



Consultation document

The 2011 Census:
Initial View on Content for England and Wales
– Population Base

Office for National Statistics, May 2005

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Selection of the Population Base for the 2011 Census Enumeration

1. Summary

This paper announces the ONS recommendation for the enumeration base for the 2011 Census in England and Wales and summarises the research informing this decision. This research is discussed in detail in the following three papers, which are included in Annex A for information:

- *Population Base for 2011 Census enumeration.*
- *Comparison of Composite Enumeration Base options for 2011 Census.*
- *Assessment of the Implications of the Choice of Population Base, for the Continuity of Population Measurement.*

ONS recommend that the 2011 Census in England and Wales should collect information from usual residents, with some information collected on visitors present on Census Night.

There is a requirement to collect information on the same basis across the UK. Therefore this recommendation is subject to confirmation across the UK following the result of recent consultation exercises conducted in Scotland and Northern Ireland. However, early indications are that GROS and NISRA are likely to make the same recommendation for enumeration base.

2. Introduction

The choice of the population base for enumeration is a key decision, with implications for all aspects of census planning. The enumeration base describes the way we count people, but the decision on which base to use is also informed by the need to collect information on families, housing and specific population groups such as students and armed forces personnel. The population base for outputs needs to reflect the requirements of users and ensure the continuity of population measurement, with previous and future estimates. The enumeration base need not be the same as the output base, but it must be possible to derive the required outputs from the data collected.

This paper outlines why the enumeration base needed reviewing following the 2001 Census, discusses the options considered and outlines the key factors underpinning the choice of enumeration base.

3. Context

The 2001 Census in England and Wales under-estimated the population by around 275 thousand people, even after the initial adjustment for undercount. The 2001 Census collected information from usual residents only, with no attempt to collect information from visitors. This lack of visitor information has been perceived as a weakness of the 2001 Census, and it has been suggested that many people may have chosen to classify themselves as visitors in order to avoid completing a census return. It was decided to review all options for enumeration base before deciding on the appropriate base for 2011.

4. Enumeration Bases Considered

The paper *'Population Base for 2011 Census enumeration'* compared the benefits and limitations of four possible enumeration bases:

- Population present;
- Population usually resident;
- Population present, plus information on absent usual residents; and
- Population usually resident, plus information on visitors.

The first two of these were considered unsuitable for the 2011 Census. A population present enumeration base would make it very difficult to meet the key user requirement for outputs on a usual resident basis, while a usual resident only enumeration may result in higher levels of non-response given the concerns raised following the 2001 Census.

This paper concluded that the 2011 Census would require a 'composite' enumeration base (either the third or fourth of the options above). These bases both seek to collect some information on all usual residents and all people present at an address on Census Night.

The paper *'Assessment of the Implications of the Choice of Population Base, for the Continuity of Population Measurement'* considers the implications of the choice of enumeration base for 2011 Census outputs in the context of ensuring continuity of population measurement.

The paper concluded that only a composite enumeration base would meet the requirements of users for continuity of population measurement, outputs on a usual residence base and information on people living at an address but not classified as usually resident. When comparing the two composite base options, the paper concluded that a 'usual residents plus visitors' base was most suitable, as it would meet user needs more easily and may require a shorter questionnaire.

The paper also concluded that a usual residents plus visitors enumeration base would provide better continuity of population measurement with the 2001 Census, mid-year population estimates and any future administrative data based population estimates.

Therefore the paper recommends that the 2011 Census should be enumerated using a usual residents plus visitors base.

The paper *'Comparison of Composite Enumeration Base options for 2011 Census'* assesses the impact of the two composite base options in six key areas, before making a recommendation on which should be used in the 2011 Census. The six areas considered were:

- Outputs;
- Compliance;
- Questionnaire content;
- Respondent burden;
- Questionnaire delivery; and
- Questionnaire collection.

The paper concludes that a usual residents plus visitors enumeration base was better able to meet user requirements for outputs on a usual resident base and would provide more accurate information on household and family structure than the alternative of population present plus absent usual residents. It was also felt that this base would be easier to follow up for non-response and coverage assessment.

This paper recommends that the 2011 Census should be enumerated using a usual residents plus visitors base.

5. Enumeration Base Chosen

ONS have accepted the findings of these papers and recommend that the enumeration base for the 2011 Census in England and Wales should be 'usual residents plus visitors'.

As noted in section 1, this recommendation is subject to confirmation across the UK.

The exact definition of a 'usual resident' has yet to be decided. This is the subject of an on-going programme of research and testing, and the final definition will be one that best meets user requirements, while maximising response. This testing will be incorporated into the work to reach the final definition, which will be completed for use in the 2007 Census test.

Peter Stokes
April 2005

Annex A. Previous research papers

Following these links will open the papers as an *MS Word* document, in a new window.

[Population Base for 2011 Census enumeration.](#)

[Comparison of Composite Enumeration Base options for 2011 Census.](#)

[Assessment of the Implications of the Choice of Population Base, for the Continuity of Population Measurement.](#)