

Census Office,
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency,
Colby House, Stranmillis Court,
BELFAST
BT9 5RR

Mr Edward Humpherson
Director General for Regulation, Office for Statistics Regulation
1 Drummond Gate
LONDON
SW1V 2QQ

11 May 2022

Dear Mr Humpherson,

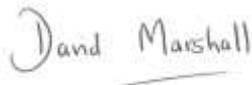
I am writing to follow up our meeting on the National Statistics assessment of the Northern Ireland Census.

Following the Office for Statistics Regulation stage 2 report, officials met with the assessors and provided a list of ongoing activities (see Annex). Data processing and output production work are still progressing and NISRA plan to release the first population level results on Tuesday 24 May. The first results will be laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly and accompanied by a public facing statistical report. Initial methodology, quality and data definition reports will be published. Thereafter there is further detailed work required on disclosure control methods before the second set of results are published later this year.

It is planned to publish a series of frequently asked questions. Officials have also been working with an independent panel of census experts, who have provided valuable feedback. The Registrar General plans to continue this initiative into the second release, where, in line with the Code of Practice for Statistics, more detailed reports on methodology and quality will also be published. This work will support users of Census data in making informed choices of how to best use the results.

In conclusion, Census data will be published in stages and my colleagues and I look forward to continue working closely with you in undertaking this important work.

Yours sincerely,



Dr David Marshall
Director of Census & Population Statistics,
Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency

cc: Siobhan Carey, Chief Executive, NISRA & Registrar General Northern Ireland
Mark Pont, Office for Statistics Regulation
Mr Sandy Fitzpatrick, Head of Census, NISRA

Requirement 1

In order to support society's need for information, NISRA needs to clearly communicate how 2021 Census data may be impacted by COVID-19 and how it plans to address any unmet user needs. NISRA should ensure this information is communicated in an accessible and timely way, being open on plans, developments and progress even where definitive answers or solutions are still being sought.

What we have done:

- We adapted the data collection operation to maximise the extent and quality of the enumeration. This was in response to any impacts that Covid-19 may had on the operation, e.g.:
 - Provided PPE and Lateral Flow Tests to field and other staff
 - Provided split shift working at the Data Processing site to support social distancing
 - Prior to the pandemic we recognised the need to capture better data on tertiary level full-time students (thus we removed the filter on Question 6 on the 2011 form and for the online form we collected term-time and home addresses)
 - Undertook engagement with universities including sending emails to all students encouraging participation
 - Provided enhanced guidance in online form for those for whom circumstances may have changed due to the pandemic
 - Prior to the pandemic recognised need for new data collection approach for communal establishments (this included a new listing form which recorded name, date of birth & sex details of all residents by the manager)
 - Sent further targeted letters to all non-responding addresses in areas of high concentration of second-homes
 - Worked with Housing Associations/ NI Housing Executive to secure a database of vacant properties
 - Worked with NI Housing Executive to secure improved information on those rough sleeping homeless

Future plans:

- Complete data processing and quality assurance and provide more information to users
- Provide supporting quality information during the outputs publication phase
- After the results are published produce narrative on the utility of the Census data for monitoring our population for issues such as Brexit, impact of pandemic, Ukrainian migration etc....

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| <p>Requirement 2</p> <p>To assure Northern Ireland users of how their data needs will be addressed, NISRA needs to provide users with transparent, accessible and timely information on how UK population estimates for 2021, UK Census data and Ireland-Northern Ireland data will be provided. NISRA should continue to work with, and align communications with, ONS, NRS and CSO to explain any impacts on data quality and describe where user needs may or may not be met as a result.</p> | <p>What we have done:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlighted the UK Census Data User Group in 2021 Census outputs consultation, inviting those interested in UK data to engage with the group • Updated content on the UK Census data page on the NISRA website, ensuring signposting for users to corresponding ONS and NRS webpages • Work with ONS and NRS to develop an appropriate approach for the production of UK population estimates for 2021 • Engagement with CSO to reaffirm commitment to producing a report and data from Census 2021/22 for the island of Ireland <p>Future plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue updating our UK Census data webpage as plans for UK Census data are firmed up, so users are kept well-informed • Continuing engagement with UK Census Data User Group, e.g. providing any relevant feedback from outputs consultation • Continue to actively participate in UK Census Committee and UK Harmonisation Working Group • Continuing engagement with CSO to progress and deliver a report and data from Census 2021/22 for the island of Ireland |
| <p>Requirement 3</p> <p>NISRA should ensure finalised documentation on quality, information and judgements on suitable data sources, and methods and their application are complete. All supporting information should be sufficiently open and easily available to Census data users alongside its range of Census outputs.</p> | <p>What we have done:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Census 2021 operational report published on 31st January 2022 – this provided useful information for users on how Census operation was conducted, measures taken to promote participation and the data collection methods <p>Future plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publication of QA information to support Census 2021 outputs releases • Subsequent publications on methodology used to support Census 2021 data processing • Setting up external QA panel of subject matter experts to provide independent assessment of quality of Census estimates to Registrar General ahead of 2022 releases |
| <p>Requirement 4</p> <p>In order to ensure the relevance of data and statistics to users, NISRA needs to continue to develop and enhance its user engagement activities, connecting with a broad range of users and embracing challenge. NISRA should continually review and seek to implement improvements in its engagement</p> | <p>What we have done:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2021 Census outputs consultation held during October and November 2021 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Opportunity for users to provide views on our proposed strategy for producing and disseminating 2021 Census outputs – Initial report documenting the consultation responses to be published <p>Future plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning social media advertising leading up to and during the release of Census 2021 outputs to raise public awareness |

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| <p>strategies and should ensure its decision making is open and transparent, being clear where users' needs can or cannot be met.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications to all stakeholders involved in the delivery of, or communicated with during, the operational phase of the Census • Continued engagement with Demographic Statistics Advisory Group; most recent meeting took place on 28th January 2022 |
| <p>Requirement 5 NISRA needs to deliver its aims in relation to timely, accessible and flexible Census outputs – while ensuring sufficient data quality and supporting appropriate use of the data. It should clearly communicate its plans and timelines for outputs at the earliest opportunity, updating and revising these as soon as more detail is available or to reflect any changes to its plans.</p> | <p>What we have done:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Published the Census 2021 Outputs Prospectus on 31st January 2022, which outlines a broad schedule of outputs during 2022/23 • Work with ONS on development of a flexible table builder similar to its planned product <p>Future plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update the live Outputs Prospectus with release dates as they are confirmed • Report documenting responses to the outputs consultation to be published in Spring/Summer 2022 • Work with ONS to facilitate a NI flexible table builder |
| <p>Requirement 6 To best support Census data users, NISRA needs to continue to improve its webpage navigation for current materials. NISRA's plans for a separate website or webpages for Census outputs themselves will require sufficient consideration of its navigation and accessibility. NISRA should keep webpages and content refreshed and current.</p> | <p>What we have done:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular updates to the Census 2021 webpages on the NISRA website to ensure relevant and latest information is easily accessible for users • Commenced detailed review of the existing Census 2021 webpages, with aim of making the content more outputs focussed • Retained Census campaign website to have a further communication channel with the public during the outputs release phase <p>Future plans:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further updates to ensure content on Census 2021 webpages is refreshed and current • Use of social media to update users in relation to Census outputs and provide direct links to results |