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SECTOR: Unknown

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

I think that of the two options presented, option one - 'A census once a decade, similar to the one conducted in 2011, but primarily online.' - is definitely the way to go. I worked as a Census collector during the 2011 Census, knocking on people's doors and encouraging them to fill in their forms. I think my experience showed me that as long as people are followed up, encouraged and helped to fill in the form, they generally will do so. A couple of times, I helped people fill out the form on their doorstep, with as much information as they wanted to give. In those situations, I felt that gathering some information was better than getting none at all. Also, it's highly likely that these people wouldn't have bothered to fill out any of their form had they not been followed up. Basing the census online would definitely make it easier for people to fill out the census, as using the internet seems less burdensome than filling out a long paper form. Assuming that internet usage and connectivity increases over the next 8 years, by 2021 a very large proportion of the population should be able to complete an online census. As technology develops, this could even be made more accessible by allowing people to complete the census on tablets and smartphones. Having seen in the consultation document the success with which Canada has been able to implement an online based census, I feel confident that our statistical authorities would be able to successfully manage a transition to an online based census. An overall response rate of 98% seems much higher than what could be gleaned from administrative datasets. Scrapping the traditional 10 year census would also result in the loss of a historical statistical series, which as shown by the present day use of pre 1911 data, may have future uses that have not even been considered yet. I have no doubt that the administrative data used as a replacement would be less accurate and would not allow full use of the data as is available currently. The amount of benefit (and other) fraud currently occurring [<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-24104743>] (the article quotes annual cost of fraud as £1.9bn) should indicate clearly that any administrative data sets used in place of a traditional census would be undermined. Whilst the argument can be made that people could also provide false information on a census form, the crucial thing is that there is much less incentive for them to do so. This must be an important factor when the quality of the data is what is paramount. There appears the possibility that at least half of the population would not be surveyed under the alternative 4% a year system, so specific data on these families would not exist. Also, it appears that some people may not be captured on the administrative data sets used but would be willing to fill out a census form. My view, as a statistician, is that administrative data contains many faults and is not as comprehensive as a true census. Administrative data can be used as is the case currently to verify the quality of the census data. My experiences lead me to believe that completing a census form once a decade is definitely not as big a burden as some make it out to be.

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

Use of population data by foreign researchers and academics looking at population trends and migration flows from their own countries.

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

Using the population data to promote the benefits of statistics and data to children in school, to inspire them to use and study mathematics and statistics further. (I'm sure we all agree that having numerically aware and competent children is a benefit to the nation.)

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?

Medium

If medium or high, please give further information.

It would adversely affect those from a wide range of backgrounds who use the data at lower levels, as outlined in the uses document (genealogists, charities, researchers etc.)

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?

Low

If medium or high please give further information.

More regular time series available at local authority levels, which helps for making comparisons between them.

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?

Possibly more information if it is made available from a wide range of data sets

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

The accuracy of administrative datasets seems more questionable than that of census data. I do not see how this can be completely managed, as people seem willing to provide false information when they have an incentive to do so (i.e. fraudulent benefit claims).

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

I have concerns that releasing or archiving administrative datasets will be a lot tougher than is currently the case with census data, and will not be easily accepted by the general public.