

RESPONDENT: 2974994639 – A Neave
SECTOR: Unknown - Individual

Q1 - What are your views of the different census approaches described in the consultation document?

I found the traditional census very useful and have great affection for it and its history. The new method proposed using government administrative sources and large surveys is interesting and offers some benefits. a) More frequent estimates of some statistics would be useful to help monitor change b) it offers a way to improve on the current mid year population estimates even if we continue with a full scale census every 10 years. I am not sure if fewer data items would be collected via the new administrative sources and surveys approach or not. I recognise very small area statistics would not be possible, would we still have the same variables or number of questions answered but only for MSOAs, and larger geographical areas?

Q2 - Please specify any significant uses of population and housing statistics that we have not already identified.

Q3 - Please specify any significant additional benefits of population and housing statistics that we have not already identified.

Q4 - What would the impact be if the most detailed statistics for very small geographic areas and small population groups were no longer available? High, medium, low or no impact?

Low

If medium or high, please give further information.

Mostly low impact I think. As few people really need very small area statistics, if ONS could provide some facilities for some bespoke area estimates if LSOAs cannot provide the area they need. My only worry is if there are some very small groups of people who are of particular social or policy concern e.g. disadvantaged groups like travellers, some ethnic minority groups or nationalities or people with particular characteristics. The some form of sample boosts for these groups in the 4 % survey or additional focussed surveys in the particular areas might be needed.

Q5 - What would the additional benefit be if more frequent (i.e. annual) statistics about population characteristics were available for areas like local authorities and electoral wards? High, medium, low or no additional benefit?

Medium

If medium or high please give further information.

This would help monitor changes more frequently and so not miss important things. Some things like housing need, incomes, employment and the numbers of children requiring education can change more frequently than every 10 years

Q6 - Please specify any significant uses of census information for historical research that we have not already identified.

Q7 - What advantages or disadvantages for genealogical or historical research can you see from a move to a solution based on archiving administrative data sources?

I have reservations about this working in practice. In theory it could offer similar data to what people use from old census returns (which collected few data items) plus more data items if these are not considered to be personally sensitive to release. However, I doubt other government departments would actually go to the expense and trouble of archiving the data unless they are made to do it. Do we actually have the detailed NI and benefits data, from the 1970s and 1980s or even the 1990s available? I suspect Departments deleted old data and only kept summary statistics and the data needed for calculating individuals' entitlement to pensions or other contributions based benefits.

Q8 - What are your views of the risks of each census approach and how they might be managed?

I think these were well outlined in the consultation document. Greater use of online data collection needs careful management and some flexibility. It will not work with some groups of people e.g. those who never use a computer or the internet like my mother who is aged over 70. As you say, paper or interviewers will need to get data from some people. I think changes to government departments' administrative sources is a significant risk. You point out that ONS might need a formal role in decisions about changes to key data sources. You might well need something stronger than this, such as ensuring there is a legal obligation to provide data to ONS so they can continue to provide the core national statistics and census information. Does the quality and accuracy of the administrative data sources vary for different small geographical areas? This might affect the quality of the results and could be due to the population in those areas behaving differently and that staff collecting/recording administrative data in those areas may vary in the quality of what they input. Some members of the public may worry about confidentiality if more data is shared but I believe these concerns could be alleviated and managed.

Q9 - Are there any other issues that you believe we should be taking into account?

I think there is a need to explain more about monitoring change when using 3 or 5 yearly combined estimates. Yes, estimates appear more frequently, but measuring change between combined years data is not straightforward. If the periods overlap then the detection of difference is more complicated. In practice comparing 2005-2007 with 2006-2008 is really comparing 2005 - 2008 and that might have low precision due to the small sample size. Users might need 2005 - 2007 compared to 2008-2011 to know if there is a difference. For the admin sources + surveys method, I think you should consider the effect of how many households are likely to get chosen to participate in the compulsory surveys 2 or 3 times within a decade and what effects this might have on their cooperation and on the resulting estimates. Would ONS consider using administrative sources to improve the annual population estimates even if they continue with a full census method. This work could start in the next few years.