

Beyond 2011

**Stakeholder Engagement workshop
Inverness, 29th January 2013**

Published on 10 April 2013

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Beyond 2011 Stakeholder Engagement workshop – 29 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. 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.

‘I can’t think of a better source for things like religion, ethnicity, overcrowding and multiple-occupancy. You could not get any of this information from the private sector. It is unique.’

‘I use population estimates for things like helping education departments design new schools. Knowing the demand for Gaelic education is important. Travel to work areas are very useful too.’

‘It is very difficult to ascertain the number of Gaelic speakers if you don’t have the census.’

‘All of our council plans will have used census based data at some point.’

The [public sector equalities duty](#) (PDF document available on the Press for Change website) arising from the Equalities Act 2010 (on the [legislation.gov.uk website](#)) requires all public bodies to make assessments to ensure they are not discriminating against anyone with a protected characteristic (i.e. age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion and belief). The census provides local authorities and NHS Boards with baseline information on these characteristics. All delegates stressed the importance of the census as being the primary source of equality information, particularly relating to ethnicity, disability (self-diagnosed), and religion.

‘Only the census captures equalities data.’

‘There is no other source for equalities data. I have been relying on census 2001 data even though it is now well out of date.’

2.2 Trust in the census

The delegates were very positive about the census during the discussion. They remarked on the perceived reliability of the census.

‘When you reference the census it is beyond question.’

‘Everyone thinks it is very reliable. People question other surveys but always accept that Census is right.’

‘Despite 2001 Census data now being out of date, there is an understanding that it still provides a firm and sound foundation.’

2.3 Issues with geographical coverage

Aggregate statistics derived from the census are available for geographical levels from output areas to a national level. Due to data confidentiality reasons there are, however, minimum population and household threshold numbers for publishing output areas. In some cases an island on its own will not have sufficient numbers to meet the minimum threshold for population and household numbers and has to be included with another island or the mainland. The same rule applies for data zone areas but with different threshold numbers.

‘Islands are lumped into the mainland in some data zones. This is a problem. Census output areas for 2011 will be really helpful.’

3. Alternative sources used

Delegates were asked about other data sources used in their work. A wide range of administrative sources were used including the Pupil Census, National Health Service Central Register (NHSCR), Sport Scotland, NOMIS (official labour market statistics) and the Corporate Address Gazetteer. The delegates also used a number of social surveys including the Family Resource Survey and Business Register and Employment Survey (BRES). The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation was also frequently used by some of the delegates.

4. Views on alternative sources

Delegates also discussed possible alternatives, including health records and Her Majesty's Revenues and Custom (HMRC) data, which could possibly be used by local authorities to monitor equality and provide better indicators of poverty. The group also discussed the issues and limitations of indicators, social surveys and administrative sources.

4.1 Indicators

The [Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation](#) (SIMD) which is available on the Scottish Government website was used frequently by delegates. SIMD uses census data, in addition to a range of other sources of information, to calculate a measure of deprivation¹ within small data zone areas. Each data zone area has roughly the same population. There was recognition amongst the delegates that the SIMD is not as accurate in the Highland area as it may be elsewhere, due to the low population density.

'The SIMD is a very significant tool for us and is reliant on census data.'

'There are problems with SIMD and its data zone areas. In the Highland area, because of the population density being low, often there are two or three areas with completely different demographics joined together. This can result in a data zone that can skew the apparent deprivation and 'hide' very deprived areas.'

'In an area like the Highland, local authority data can be meaningless. Parts of it are quite different.'

4.2 Surveys

Delegates discussed issues that they had experienced surrounding the use of surveys. The groups discussed the problem of geographical areas not being represented by the surveys. The large surveys merge large geographical areas to a much greater extent than the census and therefore do not have the detail needed for the delegate.

'Many years ago when I used the Scottish Household Survey, it had Moray in with the Highlands and not broken down. This made most of the data meaningless.'

The sample size of the surveys was also considered a problem for some delegates. Sampling is the process by which a feature of interest relating to a group of interest is estimated, by measuring its value in a smaller but representative sub group. The aim of sampling is to enable estimates that are as close as possible to the real value in the population. However, estimates

Footnote

- 1) 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.

obtained from samples can never perfectly match the true population parameters because of the information that is missing for the non-sampled population members². As the population is strongly grouped by small geographies, some islands or groups may not be adequately represented in the sample.

‘There is a house condition survey in Moray. There is also the Scottish House Condition Survey, which also measures fuel poverty. The sample size is very limited though.’

‘With samples people question how robust they are. There is always a question over how big the sample size is.’

4.3 Administrative sources

A number of delegates expressed concerns about the use of administrative sources as an alternative to the census. One delegate had experience of using administrative sources and found their reliability uncertain.

‘Worryingly for me, when I looked into it the match between census and other administrative sources was very poor in some areas.’

‘I don’t think an alternative to the census would be any better or faster. I have previously tried to use a database based around an address list and on top of the coverage being low, loading in information quickly was impossible.’

There were also some concerns by delegates about the validity of some administrative sources in measuring employment, for example. Delegates felt that benefits information alone is not adequate to understand the extent of unemployment as not all unemployed people claim benefits, and some people are not eligible to claim. A delegate explained:

‘You can just get those who are eligible in employment data. You can’t count unemployment in 16 and 17 year olds.’

A delegate also said that they would have concerns about privacy if their personal information derived from administrative sources was used.

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

It was agreed that geographic coverage and aggregation were the most important aspects for future censuses. As discussed in earlier sections, aggregated statistics are collections of summary counts grouped by different

Footnote

- 2) More information on sampling techniques can be found on the [Scottish Government](#) website using the search engine.

characteristics. The delegates said that they would need data that are aggregated at low levels, therefore providing the most detailed information. Related to this, it is important to the delegates that the data is at low levels of geography so that their area is not grouped or aggregated with an area which has completely different characteristics. The delegates emphasised the importance of being able to produce cross tabulations. Cross tabulations summarise data based on two or more of the characteristics (or aggregate groups) and can show the interrelationship between two or more characteristics. For example, one of the delegates said that they would like to produce cross tabulations on language and income:

‘What Gaelic speakers are earning, i.e. cross tabulation, is important. If data was collected by other means but could still be cross tabulated that would be fine.’

‘Cross tabulation is useful. You can’t stitch individual level records together.’

Delegates were asked to list the characteristics that they would be most interested in having access to. They were keen on self employment rates, 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.

Delegates also discussed the importance of accuracy. They agreed that the accuracy could never be perfect, but that accuracy should be a priority. One delegate said that it is important to check the accuracy of the census through coverage surveys³.

‘The census doesn’t have to be 100% accurate; it just has to be accurate enough. Coverage surveys play a very large part.’

The frequency of the census was not considered as crucial as the other aspects.

‘I don’t mind the 10 year wait if I can have data which has not been subject to aggregation.’

Delegates noted that it would be better to have a more regular census to help improve the accuracy of the Mid-Year Estimates (MYE)⁴.

‘It would be good to have something every 5 years to get the Mid Year Estimates back on track.’

Delegates were also keen to express the importance of being able to compare 10 year periods.

‘Time series data is very useful for us. A look at 1991, 2001 and 2011 will be good when the 2011 results come out.’

Footnotes

3) The coverage survey is conducted independently of the census and is designed to calculate how many individuals may have been missed by the census enabling accurate population estimates to be calculated.

4) The mid-year population estimates provide an annual estimate for the population as of 30 June. They are based on census data and records of births, deaths and migration patterns.

‘Comparability and consistency are important to look back through the years.’

6. Implications of not having the census

The delegates were asked about the implications of not having the census to their work. The main concern for most of the delegates, if there was no census, was that service planning and resource allocation would not be effective.

‘You could have housing investments built in the wrong places.’

‘General capital spending and planning across the board would be less reliable.’

‘We look to census for priority areas and fragile areas. Without census, money would go into the wrong areas.’

7. Conclusion

The discussions generated were useful and allowed the Beyond 2011 team to understand how the census is used in the Highlands and Moray. The delegates emphasised that the census outputs are essential to their work. They were concerned about whether the alternative options outlined in the presentation would be able to meet their needs.

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.

8. Our contact details

For further information or enquiries about the Beyond 2011 please contact:

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