

THE CONDUCT OF THE 2011 CENSUSES IN THE UK STATEMENT OF AGREEMENT OF THE NATIONAL STATISTICIAN AND THE REGISTRARS GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND

The passages in italics are a commentary on progress at August 2008.

Introduction

1. This is a statement of agreement between the National Statistician and the Registrars General for Scotland and Northern Ireland about the conduct of the 2011 Censuses which it is the intention to conduct simultaneously throughout the UK in 2011.
2. A Census is taken by the Statistics Board (UK Statistics Authority) and the Registrar General for Scotland under the Census Act 1920 and by the Registrar General for Northern Ireland under the Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969. The necessary subordinate legislation, relating to the specific arrangements for the Census in each country, requires the approval of the UK Parliament in Westminster for England and Wales the Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly respectively. Welsh Ministers will be consulted on the Census for England and Wales, and will be responsible for making Census Regulations for Wales.

Principles

3. Each country will be autonomous, with the final decision lying with the relevant Registrar General, Ministers and legislature.
4. Subject to that autonomy, the National Statistician and Registrars General agree that the three Census Offices (the Office for National Statistics (ONS), General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)) will aim to work in unison to ensure that the 2011 Censuses are a success in providing high quality population and housing statistics, meeting the needs of data users and reflecting UN-ECE and Eurostat requirements.
5. In particular, the National Statistician and the Registrars General have agreed that the three Census Offices and the Welsh Assembly Government will work together and will reach mutual agreement wherever possible on the points in this Statement of Agreement, which will facilitate harmonisation where that is in the interest of Census users. Other points may be added over time, where that would facilitate harmonisation.

Harmonised Aspects

6. The National Statistician and Registrars General have, subject to the need for approval where appropriate by the relevant legislatures, agreed the following aspects of the Census where they will aim to achieve harmonisation:-

- **Date.** The three Censuses should be carried out on the same date in 2011. *Subject to the necessary Ministerial and Parliamentary approval the planned date is 27 March 2011.*
- **Population Base.** A common population base should be agreed. *A common population base (usual residents plus visitors) has been agreed in principle and is expected to be ratified in due course.*
- **Topics and Questions.** Common questions should be agreed wherever possible, diverging only in response to clear user needs, with such divergences minimised and the scope for cross-comparison maximised. *Extensive consultation has been carried out with users and other interest groups by each of the three Census Offices and a good degree of harmonisation has been achieved, helped significantly by the decision to include a fourth page of questions per person. There is currently agreement on 30 core topics across the UK out of 41, along with the wording for approximately 40 out of 50 questions. Differences that remain are largely due to differences in context in each country. Final views on topics will be published in Autumn 2008, subject to subsequent approval by the legislatures.*
- **Census materials.** The design of the Census forms and other materials should be co-ordinated. *Ad hoc forms etc have been used for the Census Tests but a common approach is envisaged for 2011.*
- **Definitions.** Common definitions and classifications should be agreed and published. *Good progress is being made. Key definitions will be published alongside the proposals to the UK legislatures on census topics.*
- **Disclosure Control and Estimation Methodology.** Common methodologies for disclosure control and for estimation should be evaluated, tested and agreed in advance of the Census. *A disclosure control policy has been agreed by the National Statistician and the Registrars General which has been received well by users. The policy statement forms an Annex to this agreement. Methodological research is progressing well and findings will be discussed with users in Autumn 2008, with a final decision being taken in 2009.*
- **Publicity.** A common approach to publicity, tailored to local needs, should be agreed. *Publicity for the Census Tests has been approached separately but common branding across the UK for 2011 is currently being explored.*
- **Procurement of Systems and Services.** The different scale of the Census Offices may dictate different procurement solutions but a common strategy should be adopted and a common approach generally taken where that maximises value for money, operational effectiveness and (especially) consistency of outputs. *A single procurement, with core elements and variations for each Census Office, is being used for the key operational services for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The decision on the final choice of supplier to work on the 2009 Rehearsal and*

2011 Census is planned for Summer 2008. A separate Scottish contract was awarded to CACI (UK) Ltd. in June 2008.

- **Outputs.** The final product should be consistent, coherent and accessible statistics for the UK and for each component country, a joint database (and/or a common data schema) being a desirable way of facilitating that outcome, with a common approach taken to output specifications, quality, data format and timing of releases. *A joint statement on Output Aims has been agreed by the National Statistician and Registrars General and forms an Annex to this agreement. A UK output strategy is currently under development and will be the subject of consultation with users.*

Cost Sharing

7. The costs, both contractor and Census Office, of systems and services will normally be shared between the Census Offices on an actual cost basis, where appropriate, or apportioned according to the population totals (2001 Census). Differences in approach will be kept to a minimum.

Governance and dispute resolution

8. To promote UK harmonisation, every effort will be made to reach agreement through the cross-working mechanisms of the three Census Offices and any differences of opinion will be discussed and resolved at the UK Census Committee.

**Office for National Statistics
General Register Office for Scotland
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency**

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