

Beyond 2011

**Stakeholder Engagement workshop
8 November 2012**

Published on 13 December 2012

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Beyond 2011 Stakeholder Engagement workshop – 8 November 2012

1. Introduction

On the 8th November 2012 National Records of Scotland (NRS) ran a stakeholder engagement session with a range of Genealogists, Registrars and other Ancestral history specialists. This was the first in a series of internal and external discussions on possible user needs for small area population and socio demographic statistics, before a formal consultation is launched in Q1 2013.¹

The event began with a presentation by Jules Goodlet-Rowley, branch head for the Data Access and Communications work stream within the Beyond 2011 programme. This presentation detailed the reasons behind the initiation of the project and the different options that are currently being investigated.

The presentation can be found within the [Beyond 2011 Events](#) section on the NRS website.

Delegates were then split into two groups and 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 – 4 of this document.

2. Current uses of Census data

In both groups it was clear that archived record level Census data up to and including the 1911² Census was well used. The following sections detail how the Census is used by the delegates.

Family history tool

Census data had been used by delegates to 'track down family histories and links between families'. Other delegates remarked that the census was often used by them as a 'cross-over tool' to 'breach illegitimacy, name misspellings and street misspellings'.

Another example of family history use concerned the work of Genealogists and the issue of probate and looking for possible family links to the deceased.

Property history tool

It was evident from both group discussions that the rich information included in the Census was used for more than simply tracing family histories. The Census was also used for tracing the history of properties and how areas evolved through time.

'I use the Census to trace the history of properties, sometimes even to identify their location. You can find street addresses that are, now, vanished. Tracing the enumerator's route on the map.'

Historical tourism tool

One area of work that involves genealogy as well as tourism was around the area of historical tourism.

Footnotes

- 1) Future consultations will be available within the Beyond 2011 Consultation section of the NRS website.
- 2) Due to the Census Act, 1911 record level Census data is the most recent publicly available.

'The Census gives the pathway to historical tourism. A lot of North American tourists use the census to find their ancestors'

Census may be used abroad to discover the family heritage and then, through contact with agencies such as Visit Scotland, would be shown how they could visit the areas concerned, providing a possible tourism revenue to Scotland.

'Pointer' tool

Several members indicated that the Census when used with other records such as births, deaths and marriages could highlight possible avenues of research that would not otherwise have been apparent to genealogists. One example given was when some one had a rare job type and this allowed a positive identification of the individual in other record, allowing the specified piece of research to continue.

'Census is a massive cross-over tool. Without it we cannot answer or confirm a lot of information regarding family history'

3. Views on alternative census options

The views on alternatives to census were discussed in both groups. Although individuals were not asked explicitly about administrative data models³ the main themes of the discussions revolved around this issue.

Minimum data requirements

A lot of discussion was generated around the different data requirements by both groups.

Following some discussion the following parameters were thought to be essential:

- Full name
- Previous name e.g. maiden name
- Address
- Date of birth
- Occupation
- Relationship in household (e.g. mother, father, son etc)
- Gender
- Length of married or marital status
- Languages
- Tenure of property (e.g. owner, renting etc).

Footnote

3) Linking datasets containing data collected by local authorities etc for other purposes.

Variables such as these would then allow a positive identification of person and allow further research.

Aggregation

Both groups noted that aggregation of variables, e.g. only providing a small range of job classifications would negatively impact the work that they do.

‘Family historians are interested in the family picture not necessarily a “Victorian” family as many families now have different relationships/names. This information is used as building blocks by family historians.’

‘Occupation is important as it can lead you to other records.’

Data Quality

Delegates acknowledged that there were issues with data quality, especially in older Censuses where respondents may have been illiterate and enumerators were not local.

‘Historical Censuses contain wrong and inaccurate information’

Accuracy and reliability was seen to be an important factor for any option.

‘Reliability is very important to historians. How do you capture a society that has changed a lot?’

‘The more specific and exact the better. In 1911 this was the case. The more information we have the better.’

‘... even things like type of engineer are important [Talking about level of aggregation in job types]’.

‘Accuracy is more important than quantity’

It was also noted that for some people the only place they would be registered would be on the Census and this level of detail would be lost if there was no compulsory form to complete.

The issue was also raised about respondents’ privacy concerns and how this could be addressed.

‘Guarantee of confidentiality is important. People are suspicious of filling in personal data. If they can guarantee it is totally protected by law this would help alleviate the fears of those who think we are approaching a Big Brother society.’

There was also concern over the impact of changing to a web-based format and how to ensure returns are accurate as well as the possible impact on response rates.

‘There is a percentage of the population who will never complete it online, particularly older people.’

‘...people who are now in their 60s and 70s will not suddenly start using the internet in 10 years time.’

1. People lie on questionnaires, but it is even easier to lie in web based questionnaires.
2. In old censuses, some people deliberately lie to cover their track. That will become more of a problem in the future.'

'Electronic information could be deleted easier...'

Frequency of releases

There was no consensus on the frequency of data releases. Some delegates indicated that the current decennial frequency was too long where as others indicated that this period was acceptable.

'The ten year period seems a good interval'

'Is it realistic to wait ten years for a Census? Should it be more regular?'

'Ten years is too wide a span.'

Geographic coverage

There was some concern that any new system would not have the same level of geographic coverage and there was a strong importance placed on the fact that the Census is a snap shot of the country on that day.

'Information has to be total and for the whole country in terms of geography.'

There was also concern over the rolling census model and how National Records of Scotland would ensure that somebody who was sampled in one year in one locality would not then be re-sampled in a different locality if they moved in the interim.

1. It could be one year we do here then the next year we do there but the same person appears every year by coincidence. This is why it has to be for the whole country at the same time.
2. No point unless this is the case.'

Administrative models

Both groups discussed how administrative data models would impact on their work, especially if there would be no census type form involved. All members acknowledged that the impact of any changes would only become evident in 100 years time, but they understood that the direct consequences related to their field.

'That [administrative only option] would have a negative impact on genealogy ; but the Census did not start to satisfy the needs of genealogists, our research is a by-product of it.'

'These options [administrative dependent options] will remove a really important source of information [for Genealogists].'

'...administrative data would not meet any Genealogist needs.'

Possible alternative data sets that could be used

If there was no census, both groups were concerned what the replacement datasets would be.

Some of the possible datasets that would be useful are currently unavailable due to legal reasons (e.g. National Insurance records) and some have been treated for anonymity (e.g. initials instead of names), therefore reducing their potential usefulness.

Other government datasets such as the electoral roll, property records, Registrars of Scotland, service records and maritime records could be used to supplement birth, death and marriage registers.

There was also some limited discussion on how tools such as Facebook could be employed in the future to determine the social interactions between members of the population.

There was also some concern that the Data Protection Act would possibly limit some of the detailed information that would be available in the future.

4. Concluding remarks

The discussions generated were useful and allowed the Beyond 2011 team to see how the Census is used by Genealogists and Family Historians. There was also some discussion around perceptions of privacy and how these should be addressed in future as well as the possible impact of moving to a more web-based approach.

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 will also be kept informed about any future events relating to Census options and will also be sent a link to the formal consultation in early 2013.

5. Our Contact Details

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