

POPULATION AND MIGRATION STATISTICS COMMITTEE (SCOTLAND)

Census Vacant Follow-up Survey (VFUS)

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1. Summary

1.1 Following the 2001 Census, a Vacant Follow-up Survey (VFUS) was carried out to identify additional information about a sample of properties identified as being vacant. The total number of vacant properties and second homes was identified via the Census itself – the purpose of the VFUS was to identify some extra information about a sample of vacant properties, such as ownership and length of vacancy. The results of this were published here: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/DataPCVS>. This paper describes the purpose of the survey, how it was carried out, the costs and results.

GROS and the Scottish Government would be interested to know:

1. Did PAMS members use the results of the 2001 PCVS, or are they aware of any uses made of the data?
2. In particular, we'd be interested in the views of those of you from councils which paid for a boost to the survey in your area (as shown in the Annex) – did you find this worthwhile?
3. Do PAMS members think there would be demand for some form of vacant follow-up survey after the 2011 Census? If so, what use would be made of the data?

2. Background

2.1 The Vacant Follow-up Survey (VFUS; also known as the Post Census Vacant Survey, PCVS) was a voluntary survey conducted by the General Register Office for Scotland on behalf of the Scottish Executive Development Department, following the 2001 Census. It was based on a 4% sample of household spaces identified as being vacant in the 2001 Census (around 5,500 dwellings). Enumerators were sent out to find out some additional information about these vacant dwellings, including ownership, reason for and length of vacancy, and characteristics of the property. The VFUS did not cover holiday homes or dwellings where the household was absent or refused to take part in the Census.

2.2 In the 1981 and 1991 Censuses, a similar survey of 10% of vacant dwellings was carried out, which allowed reasonable figures to be published a local authority level. The

smaller sample size was chosen in 2001 for financial reasons – it meant that reliable figures could be published for Scotland as a whole, but the figures were much less reliable at local authority level. Because of this, councils had the option of paying for the survey to be boosted in their area, to cover 10% of vacant dwellings – nine councils chose to do this. The sample sizes used in each council area, and those that paid for the boost, are shown in the Annex.

3. The main aims and uses of the survey

- To obtain more information about the characteristics of vacant dwellings – ownership, reason for and length of vacancy, and characteristics of the property.
- To allow councils to boost the sample in their area to 10% to provide better information about vacant dwelling in their area.
- To quality-assure the Census information on vacancy.
- To weight the number of vacant dwellings in the Scottish House Condition Survey.
- The VFUS was not used in the household estimates – figures on vacant dwellings and second homes were used, but this came from the enumerators' 'dummy forms' from the Census itself (see below), not the VFUS.

4. How vacant dwellings were recorded in the 2001 Census

- The Census form itself had no space to record vacant dwellings or second homes – it was just focused on the household, and there was no information about dwellings which did not contain households.
- If a dwelling appeared to be vacant or a holiday home, or the householder refused to complete a form, the enumerator filled in a 'dummy form'. This recorded the reason that the dummy form was completed (i.e., absent household, refusal, second residence/holiday accommodation, vacant household space). It also recorded some information about the dwelling, including the type of dwelling and floor level. This information was used to publish statistics on the number of vacant and holiday homes, to produce figures for all housing stock, and to impute figures where a household failed to complete a form. No further information was collected about vacant dwellings in the Census itself.
- A 4% sample of dwellings which were identified by the enumerator as being 'vacant' on the dummy form was chosen for the VFUS. This survey was carried out by enumerators after the main Census, to identify additional information about the vacant dwellings. Note that dwellings where a dummy form was completed for other reasons (i.e., second homes/holiday homes, refusals and absent households) were *not* covered in the VFUS, in 2001 or 1991 – though they were contacted in 1981.

5. Content of the 2001 VFUS

The VFUS form can be found here:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/933/0033558.pdf>

It included:

- Address
- Accommodation type
- Lowest level of accommodation
- Whether dwelling has been/is being demolished
- Whether dwelling is new and has not yet been occupied
- Current state of building (derelict/ newly built / being rebuilt / boarded up / for sale / for rent / other)

- Estimated number of rooms in dwelling
- Is dwelling vacant?
- Is occupier / owner / neighbour available for interview? If so:
 - Is dwelling occupied/ vacant/ second home / holiday let / non-residential?
 - Was a Census form delivered and returned?
 - Tenure
 - Length of vacancy
 - Reason for vacancy
 - Owner
 - Size of dwelling

6. Output from 2001 VFUS

6.1 The VFUS data were held by GROS, and the SE commissioned a number of tables. The content of the tables was agreed following discussion between GROS, the SE, HARG, PAMS and BESAC. The final tables were produced by GROS and published on the SE housing statistics website: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/Browse/Housing-Regeneration/DataPCVS>. The News release is available here: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2004/05/5472>

6.2 The following tables were published:

Table description	Source
Ownership of occupied and vacant household spaces (Scotland)	Census and VFUS
Vacancy rate by tenure/ownership (Scotland)	VFUS (1981-2001)
Number of vacant household spaces & vacancy rates by ownership and LA	VFUS
Reason for vacancy by LA	VFUS
Length of vacancy by ownership	VFUS
Length of vacancy by LA	VFUS
Accommodation type for occupied and vacant household spaces	Census and VFUS
Accommodation type for vacant household spaces by ownership	VFUS
Number of rooms for occupied and vacant household spaces	Census and VFUS
Number of rooms for vacant household spaces by ownership	VFUS
Lowest floor level of occupied and vacant household spaces	Census and VFUS
Lowest floor level of vacant household spaces by ownership	VFUS

7. Main results from the VFUS

7.1 The statistical news release for the VFUS (<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/News/Releases/2004/05/5472>) highlighted a few key points:

- The estimated vacancy rate was higher in the social sector (5%) than the private sector (3%)
- Where reasons for vacancy were known, 41% were to let, 24% were for sale, 18% were being converted/improved, and 10% were derelict or awaiting demolition.

- Over half of vacant dwellings (57%) had been occupied for less than 6 months, while 18% had been unoccupied for a year or more.
- The highest vacancy rates were for flats (6%, compared to an average of 4%). Linked to this, vacant dwellings were more likely to be above ground-floor level, and they tended to be smaller than average.

8. Sample size

8.1 The VFUS publication (above) shows the samples size achieved in each LA. A sample of just 4% of vacant dwellings was chosen. The original intention was not to publish figures for each LA, but in the end, several tables were published at this level – with footnotes warning that in some cases the sample sizes were very small.

8.2 The non-boosted samples sizes ranged from just 17 dwellings in East Dunbartonshire to 593 in Glasgow, with 8 councils having sample sizes of less than 50. For the councils that paid for a boost, the sample size ranged from 68 in Clackmannanshire to 748 in Edinburgh. Of the dwellings sampled, an interview (e.g., with the occupier/owner/neighbour) was achieved in 79% of cases, and this ranged from 65% in Glasgow to 100% in a few councils with sample sizes under 50.

8.3 To select the sample, vacant dwellings were given an indicator of 'urban' if they were within a settlement of at least 500 people, or 'rural' if they were not. The category of 'urban' was then split into 'urban deprived' and 'urban non-deprived'. However, results were not published broken down by these indicators.

8.4 The low sample sizes make the figures published at local authority level quite unreliable – there are many cases (which are highlighted in the report) where the number of dwellings in a category was less than 10.

9. Costs

9.1 The cost to LAs of carrying out a boosted sample depended on the size of the boost – they were charged £19 for each additional dwelling covered. This varied from a total of £570 for Perth and Kinross to £7,600 for Edinburgh.

9.2 The overall cost, as estimated in 2001, was £80,000 – this included GROS staff costs, enumerator costs, printing costs etc.

10. Issues to consider for 2011

10.1 In order to consider whether it would be worth carrying out another VFUS following the 2011 Census, GROS and the Scottish Government need to know how much demand there would be for this, and how much use was made of the 2001 Census VFUS.

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Annex: Sample sizes used in 2001 VFUS

Local authority	Census vacants	Selected sample size	Proportion sampled	Number of interviews achieved	Number in achieved sample vacant
Scotland	87,394	5,481	6.3%	4,316	3,629
Aberdeen City	6,912	231	3.3%	189	164
Aberdeenshire	4,182	173	4.1%	145	134
Angus	2,418	227	9.4%	198	185
Argyll & Bute	2,447	116	4.7%	110	97
Clackmannanshire	676	68	10.1%	52	51
Dumfries & Galloway	2,507	168	6.7%	141	108
Dundee City	3,147	166	5.3%	123	111
East Ayrshire	2,123	180	8.5%	138	129
East Dunbartonshire	589	17	2.9%	17	15
East Lothian	998	35	3.5%	35	24
East Renfrewshire	647	29	4.5%	22	20
Edinburgh	8,741	748	8.6%	546	420
Eilean Siar	969	49	5.1%	49	43
Falkirk	1,723	59	3.4%	54	50
Fife	4,741	259	5.5%	221	179
Glasgow	10,080	593	5.9%	383	306
Highland	4,000	226	5.7%	198	152
Inverclyde	2,093	190	9.1%	141	136
Midlothian	548	23	4.2%	23	19
Moray	1,907	179	9.4%	156	134
North Ayrshire	2,104	99	4.7%	90	67
North Lanarkshire	3,376	314	9.3%	221	197
Orkney Islands	576	33	5.7%	33	26
Perth & Kinross	2,422	245	10.1%	222	183
Renfrewshire	4,790	437	9.1%	297	263
Scottish Borders	2,627	120	4.6%	102	79
Shetland Islands	572	32	5.6%	32	27
South Ayrshire	1,648	88	5.3%	72	43
South Lanarkshire	3,347	166	5.0%	138	121
Stirling	1,032	47	4.6%	41	39
West Dunbartonshire	2,355	102	4.3%	75	68
West Lothian	1,097	62	5.7%	52	39