



2011 Census update: United Kingdom

Census day in the UK was Sunday 27 March 2011. The collection model for the 2011 Census in England and Wales and Northern Ireland was a post-out/post-back model but there was fieldwork follow-up which took place from 6 April to 8 May. The post out/post back was based on a complete address list of all dwellings and communal establishments and this address list was built as part of the Census programme, by merging a number of household lists and carrying out an on-the-ground check (15 per cent of addresses in England and Wales, and a full check in Northern Ireland). One initiative for the 2011 Census was that questionnaires were bar coded and there was a questionnaire tracking system that enabled the follow-up of non-response. In Scotland, the more traditional hand delivery of census forms by enumerators was adopted, but the questionnaires were mailed back.

Fieldwork for the Census Coverage Survey (CCS) in England and Wales of around 350,000 addresses (1.5 per cent) to assess coverage, started in May and finished in June 2011. The follow-up fieldwork also included the non-compliance interviews of those people who persistently refused to complete a questionnaire. Prosecutions against a number of people who refused to make a return have taken place, and as at 1 February 2012, some 148 such prosecutions have been completed. Similar, parallel processes, proportionate to population size, were carried out in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

The fieldwork was helped by very successful, but separate advertising campaigns in England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, and the TV advertisement came top of an advertising industry poll for best recall – scoring higher even than Britain’s leading supermarkets. Press coverage during the fieldwork was generally positive, especially in the regional media. There were no significant national campaigns aimed at encouraging non-compliance. Support from local authorities and community groups, religious organisations, voluntary organisations etc had a positive impact both in press coverage, support and the completion events arranged to offer help in completing the questionnaire.

There were no system failures or major crises during the fieldwork. The online completion system held up very well and received universally positive feedback on the usability of the online census questionnaire. Furthermore, an online self-help system coped very well with a large volume of calls - some 1.3 million general queries and 1 million sensitive help queries - especially around Census Day. This was the first time that an online return facility was provided in the UK and it worked well, although in the take up in England and Wales (at 16 per cent of returns) and in Scotland (19 per cent) was below expectations. Response in Northern Ireland (at around 15 per cent of all returns) was at the level that had been anticipated there.

Final census response rates cannot be estimated until the results of the CCS have been assessed and the adjusted counts quality assured. Early indications are that the UK targets of a response rate of 94 per cent nationally and over 80 per cent in every local authority will be achieved. The CCS was a voluntary survey and this achieved an excellent response rate (being over 90 per cent in England and Wales). Across London, the estimated Census response rate in most boroughs is between 5 and 15 percentage points better than in 2001, and across the capital as a whole a response rate of over 90 per cent is anticipated. The

strategy of putting more staff into the hardest-to-count areas appears to have been successful.

Data capture (scanning and coding) is now complete, and currently the Census and CCS responses are being matched in order to produce population estimates that are adjusted for under- and over-coverage. The first census results for England and Wales and for Northern Ireland (age/sex population estimates for local authorities) are planned to be published in the summer 2012. Subsequent tranches of release in Scotland, and the more detailed univariate and multivariate analyses and small area data for the UK, will follow over a period of around 12 months or more. The estimated resident population of the UK is around 62 million.

The total cost of the Census is forecast to be around £500 million (\$800 million) – in line with expectations. With a mind to reducing future costs, the UK has started a programme of work to assess the viability of alternative data sources, including the use of data from linked administrative registers, a rolling census, and other options, for the purposes of producing more regular socio-demographic statistics without having to undertake a traditional full field enumeration. Recommendations on the best option for the 2021 Census will be presented to the UK Parliament in 2014.

More information about the Census in England and Wales, and links to information about the Census in Scotland and Northern Ireland can be found at;

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/the-2011-census/index.html>