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# The 2001 Census of Population

The 2001 Census of Population will take place on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2001.

This paper considers the history and purpose of censuses, focuses on the selection of topics for the 2001 Census, and outlines the methods used in conducting the census.

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## Summary of main points

The 2001 Census of Population will take place on Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> April 2001. A census has been held each ten years since, except 1941, with an additional census in 1966. The 2001 Census is expected to cost a total of £255 million over the thirteen-year cycle from planning to final dissemination of results. It will attempt to enumerate every household and individual in the country, and its results will inform resource allocation by central and local government and the planning of housing, health, education and transport services over the following decade.

As Professor Ian Diamond of Southampton University comments:

A census is essential. It is the only time when data are collected nationally at a very local level. This means that they can be used to allocate resources to a wide variety of geographies. The census data also provide the base from which population numbers can be estimated for the 10 intercensal years. The census is certainly the biggest and probably the most important data collection exercise carried out in the United Kingdom, as it is in most countries around the world.<sup>1</sup>

Strictly speaking there will be three censuses in the UK on 29<sup>th</sup> April – in England & Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland - although the content, conduct and results of each are closely co-ordinated. In England & Wales the census is the responsibility of the Office for National Statistics (ONS); in Scotland the General Register Office for Scotland (GROS); in Northern Ireland the Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency (NISRA). In Scotland the census is a devolved matter, with the legislation for the 2001 Census having been passed by the Scottish Parliament. This paper concentrates on the census in England & Wales, while highlighting important differences between the three censuses. Appendix C includes sources of further information on the censuses in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

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<sup>1</sup> “The Census”, in Dorling and Simpson (eds.), *Statistics in Society*, p.9

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# I Introduction

## A. History and purposes

Governments have long been interested in measuring their national resources. In ancient times, for example, the Babylonians, Chinese and Egyptians all used censuses to plan workforces, armies and levy taxation.<sup>2</sup> In England and Wales, the Domesday Book of 1086 was the first comprehensive record of land and property. Full enumeration of the population in the UK came later, fuelled by late-18<sup>th</sup> century concerns about excessive population growth and by the need to gauge manpower resources during the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>3</sup>

These concerns gave rise to the census of 1801. The 1801 census and subsequent censuses in 1811, 1821 and 1831 were largely headcounts of the population, with little collection of supplementary information. The creation of the office of registrar general and a system of civil registration in 1836 provided the administrative machinery necessary for a more detailed census in 1841, widely regarded as the first modern census in the UK.

In 1800, John Rickman, the clerk to the House of Commons who oversaw the censuses between 1801 and 1831, outlined twelve arguments in favour of a census:

1. The intimate knowledge of any country must form the rational basis of legislation and diplomacy.
2. An industrious population is the basic power and resource of any nation, and as such its size needs to be known.
3. The number of men required for conscription to the militia in different areas should reflect the area's population.
4. Similarly, there are defence reasons for wanting to know the number of seamen.
5. The production of corn needs to be planned and thus it is essential we know how many people need to be fed.
6. A government anxious to increase total 'felicity' needs to know the number of marriages and the factors affecting them.
7. The true size of the population, even after the effects of war, is probably far greater than the usual estimates, and knowledge of this would 'be the most consoling gratification to every lover of his country'.
8. In a time when many fear the disaffection of the people, doing a census would improve the Government's image as setting out to promote the public good.
9. A census would generally encourage the social sciences to flourish.
10. It might encourage improved methods of property counting which would be useful for the operation of the land tax.
11. The life insurance industry would be stimulated by the results.
12. There is wide consensus among those writing about the state and politics of the need for a reliable estimate of the population.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Office for National Statistics, Census Factsheet 8, *Census taking through the ages*

<sup>3</sup> Edward Higgs, *A Clearer Sense of the Census* p.7 (1996)

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Angela Dale and Catherine Marsh *The 1991 Census User's Guide* pp 11-13 (1993)

While few would refer now to the public relations benefits of a census and while the importance of war and of corn production has declined, the thrust of his points remains central to the case for census taking two hundred years on. Government, central and local, has a continuing need for data on the size and characteristics of the population to inform policy, plan services for particular groups of the population and to distribute resources according to need. Census data continues to underlie much social research, both within and outwith government, and businesses – well beyond the life insurance industry – use it to target their marketing and location policies.

There are new uses for the census too. Government researchers use census data to assess the representativeness of other social surveys. Census output also meets the core requirements of Eurostat (the statistical office of the European Communities) and the United Nations for statistical data from member states.

Much of the information required by all these users can be obtained from alternative sources, particularly sample surveys and administrative data on, for example, receipt of social security benefits or hospital attendances. The advantages of a census, however, reflect its coverage of the entire population and its cross-tabulation of a wide range of demographic, social and economic data. As the Census White Paper puts it:

Only a census can provide the information on a uniform basis both about the country as a whole and about individual small areas and sub-groups of the population in relation to one another.<sup>5</sup>

It is this availability of local level data which is the main advantage of the census over alternative data sources.

An ONS factsheet provides further information on the uses of different types of census data:

**Population** – an accurate count of the population in each local area helps central government to calculate the size of grants it allocates each local authority and health authority. In turn, these authorities use census information when planning services within their areas.

**Housing** – a count of the various types of dwelling and of the people in them helps planners to identify inadequate accommodation and assess the demand for new housing.

**Employment** – the census shows how many people work in different occupations and industries throughout the country, helping government and businesses to plan jobs and training policies and to make informed investment decisions.

**Transport** – information collected on travel to and from work, and on the availability of cars, contributes to the planning of roads and public transport.

**Health** – data on general health, long-term illness and provision of care will enable the Government to plan health and social services and allocate resources to best effect.

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<sup>5</sup> *The 2001 Census of Population* Cm 4253, March 1999 para. 7

**Ethnic group** – data on ethnic groups help to identify the extent and nature of racial disadvantage in Britain and measure the success of equal opportunities policies. The information helps central and local government to allocate resources and plan programmes to take account of the need of minority groups.<sup>6</sup>

The continuing necessity of a census is evaluated in the period between censuses. In 1992, the three UK census offices undertook a full reappraisal of the census. Their conclusions identified a continuing need in both public and private sectors for demographic information and recognised that there were no alternative sources for providing standard local area data across the country.

This is true of the UK, although other countries, for example Finland, obtain census-type information from periodic analyses of central population registers. This approach eradicates the need to send out census forms (which the Finnish Government last did in 1980), but is predicated on the regular collation and interrogation of far more detailed databases than are currently held in the UK.

## **B. Statutory basis and Parliamentary procedure**

The statutory authority for the Census in Great Britain is the *Census Act 1920* (in Northern Ireland, the corresponding legislation is the *Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969*). Section 1 of the act permits the laying of an Order in Council directing that a census be taken and detailing its contents. Section 3 permits the laying of Regulations, detailing the procedures for undertaking the census and containing copies of the census forms. The schedule to the Act lists the topics on which the census may collect information.

The original statutory instruments for the 2001 Census – the *Census Order 2000*<sup>7</sup> and the *Census Regulations 2000*<sup>8</sup> – were made in March 2000 and June 2000 respectively. Subsequently, the *Census (Amendment) Act 2000* amended the Census Act to permit the inclusion of a question on religion. Amendments to the statutory instruments were included in the *Census (Amendment) Order 2000*<sup>9</sup> and the *Census (Amendment) Regulations 2000*<sup>10</sup> to include a question on religion.

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<sup>6</sup> Office for National Statistics, Census Factsheet 2, *Why we need a census*

<sup>7</sup> SI 2000/744

<sup>8</sup> SI 2000/1473

<sup>9</sup> SI 2000/3249

<sup>10</sup> SI 2000/3351

## **II Census Content**

### **A. A brief history of census topics**

In the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the coverage of the census was limited. Completed by parish clergy and overseers of the poor, the first censuses recorded information only on the number of inhabited and uninhabited houses, the number of persons by sex, and four classes of occupation. By the 1841 census coverage had expanded to include age, birthplace and nationality.

Subsequently, coverage has increased steadily, with growing user needs providing the demand for more topics and more detailed classifications, and improved enumeration methods and processing technology providing the means. Key additions to the census topics since 1841 include:

- In 1851, a detailed classification of occupations which has formed the basis of official measures of social class ever since.
- In 1871, economic status.
- In 1891 (in Wales), a question on Welsh language.
- In 1901, number of rooms in a dwelling.
- In 1911, industry of employment.
- In 1921, place of work.
- In 1931, place of usual residence (as opposed to residence on the night of the census).
- In 1951, household amenities.
- In 1961, qualifications; migration.
- In 1966, car ownership; travel to work.
- In 1991, ethnic group; limiting long-standing illness.

New questions for 2001 are considered in a separate selection below. Appendix A provides more details on the topics covered by each census since 1801.

### **B. Selecting census topics**

The 2001 Census form contains 41 questions, with an additional 42<sup>nd</sup> question in Wales. Seven of these are new to the census (and are discussed in section C below), the remainder were included in the 1991 Census. Around 25 other new topics were considered for inclusion, but subsequently rejected after consultation with users. These include questions on income; age and valuation of dwellings; disability; annual travel; and access to private education, insurance and pensions.<sup>11</sup>

The selection of topics depends on a number of factors, and is considered through consultation with a wide spectrum of users in central and local government, health authorities, academia, business and others with particular interests or concerns. While there are a number of core topics – number of households, number of people, usual address, age and sex – most topics require the

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<sup>11</sup> *The 2001 Census of Population*, Cm 4253, March 1999 para 111.

submission of a business case by users stating how they would use census data. These cases are then assessed against three key criteria:

- **Public acceptability:** where a question may be seen by respondents as overly intrusive its inclusion can reduce response rates for the census as a whole, undermining the comprehensive coverage which the census is intended to produce. Moreover, each additional question lengthens the census form and increases the likelihood of non-completion or inaccurate completion. Risk to overall response rates was cited by ONS as the main reason for not including a question on income.<sup>12</sup>
- **Reliability of results:** it is not always possible to phrase a question which will produce results which are reliable enough to meet users' needs. Disability, for example, means different things to different people and two people with the same level of functional disability might respond to a question in different ways.
- **Availability of alternative data sources:** some topics not covered by the census are covered by one or more other Government surveys which, in some cases, will provide data adequate for users' needs. Surveys allow follow-up questions and can provide data which is more tightly focused on a particular topic; they may, therefore, produce data which is more suitable than that which could be provided by a census.

### C. Topics in the 2001 Census

Appendix B summarises the topics that will be covered by the 2001 Census. Copies of the full census forms are available from the National Statistics website.<sup>13</sup>

The majority of the topics were covered by the 1991 Census. Significant additions are outlined below. Also, additional information will be recorded on the relationships between all members of a household. Whereas previously only the relationship between the head and second member of a household was recorded, new information will enable the mapping of more complex household structures.

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<sup>12</sup> Office for National Statistics, *Income Data for Small Areas*, September 1999

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/nsbase/countmein/form.html>

## 1. New topics

### a. Religion.

#### What is your religion?

◆ This question is voluntary.

◆ Tick one box only.

None

Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)

Buddhist

Hindu

Muslim

Sikh

Jewish

Any other religion, *please write in*

The inclusion of a question on religion is permitted by the *Census (Amendment) Act 2000*. The Act amends the *Census Act 1920* to add religion to the list of topics about which questions can be asked. 2001 will be the first time religion has been covered by the census in Great Britain, although the 1851 Census included a count of religious buildings and attendance. A question on religion has been asked in Northern Ireland since 1971.

The Census White Paper described the usefulness of a question on religion in terms of supplementing ethnic data to identify ethnic minority sub-groups, particularly from south Asia.<sup>14</sup> The Department for Environment, Transport and the Regions will use the data for regeneration policy; the Department for Education and Employment will use the data for policy development and identifying disadvantage and educational priorities; the Department of Health will study health indicators and inequalities; the Home Office will carry out ethnic monitoring and add value to its race relations research programme.<sup>15</sup>

Further information on the religious question and the debate over its voluntary nature is in House of Commons Library research paper 2000/43, *Census (Amendment) Bill*.

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<sup>14</sup> *The 2001 Census of Population*, Cm 4253, March 1999 para 64.

<sup>15</sup> Office for National Statistics, personal communication

**b. General health.**

**Over the last twelve months would you say your health has on the whole been:**

- Good?  
 Fairly good?  
 Not good?

While this may appear a vague, subjective question, survey results have shown that it is valuable in predicting the need for health and personal care services.

**c. Provision of unpaid care.**

**Do you look after, or give any help or support to family members, friends, neighbours or others because of:**

- long-term physical or mental ill-health or disability
- problems related to old age?
- ◆ Do *not* count anything you do as part of your paid employment.
- ◆ Tick time spent in a typical week.

- No  
 Yes, 1-19 hours a week  
 Yes, 20-49 hours a week  
 Yes, 50+ hours a week

This question is included in an attempt to gauge the level of informal care provision. It will identify providers of care rather than recipients, and will be used to identify additional needs for social services.

**d. Time since last employment.**

**Have you ever worked?**

- Yes, please write in the year you last worked.  
 No, have never worked.

This question is included to assess patterns in duration of unemployment. Its results will assess the planning of education and training, the allocation of resources, and studies relating mortality and ill-health to unemployment.

*e. Supervisor status and size of employing organisation.*

**Do (did) you supervise any other employees?**

A supervisor or foreman is responsible for overseeing the work of other employees on a day-to-day basis.

Yes

No

**How many people work (worked) for your employer at the place where you work (worked)?**

If you are (were) self-employed, show how many people you employ (employed).

1-9

10-24

25-499

500 or more

These two questions are proposed to inform development of the Government's new measure of "social class", the National Statistics Socio-Economic Classification (NS-SEC). Whereas the former measure, Registrar-General's Social Class, was based almost solely on occupation this new measure involves classification by supervisory status and size of employing organisation as well.

## **2. The revised ethnic question**

An ethnic question was included in the census for the first time in 1991. The question, based on self-defined ethnic group, was seen as a success by the ONS and its categorisation of ethnic groups has become the standard for official surveys such as the *Labour Force Survey*, the *General Household Survey* and the *Family Resources Survey*. The data provided on ethnic groups has enabled public authorities to take account of the needs of different ethnic groups in service planning and delivery and has provided a baseline against which future changes in the socio-economic position of people from different ethnic groups can be measured.

The question on ethnicity is being revised to enable new ethnic groups to be identified. First the "White" ethnic group will be subdivided into "British", "Irish" and "other". This reflects pressure from Irish community groups and the Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) to identify the particular circumstances of people of Irish origin. The CRE's survey of the Irish population in Britain recommended that "an Irish category should be included in all forms of ethnic monitoring, including Census ethnic categories, which have a major influence on the practice of other bodies".<sup>16</sup> Second, greater information will be provided on people of mixed ethnic groups to meet users' requirements. Third, people will be able to describe themselves as "Black British" or "Asian British" something which ONS believe will prove more acceptable to some respondents and may improve response rates.

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<sup>16</sup> Commission for Racial Equality *Discrimination and the Irish Community in Britain* (p.235) June 1997

The question in 2001 will ask:

**What is your ethnic group?**

Choose one section from (a) to (e) then tick the appropriate box to indicate your cultural background.

**a) White**

- British  
 Irish  
 Any other White background

*please write in*

.....

**b) Mixed**

- White and Black Caribbean  
 White and Black African  
 White and Asian  
 Any other mixed background

*please write in*

.....

**c) Asian or Asian British**

- Indian  
 Pakistani  
 Bangladeshi  
 Any other Asian background

*please write in*

.....

**d) Black or Black British**

- Caribbean  
 African  
 Any other Black background

*please write in*

.....

**e) Chinese or Other ethnic group**

- Chinese  
 Any other

*please write in*

.....

**a. Welsh ethnicity**

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the 2001 Census so far has been the lack of a tick box for a Welsh ethnic group. People who would describe themselves as Welsh can tick the “any other white background” box and write in “Welsh” underneath. The majority of published Census results will be based upon coding of the tick boxes and will, therefore, show white Welsh residents as “white-British”, “white-Irish” or “white-other”. However, ONS will be producing a more detailed set of ethnic group tabulations at local authority, national and UK level. These will include information drawn from the written responses of people ticking the “white-other” box and will provide a count of the number of people describing themselves as Welsh.

The arguments for a Welsh tick box reflect the political and cultural importance of the census. Identification of a cultural group in the census adds to the political weight of that group and can allow its members to express clearly their identity. Speaking for Plaid Cymru in the National

Assembly, Ieuan Wyn Jones AM MP argued that it was a fundamental human right for people to express their identity and that the census should cater for people who wish to do so:

All Assembly Members will accept that being classified as ‘Other’ on the census form has led to widespread anger in Wales. We have seen an unprecedented unity on this issue. We all agree that Welshness is not a question of ethnicity. Anyone who lives in Wales and regards themselves as belonging here should be able to mark themselves as ‘Welsh’, if they wish to do so. I can think of many examples of people from Asian or African ethnic origin who may want to describe their cultural background as Welsh. They are entitled to do so. However, the census does not cater for them. There is also a clear implication on the form, as it stands, that to be British is to be white. The dangers of that were highlighted in the recent Runnymede Trust report, ‘The Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain’.

No claims of nationality or identity should be exclusive. Many people can and do have a sense of belonging to more than one group. This should be recognised and encouraged. It is Wales’s cultural diversity that gives it its energy and distinctiveness. It is a matter of fundamental human rights that people can choose how they want to express their identity.<sup>17</sup>

The CRE has also noted that “there was a strong case for having tick-boxes for all the four (British Isles) countries”.<sup>18</sup>

The Government maintains that no such case was made during the consultation period, and that when the issue was raised during the summer of 2000 it was too late to amend the census forms. Consultees in Wales included the former Welsh Office, the 22 local government authorities, health authorities and other public bodies such as the Welsh Language Board. Speaking in an adjournment debate at Westminster, Melanie Johnson, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, described the process of consultation and Parliamentary scrutiny in greater detail:

The census questions in Wales have been subject to comprehensive public consultation and parliamentary scrutiny. Let me loiter for a moment over some of the dates contained within the consultation period. Consultation began in June 1998 when the United Kingdom census committee considered a paper including recommendations on the content of the 2001 census.

The draft White Paper was published on 18 December 1998, but work was done before that. On 30 March 1999, the Welsh census user network group met, and that meeting was attended by representatives of the ONS, 22 Welsh local authorities, health authorities, national park authorities and other public sector services such as the police. The White Paper proposals were discussed, but issues were raised only in relation to the religion and income questions.

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<sup>17</sup> National Assembly for Wales Report of Proceedings, 5 December 2000 pp84-111

<sup>18</sup> Cited in “Welsh roars of protest as census ignores a nation”, *The Independent*, 10 January 2001

Several public roadshows were held. At a meeting in Cardiff, 46 representatives of the census user community included those from the councils of Caerphilly, Carmarthen, City of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot. The issue of ethnic group categories was not raised. On 22 April, a public roadshow meeting held at Mold was attended by a further 34 representatives, including those from Gwynedd council. On 25 April, a census rehearsal was held at 15,000 households. The hon. Gentleman smiles, having realised that that took place not just in Gwynedd but in Ceredigion. Contrary to what he said, the ONS was not made aware of any evidence of concern about the wording relating to ethnic group. If the matter was contentious in any way, it was not raised as a result of the extensive census rehearsal. We are not, I know, concerned only with the hon. Gentleman's constituency tonight, but about 25 per cent. of the total households there were involved in that exercise.

A further meeting was held last July with the National Assembly for Wales to discuss the output requirements. Again, the question was not raised. On 26 July 1999, there were discussions between several parties, including the Welsh Language Board, which was also involved in discussions held in January 2000. I appreciate that the hon. Gentleman was not yet a Member of Parliament at that point, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Mr. Rogers) said, a notable member of the hon. Gentleman's party was then president of the Welsh Language Board, and, although his concentration may well have been focused on the Welsh language, he was in an ideal position to make any representations had this been a burning topic. So far as I am aware, no such representations were made.

The hon. Gentleman was elected to the House in February 2000. As my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda made clear, census regulations were laid before Parliament several months later--in June. The hon. Member for Ceredigion observed that, because people did not shout about these matters from Wales, the situation did not reflect what might be a sensitive issue for some there. I do not think that it would be regarded as such by all on the same basis; but let us assume that some Welsh representatives might well have wanted to shout about it--including, I have to say, the hon. Gentleman, who did not shout on 6 June when the census regulations were laid before the House.<sup>19</sup>

The debate has been fuelled by the inclusion of "white-Scottish" tick box in the Scottish census as approved by the Scottish Parliament through *The Census (Scotland) Amendment Order 2000*<sup>20</sup>. It is worth noting that the inclusion of a Scottish tick box was more of an afterthought than the product of arguments in favour of it. The ethnic group question initially proposed for Scotland was identical to the question used in 1991. That is, unlike the question proposed for England & Wales, it did not identify "Irish" as a specific ethnicity. In considering the draft order the Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee in particular criticised this and two other cultural omissions from the Scottish census: religion and use of Scots language. Very little mention was made of Scottish ethnicity during debates on the draft census order in either the Equal Opportunity Committee<sup>21</sup> or the Parliamentary debate<sup>22</sup>. Rather the issue was raised by the

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<sup>19</sup> HC Deb 30 October 2000 c584

<sup>20</sup> SSI 2000/172

<sup>21</sup> Scottish Parliament Equal Opportunities Committee Official Report 8 February 2000 c301-28

Registrar-General for Scotland in his consultation on religion and ethnicity<sup>23</sup>, where he noted that it would be “odd” to identify an Irish ethnic group without also identifying a Scottish ethnic group.

While maintaining that the census forms cannot now be changed, the Government has taken two steps to attempt to improve the scope for expression of Welsh identity. A £½ million advertising campaign will alert people in Wales to the option of writing in Welsh as an ethnic group. In addition, there will be an expansion and enhancement of the quarterly Labour Force Survey in Wales funded by the National Assembly for Wales.<sup>24</sup> From March-May 2001, the survey will ask specific questions about Welsh ethnicity and identity, and an increase in the sample size for Wales will enable results to be produced at unitary authority level. For some, this indicates that the Government has accepted the validity of campaigners’ demands without meeting them in full. Barry Jones of the Welsh Governance Centre at Cardiff University notes of the Government’s position:

They’ve got the worst of both worlds, because they’ve conceded the moral ground in agreeing to a series of concessions without satisfying the demand for a tick box.<sup>25</sup>

#### **D. Comparing the three censuses**

The census forms for England & Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland will be in large part identical. The differences between them are noted below.<sup>26</sup>

- **Household accommodation questions:** In Scotland, there is an additional question on whether accommodation is provided furnished or unfurnished. In Northern Ireland, there is an additional question on the number of floors in a dwelling.
- **Religion question:** Religion is asked about in more detail in both Scotland and Northern Ireland. In Northern Ireland, an introductory question asks “do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?” In both countries, there are two questions asking about the religion, religious body or denomination which people a) belong to and b) were brought up in. Both countries also provide tick boxes distinguishing between different denominations of Christianity: these specify Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic and other in Scotland, and Roman Catholic, Presbyterian, Church of Ireland, Methodist and other in Northern Ireland.
- **Ethnic group question:** In Northern Ireland, there is a single tick box for the white ethnic group, with no distinction between British and Irish. There are no tick boxes for different types of mixed ethnicity, and an additional tick box for Irish travellers. In Scotland, there is an additional tick box for white-Scottish.

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<sup>22</sup> Scottish Parliament Official Report 16 February 2000 c1074-1122

<sup>23</sup> Letter of 25 February 2000

<sup>24</sup> Office for National Statistics News Release 25 October 2000 *Package to improve Welsh household statistics*

<sup>25</sup> Cited in “Census issue may ‘haunt’ Labour”, *Western Mail*, 3 November 2000

<sup>26</sup> ONS, GROS, NISRA *Census News 44*, December 2000 pp 27-8

### III Conducting the census

In total across the UK, the 2001 census is expected to cost around £255m. This sum covers the whole 13-year cycle, from the start of planning in 1993 to the completion of publication of results in 2006.<sup>27</sup>

#### A. Delivering and completing the forms

For the census, England and Wales is divided into around 115,000 small areas known as enumeration districts. Each enumeration district contains an average of around 200 households. A team of some 63,000 enumerators is responsible for ensuring that all dwellings (whether occupied or not) are identified in their district, and for delivering census forms to each household. Enumerators will begin delivering forms around three weeks before census day (April 29<sup>th</sup>) and will attempt to contact each householder while doing so.

Some have noted the scope for confusion if census day were to coincide with a general election campaign for a May 3<sup>rd</sup> election.<sup>28</sup> There has never been a full census during a general election campaign and there are some concerns that some people may be confused by the coincidence of visits from census enumerators with those from party campaigners.

The door-to-door method of enumeration may also undermine attempts to control the outbreak of foot and mouth disease. Nick Brown, the agriculture minister has stated that “it may be necessary to postpone” the census.<sup>29</sup> This would require new secondary legislation, as the census date as specified in the respective Orders for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Press reports also suggest that postponement would entail the reprinting of 32 million census forms, a process which could take four months.<sup>30</sup>

Completing the census form is a statutory obligation under the *Census Act 1920*, and householders who do not complete it face prosecution and a fine of up to £1,000. The question on religion, however, is voluntary. This is stated on the front of the census form and in the text of the question itself.

In practice, around 2% of the population did not complete the 1991 Census. This would not be a significant problem if underenumeration were spread evenly between population groups (it could be assumed that those not enumerated shared the characteristics of those who were). However, certain groups are more likely to be underenumerated:

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<sup>27</sup> Office for National Statistics, Census Factsheet 1, *The census*

<sup>28</sup> See, for example, “Census is factor in choice of April 5 or March 3 poll day”, *The Guardian*, February 23 2001

<sup>29</sup> HC Deb 28 February 2001 c925

<sup>30</sup> “Ministers may delay census”, *The Guardian*, 29 February 2001

- **young people** (aged 20 to 29) particularly in inner cities. Reasons include difficulties in access and identification because of lifestyle and multi-occupied accommodation;
- **babies** are often left off census forms when they are still in hospital;
- **the elderly**, where reasons include difficulties in filling out the form and reluctance to answer the door to enumerators;
- **students**, for whom there is confusion as to whether they are resident at their parents' or term-time address; and
- **ethnic minorities**, who may be suspicious of the census process and may face language difficulties.<sup>31</sup>

A programme to minimise underenumeration includes:

- community liaison work – ONS have worked with organisations representing the elderly, ethnic communities, faith groups and people with disabilities. The intention is that these organisations will reassure community members about the purpose of the census and offer help in form completion;
- the census publicity campaign – the multimedia “count me in” campaign stresses the importance of the census, focussing on groups less likely to be involved in the census;
- counting special population groups – arrangements are in hand to ensure that difficult to count groups – including HM forces, students, rough sleepers, refugees and asylum seekers – are enumerated.

## **B. Processing the results and the “one number census”**

Once the census forms have been posted back or collected by enumerators, the processing of data begins. The forms will be scanned onto microfilm and subsequently destroyed. Processing is expected to last until March 2002. Advances in image recognition technology will improve the speed and accuracy of the coding of data. This means that it will be possible to base all results on 100% coding whereas in previous censuses some results were based on a 10% sample.

Concurrently, during May-June 2001, the level of enumeration achieved will be measured through a census coverage survey involving interviews with 300,000 households. The survey will cover all households in a selection of postcodes. The responses to the survey are compared with the results of the census to provide an estimate of undercounting and to identify the characteristics of those not enumerated.

By combining the results of the census itself with the findings from the coverage survey, ONS plan to produce a “one number census” with a single population database for the entire population. This will ensure that all results from the census are consistent with each other and that they cover all individuals – whether enumerated or not. The process involves complex statistical techniques, but in brief will involve “imputing” the characteristics of the non-

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<sup>31</sup> Office for National Statistics, Census factsheet 4, *Counting everyone in – the big challenge*

enumerated population using the findings of the coverage survey and adding them to the database of census results.

### **C. Disseminating the results**

The first results from the census are expected to be published in late summer 2002. These will cover populations by age and sex for local authority areas. Subsequent releases over the following year will include summary statistics for the UK as a whole, small area statistics and reports on topic themes such as the labour market and health. Dissemination will be largely electronic, making use of the internet.<sup>32</sup>

Section 4(1) of the *Census Act 1920* also requires the laying of printed census reports before Parliament. As a result of devolution, this requirement only applies to the respective legislatures of the three census offices, so ONS are required only to lay reports relating to England and Wales before Parliament. In practice, however, co-ordination between the census offices will enable the production and laying of similar results for Great Britain and the UK.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Office for National Statistics, Census Factsheet 5, *The census organisation*

<sup>33</sup> *The 2001 Census of Population*, Cm 4253, March 1999 para 157.

## Appendix A: Topic coverage of the Census, 1841-2001

Question topic	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911	1921	1931	1951	1961	1966	1971	1981	1991	2001
Age	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sex	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Marital status		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Birthplace	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Nationality	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓					
Ethnic group																✓	✓
<b>Religion<sup>(a)</sup></b>		✓															✓
Usual residence										✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Economic position				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Occupation	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Industry									✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Time since last employment</b>																	✓
Qualifications												✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Size of workforce</b>																	✓
<b>Supervisor status</b>																	✓
Place of work									✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Journey to work													✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fertility								✓			✓	✓		✓			
Marriage duration								✓			✓	✓		✓			
Car availability													✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Infirmity		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓									✓
<b>General health</b>																	✓
<b>Provision of unpaid personal care</b>																	✓
Limiting long-standing illness																✓	✓
Dwellings (number)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rooms (number)							✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Tenure												✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
<b>Lowest floor level of accommodation</b>																	✓
Household amenities										✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: Based on a table in the *1991 Census User's Guide* (Table 1.2, Page 12).

✓ Topic first included in the census.

a) Covered in 1851 by a count of religious buildings and church attendance.

✓ Topic included in the census.

## Appendix B: Topics covered in the 2001 Census

### Section 1: Usual residents

- Name of each person usually resident at the address

### Section 2: Visitors

- Name and usual address of any visitors

### Section 3: Household questions

- Type of accommodation
- Whether accommodation is self-contained
- Number of rooms
- Sole use of bath/shower and toilet
- Lowest floor level of accommodation
- Central heating
- Car/van ownership
- Tenure

### Section 4: Household relationships

- Relationship between each person in the household

### Section 5: Individual questions

- Sex
- Date of birth
- Marital status
- Migration – address one year ago
- Country of birth
- Ethnic group
- Religion
- Welsh language ability (Wales only)
- Limiting long-term illness
- General health
- Provision of care
- Academic and vocational qualifications
- Professional qualifications
- Economic activity in past week
- Time since last employment
- Employed/self-employed
- Size of work force at place of work
- Job title in current or last job
- Supervisory responsibilities
- Employer's business
- Name of employer
- Address of work place
- Method of travel to work
- Usual weekly working hours

## Appendix C: Further reading

### The White Paper on the Census

*The 2001 Census of Population* (Cm 4253), March 1999

### Census forms

For England & Wales, in the *Census (Amendment) Regulations 2000*.<sup>34</sup>

For Scotland, in the *Census (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2000*.<sup>35</sup>

For Northern Ireland, in the *Census (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2000*.<sup>36</sup>

### Census information from the Census Organisations

Office for National Statistics: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/nsbase/countmein/index.html>

General Register Office (Scotland): <http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/grosweb/grosweb.nsf/pages/censushm>

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency: <http://www.nisra.gov.uk>

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<sup>34</sup> SI 2000/3351

<sup>35</sup> SSI 2000/194

<sup>36</sup> SR 2000/198