

AG (15) 01: Census Advisory Group (CAG) Workshop - 2011 Census Outputs Evaluation

Notes of User Feedback Workshop held 8th January 2015, City Hall, London

[The agenda for this workshop is available here](#)

[Slides from this workshop are available here](#)

Attendees:

ONS

Chris Ashford (Chair)	Census User Support
Colin Lloyd (Facilitator)	Census Outputs
Garnett Compton	Head of 2011 Census Quality & Outputs
Keith Spicer	Statistical Disclosure Control
Lisa Moore	Census Outputs
Cal Ghee	Census Outputs
Ann Blake	2021 Statistical Options
Callum Foster (Speaker)	2021 Operational Development
Andy Tait	ONS Geography
Steph Thomas (Secretariat)	Census Customer Services
Issi Trevenna	Census Customer Services
Debbie Burt	Census Customer Services
James P Harris	Analysis and Data Access

NRS & NISRA Representatives

Brian French	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)
Sandy Taylor	National Records Scotland (NRS)

CAG Representatives

Name	Organisation	Census Advisory Group
Alan Lewis	GLA / SASPAC	CLIP
Barry Leventhal (Speaker)	MRS Census & Geodemographics Group	BAPIAG
Caitlin Boswell – Jones	Scope	DiAG
David Harris	CACI	BAPIAG
Keith Dugmore	Demographic Decisions Ltd	BAPIAG
David Martin	Southampton University	AAG
Humphrey Southall	University of Portsmouth	AAG

Jayne Mills (Speaker)	Bristol City Council	CLIP
Justin Hayes (Speaker)	UK Data Service	AAG
Liam Reynolds	Shelter	DiAG
Mary Moore	Suffolk County Council	CLIP
Maureen Jalilli (Speaker)	National Association of British Arabs	DiAG
Linda Frost	Manchester City Council	CLIP
Neil Storer	London Borough of Camden	CLIP
Rai Karra	British Ravidassia Society	DIAG
Richard Cameron	GLA	CLIP
Seán Hutton	Irish in Britain	DiAG
Simon Whalley	Beacon Dodsworth	Guest
Sinclair Sutherland	nomis	Guest
Susan Mayne	Health and Social Care Information Centre	HSAG

CLIP: Central and Local Government Information Partnership

BAPIAG: Business and Professional Interests Advisory Group

DiAG: Diversity Advisory Group

AAG: Academic Advisory Group

HSAG: Health Service Advisory Group

1. Welcome and introductions

1.1 Colin Lloyd welcomed the representatives from 2011 Census Advisory Groups and outlined the purpose of the workshop which was to gather user feedback for evaluation and planning purposes. Colin also requested that only questions of clarification be raised after presentations, and discussion points be left until the dedicated session that would follow each set of presentations.

2. Presentations (part 1) Five presentations were given:

2.1. ONS Perspective; Chris Ashford, Dissemination and User Support Manager.

Chris Ashford presented an ONS view of what went well and lessons learned from the 2011 Census Programme. Key points included:

- Engagement started early (2006) with consultation and consideration for user requirements.
- Geography; in particular the introduction of workplace zones.
- Efficient and accurate output production and dissemination;
- Statistical Disclosure Control providing additivity and consistency; Post tabular disclosure control limited to output for Eurostat. <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/population-and-housing-census/census-data/2011-census>

- Micro data File Design; a teaching dataset was introduced for 2011 Census and the other microdata products had greater utility than produced from 2001 Census.
- Lessons learned;
 - Skilled & knowledgeable ONS staff and key users are needed to ensure the complexities of census outputs are understood, and high quality outputs delivered.
 - Understand user *needs* about content and delivery rather than try to satisfy a diverse range of “wants”.
 - Earlier decision making on content.
 - Manage changes effectively and keep users informed
 - Aim to release initial outputs earlier and complete entire suite sooner.
 - Ensure robust quality checking processes are implemented.

There were no questions at the end of this presentation.

2.2. The Local Authority Perspective; Jayne Mills, Bristol City Council.

Jayne Mills presented a local Authority view of what went well with the 2011 Census Programme and areas that could be improved. Key points included:

- **What went well**
 - Users had confidence in the statistics.
 - Key and Quick Statistics provided all the key data.
 - New topics supported LA work in health and electoral registration.
 - The application of statistical disclosure control was less problematical than in 2001
 - The addition of Workplace Zones as a new geography
 - Release of statistics through nomis and SASPAC
 - New data visualisation
 - Timetable for main outputs
 - User engagement
- **Suggestions for improvement**
 - Simpler web interfaces to Origin Destination outputs
 - Less restrictive access to Origin Destination products and microdata.
 - Outputs consultation was over ambitious
 - Working more closely with LAs over enumeration of communal establishments
 - Content: complex tables reduced detail; simpler cross tabulations preferred.
 - Provide intelligence in geographical codes (ie hierarchy information)
 - Improve management of anomalies in workplace coding
 - Provide Census 2001 univariate data on nomis; for completeness
 - Provide bespoke website for census outputs
 - More frequent and interactive working groups

There were no questions at the end of this presentation

2.3. The Business Sector Perspective. Dr Barry Leventhal. MRS Census & Geodemographics Group.

Dr Leventhal presented a commercial users view of what went well with the 2011 Census Programme and what could be improved. Key points included:

- **What went well**
 - Comprehensive and detailed question consultation
 - Excellent fieldwork leading to high response rates
 - A wide range of geography products
 - The bulk output format was easier and quicker to use than from 2001 Census
 - A consistent set of univariate statistics across the UK at OA level
 - Creation of Workplace Zones
 - Cooperation from ONS and NRS in resolving issues with table specifications
- **Suggestions for improvement**
 - Statistical Disclosure Control should:
 - Be sufficiently resourced and have processes that do not delay output
 - be conducted with greater transparency
 - be consistent across ONS, NISRA and NRS where possible
 - Plans and specifications for safeguarded products shared with users earlier.
 - Detailed table specifications produced and available to users in advance of the outputs.
 - Avoid late changes to outputs.
 - Maintain consistency in Local Characteristics across UK .
 - Improve access to Origin/Destination safeguarded data.
 - Speed and order of Census delivery. Delivery did not improve in line with technology, possibly due to reduced staff resource in 2014; this is a key point to consider for 2021.
 - Use finalised 2011 table specs as a starting point focussing on the needs of Census users for 2021 output content.
 - Ensure sufficient staff resources to deliver to timetable
 - Recommend undertaking a feasibility study to reduce the time for producing results from the 2021 Census .

2.4. Independent Research Perspective. Maureen Jalilli, National Association of British Arabs (NABA).

Maureen Jalilli presented an Independent Researchers view of how the 2011 Census Programme supported their research and how it could be improved. Key points included:

- A summary of how a business case was prepared and submitted to ONS to include Arab as a separate group within the Ethnic Group question section of the 2011 Census.
- Experience as a member of the diversity working group
- Issues encountered:
 - Inconsistency in written responses.
 - Discrepancy between place of birth and ethnicity figures
 - Limitation of response due to misunderstanding, reluctance or fear.

There were no questions at the end of this presentation

2.5. Statistical Disclosure Control. Keith Spicer, ONS Statistical Disclosure Control Manager.

To assist the workshop in discussion of statistical disclosure control (SDC), Keith Spicer presented the background for 2011 Census SDCl in acknowledgement of observations made earlier. Key points were:

- The method was approved by the National Statistician following intruder testing on 2011 data which could only be completed after receipt of the data.
- ONS responded to user feedback from 2001 Census regarding Small Cell Adjustment and considered alternative options that maximised utility within legal constraints.
- Controlling access to the origin destination data is considered to provide the best protection for that particular product, as it meets user needs for more detail without post tabular disclosure control.

There were no questions at the end of this presentation

Discussion Session 1

The first of two discussion sessions was held for representatives to submit suggestions, questions or thoughts generated by the presentations. Key topics and main points discussed were:

- Statistical Disclosure Control - though much support for the method, it was seen to be a bottle neck resulting in delays and perhaps too restrictive from what was originally planned. In some cases it was also felt that decisions on changing table specs were too isolated and as a result classifications in a variable were collapsed rather than removing a variable from a table making it less useful. The lack of consistency with 2001 tables was also highlighted.
- Inconsistency across UK - When changes were made as a result of disclosure or changing needs, these changes were not consistently applied across the census offices. In some cases this made it difficult to compare results across the UK.
- Timetable – Results need to be earlier and the long tail to finish the outputs was problematic. Not to automatically leave the more complex products (origin-destination, microdata) until the end. Users felt these are important products that are at risk of suffering from “end of programme fatigue”.
- Access to Safeguarded Origin Destination Datasets - Mostly raised by the commercial sector but the LAs also thought that controlled access to this information should be available through Nomis much like the BREs data. User held the view that managing the SDC issues by allowing the detail, but through access control, has reduced the value of this information.
- Resources - there was a suggestion that levels of resource devoted to outputs was too low (disproportionately low compared to the overall total cost) and that personnel moved on at key times, creating delays, inconsistency in understanding and approach.

- User Engagement and Communication – The key points were (i) to be clear at all times about the detail of what would be available when and involving users in decisions on changing content and priorities when required, and (ii) to ensure thorough consultation and involvement with smaller communities.
- Geography - General satisfaction with geographic products and services, and access to them, but disappointment among affected users regarding the lack of data for small parishes

2.6 Supporting Academia. Justin Hayes, UK Data Service Census Support.

Justin Hayes from the UK Data Service gave a short presentation about the InFuse interface that provides quick, intuitive and comprehensive access to aggregate outputs from UK censuses via user-selected combinations of variables and categories rather than traditional census tables. He also described the underlying technologies on which the interface is built including:

- Integration and harmonisation of data across the UK 2011 Census in a unified descriptive model based on standard aggregate data concepts.
- Database implementation of the descriptive model to provide global operations on all aspects of data and metadata.
- Managed Web access via an Application Programming Interface (API) to provide secure automated operations and facilitate application development.

Justin commented on positive aspects of the 2011 census aggregate outputs including improvements in consistency and UK harmonisation, as well as on aspects that make working with them more difficult, particularly the continued use of a pre-defined set of tables as the basis for user consultation and production of outputs. He encouraged ONS and the other census agencies to move to a multi-dimensional approach to census and other data to enable faster and more flexible delivery, to persevere with developing API access to encourage innovation in dissemination, and to investigate the potential for dynamic generation of aggregate data from unit records using automated disclosure control.

There were no questions at the end of this presentation.

2.7 Callum Foster; Analysis and Dissemination Manager.

Callum Foster gave a short presentation about the transition from Beyond 2011 to the Census Transformation programme and the early aspirations. Callum emphasised that it was early days and nothing had been agreed or confirmed yet. Key points were:

- 2021 Census will comprise an online census with support for those unable to complete online and:
- Increased use of administrative data and surveys to enhance 2021 Census data and improve annual statistics

- Potential options for disseminating the 2021 Census results
- The potential advantages, disadvantages and obstacles to consider when developing the 2021 Census Outputs Strategy.

There were no questions at the end of this presentation

Discussion Session 2

A second discussion session was held for representatives to submit suggestions, questions or thoughts generated by the presentations. Key topics discussed were:

- The avoidance of the term 'cubes' as that had some negative connotations from consultations on 2011 Census outputs, and meant different things to different people.
- The potential use of holding the data in a more flexible way than the more traditional large number of predefined tables. The thinking should be about constructing data structures in such a way that the information can be used and reused most effectively. This approach was initially proposed for 2011 Census but through consultation with users, the demand for traditional tables took priority.
- A more flexible approach as outlined would bring numerous benefits, more flexibility, improved timing, less need for commissioned outputs, and be more widely accessible.
- However it would present a challenge to SDC, and automated approaches were mentioned by users. ONS recognised the need to develop different and enhanced approaches.
- Attendees were curious as to how the proposed changes would be achieved as they were not in 2011 Census. ONS accepted the challenge and highlighted related work in other NSIs
- User engagement for Census 2021 will start this year and will take account of feedback from users of 2011 Census data
- The current thinking is that dissemination systems should be ready earlier, and consideration is being given to using those systems to make trial outputs available before 2021
- It was recognised that there would need to be considerable support for respondents who cannot complete online; a new "hard to count" community. Potential for assisted digital interviewing. This would be considered within the design for the 2021 Census.
- ONS are starting work early to scope out design principles and vision for dissemination and want to do this with users/experts through a working group.

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Summary and Close; Chris Ashford, Dissemination and User Support Manager

Chris Ashford thanked all the delegates, not only for attending but also for providing support to the Census teams throughout the whole programme; he also thanked the speakers and acknowledged the value of their contribution to the success of the workshop. The delegates were clearly engaged in planning for 2021 and positive continuity would be welcomed in future working groups.

The presentation slides, notes and questions/answers would be published on the ONS census website and they would be notified when they are available.