

Beyond 2011

**Stakeholder Engagement workshop
Aberdeen, 30th January 2013**

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Beyond 2011 Stakeholder Engagement workshop – 30th January 2013

1. Introduction

National Records of Scotland (NRS) has been running a series of stakeholder engagement sessions with representatives from a range of users interested in small area population and socio demographic information. Local authorities, health boards and others have been invited to take part in this process. These discussions on the 30th January 2013 precede a formal consultation to gather user needs which is being launched in March 2013.

Each session began with a presentation detailing the reasons behind the initiation of the project and the different options that are currently being investigated. This presentation can be found within the [Beyond 2011 Events](#) section on the NRS website. Delegates were invited to discuss how they currently use census information and how any changes could affect their work. The outcome of these discussions is included in sections 2 – 6 of this document.

2. Current uses of census data

The following section details how the census is currently used by the delegates.

2.1 Planning and resource allocation

Census data is currently used by the delegates in the planning of a range of services. The delegates use a range of aggregate statistics derived from the census to effectively plan services. Aggregate statistics are a collection of summary counts of the numbers of people, families or households resident in specific geographical areas possessing particular characteristics, or combinations of characteristics drawn from the themes of population, including ethnicity and religion, health, work, and housing. They are derived from analysis of the information provided in returned census forms. Adjustments are made in the outputs for people and households who may have been missed out and not been recorded on a form, or may have been counted more than once by being recorded on more than one form.

A number of the particular characteristics and combinations of characteristics drawn from the census, such as health and ethnicity, were mentioned by the delegates as being important to the planning of a range of services. A number of delegates working in housing strategy use the census information on tenure, in combination with other characteristics such as work and health, to estimate housing demand. These estimates were considered unique to the census.

‘Tenure assists in planning and patterns for housing.’

‘I examine affordable housing, the private sector and fuel poverty among other areas. These all use information from the census.’

‘Occupation and profession are good for building pictures of areas.’

Other characteristics captured by the census that the delegates were interested in and used for planning include travel to work information, and information relating to equalities. A number of delegates mentioned that they are particularly interested in ethnicity.

‘There is a lot of interest in ethnicity.’

Aggregate statistics derived from the census are available for a range of geographies from data zones to a national level. This aspect of the statistics was considered very important by a number of delegates to allow effective planning and targeting of resources.

'Data at a low level is very important and settlement areas¹ are crucial.'

2.2 Indicators

A number of delegates also use measures or indicators, which combine characteristics from the census and other data sources, to understand where to target investment and plan services. The two main indicators used by the delegates were the Carstairs deprivation index² and the [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation \(SIMD\)](#)³. The SIMD is the Scottish Government's official tool for identifying areas in Scotland suffering from deprivation. One delegate discussed the merits and potential issues with the two indexes of deprivation:

'We use the Carstairs deprivation index a lot. It comes from the census and I understand it will be updated in 2011. The Scottish Indicator of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) Index has random variation due to data zone lines sometimes, making it hard to target actual deprivation. This is why the Carstairs index is important.'

2.3 Information requests

Some of the delegates regularly received information requests about the census. They were expected to disclose and explain a wide range of outputs to members of the public, which includes academics doing research projects and small businesses looking for the best place to invest.

'We are asked for things like small level population statistics and projections.'

'We get requests from community planning and councils about settlement areas.'

2.4 Benchmarking

The census is used by a number of delegates to check the accuracy of their own data. The census was widely considered to be more reliable and accurate than any other known source.

'Census data is definite. It is difficult to be definite with other sources.'

'I would like to have the reliability of the census for every kind of information. The census is a baseline. It would be a lot of work to build up as much trust in other sources.'

2.5 Family history tool

The importance of the census to people studying family history was also discussed. Further information on this can be found on the NRS website within the event report for the [Beyond 2011 Stakeholder Engagement Workshop](#) held in Edinburgh on the 8th November 2012.

Footnotes

- 1) A settlement is defined as a group of high density postcodes containing a minimum of 500 residents, which are enclosed by low density postcodes or water.
- 2) The Carstairs index is based on four census indicators including low social class, lack of car ownership, overcrowding and male unemployment within postcode areas. More information can be found on the [Publications Section](#) of the Social and Public Health Sciences Unit website.
- 3) It incorporates several different aspects of deprivation, combining them into a single index. It divides Scotland into 6,505 small areas, called data zones, each containing around 350 households. Deprivation is defined more widely as the range of problems that arise due to lack of resources or opportunities, covering health, safety, education, employment, housing and access to services, as well as financial aspects. The SIMD ranks small areas (called data zones) from most deprived – ranked 1 – to least deprived – ranked 6,505.

'The second biggest usage of the internet is family history. Place of birth is one of the key things to make this work. Heritage tourism has become important.'

2.6 Limitations to current census data

Many delegates expressed frustration at the 10 year cycle of the census and the time it takes from the day of collection to the publishing of population estimates and outputs.

'Information on owner occupiers and private rental is good but due to the length of time a census turnover takes they are out of date by the time we get them.'

The lack of any alternatives to census data in certain areas was highlighted by the fact that some delegates still use the 2001 Census data, which is now 12 years out of date.

'We use housing completions to keep up-to-date, but are keen to get new census figures as we are still using 2001 data.'

In between the censuses the Mid-Year Estimates⁴ update the population estimates. However, a number of delegates questioned the accuracy of the mid-year estimates largely due to problems estimating migration.

A number of delegates felt that the current ten year frequency of the census made it difficult to understand social changes taking place within the area.

'Aberdeen is a very interesting example. The oil sector has caused growth beyond what could be expected in other places. With a 10 year census it is hard to see exactly when the growth has been taking place.'

Not having up-to-date, accurate data was considered a large problem for the efficacy of resource allocation and planning. The delegates' views on the ideal frequency for the census are discussed in [Section 3](#).

Statistical disclosure control rules were also considered a barrier to analysis. In order to prevent information about an individual person being deduced from census outputs (as the census form gives respondents an assurance that their information will be treated as confidential) statistical disclosure techniques are employed to ensure that the risk of inadvertent disclosure in statistical outputs is minimised. This is applicable to all published statistics and would apply to all censuses.

'Ethnic population counts often fall foul of disclosure rules.'

The delegates also stressed that they did not always have the correct information to give people who needed it. This outlines that there is a high public demand for information in a variety of different areas, including some which the local authorities cannot provide to the public.

'Some people come to us with Freedom of Information requests. If we can't co-ordinate the information then we send them to the Scottish Government website.'

'Information on income and household income would be good to have back.'⁵

Footnotes

4) The current estimates are based on the 2001 Census. Each year the population is 'aged on' one year (that is, the 0 year olds become 1 year olds, and so on), the number of births in the year are added, the number of deaths subtracted and adjustments are made for estimated migration and other changes in special populations.

5) For more information on the reasons behind question inclusion in 2011 go to the [2011 census recommendations paper](#) available in the Policy Section of the NRS website.

3. Alternative data sources used

Delegates were asked about other sources used in their work. They use a wide range of administrative sources including the Community Health Index (CHI), Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (SNS), NOMIS (official Labour market statistics), the National Health Service Central Register (NHSCR), the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), the Scottish Household Survey (SHS), and the Pupil Census.

‘We try to supplement data with other sources while we wait for 2011 Census results, which are not as good or detailed. We do what we can to build a more rounded picture.’

4. Views on alternative data sources

4.1 Surveys

Delegates also talked briefly about the [Scottish Household Survey](#) (available on the Scottish Government website). However delegates stressed that not all local authorities have the same coverage, making it difficult for local authorities to accurately compare results nationally.

‘It would be good to improve the consistency of SHS surveys among councils so that results mean more. A survey examining broadband use and technology would be good.’

4.2 Administrative data sources and data linkage

Opinions on using Alternative Sources were generally positive, with delegates agreeing that there is huge potential for them to be used in future. There was also some discussion over international models.

‘I’ve been told that in Finland they don’t need a census as they have a register system in operation. Every time anything happens they report it. You could virtually run a census at any point in time.’

One delegate told the group of a linkage program which had been conducted in England, stating that it was very successful but did not receive enough political backing.

‘There was a big program in England called [‘contact point’](#) (Encyclopaedia of Informal Education website) which joined children’s data together. It worked for every child in England and the purpose of it was to highlight children in need. A massive cleaning operation went on. It even included records from children’s charities. It seems to me that younger generations are happy to share information.’

There also seemed to be a demand for data linkage among the delegates. One delegate said that they currently struggle to get the health data they need and would find data linkage⁶ between health and council data really helpful:

‘Health data is really difficult for us to get. [...] It would be really helpful if the government could get health data and council data together and publish it with the same reliability factor as census.’

There were some interesting discussions on potential additional uses of the CHI relating to data linkage. CHI is a database in wide use throughout the NHS in Scotland containing data on patient demographics and some clinical information on aspects of healthcare screening and surveillance. The CHI number is effectively an

Footnote

6) Data linkage is the joining of two or more administrative or survey datasets to increase the power of analysis possible with the data. More information on the [Data Linkage Framework](#) and the [Data Sharing Service](#) can be found on the Statistics section of the Scottish Government website.

NHS number and its use as a patient identifier makes it increasingly important to the implementation of 'ehealth' Electronic Health Records (EHR) and other Information and Communication Technologies being introduced to healthcare in Scotland. Alternative uses of the CHI in addition to the administrative function for the NHS were discussed.

'Since 1991 we have been taking snapshots of the CHI. We have postcode, age, sex and medical practice for everyone living in the area, so we are able to work out populations corresponding to SIMD data zones. We can use this to work out what populations were in the past, and can work out past history of geographical incidence of a disease.'

In addition, the CHI was suggested as a potential index data set for data linkage.

'The CHI is a potential vehicle for a form of register. There is a unique identifier which should eliminate duplicates.'

5. Priorities for alternatives to the census

The group was asked to discuss the following aspects of the information they use and their relative importance:

- Quality and Accuracy
- Geographic coverage
- Frequency
- Aggregation

Most delegates thought that aggregation and geographic coverage were most important. Delegates felt that is important for users, particularly in sparsely populated areas, to see data at a low level of geography so that their area is not grouped with an area which has completely different characteristics. Being able to aggregate and disaggregate data by different characteristics and geographical levels was considered important.

'Flexibility is important – things like being able to manipulate data at different levels.'

Delegates were asked to list the characteristics that they would be most interested in having access to in an ideal publication of socio-demographic population statistics. They were interested in self-employment, car ownership, level of education, type of job, sector of employment, income, property condition, house type and tenure, information on the private rental sector, figures for carers and equalities information.

The delegates thought that quality and accuracy go hand in hand with these aspects and are also vital.

'If it can't be geographically located then why are we actually collecting it at all? Obviously quality is essential but if you have highly reliable data and you don't know where it's from it's pointless.'

The frequency, though desirable, was not considered as crucial as the other aspects among most delegates. Some delegates said it would be desirable to have information more regularly.

'You always want the information quicker. I don't think every year is necessary or possible though.'

'Every three to five years with a fast turnaround would be good.'

One delegate also pointed out the importance of having 'fixed points' in order to consider 'long-term patterns' or to carry out time-series analysis.

6. Conclusion

The discussions generated were useful and allowed the Beyond 2011 team to see how the Census is used by local authorities and health boards.

There was a consensus among the group that the timescale of the Beyond 2011 programme was ambitious, and that changes would take time to be brought in properly.

‘I think we should be debating ‘Do we have a 2031 Census’ to give us more time to properly consider everything and ensure public understanding and buy in.’

The information included in this report will be added to the bank of information currently being collected by the Beyond 2011 team and will be used in the evaluation of any census alternatives.

Delegates were advised that they would be kept informed about any future events relating to census options and would be sent a link to the formal consultation in early 2013.

7. Our contact details

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