

The Census

A giant snapshot of the whole nation

What is the Census?

On Sunday 29 April 2001, every individual who is usually resident in this country will take part in the Census.

Since 1801 and every 10 years, the nation has set aside one day for the Census - a count of all people and households in the UK. It is the most complete source of information about the population we have.

Every effort is made to include everyone. That is why the Census is so important. It is the only survey which provides a detailed picture of the entire population and it is unique in that it covers everyone at the same time and asks the same questions everywhere, making it easy to compare different parts of the country. It will involve millions of average households but will also include those living under one roof in organisations like care homes and boarding schools. It will include British citizens who are abroad on temporary postings with the Armed Forces and people sleeping rough. However, visitors to Britain, such as tourists, will not be included.

The information the Census provides will allow central and local Government, health authorities and many other organisations to target their resources more effectively and to plan housing, education, health and transport services for years to come. It is particularly important, therefore, that every section of the community is fully represented.

Who is responsible for taking the Census?

In England and Wales the Census is planned and carried out by the Office for National Statistics. Elsewhere, responsibility lies with the General Register Office for Scotland and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency.

How will the Census be taken?

The Census in England and Wales will require a large fieldforce - some 70,000 strong - to carry it out. Most of these are enumerators, who deliver the forms in the weeks leading up to Census Day, and make personal contact with the householder. Enumerators will also return to any households who fail to post the Census form in order to collect it.

What questions will be asked?

The Census form will contain 40 questions in England and 41 in Wales – with the possibility of an additional question on religion. The first set of questions are about accommodation and relationships within the household, and are answered by the householder / joint householder on behalf of the household as a whole. The remaining 30 or so questions are addressed to each individual within the household and should be answered by each of them in turn. The questions aimed at individuals will cover six broad subject areas: demographics (e.g. age, sex); cultural characteristics (e.g. ethnic group); state of health/long-term illness; qualifications; employment/economic activity; workplace and journey to work.

In Wales there will be a question on knowledge of Welsh and a Welsh language version of the Census form will be available to every household along with an English language version.

What will happen on Census Day?

By 'Census Day' (29 April), every household in England and Wales will have received a Census form. The answers people write on their Census form should reflect their circumstances on Census Day and the forms must be posted back in the reply-paid envelope provided, as soon as possible after Census Day.

Will Census returns be confidential?

The information is used only to produce statistics about the population in general, and nothing will be released which identifies any individual or household. The confidentiality of the information provided is protected by law. Micro-film 2001 Census records will be held in secure storage for 100 years before release to the public by the Public Records Office. The personal information contained in the 2001 returns will, therefore not be available until 2102.

How long will it take to fill in the form?

The form has been designed to be as clear as possible and questions are mainly tick-box with a few write-in replies. It should take about 30 minutes to complete in the case of the average household.

Is completing a Census form compulsory?

It is designed to be a complete count of the population, and every household must return a form by law. Failure to complete and post back the form is an offence which can attract a fine of up to £1,000.

What help will be available?

Instructions included on the Census form itself should answer most queries people may have when filling in their form. However, a telephone helpline (calls charged at local rate) will be available every day during the Census enumeration period to answer public enquiries. A leaflet explaining how to fill in the Census form will be available in 23 minority languages. Bilingual helpline advisers will be available for many languages other than English, and a special service will be provided for the deaf community.

How will people know about the Census?

The 'Count Me In' national advertising and publicity campaign is planned to raise awareness and understanding of the Census. Our aim is that through paid advertising and free publicity in national and regional media the majority of people will be aware of the Census before Census Day.

What happens after Census Day?

All forms are collected and delivered to a central processing centre. First the forms will be electronically scanned, the data captured and the write-in responses coded. The images will then be written to microfilm for long-term storage. In England and Wales the paper forms will then be destroyed, saving the £3 million cost of storing some 30 miles of shelved paper records. This phase of the operation is due to be completed by March 2002.

How much will the 2001 Census cost?

Some £255 million for the UK as a whole of which £30-35 million is for Scotland. This sum covers the whole 13-year census cycle from 1993 (when planning begins) to 2006, when all the information is published, and is equivalent to less than £5 per person spread over 13 years. This investment will give us vital information so we can be sure billions of pounds of public money are distributed effectively for the next decade.

How do we know that the Census is accurate?

Once the Census has been taken, a check needs to be made on how well the Census counted people. This check is called a Census Coverage Survey. In May-June 2001, interviewers will revisit a sample of 300,000 households across the country and carry out a doorstep interview. The responses to a few key questions will be compared with the returns for the main Census to highlight any differences in coverage, and will be used to estimate any under-count

When will the results be available?

The main core Census results will begin to be published in Summer 2003 and will be made available mainly on the Internet. Paper publications may also be made available following consultation with users.

Other factsheets:

2. Why We Need
a Census
3. Census 2001
– What's New?
4. Counting Everyone In
– the Big Challenge
5. The Census
Organisation
6. Census Jobs
7. The Census
and the Law
8. Census Taking
Through the Ages

Contact for further information:

Press enquiries only:

Tel: 020 7533 5160

Public enquiries only:

Census Customer Services
Room 4300S
Office for National Statistics
Segensworth Road
Titchfield
PO15 5RR

Tel: 01329 813800

Fax: 01329 813587

email: census.customerservices@ons.gov.uk

website: www.statistics.gov.uk