

Population and Migration Statistics Committee (PAMS) (Scotland)

Research on Census Alternatives: Update

Data Access

There still remain a number of challenges in gaining access to data necessary to be able to advance our research into the use of administrative data in alternatives to the census. The NHS Central Register (NHSCR), electoral register and school census are the main record level data with which we are currently working. We are awaiting Community Health Index (CHI) address information before carrying out linkages with other data sources including the census.

We recently received a 2010/11 extract of data on Higher Education (HE) students from Scotland who are registered for study elsewhere in the UK and we are preparing the data for use. However we are still trying to resolve barriers to gaining access to data on HE students from Scotland studying in Scotland.

There continues to be positive progress in work to establish a legal gateway to Social Security and Revenue information (also referred to as the Customer Information System). The House of Lords debate took place on 20th March 2012 and the case was approved. We are hoping for similar success at the House of Commons debate which has been arranged for 17th April 2012.

Stakeholder engagement

During the past few months we have continued to work with stakeholders. In February we presented our research plans at the Local Authority Research and Intelligence Association Conference (LARIA) and met with the Society of Local Authority Lawyers and Administrators (SOLAR) to discuss how best to progress data sharing with Local Authorities. In December 2011 we presented at the Scottish Privacy Forum and had a useful discussion with members of the forum about the potential privacy impacts of some of the proposed research. This will inform our Privacy Impact Assessment and help design our research in a way that minimizes potential privacy issues. Together with the Scottish Government we are in the process of commissioning research to understand better the views of the general public in this area.

Further presentations on our Census Alternatives research are being offered at the SCOTSTAT conference on Data Linkage on 26 March which launches the Government consultation on the Framework for Data Linkage. As well as a general talk on the objectives and nature of the research, we offer a more specific session on record linkage techniques.

The report of the findings from the user needs workshop which took place during the 2011 PAMS User Conference are being published this month. We will continue to monitor user views as the research progresses. We are currently developing a Stakeholder Engagement strategy, detailing our plans with respect to engaging with data custodians, users and the public throughout the Beyond 2011 project.

As well as finding out users' views on the type of data required, we are keen to try and measure the benefits of different types of data for users and the costs if it was not available.

We will shortly complete and publish a report on the coverage of administrative data sources based on aggregate level comparisons with our mid-year population estimates. We have also nearly completed an evaluation of various linkage software packages. A small study using school census data and an extract from the NHS central register has been completed and will inform future work. We liaise regularly with Office for National Statistics (ONS) and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) to share progress and benefit from the work of each other.

Many aspects of the 2011 Census evaluation will feed into the workstream looking at variants of the census. This is being taken forward in parallel with this project.

We continue to explore options for engaging academic experts in developing methodological strands of the work. We recently gained funding from the Quality Improvement Fund of the UK Statistical Authority to commission a feasibility study from experts from Queen Mary University of London.

National Records of Scotland
March 2012