
Ed Humpherson, Director General for Regulation

Pete Benton, Director of Transformation - Health, Population and Methods Group, Office for National Statistics
David Marshall, Director of Census and Population Statistics, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
(by email)

17 November 2021

Dear Pete and David

Assessment of 2021 Census in England and Wales and 2021 Census in Northern Ireland

We have today published our phase 2 assessment reports of the 2021 Census in England and Wales and the 2021 Census in Northern Ireland. These reports draw on our previous [preliminary findings](#) from the first phase of the assessment and reflect our judgements based on evidence from ONS and NISRA teams and our consideration of users' views. I would like to thank you and your teams for their cooperation and engagement throughout this assessment.

Both ONS and NISRA have achieved a great deal through their planning, development and operational delivery of the 2021 Censuses. I particularly recognise the significant efforts that ONS and NISRA made to run live Census collection operations during COVID-19, achieving high levels of household response rates across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. There have been challenges you have faced, some of which we have highlighted in our report, and we would ask that you learn from these to adapt and enhance your ways of working as you continue your efforts on the Census.

While in this stage between collection and outputs, we recognise the current work ONS and NISRA are undertaking to process and assure the quality of Census data. To date, your communications have been strongest where you have been transparent with users on plans for your considerations in early stages of developments. One of our key concerns from the assessment however has been the lack of widely available information on the impact of COVID-19, Brexit, and differing timings of Census collections on Census data. Given these circumstances, some user data needs may no longer be met through Census data, and ONS and NISRA need to provide users with more information on the impacts on data and how you will address any unmet user needs.

Looking ahead, users of Census data and statistics eagerly await the publication of Census outputs. Our report sets out our expectations for how you should provide finalised information and assurance for users about the quality of Census data. One positive to highlight is how you are focusing on making Census outputs more timely, accessible and flexible in comparison to 2011 and are developing new dissemination tools.

In conclusion, the Census is such an important source of data and statistics. You and your teams' work to be able to deliver these hugely valuable data has been extensive; impressive in scale; and ambitious in its innovation and approach. Please extend my recognition of all your hard work to all involved in Census – not only as Director General of Regulation but as a Census data user and Census respondent as well.

I am copying this letter to Sir Iain Diamond, National Statistician; Rachel Skentelbery, Head of Profession for Statistics, ONS; Stephanie Howarth, Chief Statistician, Welsh Government; Siobhan Carey, Chief Executive and Registrar General for Northern Ireland.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ed Humpherson', written in a cursive style.

Ed Humpherson
Director General for Regulation