

**THE 1997 CENSUS TEST: OBJECTIVES , EVALUATION AND KEY DATES****1. INTRODUCTION**

The previous 1997 Census Test paper presented at the last round of meetings announced details of 1997 Census Test, to be carried out as part of the planning and testing programme for the 2001 Census. Press releases issued on 8 November 1996 by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and General Register Office for Scotland (GRO(S)) announced that the date of the 1997 Census Test is to be 15 June 1997 and not 27 April 1997 as previously planned. The date was postponed in order to avoid the danger of the enumeration clashing with canvassing for the General Election in Spring 1997.

**Advisory Group members are invited to note the following:**

- 1. the revised date of the 1997 Test;**
- 2. the objectives and evaluation of the Test;**
- 3. key dates and activities of the Test.**

**2. PURPOSE OF THE TEST**

The main aim of the Test is to enable the Census Offices to evaluate new collection and processing methods, an alternative style for the Census form and to test public reaction to new questions.

The Test will be held in eight different local authority areas covering about 97,000 households in Great Britain. The Northern Ireland Census Office (part of the Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)) will also conduct a Census Test covering some 9,400 households in Northern Ireland.

**3. 1997 TEST AREAS**

The Test will be carried out in parts of Brent, Birmingham, Glasgow, Craven, Alton/Petersfield, Bridlington, Thame and South West Argyll (see Appendix A). The areas have been chosen to provide a varied cross-section of the population and types of housing.

The Test areas in Northern Ireland were chosen to take account of the religious make-up of the resident population, the urban/rural classification and the level of deprivation in the area.

#### 4. MAIN OBJECTIVES

The 1997 Test will be driven by three primary objectives:

- **form design:** to compare a conventional 'matrix' form, as used in the 1991 Census, with a 'page-per-person' form. The two different types of form, with new and revised questions, are to be tested to gauge public reaction to the layout and question wording.
- **form content:** this is primarily concerned with comparing response rates to those census forms with and without a question on income. This will allow Census Offices to assess the impact of income on response rates.
- **collection procedure:** to test new and revised enumeration procedures with the aim of improving coverage, quality and cost effectiveness. These include testing postal methods of collection of census forms as well as the conventional method of delivery and collection by an enumerator. In South West Argyll, a postal method of form delivery will be tested.

In addition to these three primary objectives, there will also be ancillary prototyping, including:

- the use of a new method of planning enumeration areas, using Geographic Information Systems software, digital maps and boundaries. The enumerators will be supplied with clearer maps supplemented by address lists. They will be asked to use the latter as a guide, adding to it as necessary; and
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- the use of automatic data capture and coding technology: scanning; optical mark reading; optical character recognition techniques; and automatic and computer assisted coding of write-in responses.

The objective of the statistical design of the 1997 Test is to allocate the three primary factors to areas in such a way as to allow comparisons between the factors: matrix vs page-per-person forms; income vs no income questions; and postback vs collection methodology.

Within Great Britain, a postal methodology will be tested in parts of Brent, Birmingham, Alton, Craven, Glasgow and Argyll. Traditional collection methodology will be tested in parts of Brent, Birmingham, Thame, Bridlington, Glasgow and Argyll. Within each of the main Test areas, both form styles and sets of questions will be tested, although within an Enumeration District only one type of form and one set of questions will be used.

#### 5. EVALUATION

There will be three follow-up surveys in parts of the Test areas:

##### a) Census Test Validation Survey

The Census Test Validation Survey will be an interview-based survey of 1,500 households. A sample of households will be selected from half the Enumeration Districts in every Test area in England and from Glasgow.

The survey will interview a sample of responding households in order to assess coverage of people within the household. Questions will be asked to ascertain respondents attitude to the questionnaire and to sensitive questions, and about the burden imposed on the householder. There will also be questions to ascertain the quality of answers to, and understanding of, some of the other Census Test questions.

The survey will also include interviews with non-responders to the Census Test form in an attempt to discover the reasons for non-response.

## **b) Coverage of Addresses and Households**

Census HQ staff will carry out field trips to a number of Test areas to create an independent listing of addresses. The objective is to check the type of building, whether self-contained, whether occupied or unoccupied and the number of households at each address.

It is proposed to carry this out in parts of each Census District in Brent and Glasgow, and in Craven and Bridlington. Brent and Glasgow will provide areas with multi-occupancy. Some Enumeration Districts will be relisted to ensure there is no differential coverage of addresses which might affect the comparison between postback and standard collection methodology. Craven was selected to check address listings for remote areas where particular geographical planning problems may have arisen. Bridlington will provide an area with unoccupied properties (second/holiday homes) and multi-occupancy both of which present potential pitfalls for the coverage of addresses.

## **c) Interviews with Managers of Communal Establishments**

In the 1997 Test there are some Communal Establishments in Bridlington, Brent and Birmingham. Census HQ staff will carry out follow-up interviews with a sample of managers of selected establishments to assess the burden of identifying residents (those who should complete a form) and to generally assess the procedures.

## **d) Evaluation of Other Information**

A Public Enquiry Unit will be in operation for the duration of the Test. Information from this and other sources: fieldstaff debriefing sessions; observational analysis in the field; the analysis of management information collected as part of the field operation will all be considered as part of the evaluation of the 1997 Census Test.

## **6. KEY DATES AND ACTIVITIES**

The key dates and activities associated with the 1997 Test are:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Activity</i>
30 May 1997	Advance Round commences Public Enquiry Unit opens
6-12 June 1997	Delivery of Forms
15 June 1997	Census Test Day
16-27 June 1997	Collection/Postback of Forms
August - October 1997	Census Test Validation Survey
Autumn 1997	Coverage of Addresses & Households Survey Interviews with Managers of Communal Establishment
March 1998	Final Census Test Evaluation Report

## **7. AFTER THE TEST**

The results of the 1997 Test will be a key input into the decisions to be made about acceptability and quality of new questions and procedures. Following the Test and a re-examination of the business case for each existing and new census topic the Government will make proposals in a White Paper for the topics to be included in the 2001 Census and how, in broad terms, it will be carried out. An operational Dress Rehearsal will be held in 1999 which will give a thorough rehearsal of the census operation to ensure procedures work effectively.

## **8. ACTION**

**Advisory Group members are invited to note the following:**

- 1. the revised date of the 1997 Test;**
- 2. the objectives and evaluation of the Test;**
- 3. key dates and activities of the Test.**

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Map to be inserted here