is a key element of the 2011 Census design, in particular the development of the questionnaire and the production of "harmonised" products. The "Statement of Agreement" between the three census offices includes a section on "harmonised aspects" of the Census<sup>3</sup>. Development of the questionnaire content and question wording was co-ordinated across the three offices with the aim of making the content as harmonised as possible, although there are differences in questionnaire content which reflect differing user needs. The census offices are endeavouring to ensure that, even with these differences in 'inputs', outputs from the three Censuses will be as comparable as is possible<sup>4</sup>.
- 3.19 Some commentators are likely to view the success of the 2011 Census in terms of the comparability of the population estimates with official mid-year population estimates (MYEs). The census offices should therefore ensure that the relationships between Census estimates and MYEs are explained clearly. England, Wales and Northern Ireland have a different collection base than in 2001 as they intend to include everyone resident - or intending to be resident - in the respective countries for at least three months. In 2001 the collection base was those who had been resident for at least six months. Scotland's collection base will be the same in 2011 as it was in 2001 - those resident for in the country for at least six months.
- 3.20 All four countries plan to produce population counts of those people resident or intending to be resident for 12 months or more. This will mean that the outputs are consistent across the UK and are also consistent with MYEs. To comply with the Code of Practice, the census offices should publish explanations of how the Census estimates relating to the resident population, based on 12-

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/2011-census-project/reg-gen-agree.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Although the Census in Wales is undertaken by ONS there are slight differences in the questionnaire that reflect the need to reorder or reword some response options, the need to collect data on Welsh language and to provide census questionnaires in the Welsh language.

month residency, will be derived from the information collected about three and six-month residency (Requirement 1)<sup>5</sup>. GROS should include information on any additional steps that it needs to take given that it does not plan to ask respondents how long they intend to stay in the UK. We suggest that the census offices document the risks of using data compiled from respondents' intentions and the steps they have taken to assure themselves of the accuracy of these data.

- 3.21 While addressing past inconsistencies with MYEs, the move to a 12-month residency base for 2011 Census outputs across the UK will introduce inconsistency with 2001 Census outputs as these were produced on the basis of six months' residency in the UK. To comply with the Code of Practice, the census offices should publish information on how discontinuities (relating to the introduction of the 12-month residency base) between population estimates from the 2001 and 2011 Censuses will be measured and explained (Requirement 2)<sup>6</sup>.
- 3.22 All UK countries will be collecting information from people (those resident, or intending to be resident, in the UK for less than 12 months) who will not be included in the main outputs. We suggest that the census offices publish information about how data on people resident in the UK for less than 12 months will be used, and the value of the data in relation to the cost to the public and the census offices of their collection and processing.
- 3.23 Comparability with the 2001 Census has been one of the considerations in finalising the 2011 Census questionnaires. The differences between the 2001 and proposed 2011 questionnaire content have been documented by each Census office. In October 2009 ONS published the final recommended content for the England and Wales questionnaire, which included a comparison with the content of the 2001 questionnaire. The Scottish Government's statement "Scotland's Census 2011" (December 2008) also included a comparison between the contents of the 2001 and 2011 questionnaires. NISRA recognises that aspects of the 2011 Census outputs from Northern Ireland will be different from the 2001 Census due to the ongoing Boundary Commission Review. NISRA is considering how best to address this in terms of census outputs.
- 3.24 In Scotland, most census forms will be hand-delivered with only those in remote rural areas being delivered by Royal Mail. In the rest of the UK over 90 per cent of forms will be delivered by Royal Mail. The remainder, in areas where the address list is thought to be of poor quality or where there are particular enumeration challenges, such as hard-to-count populations or large households, will be delivered by enumerators. This is in response to problems with recruiting and retaining enumerators for the 2001 Census. The "post-out, post-back" methodology is also intended to generate savings which can be re-invested in improving response from hard-to-reach groups - one of the main aims of the 2011 Census.
- 3.25 A key part of the "post-out, post-back" methodology is the development of an accurate and complete address list. In its 2007 report on the 2011 Census, the Statistics Commission identified several risks associated with this

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<sup>5</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

<sup>6</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

methodology.<sup>7</sup> ONS is working with Royal Mail, Ordnance Survey and local authorities to develop an address list for use in the 2011 Census. Checks on the accuracy and completeness of the list were carried out in 2007 and in preparation for the 2009 Rehearsal. These checks showed there are ongoing problems with the list in terms of both missing and duplicate addresses. The resolution of some of these problems is compounded by the nature of the ownership of the component lists. The Assessment team understands that there are no plans to maintain the ONS address list after the Census (see Protocol 3 for further discussion). The address list NISRA plans to use (POINTER) is being developed by a consortium including Land and Property Services (incorporating Ordnance Survey NI), Royal Mail and local authorities. NISRA has been involved throughout the development of POINTER via the Census Address Register (CAR) Group, which it chairs. Address checks will be carried out by census enumerators in their Enumeration Districts in the weeks preceding census day to validate the CAR. We suggest that ONS and NISRA publish a note which details how they will mitigate the impact of the risks associated with post-out, post-back methodology.

- 3.26 The census offices expect differences in contracting arrangements between Scotland and the rest of the UK to have only minimal impact on the comparability of Census outputs. They consider that close co-operation between the three offices, and the use of common processing methods, should help to ensure this.

#### *Adopting quality assurance procedures*

- 3.27 There is close co-operation between the three census offices in developing the quality assurance processes that the data will be subject to before publication. The offices are also collaborating on the design and implementation of the census follow-up surveys - the Census Coverage Survey (CCS) and the Census Quality Survey (CQS). The UK Census Design and Methodology Advisory Committee, along with Census Advisory Groups and other groups, fulfil a quality assurance role regarding census methodology.
- 3.28 The census offices also monitor and contribute to international developments in census design - for example, representatives of all three census offices attend and contribute to a regular programme of international review meetings which include representatives from the Republic of Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the USA. The UK continues to be closely involved in the Eurostat Census taskforce.
- 3.29 A UK-wide Census Data Strategy includes key objectives for achieving and assuring quality in the 2011 Census. The planning arrangements for each census office have been subject to a series of Gateway Reviews, and the census offices have identified lessons on quality from their respective census tests and rehearsals. The census offices have - or plan to develop - Critical Success Factors and Key Performance Indicators to steer the planning and design of the 2011 Census. The census offices also plan to consult with users of Census statistics on data quality and measures of quality. We suggest that

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<sup>7</sup> Counting on Success: The 2011 Census - Managing the Risks. Statistics Commission report 36. 2007 (See also footnote 9).



the census offices publish the results of these consultations and include clear explanations of the quality measures to be used.

- 3.30 All three census offices have undertaken qualitative research to help them understand the acceptability of proposed new questions and to give them an indication of the quality of data that could be obtained from all questions. This has involved cognitive question testing and a wide range of focus groups.
- 3.31 The response rates in the (voluntary) Census Rehearsals only reached 42 per cent in Scotland and 35 per cent in England and Wales. The Census itself is mandatory, but there is a risk that low participation may compromise the quality of the results. Participation in the two post-enumeration quality assurance surveys - the Census Coverage Survey (CCS) and the Census Quality Survey (CQS) - will be voluntary. The CCS response rate following the Census Rehearsal in England and Wales was 74 per cent - 16 percentage points lower than the ONS's target figure of 90 per cent. To comply with the Code of Practice, the census offices should publish plans for how participation in both the Census and the follow-up surveys will be maximised, in the light of the low response rates in the Census Rehearsals (Requirement 3)<sup>8</sup>.

#### *Seeking continuous improvement*

- 3.32 Many of the changes to both field procedures and questionnaire content in England, Wales and Northern Ireland have been made in response to problems with these aspects of the 2001 Census. These problems included the recruitment and retention of enumerators; delivery of questionnaires to access-controlled buildings; and inconsistencies between census counts and mid-year estimates of population, particularly in large urban areas<sup>9</sup>. Some stakeholders told the Assessment team that they were concerned that as a result of problems with the 2001 Census there was an overemphasis on 'field procedure' for the 2011 Census at the expense of statistical matters.
- 3.33 All three census offices have already published papers on census methods and plan to publish further papers on aspects of census design and methodology once they have been finalised. These papers will be published on the census offices' respective websites as well as via other media such as journals and conference papers. In 2009 ONS produced a booklet to explain the methods of estimating population numbers to non-experts.<sup>10</sup> The Assessment team supports this innovation, and suggests that the census offices build on it to make further efforts to explain complex Census issues to users and other stakeholders.

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<sup>8</sup> In relation to Principle 4 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

<sup>9</sup> Census and population estimates and the 2001 Census in Westminster: Final Report, Statistics Commission report 22. 2004.

<sup>10</sup> Trout, Catfish and Roach. The beginner's guide to census population estimates. Office for National Statistics, 2009.

## **Principle 5: Confidentiality**

**Private information about individual persons (including bodies corporate) compiled in the production of official statistics is confidential, and should be used for statistical purposes only.**

- 3.34 All three census offices informed us that they have appropriate and robust arrangements for confidentiality protection. The Census complies with government security and confidentiality requirements. All confidentiality systems are tested by UK security organisations against published standards and best practice. All staff working with census information are required to sign the Census Confidentiality Undertaking and strict confidentiality requirements are built into suppliers' contracts, including compliance with UK and international security standards.
- 3.35 One criticism of the 2001 Census was that the outputs from the three census offices had different statistical disclosure control methodologies which impeded UK-wide comparability. The census offices have told us that they will use the same disclosure control methodology as each other for 2011 outputs.
- 3.36 Confidentiality information for respondents is included on the first page of the census form, and there is confidentiality information on the census "self-help" web pages. The respective census websites contain further confidentiality information, such as privacy statements and a section on confidentiality in the "Frequently Asked Questions" section.
- 3.37 The UK Longitudinal Studies use Census information, along with other data sources, to investigate a range of issues. All staff working on these studies sign the Census Confidentiality Undertaking.

## Principle 6: Proportionate burden

**The cost burden on data suppliers should not be excessive and should be assessed relative to the benefits arising from the use of the statistics.**

- 3.38 Participation in the Census is mandatory. The census offices told us that they aim to inform the public about the uses and benefits of the Census through an awareness campaign. They also plan to engage with schools and communities to promote the Census. We suggest that the three census offices collaborate on further ways to encourage the public to participate in the Census.
- 3.39 For the first time in a UK Census, respondents will be able to complete the questionnaire online. They will also have access to dedicated support services such as a contact centre and self-help pages on the web.
- 3.40 For the 2009 Census Rehearsals in England and Wales, ONS published information on the estimated time to complete the questionnaire. The estimated time to complete the paper questionnaire was expected to be about 10 minutes per person. It was estimated that online completion of the individual questionnaire would take about 20 minutes, and (for the average household), the household questionnaire would take about 40 minutes. These estimates varied depending on a number of factors, including the number of people in the household, the speed of the internet connection and respondents' experience of using a computer. In Scotland, the average time taken to complete the household questionnaire was around 25 minutes. The average time increased as the number of people in the household increased - a one-person household took around 15 minutes, a 6-member household took about 45 minutes. To comply with the Code of Practice, the census offices should publish estimates, with methods, of the times taken to complete the paper and online versions of the Census questionnaire, based on data from the Census Rehearsals (Requirement 4)<sup>11</sup>.
- 3.41 The proposed questionnaires contain more questions than the 2001 Census (six for England and Wales, six for Scotland, eight for Northern Ireland). The respective Business Cases for the Census include evidence of the need for additional questions.
- 3.42 The three census offices carried out parallel strategic reviews in 2003 to consider alternative ways of collecting census-type data. The reviews concluded that in the absence of viable alternatives, the 2011 Census should be carried out. The census Business Cases also state that one of the criteria for including a question in the Census was the absence of an alternative data source.

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<sup>11</sup> In relation to Principle 6 Practice 1 of the Code of Practice

## Principle 7: Resources

**The resources made available for statistical activities should be sufficient to meet the requirements of this Code and should be used efficiently and effectively.**

- 3.43 All three census offices have assured us that they have secured sufficient resources to carry out the Census, although in the present climate there are inevitable uncertainties about funding. This includes adequate funding for continued user consultation, including planned events to discuss census outputs and dissemination strategies. All three census offices have systems in place for monitoring spending and progress against plans.
- 3.44 Despite the census offices' assurances, it is not clear whether they will have sufficient resources to produce the required outputs and carry out other activities such as the follow-up surveys. In Scotland, for example, a budget of around £40 million has been allocated to fund the Census up to census day in March 2011 (which coincides with the end of the current spending review period) but GROS estimates that around another £20 million will be needed for further activities<sup>12</sup>. Such provision for later years will be subject to future government spending reviews. In the current financial climate there is a risk that areas such as data processing and output production will be under-resourced and that quality assurance could be compromised. We hope that the census offices will be able to secure the required budgets for the later phases of the Census as soon as possible, and we suggest the census offices develop and publish contingency plans in the event of any shortfall in funding.
- 3.45 The census offices have established procedures for recruiting statistical staff and staff are allocated to posts depending on their skills and competencies. Staff objectives and development plans comply with relevant competency frameworks.
- 3.46 Following criticism of its procurement of field staff payroll systems and consultancy support for the 2001 Census, ONS has improved its procurement practices for the 2011 Census<sup>13</sup>. These improvements include the management of all Census procurements through ONS's procurement unit, and the establishment of a Procurement Advisory Group. This group, which is made up of senior members of ONS's procurement unit, the Census management team and representatives from NISRA and WAG, reviews all procurement processes. NISRA has joint procurement arrangements with ONS for some Census processes, and these arrangements have been assessed by Gateway Reviews at both census offices. GROS has developed its own procurement strategy, which has also been subject to a Gateway Review. GROS informed us that its procurement arrangements were working well and would have minimal adverse impact on UK-wide harmonisation.

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<sup>12</sup> Scottish Government: *Scotland's Census 2011 - A Government Statement*. December 2008.

<sup>13</sup> National Audit Office: *Office for National Statistics: Outsourcing the 2001 Census*. October 2002.

- 3.47 The census offices ' respective Business Cases specify the balance between the costs and benefits of the Census. Realising these benefits will help the census offices achieve the high-level strategic aims<sup>14</sup> of the Census.
- 3.48 The UK-wide Census Quality Assurance Strategy lists the administrative data sources which will be considered as part of the process for assuring the quality of census results.

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<sup>14</sup> To provide high-quality, value-for-money statistics which are fit for purpose and meet users' needs; to maximise overall response rates by raising awareness of the importance of the Census and encouraging public participation; to protect - and be seen to protect - census information; and to secure user and public confidence in Census results and deliver them in a timely manner.

## **Principle 8: Frankness and accessibility**

**Official statistics, accompanied by full and frank commentary, should be readily accessible to all users.**

3.49 This principle will be covered in phase 2 of this assessment, starting in late 2010.

## **Protocol 1: User engagement**

**Effective user engagement is fundamental both to trust in statistics and securing maximum public value. This Protocol draws together the relevant practices set out elsewhere in the Code and expands on the requirements in relation to consultation.**

3.50 The requirements for this protocol are covered elsewhere in the report.

## **Protocol 2: Release practices**

**Statistical reports should be released into the public domain in an orderly manner that promotes public confidence and gives equal access to all, subject to relevant legislation.**

3.51 This protocol will be covered in phase 2 of this assessment, starting in late 2010.



### **Protocol 3: The use of administrative sources for statistical purposes**

**Administrative sources should be fully exploited for statistical purposes, subject to adherence to appropriate safeguards.**

- 3.52 NISRA and ONS have made extensive use of administrative data in the development of the address lists that they will use for the postal delivery of the majority of questionnaires. Administrative data are also being heavily used by ONS in the development of a 'hard-to-count' index which is designed to give an indication of the expected ease or difficulty in enumerating specific areas. The census offices are also planning to use administrative data to help assure the quality of Census estimates. The details of what data will be used are yet to be determined.
- 3.53 Despite the high cost of developing the address list for England and Wales and its undoubted usefulness to a wide range of organisations, the Assessment team understands that the UK Government has no plans to maintain the list after the Census.<sup>15</sup> <sup>16</sup> We suggest ONS publish the reasons why it will not maintain the address list, and explain why ONS itself is not able to make its list available to other organisations.

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<sup>15</sup> The Authority has raised this issue with Government in the past. <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/reports---correspondence/correspondence/letter-from-sir-michael-scholar-to-john-healey-mp---national-address-register--8-july-2009.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> In Scotland, the address list is an extract from Royal Mail's Postcode Address File at a given point in time. In Northern Ireland, the POINTER address list will be available to other organisations.

## Annex 1: Code of Practice - coverage of practices in this report

A1.1 The following table shows which practices in the Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Official Statistics were assessed in this report. These are the areas where planning for the 2011 Census is essentially complete (at December 2009). The remaining practices will be assessed in the second and/or third phases of the assessment. Some issues which were assessed in phase 1 - for example, confidentiality and resources - will be further assessed in the later phases.

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Practices considered in Phase 1</b>	<b>Practices not considered in Phase 1</b>
1: Meeting user needs	1-3	4, 5
2: Impartiality and objectivity	4	1-3, 5-9
3: Integrity	3-7	1, 2
4: Sound methods and assured quality	1-7	-
5: Confidentiality	1-4, 6	5
6: Proportionate burden	2, 4, 5	1, 3
7: Resources	1-7	-
8: Frankness and accessibility	-	1-7

## Annex 2: Suggestions for improvement

A2.1 This annex includes some suggestions to help the census offices to improve their planning for the remaining phases of the 2011 Census. These are not formally required for compliance with the Code of Practice, but the Assessment team considers that their implementation will improve public confidence in the production, management and dissemination of official statistics.

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|---------------------|---|
| <b>Suggestion 1</b> | Publicise any further changes to Census methods and questionnaires and explain clearly the reasons for these changes (para 3.11)  |
| <b>Suggestion 2</b> | Document the risks of using data compiled from respondents' intentions to stay in the UK and the steps taken to assure the accuracy of these data (para 3.20).  |
| <b>Suggestion 3</b> | Publish information about how data on people resident in the UK for less than 12 months will be used, and the value of the data in relation to the cost to the public and the census offices of their collection and processing (para 3.22) |
| <b>Suggestion 4</b> | Publish a note which details how the ONS and NISRA will mitigate the impact of the risks associated with post-out, post-back methodology (para 3.25)  |
| <b>Suggestion 5</b> | Publish the results of consultations with users about data quality and measures of quality and include clear explanations of the quality measures to be used (para 3.29)  |
| <b>Suggestion 6</b> | Make further efforts to explain complex Census issues to users and other stakeholders (para 3.33)   |
| <b>Suggestion 7</b> | Collaborate on ways to encourage the public to participate in the Census, over and above existing plans (para 3.38)   |
| <b>Suggestion 8</b> | Develop and publish contingency plans in the event of any shortfall in funding (para 3.44)  |
| <b>Suggestion 9</b> | Publish the reasons why the address list will not be maintained and explain why ONS itself is not able to make its list available to other organisations (para 3.53)  |

## Annex 3: Summary of assessment process and users' views

- A3.1 This assessment was conducted from October 2009 to January 2010.
- A3.2 The Assessment team agreed the scope and timetable for this assessment with representatives of ONS, GROS and NISRA in October 2009. The census offices provided written evidence for assessment by mid-November. The Assessment team subsequently met with the census offices during December 2009 to review the evidence and to discuss outstanding issues.

### Summary of users contacted, and issues raised

- A3.3 Part of the assessment process involves our consideration of the views of users. We approach some known and potential users of the set of statistics, and we invite comments via an open note on the Authority's website. This process is not a statistical survey, but it enables us to gain some insights about the extent to which the statistics meet users' needs and the extent to which users feel that the producers of those statistics engage with them. We are aware that responses from users may not be representative of wider views, and we take account of this in the way that we prepare assessment reports.
- A3.4 The Assessment team emailed a sample of stakeholders and users identified by the three census offices and its own research. Those contacted were invited to take part in a telephone interview or to respond to a short set of questions via email. In total 26 data users and stakeholders from England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland responded, 21 via phone, 4 via email and one face to face. The respondents were grouped as follows:

Stakeholders	8
ONS/Welsh Assembly Government users	11
NISRA users	4
GROS users	3

- A3.5 The overall impression of users and stakeholders is that all three census offices have put considerable effort into consultation for the 2011 Census and that it is a great improvement on previous Census consultations. NISRA and GROS stakeholders and users were, on the whole, more positive about their relationship with their census office and largely attributed this to the relatively small size of the relevant organisation when compared with ONS.
- A3.6 Despite the view that a lot of effort had been put into consultation, stakeholders and users identified several areas where they felt that improvements could be made. While most of the comments given below were directed at ONS, they offer an insight into users' perceptions and are an opportunity for all three offices to improve the next phases of stakeholder and user consultation.

#### Advisory groups:

- While it was felt that an honest attempt had been made to engage using an open process, many advisory group members felt there was documentation overload and that summaries of papers, succinct meeting minutes and earlier circulation of relevant documentation would enable more considered input.

- More forward timetabling of advisory groups may have enabled members to attend more regularly.
- There was some feeling that advisory groups had become a means of ONS communicating decisions to them rather than an opportunity for ONS to seek advice and input.
- The increased size of many groups over past years and of the census organisation made in-depth discussion of issues difficult within the advisory group structure. However, ONS was willing to engage in additional focused meetings.
- ONS was seen as willing to engage with groups to address specific issues, eg inclusion of a Cornish identity tick box, a question on sexual identity, and the list of religions/beliefs included as tick boxes on the questionnaire.
- There were mixed views on how well the roles and responsibilities of the various groups had been communicated and understood.
- There was a feeling that whilst decisions were reasonably well explained, there was room for improvement in explaining the reasoning behind the inclusion or exclusion of particular questions.

Wider user consultation:

- User expectations could have been more successfully managed by ONS. It was felt by some that, in asking people what they wanted, an expectation was created that they would get it - which led to dissatisfaction.
- Roadshows were seen as a very positive move as they enabled individuals and groups to make their views known and provided a forum for users to talk to each other.
- The use of the web to disseminate information was applauded but its use as a means of seeking views was questioned by some. While the idea of a blog was novel, even very keen and involved census data users felt it was not a useful tool in this situation.

### **Key documents/links provided**

Written Evidence for Assessment document

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/16002>

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/16002/PublicationTransport>

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/About/Surveys>

## List of assessment reports published to date<sup>17</sup>

1. Statistics from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System  
*National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse*
2. Recorded Crime in Scotland  
*Scottish Government*
3. Statistics on Enrolments at Schools and in Funded Pre-School Education in Northern Ireland  
*Department of Education, Northern Ireland*
4. Road Casualty Statistics  
*Department for Transport*
5. UK Energy Sector Indicators  
*Department of Energy and Climate Change*
6. Statistics on Road Freight  
*Department for Transport*
7. Prison Population Projections  
*Ministry of Justice*
8. Migration Statistics  
*Office for National Statistics*
9. Statistics on International Development and the ODA:GNI Ratio  
*Department for International Development*
10. The Scottish Health Survey  
*Scottish Government*
11. Scottish House Condition Survey  
*Scottish Government*
12. Scottish Crime and Justice Survey  
*Scottish Government*
13. Statistics on Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England  
*Department for Children, Schools and Families*
14. Statistics on Children Looked After by Local Authorities in Scotland  
*Scottish Government*
15. Statistics on Children Looked After by Local Authorities in Wales  
*Welsh Assembly Government*
16. Statistics on Children Looked After by Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland  
*Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety, Northern Ireland*
17. Wealth in Great Britain  
*Office for National Statistics*
18. Statistics on the National Child Measurement Programme  
*NHS Information Centre*
19. Average Weekly Earnings  
*Office for National Statistics*
20. Energy Statistics  
*Department of Energy and Climate Change*
21. 18 Weeks Referral to Treatment Statistics  
*Department of Health*
22. Agriculture in the UK and selected crop and livestock statistics  
*Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs*

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<sup>17</sup> Published reports are available at: <http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/assessment-reports/index.html>

23. Child Benefit Statistics  
*Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs*
24. Producer Price Indices  
*Office for National Statistics*
25. Services Producer Price Indices  
*Office for National Statistics*
26. Scottish Household Survey outputs  
*Scottish Government*
27. Scottish Labour Market Statistics  
*Scottish Government*
28. Special Assessment of the 2011 Censuses in the UK: Phase 1  
*Office for National Statistics, the General Register Office for Scotland and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency*
29. Labour Market Statistics for Northern Ireland  
*Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment, Northern Ireland*
30. Child and Working Tax Credit Statistics  
*Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs*

