

## 1 Introduction and background

### Historical background

- 1.1 There has been a census in England and Wales (and Scotland) every 10 years since 1801, with the exception of 1941 during the Second World War. Additionally there was a mid-term census in 1966. The Census of Population and Housing is the most important single source of information about the size and condition of the country's most valuable resource – its population. Broadly the same questions are asked, and the information is recorded in the same way, throughout the UK. This means that the census allows the comparison of different groups of people and small areas across the entire nation, and the opportunity to inter-relate various characteristics of the population. The high degree of consistency between one census and another also allows for changes over time to be measured.

### Reasons for a census

- 1.2 Everyone in the country uses public services at various times, including schools, health services, roads and libraries. These services have to be planned to keep pace with changing patterns of life. For their work to be effective, government, local authorities, the health service, the education and academic community, commercial business, professional organisations and the public at large all need reliable information on the number and characteristics of people and households. This need is currently best met by conducting a census every 10 years covering the whole of the population, and by updating the population estimates each year benchmarked on the preceding census.

### *Shaping government policy*

- 1.3 In particular, the UK Government and the Welsh Government need this kind of information to form policy, to plan services for specific groups of people and, especially, to enable local and health authorities to direct resources where they are needed. The information must be authoritative, accurate and comparable for all parts of the country. Currently only a census can provide the range of such information uniformly, both about the country as a whole and about individual small areas and sub-groups of the population.
- 1.4 The census counts the numbers of people living in each city, town and country area, distinguishing those who live in households and those who are resident in communal establishments. It provides information about each area and its population, including the balance of young and old, the healthy and sick, what jobs people do, the transport they use and the type of housing they live in.
- 1.5 An accurate count of the population in each local area is crucial for government to calculate the size of grants it allocates to local and health authorities. In turn, these authorities use census information when planning services in their areas.
- 1.6 As noted in the Government's 2008 White Paper '*Helping to shape tomorrow*<sup>1</sup>', basic information on the population size, age, sex and location are fundamental to many government policies including:
- ageing and pensions
  - migration into and out of the country, and internally

- long-term sustainability of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth and long-term sustainability of government revenues
- labour supply and inflationary pressures

1.7 Information on housing, household size and family make-up is important for:

- redressing inadequate accommodation and over-crowding, and
- meeting local housing demand and planning

The range of other information collected in the census:

- provides a better understanding of pressures on transport systems and the planning of roads and public transport
- enables the identification of areas of deprivation for targeting initiatives such as Neighbourhood Renewal and Sure Start
- provides information on ethnicity, qualifications and labour market status, for example to identify the causes of deprivation and appropriate policy interventions
- shows how many people work in different occupations and industries, helping government and businesses to plan jobs and training policies and to make informed investment decisions

### *Benchmarking*

1.8 The census provides the basis for deriving many social and economic indicators such as:

- population estimates
- employment and unemployment rates
- birth, death, mortality and fertility rates
- equalities monitoring (information on age, sex, ethnicity, religion, and disability help to identify disadvantage and measure the success of equal opportunities policies)
- grossing-up sample survey data (the census underpins socio-economic surveys carried out by government and the private sector because the survey results are grossed to census population counts. Without the census such surveys would be less reliable or would need to be larger and more costly)

1.9 Census benchmarks also underpin democratic engagement. The Boundary Commission, for example, takes account of population change to reshape constituency boundaries, and Member of European Parliament (MEP) representation is calculated using census population figures.

### *Allocation of resources*

1.10 The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Department of Health (DH) allocate money to local authorities and clinical commissioning groups to ensure that access to services is based on relative need rather than the ability of a local area to fund those services. Between them DCLG and DH currently allocate about £110bn a year to local authorities and clinical commissioning groups in England, based on a whole range of factors including census-derived population estimates, projections and breakdowns. In Wales, census-derived indicators are used in the direct allocation of around £2.4bn out of the £5.5bn

available to councils in the Local Government Revenue settlement. Over £4bn of funds are also allocated to health areas in Wales based in part on census figures.

### *Local investment and monitoring*

1.11 The census drives targeting of local services such as:

- local health (census questions on long-term illness and general health are good predictors of demand on the NHS)
- local education needs (census informs where to site new schools)
- local transport planning and traffic modelling
- local authority development plans (to ensure that development happens at the right locations)
- community support services, including home help and home care

### *Use by businesses*

1.12 The business community uses census data in a variety of ways, such as:

- in the creation of geodemographic packages such as Acorn and Mosaic
- in understanding small area characteristics for better market research
- in location analysis for determining sites for future stores and which products to stock in different parts of the country
- for selecting direct marketing strategies
- in financial product design

### *Academic research*

1.13 The census is an excellent source of data for social science research. The ONS Longitudinal Study is a 1 per cent sample based on census records linked together from censuses since 1971 and combined with other sources such as cancer registrations, births and deaths. This provides, for example, an unrivalled source for examining change over time. Such studies increase our understanding of social conditions and can shed light on the impact of past policies.

1.14 In conducting all such research ONS takes its confidentiality pledge to the public extremely seriously. When data are published ONS takes great care to ensure that reports are anonymised so that no individual data can be identified.

## Legal basis, the UK context and EU requirements

### *The UK context*

1.15 The statutory authority for taking a census of population in England and Wales is the Census Act 1920 (this Act also provides for a separate devolved census in Scotland, and similar legislation covers the census in Northern Ireland). The Act gives powers for taking a census in any year that is at least five years from the year of the previous census.

1.16 The introduction of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 (SRSA), which came into effect in April 2008, separated the function of the Registrar General (who had been responsible for the census since 1841) from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The authority for carrying out the census in England and Wales under the Census Act 1920 now lies with the independent UK Statistics Board

(whose functions are carried out under the title of the UK Statistics Authority). ONS is the executive arm of the UK Statistics Authority.

- 1.17 The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 (SRSA) also transferred ministerial responsibility from the Treasury to the Cabinet Office. The scope and authority of the Census Act otherwise remains broadly unchanged (see chapter 6) as a result of SRSA, though the provisions concerned with protecting confidentiality have been extended.
- 1.18 Under the terms of the Census Act, the Registrar General for Scotland still has the authority for taking the census in Scotland. But since devolution the Scottish Parliament is entirely responsible for approving separate subordinate legislation relating to the census in Scotland and its funding. The Registrar General for Northern Ireland is similarly responsible to the Northern Ireland Assembly, under the provisions of the Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969.
- 1.19 United Kingdom harmonisation has been achieved through close liaison and co-operation between the three census offices. The National Statistician and the Registrars General have a formal agreement<sup>2</sup> to work together to achieve consistent and comparable census outputs – both to meet domestic users' requirements and to fulfil the UK's international obligations.
- 1.20 The 2011 Census was compatible with the Human Rights Act (HRA), Data Protection Act (DPA), Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) and UK Equality legislation, and was carried out in a form and timeframe required by European Union regulations.

### *European Union requirements*

- 1.21 The need for census information is shared by the European Union (EU). The European Commission needs sufficiently reliable and comparable data on population and housing in order to fulfil the tasks assigned to it, notably by Articles 2 and 3 of the Treaty establishing the European Community<sup>3</sup>. To this end a Council and European Parliament Regulation<sup>4</sup> requiring member states to provide the Statistical Office of the European Communities (Eurostat) with census-derived statistical information, or equivalent data, relating to the reference year 2011 came into force in July 2008. Aggregated statistics, agreed by the National Statistical Institutes of Member States, and prescribed by a subsequent Commission Regulation<sup>5</sup>, have been supplied to Eurostat for use by the European Commission in support of the European Parliament.
- 1.22 The concepts and definitions adopted by the EU adhere to the Conference of European Statisticians' *Recommendations for the 2010 Censuses of Population and Housing*<sup>7</sup>. This was prepared by a joint Eurostat and UN Economic Commission for Europe working group, to which the UK made a significant contribution. Statistical disclosure controls protect the confidentiality of any statistical data made accessible to Eurostat under this obligation.

### *Separate arrangements in Wales*

- 1.23 Statutory responsibility for the administration and conduct of the census is not fully devolved in Wales. However, there were concerns and strong feelings in Wales over the lack of a 'Welsh' tick box in the 2001 Census ethnic group question. This, together with a recommendation in the Treasury Select Committee's report on the 2001 Census,<sup>6</sup> resulted in a commitment to work with the Welsh Government and

give Welsh Ministers a more formal role in determining the conduct and content of any future census in Wales. Information on the legislative process necessary for taking the census in Wales is set out in chapter 2.

- 1.24 The 2011 Census field force was managed by a regional management team with a separate regional manager for Wales.
- 1.25 A census household questionnaire has been provided in Welsh since at least 1841. Prior to the 2011 Census this was produced by translating the finalised English questionnaire into Welsh. A new method was used for the 2011 Census, developing questions in the Welsh and English languages simultaneously. This approach gave both languages equal status throughout the development cycle, and allowed cognitive testing of questions in both languages at the same time. The new method enabled issues unique to each language to be considered at every stage of development, and ultimately both versions of the questionnaire met the same quality standard.
- 1.26 Recruitment campaigns in Wales were bilingual and application forms could be completed in Welsh. All interviews were available bilingually, and candidates applying for 'Welsh speaking essential' areas had a short interview in Welsh.

## Recommendations from the 2011 Census and strategic aims

- 1.27 The design of the 2011 Census took into account the lessons learned from the 2001 Census, as assessed by ONS through its own evaluations, and also the changes in society that were expected between 2001 and 2011. ONS also took account of the recommendations made by external bodies, such as the Treasury Select Committee<sup>6</sup>, the National Audit Office<sup>8</sup>, the Statistics Commission, the Public Accounts Committee<sup>9</sup> and the Local Government Association<sup>10</sup> in their own independent reviews of the 2001 Census.
- 1.28 The key issues raised in these reviews covered the need to:
- select external suppliers of outsourced census operations early, using rigorous procurement procedures, and test their systems before the census
  - increase the efficiency of census questionnaire delivery by developing a high quality and up-to-date address list
  - enable better central control of field processes and activities by developing robust field management and questionnaire-tracking systems
  - have earlier and more detailed engagement with stakeholders, particularly local authorities, and review consultation processes to ensure the disabled community's needs were taken into account
  - ensure that the views of people in Wales and the Welsh Government are better reflected in census planning, by reviewing consultation processes
  - review whether or not the coverage survey's design is sufficient to identify under-enumeration in the hardest-to-count areas
  - review the need to collect information on income
  - review the cost-benefit trade-offs in aiming to produce more timely outputs that are consistent and harmonised across the UK, and
  - review the mechanisms to protect statistical confidentiality without eroding the utility of the data

### *Strategic aims*

1.29 Taking account of these and many other comments arising from the 2001 Census, the design of the 2011 Census was based on a number of broad strategic aims:

- to give the highest priority to getting the national and local population counts right
- to build effective partnerships with other organisations, particularly local authorities, in planning and executing the field operation
- to provide high quality, value-for-money, fit-for-purpose statistics that meet user needs, inspire user confidence, and are as consistent, comparable and accessible across the UK as possible
- to maximise overall response rates and minimise differences in response rates in specific areas and among particular population sub-groups, and
- to protect, and be seen to protect, confidential personal census information

### Key elements and innovations of the 2011 Census design

1.30 To achieve these aims, and to respond to changes in society since 2001, the design of the 2011 Census was significantly different from its predecessors. The societal changes included:

- an increasing ageing population
- a more mobile population with more complex living arrangements
- increasing numbers of migrant communities, particularly from east European countries
- greater numbers of people in both single-person households and in dwellings with multiple household occupation

1.31 The key elements were that:

- the census would aim to cover everyone usually resident in England and Wales on census night, with a subset of information also collected from visitors present in households on census night
- questionnaires would primarily be delivered by post, using a purpose built address register
- field staff resources would be focused in areas which were particularly hard to enumerate, and from which initial response rates were low
- the public could return completed questionnaires either by post or online
- help would be available to anyone who had difficulty in completing the census questionnaire
- there would be a slight increase in the number of questions compared with the 2001 Census, but the questionnaire would be re-designed to make it easier to complete
- there would be some significant changes from 2001 in the questions asked, in particular:
  - questions on national identity and citizenship
  - additional response categories in the ethnicity question
  - questions on second residences
  - a question on language
  - the inclusion of a civil partnership category in the marital status question

- questions on date of entry into the UK for immigrants and intention to stay
  - the omission of questions on access to toilet and bath/shower
  - some further differences compared with the censuses in Scotland and in Northern Ireland
- each question would meet a demonstrated need, would be publicly acceptable, and would be suitable for a self-completed questionnaire
  - stringent confidentiality and security procedures would protect the information gathered in the census and would conform to the requirements of census confidentiality, data protection and freedom of information legislation, as well as to the provisions of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007
  - to help achieve the public co-operation that a census relies on, there would be publicity to convey the purpose and value of the census, and to give assurances about the confidentiality with which information is treated
  - initiatives would be put into place to maximise, and measure effectively, the quality of the information collected; in particular, census coverage and quality surveys would be carried out to measure the number of people not counted by the census and the quality of the responses given; quality assurance panels would review the outputs prior to publication to ensure differences with other sources can be explained (thereby increasing users' confidence in the estimates and realising the benefits of the census), and
  - the statistical outputs from the census would be designed to meet user requirements, and dissemination would be to a timetable
- 1.32 This report describes how the aims and objectives of the 2011 Census were carried out, and documents (in chapter 10) the key lessons from the operational activities – both the successes and particular difficulties – so that the next census can be improved.