
Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir Michael Scholar KCB

Rt. Hon. Francis Maude MP
Minister for the Cabinet Office
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Dear Francis

2011 CENSUS

Many congratulations on your appointment as Minister for the Cabinet Office! The Statistics Authority looks forward to working with you and your colleagues.

I am writing to you on behalf of, and at the request of, the non-executive members of the Board of the UK Statistics Authority, about the England and Wales 2011 Census.

We strongly believe that the Census ought to go ahead. Without it, the UK will have progressively inaccurate population statistics and projections. The many users of these statistics will protest vociferously if they have to depend over the years ahead on updated 2001 Census data. Very large sums – over £100 billion a year – of public money would be progressively misallocated, with excessive funds being sent to some providers of education, health, and other public services and visibly too little to others; the operation of monetary policy, and economic policy generally, would be affected; and many businesses would find it increasingly difficult to plan their investment, product selection, and marketing.

We fully understand the urgent need for public spending cuts, and it is, of course, for you and your colleagues to decide what can and what cannot be afforded. But we urge you to spare the Census: of the budgeted total cost of £480 million, £350 million has already been spent or contractually committed. Detailed work has been carried out and it is estimated that as of today no more than £20 million of the £130 million remainder could be cut before the Census became ineffective, or worse. Moreover, even such a reduction would affect the quality of the results. Any further significant changes to the plans at this juncture would introduce major risks and would incur additional costs. In our view, £130 million, even in present circumstances, is a price worth paying to secure the vital data on our total population, its distribution and location, and on migration – statistics that cannot presently be obtained by any other means than by a Census.

As a Board we have been concerned about the increasing costs and difficulties of traditional Census-taking. We have therefore already instructed the ONS to work urgently on the alternatives, with the intention that the 2011 Census will be the last of its kind.

We stand ready to come to discuss this with you if you would find that useful.

Best wishes



Sir Michael Scholar KCB