



Office for  
**National Statistics**  
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Office for National Statistics

# Accounting Officer Assessment

Census Data Collection Transformation Programme (CDCTP)  
Full Business Case, refresh, Approved by HM Treasury, 30th  
July, 2019

Sir Ian Diamond, National Statistician  
May 2023

# Accounting Officer Summary

## Accounting Officer Memorandum:

Census Data Collection Transformation Programme (CDCTP)

### Background and context

With the unprecedented levels of change in society at present, both technologically and socially, the Census and Data Collection Transformation Programme ensures the country has the ongoing data needed to monitor these changes. The programme takes place against the backdrop of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukrainian and cost of living crises. These events increase the value to decision-makers of quicker and better population data covering small groups and areas and insights into societal changes. The Government has shown its commitment to the Census through the publication of the White Paper: *Help Shape our Future: The 2021 Census of population and housing in England and Wales* on 14 December 2018. This set out the content and conduct of the 2021 Census which was made law in June 2020. The Census Data Collection Transformation Programme (CDCTP) has three elements:

1. The main census (for England and Wales) which delivered a predominantly online census of all households and communal establishments, exceeding our quality targets.
2. The Census will provide evidence to enable a decision in 2023 about the future provision of population statistics after this Census using data sources that already exist across government, for example from the tax, welfare, and health systems.
3. Delivering the widest possible transformation of ONS systems and collections from the investment in the Census.
  - a. Data Collection Transformation (DCT) will modernise ONS's data collection activities. This delivers efficiencies through the greater use of administrative data and survey data collected online.
  - b. The renewal of our technology infrastructure will support the delivery of the data collection transformation and the Census through common digital platforms. This supports transformation across the whole of ONS.

All these elements align with the wider Government Digital Transformation Strategy. Several methods to quantify the benefits of population statistics have been developed in the past five years, the results of which were included in the Full Business Case approved by HM Treasury (HMT) on 30th July 2019.

### Assessment against the Accounting Officer standards

#### Regularity

The ONS is the UK Statistics Authority's (UKSA) statistical production function. The UKSA was established under the Statistics and Registration Service Act (SRSA)

2007 and is an independent statutory body. It operates at arm's length from government as a non-ministerial department and reports directly to the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, and the Northern Ireland Assembly. The work of the Authority is further defined under secondary legislation made under the Act by the UK Parliament or the devolved legislatures.

As the Accounting Officer, I am satisfied that the programme is being delivered in accordance HM Treasury spend controls and the commitments set out in the latest approved Full Business Case (30<sup>th</sup> July 2019). Thus, meeting the requirements of the regularity test.

## **Propriety**

The programme sits within the Government Major Projects Portfolio (GMPP), and it is regularly assured by the Infrastructure and Projects Authority and Central Digital Data Office. Internally, the programme is monitored through ONS central governance portfolio, which includes Portfolio and Investment Committee and to the UKSA Board.

The programme has been approved, with the Full Business Case, 30<sup>th</sup> July 2019. Also, by ONS Portfolio and Investment Committee and HM Treasury – funding and expenditure is in line with spending controls.

ONS is fully committed to meeting the mandatory Digital Service Standard for all its services and delivering services that align with the organisation's key principles. Within ONS we recognise the best practice contained within the standards and have therefore taken a decision to assure that all digital solutions are compliant.

As the Accounting Officer, I am satisfied that the propriety test has been met.

## **Value for Money**

The latest Economic Case<sup>1</sup> set out the options and a recommended delivery approach.

Following a full review of all benefits, the business case in its entirety continues to demonstrate strong value for money for the public purse, that for each £1 of investment, the programme will deliver at least £5 of benefit.

Changes in the profile of benefits has been a result of strengthening the methodology used, as well as ensuring that the Economic Case is Green Book compliant. In addition, sensitivity analysis has been undertaken on the external census benefits, to provide greater assurance on the value for money of the business case.

The Full Business Case has ensured no double counting of benefits with other programmes has been included. It has highlighted the risks to benefit realisation, which for cash releasing benefits, relate to delivery of administrative data from other departments and delivery prioritisation within the ONS.

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<sup>1</sup> Set out in the latest full business case, July 2019

The programme represents good value for money and a return on investment for the Exchequer and UK society. The programme is actively managing its risk and operating in accordance with the ONS risk appetite processes.

As the Accounting Officer, I am satisfied that the value for money test is met and that the programme is a sound use of public funds.

## Feasibility

With the continuing levels of change in society the CDCTP has ensured the country has the ongoing data needed to monitor these changes through the delivery of arguably the most successful census ever. This was done against the backdrop of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Running the census during the pandemic and with a backdrop of EU Exit and the Ukraine crisis has made it clear that there is an ever-increasing demand and need for frequent and up to date statistics accurately reflecting today's society, and can be used by decision-makers to gain faster and more detailed insight into changes across the population including small groups and local areas. Engagement with Local Authorities has identified additional needs that will feature in future work.

The programme has secured delivery confidence from Infrastructure Projects Authority (IPA) reviews and delivery of key programme milestones. The programme's IPA Gate Reviews include:

- January 2016 IPA Gateway Review (Gateway 0 Strategic Assessment OBC Stage) Delivery confidence was Amber
- January 2017 IPA PAR (OBC Stage) Delivery confidence for 2017 Test was Green and for 2019 Rehearsal/ 2021 Census was Amber
- July 2017 IPA Gateway Review (Gateway 0 Strategic Assessment combined with a Gate 2 Delivery Strategy) Delivery confidence was Amber
- July 2018 PAR Delivery confidence was Amber
- March 2019 - IPA Gateway Review (Gateway 0 Strategic Assessment combined with a Gateway 3 Investment decision) Delivery confidence was Amber
- July 2020 - IPA Gateway Review (Gateway 0 Strategic Assessment) Delivery confidence was Amber
- November 2021 - IPA Gateway Review (Gateway 0 Strategic Assessment) Delivery confidence was Amber
- January 2023 - IPA Gateway Review (Gateway 0 Strategic Assessment) Delivery confidence was Amber

Leading to an overall delivery confidence assessment of Amber, as of March 2023.

As the Accounting Officer I am satisfied that delivery of the CDCTP remains feasible.

## Conclusion

As the Accounting Officer for the ONS I considered this assessment of the Census Data Collection Transformation Programme and approved it on 18 May 2023.

I have prepared this summary to set out the key points which informed my decision. If any of these factors change materially during the lifetime of this project, I undertake to prepare a revised summary, setting out my assessment of them.

This summary will be published on the government's website (GOV.UK). Copies will be deposited in the Library of the House of Commons and sent to the Comptroller and Auditor General and Treasury Officer of Accounts.

Sir Ian Diamond, 18 May 2023

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