

Quality Assurance Strategy for Implementation of Migration and Population Statistics Improvements – 2008 Round

Introduction

This document describes the strategy devised for Quality Assuring the improvements to the national and local authority mid-2008 population estimates.

Purpose

The purpose of the strategy is to ensure that we implement the best set of improvements that are possible. This will be achieved by building in quality assurance at each step of the process. Including:

- the selection of the methods;
- ensuring issues related to the quality outcomes of the methods chosen are identified;
- careful checking of the outcomes of the applications of the methods; and,
- throughout ensuring that a sufficient range of stakeholders are engaged in the quality assurance process.

Summary

The assurance of the quality of the improvements will come from the involvement of key groups and individuals in all the key stages of the design and implementation of improvements.

There are six key 'Actors' in the quality assurance strategy, these are:

- Research Review Group (RRG);
- Methodology Directorate Quality Assurance (MDQA) panels;
- CLiP Population Subgroup;
- Reference Groups;
- Formal External Peer Review; *and*
- Other Engagement Activities.

The role of each of these for quality assurance is set out below.

Annex E to this paper sets out the times of action for each of these quality assurance Actors.

The quality of each improvement strand, and the package of improvements as a whole, requires technical assessment. The way these are assessed is out of scope of this document. However, these assessments will form part of the material that is presented through the avenues outlined above. These assessments should, whenever possible, reference evidence independent

of/external to information used directly in the improvements; such evidence provides important validation of the improvements.

There follows a more detailed description of the make up and purpose of each of the six main actors.

Research Review Group

Research should be of very high quality, and there should be substantial quality assurance of new methods. The RRG is an internal peer review group that oversees methodological development. It is made up of demographers from the ONS Centre for Demography and also from Methodology Directorate. It has a wide remit that includes discussion of implementation, and advising on research direction, as well as a quality assurance role.

The RRG is the main body for making recommendations on improvements to the UK Population Committee and the ONS Statistical Policy Committee who have final decision making authority.

Research strands are required to report to RRG at significant points in their methodology development so RRG can comment and have an impact on the research to ensure quality. Periodic updating of the RRG (which may be by means of a verbal update) is important as it ensures that research continues to be focussed appropriately and it also helps highlight those issues that researchers may not have considered.

Work moves between the RRG to an 'MDQA panel' (see below), and back to RRG. It is usual for the research team to either expand upon the report that went to MDQA, to address their concerns, or bring a supplementary paper that addresses these concerns separately. When appropriate this may be in the form of a verbal update.

Following submission, RRG may chose to recommend acceptance of the research, recommend further work that is required, or, in some circumstances, recommend winding up or suspending research. Research work will be reported with its status.

Methodology Directorate Quality Assurance Panel

The role of the MDQA panel is to provide a detailed and rigorous assessment of the quality of the methods that are proposed for the improvements. The MDQA should provide recommendations on whether the improvements are fit for purpose, and what if any further work should be undertaken to further assure the quality of the improvements. MDQA panels consist largely of methodologists within ONS who are independent of the development of the methods. One of the demographic methodologists will be there to explain the work but this process is designed to provide a robust challenge and review.

As described above MDQA recommendations should be reported to the RRG.

Research leads are encouraged to consider whether interim MDQA assessments could be beneficial. It is envisaged that these would consist of the submission of work in progress to MD for guidance on what issues would likely be raised by the formal panel and what further work might be required. The benefits of this informal assessment are a reduced burden for both researchers and MD in terms of the material that needs to be submitted (informal documents can be used and a full MD write up is not required) as well as helping to spot issues earlier rather than later.

CLiP Population Subgroup

This Central Local information Partnership (CLiP) subgroup considers the methods and data sources used to produce population statistics. It is the main forum for LA oversight of the methods used to produce population statistics.

Research leads should contribute material for updates to the biannual CLiP meetings.

A specific role of CLiP is to recommend nominations for other groups, such as the reference panels and/or help ONS identify local authority representation for these groups.

Reference Panels (Expert groups and Local Insight Reference Panels)

The reference panels are groups of mainly LA experts who are able to bring a local perspective to the quality assurance. It is an aim to have a variety of members who are able to comment on methods proposed; sense check provisional results; and provide suggestions for material to be published.

Members of reference panels must be prepared to maintain the confidentiality of unpublished material. Meetings are treated as confidential. ONS intend to publish notes of the meetings which will be a broad summary of what was discussed and actions arising. These notes will not identify member's individual contributions. Members of such groups would be expected to provide their expertise with the aim of improving population estimates as a whole. They would not be representatives of their employing authority. Members will be expected to sign a memorandum of understanding confirming they agree to the terms of reference and their role and responsibilities. Membership of such groups can change over time.

Terms of Reference and Membership of the panels are shown in Annexes B and C.

Formal External Peer Review

Completed research should be formally peer reviewed. This is to ensure that the proposed improvements are subject to external, and therefore

independent, academic rigour. ONSCD has a list of demographic external experts for this purpose.¹

Two avenues for formal peer review exist; the first is via formal peer review of articles for published journals, such as *Population Trends*. However, timescales for making improvements are such that it is unlikely this route can be successfully used. This route is also more appropriate to new innovative approaches, rather than evolutionary developments to the existing methodology.

The second avenue is to commission a panel to review the work. The panel should consist of a small number (around 3) of external experts, which should include appropriate academics. Panel members might be experts in the demographic field being considered or in the method being proposed (e.g. statistical modelling). Detailed documentation should be supplied to the panel in advance. Included in this documentation will be clear terms of reference setting out the scope of the review and how comments will be addressed. A meeting of panel members, plus appropriate researchers should be arranged to allow the experts to discuss the proposals. The panel may choose to report back their findings through a written report, individual comments, or by using the note of the meeting. Panel members will normally be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement, however it is planned that the material produced for/by these meetings should be published once the improvements are ultimately published (in May 2010).

The results of the formal peer review should be reported to the RRG. This can be accompanied with further supporting material if required.

The formal peer review should not limit using other opportunities for working with academia. For example Southampton University are working on the migration modelling work. Other channels, including informal routes, should also continue to be used.

Other Engagement Activities

All other engagement activities have the potential to raise quality assurance issues. Some, such as the formal consultation, have the specific aim to contribute to the quality assurance process. Any quality assurance issues raised at engagement activities should feed their way back into research. In some cases it will be sufficient to deal with issues raised by adding material to the documentation. For larger issues, or more serious concerns, the issues raised should be formally reported back to RRG. In most cases this can be within the body of research reports that are part of the normal RRG process. For larger engagement activities, including specifically the consultation, a formal report on the issues raised should be submitted to RRG.

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http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/methodology/specific/population/future/imps/updates/downloads/ONS_Use_of_External_Experts.pdf

Other activities include, but are not limited to, those listed below:

- Formal consultation on improvements;
- LGA workshops;
- Migration Statistics Improvement Programme (MSIP) Board;
- UKPC (committee of UK National Statistics Centres);
- MSIP Working Groups;
- Meetings with LAs and LA groups;
- Bilateral meetings with OGDs and other key stakeholders;
- Correspondence; and
- Conferences.

Annex A: Incorporating feedback

The diagram (overleaf) gives a diagrammatical representation of the quality assurance strategy, including showing how feedback from the various quality assurance 'actors' is incorporated.

Overall feedback can influence the methods that are used in two different ways.

- Direct impact on methodology. Some comments and feedback will have a direct influence on the methods and sources used or their implementation. That is they will result in changes to be incorporated within the current round of improvements, which will be published in May 2010.
- Helping to shape future work. Some comments will raise issues that we are not able to address in the current round. For example, this could be because consideration of these comments would require more time for in-depth research.

There was considerable feedback during the last round of improvements to our methodology. This feedback resulted in changes that fell under both the above headings. As an example, following evidence from local areas, changes were made to the intermediate geographies that were used in the allocation of international migrants. Also following suggestions raised, country of birth indicators were included within the variables that were considered in the stepwise selection method for the international out-migrant model. Both of these are examples where comments made had a direct impact. Following on from the comments made the inclusion of country of birth has been considered in more detail for the current round of improvements. Other comments, about the desirability of having a more stable distribution of in-migrants, have contributed to the decision to have a fixed set covariates in the international migration models. Both of these are examples where comments from users have helped shape future work, and resulted in subsequent changes.

Making Feedback Effective

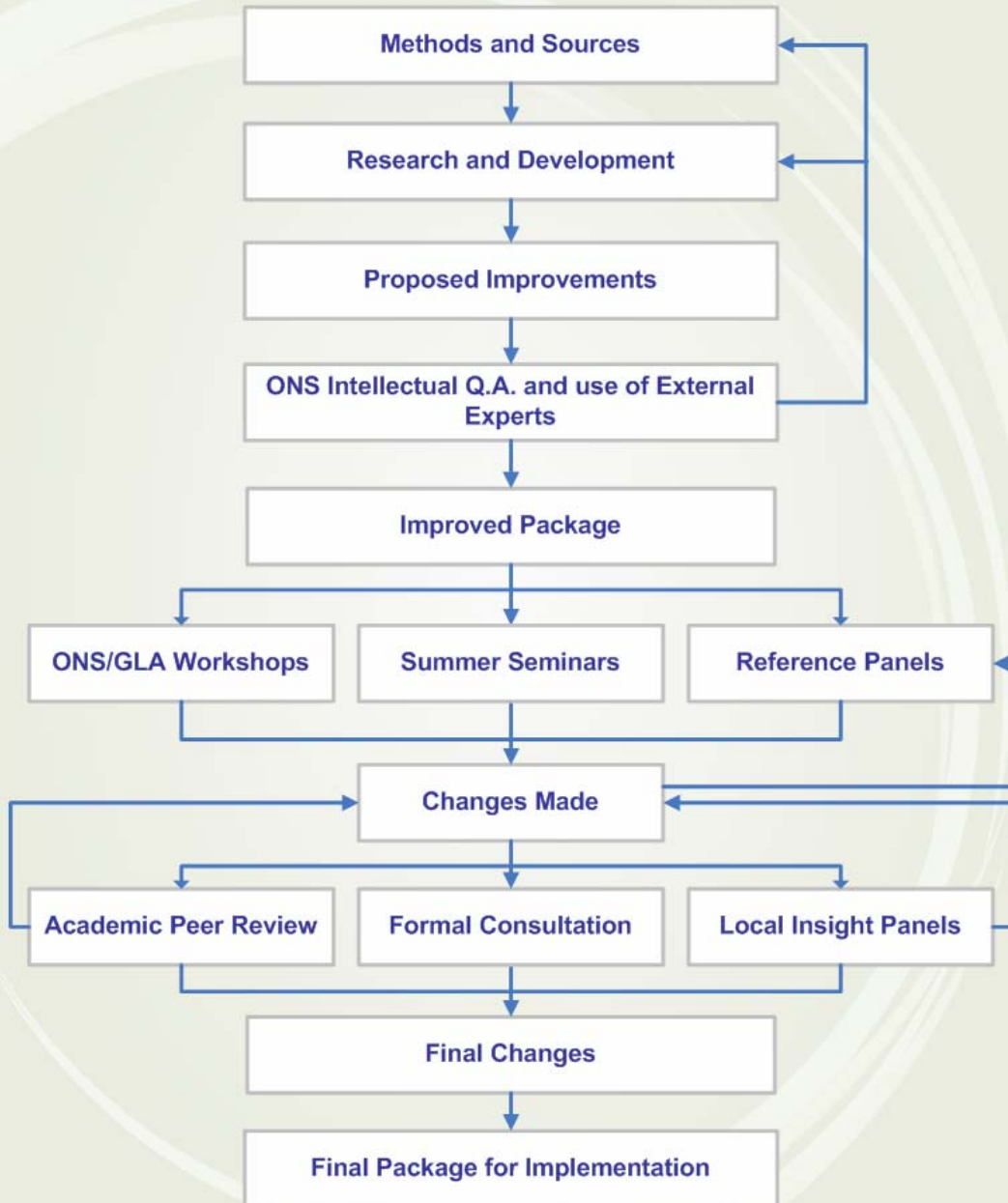
Feedback from users is strongest when backed up by evidence. As part of the documentation we will be publishing alongside the formal consultation later this year we plan to provide a guide to the sort of evidence that could be used to back up comments on the improvements.

Feedback is strongest when it is constructive and specific; if you can suggest how and where a method can be improved this provides a much more powerful case.

Finally you will wish to bear in mind that we aim to use a nationally consistent methodology; if you have a local issue that might affect the methodology we will wish to consider how that issue might also apply in other areas as well.

ONSCD - IMPS QA Strategy

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Annex B: Terms of Reference - Technical Reference Groups

1. Purpose

To assist the development of improvements to ONS migration statistics, providing knowledge of local level data, migration trends and technical methods.

2. Structure

ONS will be using the groups as part of its quality assurance strategy for implementing changes. These groups will exist in addition to independent quality assessment by ONS Methodology Directorate and academic peer review.

Each reference group will meet to discuss progress on individual strands of the work programme. There are four panels covering:

1. long-term international migration distribution
2. local area short-term migration estimation
3. adjusting for underestimation of student migration within England & Wales
4. a dedicated panel to cover all three of these issues within London

Reference group members are not being asked to sign off estimates for the individual local areas they might usually represent or for the validity of estimates across England and Wales.

3. Aims

1. To contribute to the aim of the cross-government programme to improve migration statistics with particular emphasis on local area migration statistics
2. To provide local authority users with an opportunity to comment on methods being developed
3. To help ONS evaluate the improvements
4. To provide ONS with insights into local methodological issues
5. To enable more effective user consultation

Aims will be achieved by members:

- Meeting regularly at relevant stages of the work
- Engaging with the methodology through reading relevant papers supplied
- Having open discussions about emerging work and identifying refinements to the approaches presented
- Suggesting material and additional analysis users would require when presenting and publishing results.

- Using evidence based on known sources that are supported by suitable quality assurance and metadata.

4. Responsibilities

Members will:

- Advise on methods being developed and initial results presented
- Be part of the QA process ONS are using for developing methods
- Be involved as local area demographic experts rather than as representatives from their specific area.

Members will not:

- Formally approve final methods used or resulting estimates,
- Be able to discuss initial results outside the meetings or circulate more widely,

5. Membership

Reference group membership will change where appropriate to broaden expertise. The list below is not complete. There are a small number of other members who will be added once their permission has been gained.

Long-term International Migration Distribution

Paul Barton	Luton
Andrew Blake-Herbert	Slough
Luned Jones	Welsh Assembly Government

Short-term Migration at Local Area Level

Charlotte Devereux	Herefordshire
Vicky Head	Cambridgeshire
Mary Moore	Suffolk
Jamie Thorburn	Ceredigion
Communities and Local Government	

Internal Migration of Students

Greg Ball	Birmingham
Tony Champion	Newcastle University
Jade Cheung	Haringey
Graham Gardner	Nottingham
Roland Lovatt	Sheffield
Kevin Richardson	Newcastle
Neil Storer	Camden
Jamie Thorburn	Ceredigion

London Group

John Hollis	Greater London Authority
Thomas Knight	Regional Statistician for London

Annex C: Terms of Reference – Local Insight Reference Panels (LIRPs)

1. Purpose

To provide local insight on emerging impacts of improvements to population and migration statistics.

2. Structure

ONS will be establishing LIRPs as part of its quality assurance strategy for implementing improvements in addition to independent quality assessment by ONS Methodology Directorate and academic peer review, and formal consultation.

Each group will meet to review estimates resulting from the implementation of the package of improvements. The method of working and the number of panels required will depend upon the level of interest.

Reference group members are not being asked to sign off estimates for the individual local areas they might usually represent or for the validity of estimates across England and Wales, but to provide local insight into the plausibility of the emerging numbers.

3. Aims

1. To contribute to the aim of the cross-government programme to improve migration statistics with particular emphasis on local area migration statistics
2. To provide local authority users with an opportunity to comment on the plausibility of improved estimates
3. To help ONS evaluate the improvements
4. To enable more effective user consultation

Aims will be achieved by members:

- Engaging with the estimates produced
- Having open discussions about the plausibility of estimates presented
- Providing expertise for the areas they represent
- Supplying evidence based on known sources that are supported by suitable quality assurance and metadata.

4. Responsibilities

Members will:

- Advise on the plausibility of initial results presented
- Be part of the QA process ONS are using for finalising methods
- Back up points of view with valid data sources or other evidence of known quality

Members will not:

- Formally approve final methods used or resulting estimates
- Be able to discuss initial results outside the meetings or circulate more widely

5. *Membership*

To be added when the panels are convened.

Annex D: Frequently Asked Questions

Q. How do I get involved?

A. Write to us at imps@ons.gsi.gov.uk if you are interested in getting involved with any part of our QA process, or if you would like to make direct comments. Certain events, like our seminars, are open to all; we publicise these public events widely and they have their own registration procedures. ONS/LGA workshops are publicised through the LGA and WLGA, these events are open to any in the LG community, and registration is through the LGA. Finally if you would like to be involved in the reference panels write to us at the e-mail address above; with advice from the LGA we will select a range of local experts for the reference panels.

Q. How do I know you will take into account my feedback?

A. We listen to and consider all feedback. Sometimes feedback will have an effect on improvements in later years. Feedback is most effective when it is backed by evidence, is constructive, and specific. Feedback on local issues is most effective where the wider implications are considered and where it can be incorporated into a nationally consistent methodology.

Q. Will comments made during consultation have an impact?

A. Yes. There is the potential for feedback to have an impact right up to the end of the consultation. However, the earlier issues are raised the easier they are to deal with, and thus the more likely they will have an impact on the current round of revisions. Comments made late in the engagement process, especially if they involve significant further research, may be dealt with in future rounds of improvements.

Q. How do I know what effect the improvements will have on the population estimates and projections for my area?

A. We will be publishing full indicative impacts of the improvements alongside the start of the formal consultation in about December (exact timetable to be confirmed). Before then the Local Insight Reference Panel will be considering early figures, on a confidential basis, to sense check results.

Q. Will there be changes following the publication of indicative impacts.

A. Yes. In all likelihood there will be changes between the indicative impacts and the final figures to be published in May 2010. These will reflect the impact of any changes made as a result of the consultation. We would expect changes to be relatively small in most areas, but cannot rule out the possibility of larger changes in a small number of areas.

Q. Why are the Reference Panels confidential?

A. Part of the role of the reference panels is to consider emerging methods and findings. Making the Panels confidential means that this

consideration can be done freely and frankly. Emerging findings can be considered without undue focus on particular results that will change as methods are refined. Panel members are not prohibited from discussing more widely any concerns they may have, once the research has been reported publicly.

Q. *What is the role of Regional Statisticians?*

A. Regional Statisticians can provide you with help and advice. They can also collate and feedback your views.

Q. *Is the ONS Methodology Directorate Quality Assurance Panel independent.*

A. Yes. These panels are wholly or mainly made up of methodologists who have not been involved with the research work that is being considered. These panels provide a rigorous, independent check of methodology and the results.

Annex E: Timing of Engagement Activities

As at June 2009

Activity	Timing	Participation
ONS/LGA workshops	Ongoing 3-4 meetings a year, last met May 2009 next meeting around October because of summer roadshows	LAs, LGA, and ONS researchers.
Seminar Roadshows	June and December	Public
RRG	1-3 per month sometimes more frequently at key points	ONS - Internal
MDQA	Ongoing at significant stages of initial research following consultation (June and February)	ONS Methodologists – Internal
CLIP	Six monthly, April and October	LGA, and Local Government representatives, ONS, and Other Central Government
Expert Reference Panels	Ongoing, at significant stages of research. Started December 2008	Local experts, academics, and ONS researchers.
Local Insight Reference Panels	September 2009 to December 2009	Local experts, academics, and ONS researchers
Formal External Peer Review	September 2009 to February 2010	Academic experts
Formal Consultation	Approx. December 2009 to February 2010	Public consultation