

I have read the documentation and find all the arguments for change unconvincing. I am afraid this is being driven by a search for cost-cutting. The existing format of the census may be considered expensive but if the cost is averaged over the 10 year period until the next census, then £50 million is not expensive. That is less than £1 per person per year. In fact the cost for the benefit generated is huge value for money.

The benefits of the existing system are clear. It is a detailed snap-shot of the country with very good uptake in most areas. It is well established and broadly accepted. What makes is less acceptable is the tinkering around that has become fashionable with the last two censuses. People do think it has become more intrusive but a web based system, or collecting other data sources will be more so.

The arguments about a profile of health on individuals is also an unconvincing reason to change. Much work is already being done in the Universities and NHS in this area using data linkage methodologies. It doesn't warrant ONS branching out into this area too.

ONS should concentrate on what it is good at, which is continuing to plan and run a traditional largely paper based census for 2021. Using the web has two disadvantages. It allows more questions and is therefore more intrusive. The population is increasingly elderly and this large section of the population uses the internet less if at all than other sections. This is a point recognised but then somewhat discarded in the consultation document.

If you follow the path outlined in the consultation document the public will be less engaged and more suspicious of what government is getting up to and the way in which data sources are being used. There is potential that ONS may find itself in breach of the data protection act too by following this path.

Only the census can provide the basic demographics profile of the population of the United Kingdom in terms of age, occupations and ethnicity. I think you are heading for an embarrassing disaster in 2021 if you change course.

This is personal point of view and doesn't reflect the views or policies of the organisation that I work for.

**David Tucker**