



Advisory Group Paper AG (05) 04

2007 Test England and Wales

Introduction

1. The Office for National Statistics is planning the first major field test for the next Census to take place in May 2007. It will form part of the planning and testing programme leading to up the next Census of Population for England and Wales in 2011.

Advisory Group members asked to note the plans for the 2007 Test.

Design of the Test

2. The 2007 Test will be a large-scale test in five Local Authority areas selected to reflect a range of field conditions, covering about 100-200,000 households in total. The sample of households will be selected from within the five Local Authorities (containing 552,000 households in total), split into 'like' areas (strata) according to population characteristics (such as high proportions of students, elderly, ethnic minorities, multi-occupied accommodation, etc).
3. Within England the Test will cover parts of Bath and North East Somerset, Camden, Liverpool and Stoke on Trent. In Wales the Test will take place in Carmarthenshire. One of the key requirements of the 2007 Test is to identify which fieldwork factors positively influence response and whether these vary within different 'hard-to-count' population groups. The selected Local Authorities have been chosen to provide a varied cross-section of the population and types of housing that would be covered in a full census. There will be no formal attempt to generalise from these to the population as a whole.
4. A Census Test in parts of Scotland is being undertaken by the General Register Office for Scotland in 2006.

Key aims of the Test

5. The key aims of the 2007 Test are to:
 - assess the feasibility of the major innovations in the proposed 2011 Census design;
 - assess the effectiveness of new address questions and residence definitions to capture multi-residence information;
 - further advance understanding of the drivers of, and barriers to, public response;
 - assess the effectiveness of different enumeration approaches in maximising response for different population and area types - ONS will be using multiple enumeration approaches, targeted on different areas using a geo-demographic area classification;
 - develop a detailed understanding of the requirements of business systems to support the census operation and the interfaces between them;
 - assess the performance of alternative suppliers as part of the procurement of services for the 2011 Census; and
 - develop effective ways of working with Local Authorities to improve the enumeration process.
6. The planned enumeration approach is a mix of postout and traditional delivery of forms by enumerators, with return of forms by postback, doorstep collection, internet and, possibly, telephone.
7. The Census Test will be voluntary. Information returned on the forms will be treated as confidential and only used for the evaluation of the Test and carrying out any subsequent further research. No information that could identify individuals will be passed outside the ONS.
8. There will be a full enumeration of all households in the selected areas, and a temporary field force will be recruited to carry out the work.

Topic content

9. The topics to be included in the Test are not necessarily those which will be included in the Census in 2011. One of the objectives of the Test is to examine a number of issues regarding acceptability and burden on the public, the accuracy of the information collected and, most importantly, the effect that a question might have on response rates. Particularly, the Test will enable an assessment to be made of any effect on response of the inclusion of a question on income. The questions eventually to be included in the Census in 2011 will be the subject of a Government White Paper and subsequent debate in Parliament.
10. The selection of topics for the Test follows a comprehensive and rigorous process of consultation since the 2001 Census involving Local Authorities, central government departments and other users of census data across the UK. In particular, the results of

a major consultation on topics earlier this year will inform the content of the 2007 Test questionnaire

Working with Local Authorities

11. ONS are looking to make best use of the knowledge that exists within Local Authorities about their own communities. It aims to develop the approach adopted for 2001 by several Local Authorities of appointing Census Liaison Officers to work with the Census Office, and a Local Authority Liaison Steering Group was set up in August 2004 to steer this work. (See Advisory Group Paper AG (05)02) for more details.

Ian White
October 2005