

Announcement

26 October 2009

Special Assessment of Census 2011

Introduction

The UK Statistics Authority has a statutory responsibility to assess and determine whether its Code of Practice for Official Statistics is complied with in relation to statistics already designated as National Statistics, at the time the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 came into force (April 2008). Outputs from the Population Censuses fall into this category.

The Population Censuses are the highest profile and most expensive statistical operations conducted in the UK. The next Censuses are due to be carried out in March 2011 and the UK Statistics Authority plans to carry out a special assessment of the planning arrangements for, and outputs from, the 2011 Censuses. For convenience we refer below to *the* Census, rather than the three Censuses carried out in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The Special Assessment

The assessment aims to:

1. review the extent to which the production, management and dissemination of the 2011 Census statistics comply with the Authority's Code of Practice. If the Authority decides that these statistics comply with the Code, this will allow the outputs to carry the National Statistics designation when they are published;
2. offer an independent appraisal to users and commentators of the extent to which the major issues from the previous census - carried out in 2001 - are being dealt with in planning the 2011 Census, and;
3. inform the three UK Census Offices of any further issues they might want to be aware of in relation to planning for 2011.

We do not aim to offer a formal designation of the 2001 Census outputs - we do not believe that this would be meaningful, as we see each decennial Census as being essentially a one-off exercise. But we have a legal obligation under the *Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007* to re-assess existing National Statistics, and will regard this special assessment as fulfilling our obligation under the Act in relation to the Census.

The special assessment, which is intended to complement the work of the National Statistician and the Registrars General on planning the 2011 Census, will be carried out in three phases:

The **first phase** will assess compliance with the *Code of Practice* for those areas where the planning for 2011 is essentially complete - for example, confidentiality protection. The Authority will publish its findings in an initial assessment report in early 2010.

The **second phase** will cover compliance with the remaining practices, to include, for example, provisional assessment of plans for publication of the various census outputs. This may involve a review of the 2001 outputs to assess the changes which are planned for the 2011 outputs, and the extent to which the issues from the previous census have been or are being addressed. We expect to publish a report on phase 2 in early 2011. This phase will enable the designation of

Census outputs as National Statistics in line with the Statistics Authority's usual practices for designating unpublished outputs.

The **final phase** will be carried out after the census outputs are published, and will involve an assessment of the outputs in light of users' views. We expect to publish a report on phase 3 by mid 2013.

Evidence Required

The special assessment will be informed by evidence collected both by the Statistics Authority and provided by producer bodies. This will include:

1. evidence of how producers have planned operations for the 2011 Census, including relevant evidence of how they have dealt with, or are planning to deal with, issues from the 2001 Census. This will include details of the extent to which recommendations from existing reviews have been implemented;
2. relevant documentation from users and commentators about the extent to which they are content with the way that issues have been dealt with in relation to plans for - and outputs from - the 2011 Census, and;
3. users' views of good practice in relation to the planning and conduct of the 2011 Census, and whether such good practices might be relevant in other statistical areas.

For the first phase of the special assessment, producers have agreed to supply:

1. a list of the key users of census statistics across the four countries of the UK, including academic users and special interest groups;
2. a three-point breakdown ("completed", "under way", "planned") against each practice in the *Code*, and;
3. supporting documents or other evidence for each of the "completed" practices.

We will discuss with producers the evidence that we require for the second and third phases of the assessment in due course. In general, we want to minimise burdens on producers, given their ongoing work for the 2011 Census. Where possible, we will rely on existing documentation, which should be readily available.

For the special assessment as a whole, we will also:

1. carry out our own research to identify the extent to which issues from the 2001 Census have been addressed. In doing so, we will refer to evidence from external reviews of the 2001 Census, for example those produced by the National Audit Office, the Local Government Association, and the Statistics Commission;
2. speak to other people in the development/production process, such as methodologists, so that we cover a broad range of perspectives;
3. discuss with users or their representatives any residual concerns they may have about the plans for the 2011 Census, and (later) the outputs from the census, and;
4. seek input from producers to clarify any of our findings and to fill gaps in our evidence base.

Reporting

We will analyse all of this evidence and use it as the basis for a series of reports setting out in broad terms the extent of *Code* compliance as evidenced at each phase of the assessment. These reports may include activities which we think the three Census Offices might consider, in relation to 2011, that would strengthen *Code* compliance.

Timing

The first phase will begin in earnest in October 2009, with a view to collecting information from producers during October/November, and presenting a report on this phase for the Authority Board in February 2010. The provisional timescales for the later phases of the assessment (to be confirmed in due course) are as follows.

- second phase to start in late 2010 with a view to publishing a report in early 2011.
- third phase to start in mid 2012 with a view to publishing by mid 2013.