

Progress on Population Definitions

Background

The 2003 report entitled 'A Demographic Statistics Service for the 21st Century', written by Peter Fullerton, recommended that ONS review population definitions, including usual residence, particularly in the context of the decennial Census and population estimates. The drivers for review are the changes occurring in UK society : the population becoming more mobile, within the UK and overseas, more complex patterns of residence and working arrangements and more diverse household structures and lifestyles. To assist ONS, a group known as the Population Definitions Working Group (PDWG) was established in September 2004 to provide clear definitional advice to ONS on population issues, including preparation for the 2011 Census. The Group is comprised of representatives from central and local government, academia, the private sector and topic experts from within ONS.

This note summarises the definitional work so far and highlights what remains to be achieved. A final paper, setting out the recommended definitions, will be published in Spring 2006.

Key Issues

1. Output Bases

A consultation on population definitions with external users and internal topic experts conducted by ONS from June-September 2004 revealed:

- Almost universal support for outputted census data to be based upon usual residence for both individuals/households and for communal establishments
- Concerns about a precise definition of *usual residence*, and how to 'capture' hard-to-define groups effectively by assigning them more precise working definitions
- That visitors should also be recorded.

Following this consultation, it was agreed by the Registrars General of England & Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland that the 2011 Census should have a usual resident plus visitors enumeration base. It was recognised that an effective working definition of *usual residence* was required to minimise the risk of respondents misunderstanding or avoiding their legal obligation to comply with the Census on the grounds that they do not have a 'usual residence'.

Outstanding issues for the WG are to make a recommended definition of:

- Usual residence
- Visitors
- Whether residents of England and Wales with no usual address are considered to be *usually resident* at or *visiting* their location on Census night

2. Hard-to-Define Groups

These include:

- (a) Students
- (b) Second/Multiple homes
- (c) Migrants and asylum seekers
- (d) Children
- (e) Armed Forces
- (f) Those Working Abroad
- (g) Retired People

The Working Group has provided definitional advice on hard to define groups and discussions continue.

3. Vacant Property

The Working Group are still considering recommendations relating to vacant properties including:

- The definition of a vacant property
- what data is required on vacant property ?

- how will data on vacant property be measured in a postal census ?

4. Migrants

Work is still ongoing regarding what data is required from migrants (including asylum seekers). One possibility discussed is to include a question on the Census on how long migrants *intended* to be in the UK; given the limited space on the Census, however, this would have to be considered as part of the overall Census priorities.

5. Household Definition

So far work has concluded that broadly speaking the definition employed in 2001 is sound. It is recognised that the term 'common housekeeping' appears outdated and requires attention and that it is important that people having similar living arrangements in different areas should be classified in a consistent manner. For example, whether five students each renting a room in a house are classified as one household, five households or a communal establishment.

6. Journey to Work

Usual address has a huge impact on this issue although second address will also impinge, since in the case of commuters their 'origin' will not necessarily be their usual address. Accordingly it is important to consider one single journey to work, and ensure the *right* origin of this journey. Current ONS thinking is that it is the *daily* journey to work that is required, rather than a once-a-week journey.

7. For the future, the WG will consider alternative population bases, including working population, daytime populations etc. This is consistent with the recommendations of the 2003 Fullerton report.

Contacts:

Dr Chris W Smith, email: chris.w.smith@ons.gsi.gov.uk,
Room 2300, ONS, Segensworth Road, Titchfield Hants PO15 5RR
Tel: 01329 813205,