

POPULATION AND MIGRATION STATISTICS COMMITTEE (SCOTLAND)**POPULATION BASE FOR CENSUS 2011**

1. This consultation paper invites users' views on a 12 month "usual residence" population output base for the 2011 census.

Background

2. Following consultation with users, we adopted as the population base for the next census "usual residence" (as in the 2001 census) plus "visitors". In collaboration with the other census departments (because we think that it is important to have the same population base throughout the UK) we have been thinking through the detailed implications of that population base. In September, we consulted PAMS about 2 detailed points (concerning where people who work away from home should be counted for the purposes of census, and whether people who are overseas for more than 6 months should be included in the census count). We took away from that consultation that users attach importance both to comparability with 2001 and to harmonisation with the rest of the UK. This paper is about another aspect of the population base: the length of the period which constitutes "usual residence", and how that relates to the mid year population estimates.

Position in 2001

3. The 2001 census asked for information on "all members of your household who usually live at this address". The form gave no guidance about the period of residence which was necessary for someone to be included. Guidance given to enumerators, to help them respond to questions, was that everybody who had been resident in the UK for more than 6 months should fill in the form. But only a very small number of 2001 responses will have been made in the conscious knowledge of that 6 month rule. In practice, therefore, the 2001 census outputs were based on what might be termed "self-assessed usual residence".

4. The mid year population estimate for 2001 was derived from the census outputs simply by adjusting for demographic change between census day (29 April) and the date of the mid year estimate (30 June). No adjustment was made to bring the census outputs (based loosely on usual residence of at least 6 months) into line with the UN definition of "usual residence", which is based on a 12 month rule.

Proposal for 2011 census

5. It would be possible to repeat the 2001 approach. In today's circumstances, however, we do not think that that would be acceptable. There are a larger number of migrants than in 2001, and greater policy interest in measuring migration trends. We believe that it would be insufficiently precise, in the light of these changed circumstances, to count the census on the basis of a 6 month period of usual residence, and make no adjustment to the 12 month period of usual residence which is required for the mid-year population estimates.

6. It would be possible for us to take the census on the basis of an explicit 12 month usual residence period, through making clear on the form that those in the country for more than 12 months should fill in the form. Again, we do not think that that is acceptable. It would risk missing some migrants, who might make the excuse that they were not going to stay for as long as 12 months but in fact subsequently did so. Moreover, it would lose comparability with the outputs from the 2001 census.

7. The other UK census departments intend to capture information about all those in the country (or intending to be so) for 3 months or more, coupled with a question asking how long people intend to stay – with the dual aim of establishing a count of short term migrants and enabling the filtering-out of people not intending to stay for more than 6 months or 12 months. It would be practicable for us to do the same. But there is not great demand from Scottish users for information about short-term migrants and we have concerns about the quality of the data that an ‘intention to stay’ question would yield. Adding an ‘intention to stay question’ would also necessitate sacrificing another question for which there is greater user demand. For these reasons, we would prefer not to adopt the approach planned by the other UK census departments.

8. Instead, we propose to make explicit in the census questionnaire that everybody intending to be in the UK for 6 months or more should complete the questionnaire. That would allow us to take a similar approach to Census 2001 in relation to the inclusion of usual residents, the only difference being that we would be more explicit about the 6 month rule. We would then use modelling to identify people likely to stay between 6 and 12 months.

9. The modelling would apply to all respondents born outside the UK who arrived within the last year. It would be developed in conjunction with ONS and would use a range of census variables to predict which of these respondents are likely to stay in the UK for less than 12 months. Other data used in this process would be independent estimates of short term migrants derived from the International Passenger Survey (IPS). This would allow us to remove the people likely to stay for less than 12 months and provide output base consistency with the other UK census departments. (There are complementary issues about adjusting for people who are resident here but temporarily out of the country for up to 12 months.) For mid year estimate purposes, this census output base would then require an adjustment to account for the time difference between the date of the census and the mid year estimate (as well as an adjustment to create a mid-year population base based on where people who work away from home spend the majority of time).

Conclusion

10. We believe that our proposal outlined above satisfies all needs: it is capable of producing figures broadly comparable with the 2001 census if required, but also allows production of a 12 month population output base needed for comparability with the rest of the UK in 2011, as well as for the mid year estimates. In practice, the difference between a 6 and 12 month population base may, in any event, be small: our tentative estimate of the number of international migrants staying for between 6 and 12 months (based on ONS estimates of UK-wide figures, derived from International Passenger Survey data) is around 20,000, or less.

General Register Office for Scotland, May 2009