

## OPTIONS FOR FUTURE CENSUS POLICY IN SCOTLAND

### Introduction

1. This report provides an initial review of options for producing Census-type statistics in Scotland over the period to 2011.
2. A conventional Census has many strengths, particularly public acceptability in relation to confidentiality and integrity, the small area level of geography, the range of variables and the ability to cross-tabulate between them at an individual level. The 2001 Census was generally successful within the constraints set. However, there are also significant weaknesses in conventional Censuses, for example:-
  - The relatively high cost of a conventional Census. The 2001 Census cost £32 million in Scotland, a higher per capita cost than in England and Wales, reflecting geographical and other factors.
  - The non-timeliness of results. The first statistics from the 2001 Census (population by gender and age group for Scotland and local Council areas) were published in September 2002. More detailed results became available from February 2003 (approaching 2 years after the Census). Until results are published, policies may remain founded on data collected in 1991. The speed of change in society, and the increasing needs of Government and others, cast doubt on continuing with an approach that leaves us in that situation.
  - There is a history of reducing response rates to conventional Censuses in recent decades, and also biased under-enumeration, which has meant that substantially increased resources have had to be devoted to methods of correcting for under-enumeration. In 2001 the Census Coverage Survey and One Number Census methodology cost rather over £1million in Scotland.
3. GROS has not completed the evaluation of the 2001 census. However, much evaluation material is now available. A report 'Taking Scotland's 2001 Census – A Review' is available on the GROS website ([www.gro-scotland.gov.uk](http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk)). Click on the 2001 Census home page and select 'Background Information' to access the report.
4. The first part of the report 'Census User Needs and Legislation' was released in March 2002. The second part, a review of 'Census Operations' was released in June 2002 and will be completed when the section on processing operations is released at the end of March 2003. The two remaining sections, on quality of census results and on value for money will be released as soon as they are available. It is intended that the review will be completed by March 2004.

### Wider developments

5. There are a number of wider developments, both at UK and Scottish Government levels, which may provide Census-type data in a more effective way if the problems associated with alternative approaches can be overcome. The main identified alternatives to a decennial conventional Census are:-

- a) Quinquennial Censuses;
  - b) Basic information Censuses;
  - c) Rolling Census;
  - d) Reliance on Neighbourhood Statistics and integrated surveys;
  - e) Linkage of administrative records;
  - f) a “snapshot” Census of administrative records.
- 6 The first 3 of these are variations on conventional Censuses, while the last 3 are more radical alternatives. It may be that some combination of the options would offer the optimal way forward.

### **Conventional Census Developments**

- 7 Of the conventional census options, while we are following developments on quinquennial censuses (as in Ireland) and on rolling Censuses (as proposed for France) we are not convinced these provide a way forward. Therefore we will, with ONS, just monitor developments elsewhere.
- 8 We would see a basic-information Census as part of developments to provide census type data through administrative databases. It would provide a check on the information from alternative sources. No research is currently proposed specifically for this option but it comes under the umbrella of conventional census preparation.
- 9 GROS will continue to plan for a conventional Census in 2011, taking account of lessons learnt from 2001. Even though developments elsewhere may overtake the need for a conventional Census, conventional census planning will continue until parallel data is available. Therefore we plan to hold a conventional census test in 2006. Novel features may include using national address lists, bar coding of return envelopes, e-census returns, centralised post out and post back and within Scotland processing.

### **Census Alternatives and Data-sharing in the UK**

- 10 There are a number of data sharing initiatives which we feel have the potential to provide census type data, and so remove the need for a future Census. The main initiatives are:
- The Cabinet Office - Performance and Innovation Unit report on Privacy and Data sharing;<sup>1</sup>
  - The Home Offices' Entitlement Cards Initiative;<sup>2</sup> and
  - The Treasury-led Citizen Information Project.
- 11 Developments in the sharing and linkage of data were reviewed in the report “Privacy and Data-Sharing – the way forward for Public Services” by the Performance Innovation Unit published by the Cabinet Office. The subject matter falls mainly into the reserved area of Data Protection, and the Lord Chancellor’s Department is leading follow up work on the recommendations. Clarification of

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation/2002/privacy/report/index.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/dob/ecu.htm>

what is permissible under current legislation and the need for new legislation should be covered in this work.

- 12 Other related developments include the Home Office consultation on entitlement cards and the Treasury proposals for improved public service delivery supported by a universal index of the population. The Treasury proposal is being further explored for feasibility as the ONS-led Citizen Information Project, with the assistance of the Registrar General for England and Wales.
- 13 The Citizen Information Project has started examining the feasibility of developing a high-quality common population register or 'data spine'. The study will consider whether proposals are consistent with legislation covering data protection and Privacy. A report is due to be presented to UK Ministers around April 2003. The work will be carefully co-ordinated with other initiatives, including the work on entitlement cards (led by the Home Office) and on privacy and data sharing (led by the Lord Chancellor's Department).
- 14 A recent note issued on the project described the many large public sector databases on the British population, including those for national insurance and income tax purposes; the NHS; driver and vehicle owner registers; on passport holders, council taxpayers and voters. Each one attempts to capture similar core information on people (e.g. name, address, date of birth). Data capture and maintenance is currently carried out separately, causing considerable effort and inconvenience whenever a citizen moves home, for example, and unnecessary duplication of effort within the public services.'
- 15 While there are benefits in service delivery and efficiency there are also some difficulties beyond the technical problems. Public acceptability has yet to be tested although a consultation process is now underway. There are also problems of public interface in capturing, updating and checking individual data entries. Finally legality of data sharing is still an issue and primary legislation will probably be required. Therefore the final outcome of these initiatives is by no means certain at this time.
- 16 If it were possible to collect together a range of statistical data via such linked records on a regular basis this could go a long way towards meeting the kinds of data needs that a census fulfils. A more limited option is if the record linkage was only permitted if specified in a Census Order for a specific reference date and that would constitute a Census of Administrative records.

### **Scottish Executive (SE) Developments on Data Sharing**

- 17 The SE recently established two groups: the Senior Officer's Group on Data Sharing (SOGDS) and the Scottish Data Sharing Working Group (SDSWG). The aim of these groups is to develop a strategy and guidance across the public sector to take advantage of the benefits of data sharing in terms of more effective service delivery, the tackling of fraud, and better statistics, while taking account of privacy and confidentiality considerations. Close account is being taken of the UK Government initiatives. There are some similarities between the work in Whitehall and the Scottish initiative on Modernising Government work on the Citizen's Account.

**Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (SNS)**

- 18 Work is under way to produce Scottish Neighbourhood Statistics (SNS). The SNS project aims to transform the production, dissemination and use of data at local level. The initial project – timed to run to March 2004 - will deliver a web-based system from March 2003 that allows users inside and outside Government free access to a range of local area data.
- 19 Data are being developed across the following themes:
- Access to services; Community well-being/Social environment; Crime; Economic deprivation; Education, skills & training; Health; Housing; Physical environment; Work deprivation; and Population & denominators.*
- 20 The availability of SNS data, updated annually would enable analysis at a local area level across a range of data domains, providing context and a deeper understanding of a range of social justice issues. For example, the ability to consider education data, alongside health outcomes alongside housing data will have a significant effect on policy formulation. However, such cross topic analysis would be limited to aggregate data sets collected together for small areas and would not permit statistical analysis at person or household level across different variables in the way that a Census permits.
- 21 A further development, in parallel with the NeSS initiative, is the setting up of the Scottish Population Surveys Co-ordinating Committee which will look at integrating all the various surveys currently carried out wither by SE or other UK Government Departments. The Scottish Surveys are shown in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Scottish Population Surveys carried out by Government.**

Survey	Managed by	Frequency	Scottish sample size
<b>Scottish Surveys</b>			
Scottish Household Survey	CRU	Continuous	15,000 households
Scottish Crime Survey	CRU	3-4 years	5,000 adults
Scottish Health Survey	NCSR for HD	3 years	9,000 adults, 4,000 children
Scottish House Condition Survey	Communities Scotland	5-6 years	20,000 households
Scottish Social Attitudes Survey	NCSR	Annual	1,600 adults
<b>GB or UK Surveys</b>			
Labour Force Survey	ONS	Quarterly	9,300 households
Family Resources Survey	DWP	Annual	2,200 households
Household below average income	DWP	Annual	2,200 households
New Earnings Survey	ONS	Annual	15-20,000 adults
Family Expenditure & Food	ONS	Annual	600 households
General Household		Annual	800 households
National Travel Survey	ONS	Annual - combined over 3 years	300 households
British Household Panel	ISER (ESRC funded)	Annual	2,000 households
Omnibus	ONS	8 times a year	per month

- 22 The increasing demand for more surveys, in particular possible EU Regulations obliging member states to conduct a survey of income and living conditions, may drive the integration of existing surveys to provide better information on key social and socio-economic variables between decennial Censuses for a range of policy purposes. Survey Integration would help meet the following objectives:
- An increasing demand for small area statistics that cannot be met with current arrangements: there is particular pressure for information on ethnic group information and measures of income;
  - Neighbourhood Statistics work which adds to this demand: larger samples would also improve model-based estimates;
  - The investment in surveys should be exploited more fully between censuses;
  - The need for greater coherence in Neighbourhood Statistics, which integration of sources will promote; (SILC) and to make design changes to the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

### **Other Developments**

- 23 The ONS is undertaking a review of Census policy for England and Wales with a view to developing options for public consultation in the second half of 2003.

### **Conclusions**

- 24 Our conclusions from the initial review of options for future Census policy are:-
- GROS will carry out further research in the first half of 2003 into the potential of alternatives to a conventional Census, taking account of work by ONS and the various current data sharing initiatives, and the experience of other countries.
  - Prior to a decision being taken on the options or combination of options that should be followed to produce future Census-type data, a public consultation is planned for late 2003. The consultation will concentrate on seeking opinions on alternatives to Census data.
  - As a contingency against the possibility that non-conventional approaches will not prove viable, GROS should also continue to plan for a conventional Census in 2011, taking account of lessons learnt from 2001.

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