

POPULATION AND MIGRATION STATISTICS COMMITTEE (SCOTLAND)

Alternative Sources Branch Update.**1. Introduction**

This is a brief update on the work undertaken by General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) Branch Alternative Sources over the past year. It covers 2 main areas of work for the Branch: developing the use of administrative sources and support for census linkage studies.

2. Developing the Use of Administrative Data

We have continued to explore the availability and usefulness of a broader range of data sources to support the key areas of producing population statistics in GROS:

- the traditional census enumeration;
- population and migration estimates; and
- the development of alternative methods for census taking in the future.

Our regular assessments of school census and Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) statistics on older persons in receipt of state benefits against the Mid Year Population Estimates (MYPE) has continued. The release of child benefit data has temporarily been put on hold by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) and we were unable to update our work in the past year. A new piece of analysis was produced which linked 2006/07 and 2007/08 school census data to investigate how residential moves of pupils captured by the school census compare to our usual National Health Central Register (NHSCR) based migration estimates. One of the most important developments in the past year has been the investigation of a record level download of key demographic information held on the NHSCR. An initial assessments of the quality of the data was completed and work is now proceeding to develop a statistical system which can support better the production of population estimates and experimental data integration work alongside the 2011 Census. Some key conclusions of the wide-ranging research of the Branch were reported at the PAMS conference on 30 October 2009.

Following our invitation to Local Authorities to become involved in experimental research on administrative data integration, a number of meetings were held with Edinburgh City Council and with Glasgow City Council. The objective was to explore the proposal in more detail and draw up a list of potentially useful data sources. We are now at the stage where it is helpful to examine in more depth the legal aspects of the proposed data sharing. Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) have offered to facilitate this work.

Over the past year we have also been working with Office for National Statistics (ONS) to gain access to a number of administrative sources under the 2007 SRSA:

- HMRC Migrant Worker Scan containing information on all overseas nationals who have registered for, and been allocated a National Insurance Number (NINo)¹;
- Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) student record for students from Scotland who are enrolled in HE institutions in England and Wales; and
- DWP data on benefit recipients.

The Branch is responsible for building a record linkage capability in GROS, which is an essential tool for combining different data sources. We have participated in a number of training events and carried out several record linkage exercises. Two data matching tools were identified as particularly promising and we are in the process of evaluating their performance against our requirements.

To enable further work on developing census alternatives during and after the 2011 census we need a census database suitable for record linkage in terms of content and quality and we are working with our census colleagues to ensure these requirements are met. On the other hand, our research and development work has contributed to the census rehearsal project, for example by helping identify hard-to-count areas and develop a strategy for quality assuring census outputs.

We are also closely involved with the wider Scottish Government strategy for coordinating and harmonising large scale surveys in Scotland to ensure the needs of our development work are reflected in this programme. In addition, we are working with ONS as part of the Beyond 2011 project which aims to investigate the feasibility of developing an alternative more efficient system for producing estimates for key demographic variables. Results from research on the public acceptability of data sharing across government, commissioned as part of this work, was published on 1 December 2009.²

3. Census Linkage Studies

There are currently 2 census linkage studies supported by GROS, the Scottish Longitudinal Study (SLS) and the Health and Ethnicity Study. So far 35 research projects using data from the SLS have been approved. Two of those have already been completed. The SLS database was updated with vital events information up to 2007. Two feasibility studies exploring ways of extending the SLS database were completed; one looked at the feasibility of adding information on pupil attendance and attainment from the school census, and the other examined the possibility of adding historical information from the 1939 register and subsequent vital events records. Results were encouraging for both and the team is now looking at the ways to progress this work. A pilot UK-wide project combining information from the 3 country studies (Scotland, Northern Ireland, and England and Wales) was successfully completed. ONS is now taking the lead on work to establish the best way of delivering coherent UK-wide research data for users.

¹ An initial feasibility report by ONS on this dataset is available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/imps/updates-reports/current-updates-reports/index.html>

² A copy of the report and a general update on this work are available at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/about-statistics/methodology-and-quality/imps/beyond-2011/index.html>

The Health and Ethnicity Study which is carried out in partnership with Edinburgh University and Information Services Division (ISD) completed the linkage between census and Community Health Index information. Anonymised data sets containing information on cardiovascular disease and maternity and child health are now being analysed by the researchers in a controlled access facility in Ladywell House. First findings were reported at an international conference at St Andrews University in September 2009.

General Register Office for Scotland
Alternative Sources Branch