

---

**Ed Humpherson, Director General for Office for Statistics Regulation**

Richard Elliott, Director, Census and Population Statistics, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency  
Alison Byrne, Chief Executive, National Records of Scotland  
Mary Gregory, Executive Director, Population, Census and Social Statistics, Office for National Statistics

19 May 2026

Dear all,

**Assessment of the 2031 censuses in Northern Ireland, Scotland and England and Wales**

I am writing to set out the Office for Statistics Regulation's (OSR) intended approach to regulating 2031 census outputs across the UK. As census offices develop their work programmes for 2031, I want to provide early clarity on OSR's regulatory approach and the high-level principles we will use to underpin how we work with you over the coming years.

To inform this approach, my team has reflected on OSR's regulation of the 2021/22 censuses. I would like to thank you for the feedback and contributions that you and your teams provided as part of this work.

I am sharing these principles now to support a shared understanding of our approach. These principles are:

- **A flexible assessment process** – our phased approach to regulating the 2021/22 censuses proved effective in managing the complexity and length of a census assessment. For the 2031 censuses, we intend to continue to work in stages but introduce more flexibility to our approach and timings. Given the long lead time between now and 2031, this flexibility will allow us to use our resources in a proportionate way, focusing on the areas of highest priority and those which matter most to users.
- **Review accreditation before publication of outputs** – although we will take a more flexible approach to the 2031 census assessment process, to help support public confidence in census outputs, we propose that we continue to decide on census accreditation before the outputs are published. At that point we will assess compliance with all standards and

practices of the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) (the Code). While this approach to accreditation will enable us to provide users with our assessment of the Trustworthiness, Quality and Value of these statistics, it does mean that new evidence may emerge post-publication. If this raises concerns about compliance with the Code, we may need to reconsider an accreditation decision. We will therefore make clear, in any regulatory report published before census outputs, that their accreditation is provisional and subject to final review once we have reflected on user feedback and insights from post-publication analysis.

- **Early engagement on new or revised questions** – we have reflected on OSR’s regulatory approach to new questions in the 2021/22 censuses and in particular, the gender identity question for the England and Wales census. In this instance, new evidence emerged following the publication of these outputs that demonstrated that the statistics did not comply with important quality aspects of the Code. Therefore, it was decided that these statistics should no longer be accredited official statistics and should instead be classified as official statistics in development. Taking this experience into account for our approach to 2031, where there is uncertainty, particularly about new or significantly changed questions or data sources, we will consider withholding accreditation on these aspects of the census until sufficient evidence of data quality is available.
- **Proportionate and open engagement** – we will continue to engage regularly with census offices and Welsh Government throughout the census operation. We will ensure that engagement is proportionate to provide support when and where it is needed, and reduce unnecessary burden. We know that consistent engagement, and clear expectations and requirements, is something that we can do better for 2031.

In line with these principles, we will work with you to shape an approach that is most useful and effective to provide support and challenge during the census operation. To facilitate this, in the coming months we would like to invite you to an in-person roundtable event. This event will set out expectations for the upcoming assessment process, including our requirements and the role that OSR will play.

In the meantime, we expect census offices to write to us to request an assessment of their censuses, as is standard practice for any OSR assessment. We recognise that related work is already well underway, for example question topic consultations have been undertaken. At this stage of census planning and development, and indeed all future stages, our expectation is that all census teams work in line with the Code and embed its core principles of Trustworthiness, Quality and Value early on.

I, and my team, look forward to working with you over the coming years to ensure that the 2031 censuses are produced in adherence with the Code of Practice for Statistics and for the public good.

I am copying this letter to Philip Wales, Chief Executive and Registrar General, Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency; Alastair McAlpine, Chief Statistician, Scottish Government; Esta Clark, Head of Statistical Design, National

Records of Scotland; Ruth Davies, Programme Director Census 2031, National Records of Scotland; Jason Zawadzki, Director, Census 2031 Delivery and Operations, Office for National Statistics; Jennet Woolford, Director, Social, Local and Census Statistics, Office for National Statistics; and Stephanie Howarth, Chief Statistician, Welsh Government.

Yours sincerely,

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

Ed Humpherson  
Director General for OSR