



DIALOGUE ON DATA

Exploring the public's
views on changes
to the census

Daniel Cameron
Sarah Pope
Michael Clemence
Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute



E·S·R·C
ECONOMIC
& SOCIAL
RESEARCH
COUNCIL

Table of contents

Executive summary	2
1. Introduction and methodology	7
2. Participants' views of the census.....	11
3. Beyond 2011 – Participants' views of potential changes to the census.....	16
4. Conclusions and recommendations	23
Appendices: Dialogue Materials.....	24

© 2014 Ipsos MORI – all rights reserved.

The contents of this report constitute the sole and exclusive property of Ipsos MORI. Ipsos MORI retains all right, title and interest, including without limitation copyright, in or to any Ipsos MORI trademarks, technologies, methodologies, products, analyses, software and know-how included or arising out of this proposal or used in connection with the preparation of this report. No license under any copyright is hereby granted or implied.

The contents of this report are of a commercially sensitive and confidential nature and intended solely for the review and consideration of the person or entity to which it is addressed. No other use is permitted and the addressee undertakes not to disclose all or part of this report to any third party (including but not limited, where applicable, pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act 2000) without the prior written consent of the Company Secretary of Ipsos MORI.

This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international standard for Market Research Services, ISO 20252

Executive summary

This report describes the findings from a public dialogue on administrative data commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The overall objectives were to explore public understanding and views of administrative data and data linking.¹ The dialogue focused on two uses of administrative data, one that is currently being established and one that may go ahead in future:

The new ESRC-funded Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN) that was set up in late 2013.²

The potential use of administrative data linking as one of the options for conducting the 2021 census (alongside an annual survey).³

The findings and recommendations from this project will help inform the ESRC and ONS as they develop administrative data linking, and particularly their strategies around public engagement and communications, as well as the Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN) and Administrative Data Service (ADS) as they develop their public engagement and communications strategies. This report focusses on the findings from the dialogue that relate to the ADRN.

The dialogue consisted of seven sets of workshops (14 in all) with members of the public and sector experts. These took place between the 19th of October and the 9th of November 2013 in England (London, King's Lynn, and Manchester), Wales (Cardiff, Wrexham), Scotland (Stirling) and Northern Ireland (Belfast). In each location, a group of 14-20 public participants attended an all-day workshop on a Saturday, and reconvened two weeks later for a second day-long workshop. At least two experts attended each of the workshops. In all, 136 members of the public and 20 experts attended the dialogue workshops.

The value social research and data⁴

Participants generally had very low initial awareness and understanding of social research. While knowledge increased over the course of the dialogue, some found aspects of the subject matter complicated and difficult throughout the discussions. At the beginning of the dialogues, low awareness of the uses of social research drove scepticism about its value. This scepticism was challenged by reading case studies and hearing from working social scientists about the numerous uses and impacts of social science research.

However, negative perceptions of social research as a whole were sometimes a driver of views of administrative data linking and the ADRN. Participants who held these negative perceptions compared research findings to “*common sense*” and questioned why they need to be evidenced.

¹ Administrative data is the data about individuals that is collected for operational purposes in the delivery of government services, but that also has the potential to be used in numerous social research projects.

² The ADRN consists of four Administrative Data Research Centres (ADRCs) that will act as national hubs for researcher access to administrative data, and an overarching service that will help these centres to function, known as the Administrative Data Service (ADS).

³ The UK Statistics Authority has asked the ONS to explore alternatives to a full paper census in 2021. They are due to recommend their preferred option in spring 2014. The other front-running option is a full online census.

⁴ These findings are reported here for context, and are reported in full in Cameron, Pope and Clemence (2014) [Dialogue on Data: Exploring the public's views on using linked administrative data for research purposes](#), Economic and Social Research Council, and Office for National Statistics

Later in the dialogues, when participants had learned more about the aims and methods of social research, they tended to be more positive about its value. Even so, blue skies or theory-led academic research continued to be valued far less than research perceived as socially beneficial (i.e. research that has the potential for clear policy or practice impact).

Participants did not have a clear or shared definition of 'socially beneficial'. However, while deliberating across the workshops, and when speaking to working social scientists, participants were generally very open as to what counted as social value, and thought that most of the real life examples presented across the workshops met that threshold. However their initial views suggest that the social value of research is not well understood by the public.

By contrast with their low awareness of social research, participants were familiar with the importance of data to modern society. They were quickly able to give numerous examples of providing their personal data to businesses and government, and saw this as an unavoidable aspect of modern life.

Nonetheless, keeping their personal data secure was very important to them, and they worried about their data being leaked, lost, shared or sold by organisations that hold it. Participants also felt that they had little control over their personal data. These general concerns about data security more widely drove particular security fears with relation to administrative data linking.

Beyond 2011: Views on potential changes to the census

Participants were generally positive towards the census, with some seeing filling it in as part of active citizenship. There was some sentimental attachment to the census among older participants. However, there was low awareness of the purpose of the census beyond providing simple population counts to plan government services nationally, and little understanding of how it is used at a local level.

When the potential changes to the 2021 census were explained, participants tended to understand them at the broadest level as a trade-off between cost and accuracy (in terms of both frequency and having detailed information at a household level). Even so, participants often found the detail confusing, and thus found it difficult to weigh up the potential implications of the full and administrative data options. Their views on the key considerations were:

Cost: The administrative data option is expected to cost around £300 million less than the traditional paper census. For some this was a simple and persuasive argument in favour of the administrative option, while other participants (usually older) were of the opinion that the census is worth doing 'properly' even if it is more expensive. Some argued that the saving may not be real in the long-term if accuracy of statistics is reduced, and worried that it might end up costing more because government spending is not properly targeted and thus less effective.

Loss of detail. The administrative data option would provide less detailed data for very small areas. This had very low levels of importance for participants, as they could not understand exactly what the impact of this loss would be, but it did make some feel uncomfortable about deciding on a firm preference between options.

Frequency: The administrative data option might allow for more frequent official statistics. This resonated for some, and is linked to a more general concern about statistics being based on up-to-date data. However, this did not automatically translate into supporting of the increased use of administrative data – some called for a more frequent census instead.

Family history: The administrative data option would mean that the census could no longer be used as a tool for researching family history. For some, and particularly older participants, the ability to research family and social history was proof of the value of the census. Others thought that there are other means of accessing this kind of history now, and certainly will be in the future. In any case, they reasoned that even if there weren't, this would not be a strong enough reason to retain a full census.

The survey element of the administrative data census option was seen as confusing by most participants. They were worried about the accuracy of a sample approach, and they also questioned why researchers could establish the population count and some basic characteristics from administrative data, but not other characteristics too.

Participants' reactions to the potential implications of the options varied, and tended to be split between older participants who favoured keeping the full census (either paper or online) on the grounds of the level of detail collected and its usefulness to historians, and younger participants who thought that the potential cost savings and more frequent, up-to-date statistics meant that administrative data combined with an annual survey was their preferred option.

Chapter 1: Introduction and methodology

Ipsos MORI was commissioned by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to undertake public dialogue to explore public understanding and opinion of administrative data and data linking.

This dialogue is a sub-set of the wider Public Attitudes to Science (PAS) 2014 project being undertaken by Ipsos MORI for the UK Government Department of Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) and the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The main element of this project was a random probability survey with 1,749 UK adults aged 16+ and a booster survey of 315 16-24 year-olds. One of the topic areas for this survey was public opinion and attitudes towards 'big data'. This is an emerging area in science and policy, yet public knowledge and opinion on it is not well known.⁵ The PAS survey questions asked about on numerous potential uses of big data, including operational and research purposes.

The PAS findings show that, on balance, the public oppose personal data being used for commercial gain. While a majority seem to be relatively unconcerned about the use of their records in 'big data' analysis⁶, there is strong opposition to some of the specific ways in which *private* companies might operationalise this data. For example, 62% of people oppose websites using people's online browsing histories to create personalised adverts for products that people are more likely to be interested in.

By contrast, they largely support the use of personal data in contexts where there is a tangible public benefit, such as in medicine, transport and policing. Most people (56%) support combining the data held by multiple government departments and using them to better tailor public services to individuals. This question does not however tell us whether people support this use of government administrative data for research, for operational purposes, or for both.

In addition to collecting nationally representative quantitative data on the topic, a need was recognised for more in depth, qualitative research about public attitudes towards the potential uses of government 'big data' i.e. the large administrative datasets that are held by government departments and agencies. Both ONS, who are considering the application of big data to population statistics, and ESRC, who are setting up a national big data network for administrative data, have specific policy and communications challenges relating to public views of big data that were best met by a dialogue approach.

The dialogue consisted of a series of reconvened workshops across the United Kingdom. Its principal aim was to examine public understanding of administrative data, and to uncover attitudes towards the linking of government records for the purposes of research. It represents a starting point in what will be an on-going public engagement strategy by Administrative Data Research Network and the ESRC to ensure that the public are kept engaged with and informed about their work with administrative data.

⁵ The PAS survey includes questions about people's attitudes to 'data' across private and public organisations. The topline results are included in the methodological appendix.

⁶ 61% agree with the statement "I don't mind how data collected about me is used, as long as it's anonymised and can't be linked back to me"

1.1 Background

ONS and the ESRC (on behalf of the Administrative Data Research Network (ADRN)), share a common goal of exploring in more detail public perceptions of administrative data and data linking.

Beyond 2011

As the UK population grows and becomes more complex, the cost of carrying out a traditional census increases. The 2011 census cost approximately £480 million to complete, and estimates on the cost of the 2021 census, if it is carried out using the same methodology i.e. paper-based, suggest that the cost will be approximately £800 million in today's prices. ONS has been reviewing options for how to conduct the next census. Two front-running options have been identified:

Conduct a traditional (i.e. full) census predominantly online, at an estimated cost of £625 million; and

Linking administrative datasets to produce annual population head counts supplemented with a large annual survey to model population characteristics, at an estimated cost of £460 million.

These two options were presented by ONS in their 'Beyond 2011' consultation, which ran from 23rd September to 13th December 2013. The findings from the consultation, as well as findings from this project, will form part of the evidence base that the ONS will use to present a recommended option for the 2021 census to Parliament in 2014. The findings will also help shape the ONS communication plans around whatever option is chosen, and serve as a guide for where further public research is needed.

1.2 Steering group

This dialogue was overseen by a steering group of experts who have been involved at all stages of the project design and execution. They have met three times through the course of the project: initially to set objectives and scope for the project; the second to input on and sign off material for the dialogues; and the third time to discuss the findings of this report.

Members of the steering group also attended many of the events to participate in the discussions.

The steering group members were:

David Walker (chair), Editor at Public Leaders Network

Melanie Knetsch (secretary), Deputy Head of Communications, ESRC

Genevieve Groom, Senior Research Officer, ONS

Liesbet van Zoonen, Professor at Loughborough University

Mary Hickman, Independent research consultant and member of ESRC's Methods and Infrastructure Committee

Sarah Cunningham-Burley, Professor at the University of Edinburgh

Vanessa Cuthill, Team Head, ESRC

David Carr, Policy Advisor at Wellcome Trust

Jane Naylor, Methodology, Office for National Statistics

Daniel Start, Design and Engagement Specialist, Sciencewise-ERC

Kerry Seelhoff, PAS 2014 project manager, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

Maria Sigala, Senior Policy Manager, ESRC

1.3 Objectives

The aims of this research project are to examine public views around the use of government administrative data in social research. It also seeks to investigate what sort of procedures should be set in place, and the concepts and language that need to be used to reassure the public about the safety and security of their public records in the data linking process.⁷

The objectives that related specifically to Beyond 2011 are below:

To provide ONS with more detailed evidence on public views of their current front-running option for Beyond 2011 in order to:

- Understand any concerns this option raises, in particular on sensitive issues
- Understand what messages/lines of argument help to ameliorate these concerns

1.4 Methodology⁸

Approach and overall methodology

Six sets of reconvened six-hour public dialogue workshops, each involving 16 to 20 participants, were conducted in London, Manchester, King's Lynn, Cardiff, Wrexham, Stirling and Belfast between 6 October and 9 November 2013. A total of 136 participants attended the seven reconvened workshops. Changes to the census were discussed at the five workshops in England and Wales.

A qualitative, deliberative approach was considered the best way to allow participants to explore this topic, from both a personal and a citizen perspective. Qualitative methods allow participants the freedom to express the issues that are salient to them and develop their views in the light of discussion and debate. A reconvened approach allowed participants enough time to digest the complex information that they received on the first day, and reflect on the topic outside of the dialogue environment.

Further dialogue was introduced through the attendance of 'experts' at each of the events. These experts described their work, answered participants' questions, and engaged in debate about the ADRN and the proposed changes to the ONS. Their specific role at each event is described in more detail below.

⁷ Findings about the language and concepts that people do and do not understand have been embedded throughout the report and conclusions.

⁸ Please see the Dialogue on Data: Methodological Annexe (published separately) for further methodological details.

Participants were recruited on-street and paid an incentive for taking part in the research. Quotas for gender, age, socio-economic group and ethnicity were set to ensure participation of individuals from a range of backgrounds reflective of the areas they came from and the broad diversity of the UK population. Soft quotas were set based on trust in researchers, views on data linking and use of data related technology, again to ensure a broad range of attitudes within each of the workshops. The exceptions were King's Lynn where all participants were aged under 35, and Cardiff, where all participants were aged over 55. These age-specific workshops were included as researchers hypothesised that age would have a strong influence on views on this topic.

A final two and a half hour reconvened meeting was conducted on 20 November 2013 in London, the aim of which was to involve participants in the analysis of the findings from all three workshops, and allow a chance for further dialogue with representatives from the ESRC, ADS and ONS. A small number of participants from the London, King's Lynn and Cardiff workshops were invited to attend this workshop, which ultimately involved 8 participants. Participants were chosen for their active engagement at the initial workshop and to ensure a range of views on the issues were reflected.

Materials and data collection

The workshops were deliberative and dialogic in nature, so that participants were given information about social research, the census and the implications of the Beyond 2011 options, and access to expert views about the issues covered.

During the workshops, participants were encouraged to think about data, social research, data linking, the census and the potential changes to it. They were given time and structured exercises to support exploration of the topic and expression of views and underlying values.

Ipsos MORI worked with the ESRC and the ONS to design materials for the workshops that would facilitate discussions, and ensure that participants were getting the right amount of information at the right level of detail at different points in the workshops. Facilitators followed a discussion guide throughout the two days to ensure that the same topics were covered in all locations. All materials were reviewed by the steering group at an early stage, and signed off after several iterations by ESRC and ONS. The materials that relate to parts of the dialogue where the census was discussed are appended in this document.

The experts at the workshops were invited to engage with participants, answer questions and join in discussions as and when they wanted to, except for during initial spontaneous discussions about different topics. Activities that participants engaged with throughout the two dialogue workshops included:

Spontaneous group discussion: This allowed for discussion of top of mind views about data, data linking, social research and the census.

Case study considerations: Several examples of research projects where linked administrative data has been helpful were used to prompt discussion of the uses, benefits and drawbacks of this type of research.

'Ask a researcher' session: After lunch at the first workshop, participants were given a chance to hear about researchers' work and ask any questions they wanted about data linking, or research more widely.

‘Homework’ task: In order to ensure that participants started to think about the census before the second workshop, they were given a short task to capture their thoughts on their own relationship with the census.

Presentations: These introduced participants to the key information they needed to discuss the census and Beyond 2011 options.

Implications posters: Several examples of research projects where linked administrative data has been helpful were used to prompt discussion of the uses, benefits and drawbacks of this type of research.

At several points participants were encouraged to note, record and contribute their views independently before discussing them as a group to ensure individual views were captured.

A note on interpretation of qualitative data

Qualitative research approaches (including public dialogue workshops) are used to shed light on *why* people hold particular views, rather than *how many* people hold those views. It is used to explore the contours of peoples’ views, and what factors seem to shape or underlie them. Qualitative research allows us to explore the diversity of peoples’ views and recognise that views may not be resolute.

The results are intended to be *illustrative* rather than statistically reliable and, as such, do not permit statements to be made about the extent to which something is happening. Given the qualitative nature of the data collected from the dialogue, this report aims to provide detailed and exploratory findings that give *insight* into the perceptions, thoughts and feelings of people, rather than statistical evidence from a representative sample.

It is not always possible in qualitative research to provide a precise or useful indication of the prevalence of a certain view, due to the relatively small number of participants generally involved (as compared with the larger respondent bases involved with quantitative studies). So, the views of *proportions* of the qualitative group should not be extrapolated to the population at large. Sometimes, ideas can be mentioned a number of times in a discussion, and yet hide the true drivers of thoughts or behaviours; or a minority view can, in analysis, turn out to express an important emergent view or trend. The value of qualitative work is to identify the issues which bear future investigation. Therefore we use different analysis techniques to identify how important an idea is.

In reporting we state the *strength* of feeling about a particular point rather than the number of people who have expressed that thought. Having said this, it is sometimes useful to note which ideas were discussed most by participants, so we also favour phrases such as "a few" or "a limited number" to reflect views which were mentioned infrequently and "many" or "most" when views are more frequently expressed. Where views apply only to a subset of participants, e.g. participants in King’s Lynn, we have highlighted this in the text, as this may indicate differences by region or age. Any proportions used in our reporting (e.g. a ‘couple’ or ‘handful’ of participants), should always be considered indicative, rather than exact.

Another consideration in the interpretation of qualitative data is the role of *perceptions*. Different views on an issue make up a considerable proportion of the evidence presented in this study. It is

therefore important to bear in mind that although these perceptions may not always be factually accurate, they represent the truth for those who hold these views.

Verbatim comments have been included in this report to illustrate and highlight key points, i.e. those views either shared by a large number of participants or reflecting the strong views of a smaller subset. Where verbatim quotes are used, they have been anonymised and attributed by location, e.g. London.

Chapter 2: Participants' views of the census

This chapter focuses on participants' attitudes towards the way the census has been conducted until now. Participants were given a homework task to complete between the first and second workshops to allow them to consider the census and their views about it. Spontaneous perceptions of the census were also sought during discussion on the second day itself, although emphasis was placed on participants' understanding of the proposed options and their implications.

Key points

Participants' spontaneous views of the census tended to be positive.

However, there was low familiarity with the census process and low awareness of how the data collected is used.

Aside from low familiarity and spontaneous positivity towards the census, a variety of other factors affected personal views. These included age, life stage, and level of education.

2.1 Spontaneous views of the census

Participants' spontaneous views of the census were sought at two points; firstly through a "homework" task to be completed before the second dialogue workshop, and then in discussion on the second day. The questions asked in the homework task were:

How did you feel completing the 2011 census?

If no one in your household completed the 2011 census, what are the reasons why?

Please tell us how you think the census differs from the other ways the Government collects data about you and your household. You can talk to friends and family to list the good things and the less good things about the census as a way of collecting information about households.

The purpose of this task was to gauge participants' top of mind understanding of the census, and to start them thinking so they would be ready to contribute to the discussion. During the dialogue the conversation focused more closely on the function of the census, and whether participants felt that it was a good or bad thing.

What is the census and what is it for?

Most participants thought that the census is used for demographic information, such as providing counts of the different types of people living in the country as a whole. In some groups, particularly the younger group in King's Lynn, participants did not spontaneously suggest any uses for census information beyond establishing population counts. The purpose of population counting was typically thought to be "for research" or seen as an end in itself. In the Manchester group discussion about the purpose tended to focus on the need to control immigration.

Those who viewed the census as a simple headcount then began to question the length and complexity of the form they had to complete. They were unclear why so many questions would be necessary given the purpose they assumed the census served.

Participants in the older groups, who had come into greater contact with government services, often thought that the census would be used for “planning services” generally and health services in particular. Most of the uses they discussed were thought to apply nationally, and few spontaneously suggested local applications or uses of census information, at least initially. In the oldest group, some also discussed the use of the census for genealogy.

“I would be gutted if it stopped – I use family history off it”

Cardiff

Participants in London thought that the census was used to produce population statistics for planning house-building. Participants in Wales pointed out that the census collected data on how many people self-identify as Welsh.

“It’s a good thing because people are looking for houses so at least an association can let them know how many houses to build”

London

A number of participants spontaneously questioned the purpose of the census given that much of the same information is being gathered on a daily basis by other government departments, thus pre-empting the idea of using administrative data to replace a traditional census. Complaints about different government departments asking for the same information tended to focus on the personal inconvenience of repeatedly giving the information, although a few mentioned the idea government being more efficient if this administrative burden was reduced.

“The government should have all the information it needs on us already, considering all the forms and things we have to fill in to be able to live and receive benefits in our country”

King’s Lynn

Completing the census

Most participants said they remembered completing the 2011 census form, often pointing out that doing so is a legal obligation. Whilst those who knew about the compulsory nature of the census usually thought that it was a good idea, those who did not – particularly in Wrexham – saw it as a threatening or bullying. They felt that people should not be forced to provide this level of information to government.

“I’ve always seen the census as a “compulsory” invasion of privacy. That is why I don’t fill it in”

Wrexham

“I think the census form sent to the place I live in made its way to the bin as it wasn’t agreed to be filled in by a majority”

Wrexham

However, there was little concern about prosecution for not completing the census form, and cynicism about whether the power to prosecute is ever used. As a result, participants were surprised to find out that ONS had sought to prosecute people who did not fill out the 2011 census.

A few participants said they could not recall filling out the census but assumed they had, and therefore reasoned that it must not be too onerous. A small number of individuals said no one in their household had completed the census form in 2011. The reasons for this tended to differ in each case – for example, some Londoners who didn't complete the census were out of the country at the time, whilst one participant who did not fill out the census said this was due to a decision by his father.

“Dad didn't fill it in because he couldn't be bothered as it seemed too long”

King's Lynn

One participant with more limited reading and writing comprehension claimed that they could not understand the form well enough to complete it.

Others considered the census too time-consuming, and said they had found it an inconvenience to complete as a result.

“It [the census] took me four days, I come and see it and go back [to it]”

London

Indeed, those who were more supportive of the census in principle often worried that people would not complete the form honestly because it would be too time-consuming to do so.

2.2 Positive perceptions of the census

Participants - even those whose awareness of the role and function of the census was lower - were generally positive about the census. They thought it functioned well as a as a method of gathering information about the population and about specific local areas in order to help the government direct funding. While participants assumed that government and others needed to know how many people were in the country, but were frequently unfamiliar with the specific ways the data is used.

Older participants were also more supportive of the census than others, with some saying that completing the census is a duty for citizens.

“I don't know about cost but [the census] is essential”

London

For participants, the most important positive attribute of the census was its universality. They were reassured by the fact that the census counted individuals down to a household level, allowing an accurate picture of the population to be established. Participants felt that this meant that no one would be missed out from government statistics and service provision. The usefulness of the census in helping to deliver services – schools and GPs were most commonly mentioned – was seen as another key positive aspect. For some the data was also seen as valuable for tracing family history.

Some participants assumed that the census could be used to keep track of the number of people in the country and control immigration. This was seen as a particularly important by some in Manchester and London.

2.3 Negative perceptions of the census

Negative views of the census in the discussion and homework task centred around two related points; firstly, that the census is unnecessarily long and intrusive given participants' views about its purpose; and secondly that the data the census collects could in any case be sourced elsewhere.

Many of the negative perceptions were related to the length and perceived burden of the census. Comments ranged from concerns about the environmental impact of the paper used, to complaints that many of the questions did not apply to most people, and claims that it was simply too long, too much hassle, and irrelevant. Another perception was that the census is becoming increasingly lengthy and intrusive. This perception reached its greatest extent in Wrexham, where there were strong concerns about "big brother sticking his nose in".

"Folk in power may most definitely wish to manipulate and control us – and for whose benefit?"

Wrexham

Others felt that some of the subject areas covered in the census were too personal, and that too many questions were asked in the 2011 census. Those questions most frequently cited as unnecessary were:

The questions on religion and sexuality, which were considered too personal

"The statistic I didn't like was religion. They had to set up "Jedi" as a religion"

Manchester

"I don't see why certain things matter. Why should sexuality matter?"⁹

Manchester

Questions asking immigrants when they entered the country and when they planned to leave, as this was seen as a question that was unlikely to be answered honestly

"Migrants are to state date of arrival and how long they intend to stay. Well I'm sure there's a lot of fabrication there"

Cardiff

The question asking who was staying in their house on the specific date of the census, as some participants did not understand the relevance of this

Participants who were generally negative about the census also cited problems with the decennial gap between population counts. Everyone agreed that UK society had changed considerably over the last decade, and expected a similar level of change before 2021. This view was frequently reinforced by personal reflections on how much participant's lives had changed since the 2001 census.

"The thing about the census is that it is old news – it's not very current"

Wrexham

⁹ N.B. Data on sexuality was not gathered in the 2011 census.

Those who valued the universality and accuracy of the census shared concerns about the ten year cycle – there were numerous calls for the census to be conducted more regularly to improve the on-going usefulness of the information. Those who were more positive also expressed concerns about the accuracy of the data because the census relies on people to fill it out their own form.

“You have to rely on the truth and accuracy of the people. When the government gets it [information] from other places, people can’t lie”

King’s Lynn

Knowledge of the potential uses of the census developed as the dialogue progressed and participants were shown examples and had the opportunity to discuss these with researchers and ONS experts.

Chapter 3: Beyond 2011 – Participant’s views of potential changes to the census

This chapter describes participants’ opinions on the options for the census in 2021.

Key points

Participants broadly understood the two potential options for the 2021 census, but often found the detail of the administrative option confusing, and thus found it difficult to weigh up the potential implications.

The cost and frequency arguments had most salience. Younger people tended to support the administrative option based on cost savings and more frequent statistics. Some older participants favoured a full (offline or online) census because of concerns that cost saving of replacing it would not be real in the long term.

3.1 Understanding of potential changes

After the general discussion, the potential changes to the census were introduced through a presentation and video. Two options were explained, (i) a full census carried out predominantly online every ten years, and (ii) an annual census based on linked administrative data with a large-scale survey to supplement the findings.

The potential change to a full online census was clear to all, and few participants questioned this. Many thought it would save money and be more convenient, though they did think it important that those who are not online still have the option to fill in the census on paper.

With regard to the administrative data option, participants generally understood the broad “frequency versus accuracy” trade-off between the administrative and traditional census methodologies. However the specific implications of the different approaches were much more difficult for participants to understand. This meant many found it hard to be sure which option they preferred, or fell back on the differences they could most easily understand as a basis for their views. For example, participants who were unclear on the implications of the loss of small area information were more likely to support the administrative data option as they did not see the benefits the full census would give for the extra cost.

At several points during the discussion some participants suggested a more frequent full census. In Manchester, and particularly in Cardiff, there was support for a more regular full census regardless of the increased cost. This was because these participants valued both frequency and accuracy, and argued that the additional cost was worthwhile in their view.

The 4% household survey

The yearly survey was seen as complicated by many participants. This would involve a survey of 4% of UK households, used to provide demographic characteristics to accompany the annual headcounts in an administrative data census. Some participants were unsure how a 4% annual

survey could accurately represent the UK population, whilst others thought that the data the government holds on people is comprehensive enough to make any large scale survey redundant.

“How do we know [their data] is true? Wouldn’t it be easier to collect from various bodies, from a computer system?”

London

Using administrative data instead of a survey was seen to have benefits in terms of accuracy and efficiency. Participants often worried that people would not be honest in completing the census questionnaire, or that they would be put off by its length and rush, leading to inaccuracies. There was also some concern that people might just tick the first box they saw for each question just to get the census done.

“I wouldn’t lie, but I think they get the form, look at the 56 questions, and just tick the first box that’s there”

London

Others felt that it was still necessary to carry out some form of population head counts in addition to administrative data, but worried that the newer methodology would be less accurate. The use of mathematical models to infer demographic information from the 4% survey was also difficult to explain, and participants asked numerous questions about how this modelling would work.

“Four per cent – where did that number come from? Will everyone not selected be voiceless?”

Wrexham

In King’s Lynn a handful of participants were aware of sample sizes and representative sampling. Outside of these participants, few already understood how a randomly selected sample could be used to accurately measure population characteristics. As a result, participants were concerned that if the survey was not accurate, some groups in society would miss out on government funding.

“People say four per cent isn’t enough but that is two million people. A viable sample size is about 100, but two million is likely to be a good representation of the population”

King’s Lynn

Others were unsure why a 4% annual survey had been chosen. Some proposed raising this to 5% per annum to improve the accuracy of the administrative data census. These participants were more comfortable about 50% of the population being surveyed over 10 years, as opposed to 40%. The rationale for this change was that it would be “more accurate”, particularly in smaller areas.

“If you did four per cent in Cardiff and that was used just locally for services – I would worry about that, where would you get the four per cent from?”

Cardiff

Participants also questioned how the 4% would be selected. They were concerned that an individual household could be selected repeatedly, creating a significantly higher “burden” for some, and leaving others with no involvement.

The fact that the annual survey would be compulsory and conducted face-to-face worried some people. Whilst it was generally thought that this could lead to people being more honest, some saw it as a much greater level of intrusion than the current census for those selected, and others worried that it would cost more.

“Why would it need to be like that [face-to-face]? It would cost more money”

King’s Lynn

The loss of small area level detail

Participants generally understood that under an administrative data census *individual* level information would be lost. However, this understanding often did not translate into a spontaneous appreciation that small area data would be lost too. Participants expected that it would be possible to replicate the useful parts of the census using existing administrative data sources.

“I still can’t see what they’re going to pick up on these local ones [in the census] that we won’t get in this [4%] survey”

King’s Lynn

During the dialogue process, the idea that small area detail would be lost was introduced through the stimulus materials and in discussion with experts at some of the workshops. This tended to give participants a sense that something that is currently available would no longer be available, but they were unsure what this would mean in practice. The experts found it hard to explain this in a way that resonated with participants.

3.2 Reactions to the implications of potential changes

Across the dialogue workshops there was more support for the administrative data census than retaining a traditional census or moving it online, although the reasons given for this choice varied. Participants’ general outlook based on their age, life stage and education level seemed to be more important in shaping views than the information they were given as part of the dialogue process.

The older group in Cardiff unanimously favoured retaining the traditional census because they seemed worried about changing something that has worked well in the past, and were unconvinced that either the online or administrative option would be as effective or accurate. In King’s Lynn (where all participants were younger) and London participants unanimously decided in favour of an administrative data census, and seemed to be less concerned about change provided the data was more frequent and costs could be reduced. Opinions in Wrexham and Manchester were split between both views.

The implications of the change to an administrative data census were discussed across six main categories:

Cost

Loss of local detail

Error and accuracy
Frequency
Family history
Burden

Each of these categories had a different weight in each group, although cost, frequency, and burden tended to dominate discussion in most groups, with the exception of Cardiff where accuracy was a real concern. Other categories, such as the loss of detail, were not seen as being as important, perhaps due to the fact that the implications were less clear than, for example, potential cost savings.

“Democracy costs money – I know there is a cost to democracy – I want to be asked and to be involved... I want the 10 year census. If there’s a cost then so be it.”

Cardiff

Cost versus accuracy

Older participants, particularly in the Cardiff group, tended to believe that the cost of the census was a price worth paying to do it “properly”. Where participants thought it important to reduce costs, they preferred the idea of moving to a predominantly online format rather than doing away with the full census entirely; and some even suggested increasing the frequency of the full census to once every five years.

“Why is the cost saving so important? Surely if you want it done properly then you will have to pay what’s necessary.”

Cardiff

Viewing the full census as “worth the money” was sometimes driven by scepticism about sampling and statistical methods (described by one participant as “guesswork”).

Others were cynical about the government’s motives and saw the projected savings as an attempt to massage the figures to prompt people to opt for the administrative data option. They assumed this was the government’s preferred option for reasons that remained opaque to them.

“The government will do it anyway – this is a PR exercise.”

Cardiff

The small number of participants who were particularly well informed about the methodology and use of the census were supportive of retaining the traditional census. These participants were concerned that any short-term savings gained from moving away from a traditional census methodology would be offset in the long term by increased inefficiency from less accurate government spending. Their concern with the administrative data option was that it was less accurate than the full census at the local level, which they felt would lead to government funds being distributed wrongly and unfairly. On the other hand, some felt that the accuracy of the annual administrative data option would actually be greater than the accuracy of an infrequent full census, arguing that greater efficiency and savings would result from the administrative option.

“If you’re saving money from the administrative data census, but throwing it away by misdirecting funds, are you saving money?”

King’s Lynn

However, for most participants the cost considerations were more straightforward. They argued that even if an administrative data census would be less accurate, freeing up many millions of pounds was a strong benefit for a relatively small loss, and would result in more money for their local area and for other areas of government spending. In several locations participants wanted to know where the savings would go.

“The lower cost of the administrative data census is a good thing, as long as the money saved goes back into the community.”

Wrexham

Loss of local detail

The use and accuracy of small area statistics were not seen as particularly salient by any of the groups, and were generally not well understood. This meant that the “loss of detail” implications proved difficult to explain. It was also difficult to convey the difference between a census – where all individual households in a population are sampled – and a survey, where the attributes for a population are inferred from a sample.

These differences are highly technical and were hard for participants to engage with, and as a result most believed that administrative data could be used to plug any gaps in small area detail left by abandoning the traditional census.

“Why do they have to know what cars you’ve got? You could get that off Swansea [the DVLA].”

Wrexham

Some even suggested that they would be happy with more information being collected from them at the point of delivery of public services to help with replacing the census.

Error and accuracy

Concern with overall accuracy was a more common theme than concern over a loss of local detail, particularly amongst the older group in Cardiff. Participants expressed concern that people gave false information in the traditional census, and were somewhat reassured that administrative data would reduce the chance for people to lie. However, there was also a stronger concern, specifically with the administrative data census, that any figures would be inaccurate because of the small annual survey. For some the potential loss of accuracy was more than compensated for by the increase in frequency, but for others this was not the case.

“It costs £500 million to find out who is where – and that’s if it’s accurate. You could do a lot else with that £500 million.”

King’s Lynn

Frequency

For some the frequency of results was the most important feature, as their primary concern was with government statistics being up-to-date and the rapidly changing state of UK society.

"I don't want to wait ten years to find out how many people there are in the country, I want to know now."

Manchester

Some participants were sceptical from the outset of the value of a decennial census because of how quickly things are changing. Others became so after considering the differences observed in the UK population between the 2001 and 2011 censuses. These participants tended to welcome any attempts to increase the frequency of data collection, including the move to an administrative data census. It should be noted that increased concern about the frequency of updating the census did not lead automatically to increased support for the administrative data option – some instead suggested increasing the frequency of the full census.

"I like the administrative data, the fact that if the data entry that's there is correct you will have a much more up to date census at a low cost."

London

Family history

Although some thought that tracing family history was an important use of the census, generally participants did not think that this was a good enough reason to maintain the traditional census. For some participants – those who were older or particularly interested in history – the ability to research family and social history was proof of the value of the census.

However, other participants did not see this use of the census as being particularly valuable, and were willing to lose this aspect to save money. Those older participants who were interested in their family tree felt that only the census could provide adequate detail about their ancestors. Younger participants, and those less tied to researching their family history, felt that modern technology meant that there were now other ways to record family history (e.g. social media and other data collected about all of us as individuals) that would replace the census in the future.

"Do we need family trees by census? We've got our digital footprint online."

Manchester

Burden

Participants were divided between arguing that people should be relieved of the burden of filling out forms where possible on the one hand, and a perception that the census form was not particularly onerous on the other. Those who were concerned with the burden of form filling tended to react equally negatively to the 4% annual household survey as they did to the original census, suggesting a more general opposition to form filling. A number expressed concern that they might be targeted over more than one wave of the annual household survey.

Most participants tended to see the census as a necessary task to help with the allocation of government funding or, in a few cases, a part of UK citizenship.

“I think with the original survey, I’m not joking, nearly everybody doesn’t want to do it that I know, they are forced to do it.”

Wrexham

3.3 Overall views of the potential changes

Overall most participants would be comfortable with either of the two options for the next census. The traditional full paper census was supported by some who did not want the census to change, but people did not feel particularly strongly. Emotional attachment to the census rarely featured in discussions; participants focussed mostly on balancing the perceived benefits and drawbacks of both options.

However, the administrative data option was difficult for a non-specialist audience to understand, owing to its reliance on statistical models and representative sampling. While it was favoured by some on cost and frequency grounds, it was rejected by others simply because they weren’t convinced that it is possible to produce accurate statistics for the entire population based on a sample.

In most groups the debate between a more frequent but less granular and a less frequent but more detailed census swung in both directions, with participants switching views on a number of occasions as new data was presented. People’s life stage and age tended to have an effect on their opinions. Older participants were often happier to stick with what they knew and trusted, whilst the youngest group were much more comfortable with their data being held and with the administrative data census.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and recommendations

The **census is an issue that is accorded low importance in people's lives. It does not resonate emotionally for most.** Therefore, encouraging public engagement with any proposed changes will represent a significant challenge. While this dialogue has reported on detailed reactions to the potential implications of changing the census method, it should be borne in mind that these views were not strongly held. The ONS should take into account the low familiarity and awareness when communicating any changes to the census. It may be necessary to explain, at the broadest level, why the census is important and the many ways it is used.

The dialogue findings suggest that there is **openness to changing to an administrative data approach** for the 2021 census, where people have been given access to all of the arguments for and against the change, time to reflect, and time to ask questions about the implications. There is some evidence of a limited sentimental attachment to the traditional census among older participants, and some value attached to the principle of counting each individual. However, the idea of making better use of data that has already been collected through an administrative data census was generally seen as more compelling argument.

Participants understood the basic "cost versus accuracy" trade-off that lies at the heart of the debate over changing the methodology of the census, but there were difficulties in communicating some of the more technical aspects of this discussion. For example, during the dialogue participants were presented with information and expert evidence about the potential loss of detail that would result from the administrative data option. Despite this, most participants did not seem clear about the implications of this loss of detail for small area statistics and those that currently use them (e.g. for research or local service planning).

Explaining how the proposed new method works is likely to prove a considerable challenge, and **careful communication would be needed if the administrative data census option** were chosen. Lack of public understanding of the principle of representative sampling is likely to cause confusion around the idea of the compulsory survey of 4% of the population. The language used in any general public communications would be necessary to ensure that any communications in this area are understandable and fit for purpose.

However, the **possibility of cost-savings and more frequent (thus more up to date) data for decision-making resonated with participants.** These positive benefits of the change should be stressed in any communications campaign about this method if it is chosen by the government. Cost savings messages need to be based on robust evidence as there is likely to be some cynicism. Evidence from the dialogue suggests that support for this option could increase if any savings from the switch were used for a ring-fenced, socially beneficial purpose.

Appendices: Dialogue Materials

Appendix 1: Discussion Guide

Timings	Questions and Prompts	Objectives
1405-1430	<p><u>What does the census mean to me?</u></p> <p>IN TABLES</p> <p><i>Remind participants that the census is a questionnaire filled out by every household in the country every 10 years (since 1801). The Office for National Statistics is responsible for carrying it out and publishing the (aggregated, anonymised) findings.</i></p> <p>Did you or someone in your household fill out the census form in 2011 (show of hands)? What information did you have to give? <i>Flipchart answers</i></p> <p>And why did some of you not fill in the census form? <i>Flipchart answers</i></p> <p>What do you think the census is for? <i>Flipchart responses</i></p> <p>What benefits do you think the census brings? <i>Don't spend too long on this- if they are struggling to think then it isn't necessary to prompt as we will present them with information shortly about why we do the census</i></p> <p>How do you think the information that is collected by the census is used? Who do you think uses it? For what reasons? What do you think it tells them?</p> <p>Overall, do you think the census as it is run at the moment is a good or a bad thing? Why/ why not?</p> <p>Do you think the census as it currently stands is a good use of public money? Why? Why not?</p>	<p>Gather spontaneous views on the census and proposed changes</p> <p>Some participants will have found out about the 2021 plans through the homework task – gather spontaneous reactions to that</p> <p><i>Homework task</i></p>
1430-1445	<p><u>A changing census</u></p> <p>IN PLENARY:</p> <p>Recently the ONS has been considering plans to change how the census is run. Has anyone heard about the plans to change the census? What have you heard? What do you think about the proposed changes?</p> <p><i>Reassure participants that it doesn't matter if they haven't, or if they aren't really sure what they think. Don't answer questions about this now as they will be given plenty of information about the proposed changes after this bit of the discussion. This is where we gather some</i></p>	<p>Inform participants about the aims of the census, the proposed changes and why they are taking place, so that they</p>

	<p><i>spontaneous reactions to the changes</i></p> <p>What do you think are the implications of the proposed changes for:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">You and your family Your local area Society as a whole?</p> <p><i>Briefly talk participants through Slide 7 of the participant pack, explaining that we are going to spend the rest of the day talking about the proposed changes.</i></p> <p>Now you are going to see a short film of ONS staff talking about the proposed changes to the Census</p> <p><i>PLAY FILM OF PETER BENTON, DIRECTOR OF ONS BEYOND 2011 PROGRAMME</i></p> <p>Before we discuss the issues raised in the film in small groups, is there anything that wasn't clear? Do you have any questions?</p> <p>What do you think about what you have just seen?</p> <p><i>Do a quick sense-check – ask one participant to shout out the answers to the following:</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Why we do the census <i>(IF NECESSARY: reiterate it is important for helping the government spend money where it is needed, as well as helping researchers understand more about society)</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Why the ONS are considering different options for 2021 <i>(IF NECESSARY: census in current form is expensive; lots of other countries use different methods successfully; using modern technology might bring benefits)</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">What the different options are:</p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;"><i>The <u>administrative data option</u> where the ONS would use existing data, for example people registered with a doctor, or paying tax, and combine this with results from <u>annual surveys</u>. <u>Or</u></i></p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;"><i>The <u>online census option</u> which would be carried out every 10 years similar to the current census but with most people carrying it out online</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">What consultation the ONS are doing</p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;"><i>The ONS held a series of workshops as well as an online questionnaire to find out what people need from a census. The second consultation on the above options is happening now- you can fill out the questionnaire on the ONS website</i></p> <p>Based on what you've just seen, would you support the option of using</p>	<p>can have better informed discussion in the next session</p> <p>Begin to understand the questions that need to be answered for reassurance about the current front-running proposal</p> <p>To give ONS staff (if present) the chance to interact with members of the public and understand their concerns</p>
--	---	---

	<p>linked administrative data and a large survey instead of carrying out a traditional census? (Show of hands) Why/why not?</p> <p>PASS AROUND HANDOUTS</p> <p>These handouts summarise the information from the film. We're about to have a coffee break, so you can read through them then if anything is still unclear, or ask us any questions during the break.</p>	<i>Census Handout (Q&A)</i>
1445-1500	AFTERNOON COFFEE BREAK	
1500 – 1550	<p><u>Detailed discussion of implications of proposed changes to the census</u></p> <p>IN PLENARY (20 MINS)</p> <p>Now that you know what the proposed changes to the census are we are going to discuss what impact the administrative data option might have. We are not going to focus on the online census option today. First, please split into two groups.</p> <p>Spread around the room are 4 posters: each of these describes possible implication of these changes to the census. With others in your group, please look at each poster in turn and talk about the implication on the poster. Write any comments you have on the poster on a post-it note and stick it on the poster. We have 15 minutes for this.</p> <p>SPREAD 4 GROUPS AROUND SO THEY EACH START AT A DIFFERENT POSTER</p> <p>WHEN GROUPS HAVE SEEN ALL THE POSTERS:</p> <p>When you've looked at all the posters I'd like you to line up along this wall: stand at this end if you strongly support the proposed change to administrative data, and stand at this end if you strongly oppose it.</p> <p><i>Lead facilitator to ask a few people from either end of the spectrum their main reason for supporting or opposing the proposal. DIVIDE PARTICIPANTS INTO 2 ROUGHLY EQUAL GROUPS DEPENDING ON WHERE THEY ARE STANDING AND SEPARATE INTO TABLES (25 MINS)</i></p> <p>Why do you support/ oppose the proposal?</p> <p>Was there one poster in particular that helped you make up your mind? What was it about that information that persuaded you?</p> <p>Which benefits/drawbacks should the ONS should consider most important when making their recommendations about the future of the census? And which the least?</p>	<p>Participants to gain a deeper understanding of the proposed changes to the census.</p> <p>Understand levels of support or opposition to the proposed plans once people have had exposure to a range of information and arguments about the implications</p> <p>ONS representatives (if present) to better understand</p>

	<p><i>If struggling, ask participants to place each of the implications in a row from most to least important, probing for reasons as they carry out the task.</i></p> <p>SPECIFIC PROBES</p> <p><u>1 – Savings messages</u></p> <p>What difference do the potential savings make to your view on changing the Census?</p> <p><u>2 – Burden/public opinion</u></p> <p>Should the ONS take the burden on the individual into account when making this decision? Does removing the burden justify linking any type of administrative data?</p> <p><u>3 –Frequency/flexibility vs. detail of data</u></p> <p>Is it more important to have more up to date statistics more frequently, or to have lots of detailed population data once every ten years? Why? What do you think about the potential loss of census information at the very local level?</p> <p><u>4 – Family history</u></p> <p>Is being able to trace family histories through the census an important thing to keep or is it something you are happy to lose in order to make other gains?</p>	<p>people's views of the proposed changes</p> <p><i>Potential implications of the census posters – A3 laminate and reference copies for tables</i></p>
1550 – 1600	<p>Wind Down and Evaluation</p> <p>IN PLENARY</p> <p><i>Thank respondents for taking part today, and remind them how their contributions will be used (to help ESRC and ONS understand public views, and the new ADRCs to plan how best to involve the public in their work from now on) – allow questions.</i></p> <p><i>Give out end of event questionnaire and allow participants 10 minutes to fill it in. Give out re-contact consent forms.</i></p> <p>THANK AND CLOSE</p>	

Appendix 2: 'Homework' task

13-032538-01

Ipsos MORI

Workshop task

In preparation for day 2, we would appreciate you taking the time to complete these short tasks ahead of the next workshop. It will help you to contribute more fully.

Task 1 – How did you feel completing the 2011 Census?

Please think back to when you received the Census form in March 2011 and tell us how you felt filling it in. If you did not fill in the form for your household, please ask the views of the person who did. *Please write in your responses here...*

Task 2 – If no-one in your household completed the 2011 Census, what are the reasons why?

We are interested in all the reasons why the form was not completed - whether some of the questions were off putting, or whether there were too many (there were 56), whether it was because you were not interested, or something else. *Please list all your reasons here...*

...please turn the page...

Ipsos MORI/13-032538-01

Task 3 – What is different about the UK Census?

Please tell us how you think the Census differs from the other ways Government collects data about you and your household. You can talk to family and friends to list the good things and the less good things about the Census as a way of collecting information about households.



Please write down anything you think is a positive difference about the Census here ..



Please write down anything that you think isn't so good about the Census here...

Please bring this task to the second event in two weeks time. You will receive an additional £5 for completing this task.

Appendix 3: Participant hand-out

About the census and the proposed changes

Q What is the census and why do we do it?

The census is a survey run by ONS on behalf of the Government once every ten years. It records details about every person living in the England and Wales. The Scottish Government and Northern Ireland Assembly are responsible for the census in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Conducting a census of the population allows the government to find out how many people live in the country, their age and sex, and lots of other important information about them. This data allows the government and local councils to plan their services and decide where best to put billions of pounds of government money. It is also regularly used by many other organisations including the National Health Service, universities and charities, as well as by researchers to understand more about society.

Q How does it work?

Up until now this information has been collected by sending a questionnaire to every household across the UK. The first census was held over 200 years ago, in 1801, and they have been held every 10 years since then with the exception of 1941. The most recent was held in 2011 – you might remember filling in the questionnaire for that. Usually people fill in a paper form, but in 2011, for the first time, there was the option to complete the questionnaire online (16% of responses were submitted online).

Q Why are changes being proposed?

The ***Beyond 2011 Programme*** is researching alternative approaches for the 2021 census. This is because the government has asked the Office for National Statistics (ONS) to think about different options instead of a traditional census in 2021. Some people think that the traditional census is too expensive – in 2011 it cost £500 million to run (at today's prices). To run the same model in 2021 (at today's prices) would cost approximately £800 million. Others think that because the census is only carried out every ten years, the information is often out of date. Some people think that the census in its current form is too much of a burden on individuals, and too intrusive.

Lots of other European countries are also moving away from a traditional census for similar reasons, for example Norway, the Netherlands and Austria.

Q What are the other options?

Over the last two years the ONS, and similar bodies in Northern Ireland and Scotland, have been examining different approaches for finding counting the population and providing statistics on their characteristics.

Most importantly, they've looked at how we could better use existing information that people have already provided to different parts of government, for example the list of people registered with a doctor, paying tax, receiving benefits, or registered to vote – the so called “administrative data” we discussed two weeks ago.

The ONS thinks that it will be possible to conduct a census in future through using administrative data combined with the results from annual, compulsory surveys of the population, instead of asking every household in the country to complete a questionnaire once a decade.

This kind of approach could provide statistics more frequently – every year instead of once a decade - than our current system, which some think would provide better information in our fast changing society.

Q What are the implications of the administrative data option for replacing the census?

An administrative data census would provide basic details more often but may not be able to provide such detailed information as the traditional census.

Q So what are the two main options?

1. Using administrative data, complemented by a large annual survey
2. Keeping a traditional census taking place every ten years but using online completion in place of paper questionnaires

Q Who have the ONS been talking to about this?

Members of the ***Beyond 2011 Programme*** have been speaking to a wide range of people and organisations who use the information that is produced by the census, including people who use the census to research family history and groups who have concerns about privacy issues.

The ONS is currently running its second public consultation on the issue, which is open to everyone, so please do go to their website and fill it in the consultation questionnaire if you would like to. The closing date for responses is the 13 December 2013.

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/who-ons-are/programmes-and-projects/beyond-2011/beyond-2011-consultation/index.html>

Appendix 4: Implications posters

Implications of changing the Census – Savings

Significantly lower costs

An administrative data Census would cost significantly less than conducting a traditional Census in 2021

Traditional census



A paper Census would cost £800 million. An online version would cost £625 million.

Administrative data census



The cost of an administrative data census plus annual surveys would be £460 million over ten years

Ipsos MORI
Social Research Institute
© Ipsos MORI | Version 1 | Internal Use Only

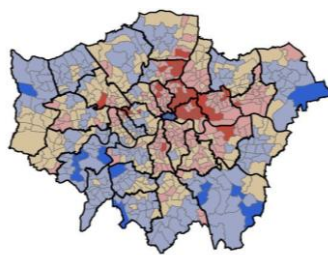
All figures are at 2013 prices



Implications of changing the Census – Loss of detail

Short term savings, long-term loss of detail?

Some argue that even if the proposed changes save the ONS money in the short term, the costs of losing consistent, comparable and detailed statistics for small local areas may prevent effective or accurate targeting of funding to local public services may be greater in the long term.



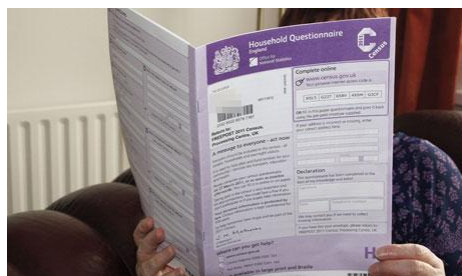
Ipsos MORI
Social Research Institute
© Ipsos MORI | Version 1 | Internal Use Only



Implications of changing the Census - Burden

Less burdensome

The census relies on everyone filling out a questionnaire. This can be time-consuming and some people find it intrusive or burdensome.



The administrative data approach would mean that Census form filling would no longer be necessary in most cases.

Implications of changing the Census – Public Opinion

The public and Parliament will need to approve of administrative data linking first

Before an administrative data census could happen, the law will have to be changed to allow ONS access to the required data from Government departments



A compulsory annual survey of 4% of the UK population (over 2 million people) would also need to be approved

Implications of changing the Census - Frequency

More frequent population data

The government uses Census data to direct funding for services. The current Census is only carried out every 10 years, so in between censuses the size of the population is *estimated* each year.



In the past, it has been possible to miss large numbers of people moving into and within the country because it has happened between censuses.



An administrative data census would mean we would have up to date statistics on the size and characteristics of the population every year.

Implications of changing the Census – Annual Survey

Administrative data alone cannot replace the census

None of the potential sources of Administrative Data provides a completely accurate count of the population.

Some Government data sources can be inaccurate, low-quality, out-of-date or inaccessible at the time it is needed.

So ONS would need to use mathematical models to adjust for those people not included in administrative data, or are recorded in the wrong location.

They would also need to conduct a large survey of about 4% of the population (over 2 million people) every year to understand more about the population (e.g. religion, type of housing, household make-up).



Implications of changing the Census - Flexibility

Based on multiple sources of real-time data

Annual surveys and the use of diverse Administrative data sources would enable ONS to adapt and respond to emerging trends and identify new changes to the population.

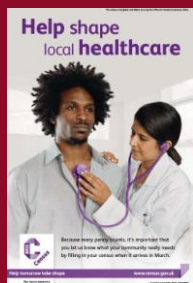


It may be possible, with legislative change, to archive administrative data (which will be made public 100 years later) more frequently than once a decade allowing future historians more frequent opportunities to look at data.

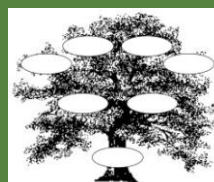


Implications of changing the Census: Loss of detail

There will be loss of very local level information and detailed historical records of people and households



It will not be possible to provide statistics for very small areas every year. It could then be harder for local services such as councils, local NHS or local police to make decisions about where to spend or target money, for example.



Census data that is released to the public after 100 years has allowed people to research their family history, and historians and social scientists to understand more about society in the past. Tracing people in this way would not be possible in an administrative data Census