

The future of demographic statistics - the UKSA Board perspective

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Focus of the session

- Vital place of demographic statistics in the life of the nations. Decision making, research and analysis, culture and identity. It's 'who we are'
- So the future of the system....massively important
- Aim of this session: to share the UK Statistics Authority Board's perspective
- It covers the Census Recommendation, but the future (and present) is more than the Census.
- NB: Recommendation has been published. Government not yet responded.

The role of the UK Statistics Authority



The Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007 established the Authority with the statutory objective of **promoting and safeguarding the production and publication of official statistics that serve the public good**



The Authority is made up of the **Board**, a **production arm (the Office for National Statistics)** and a **regulatory arm (The Office for Statistics Regulation)**



Board members are responsible for **oversight and challenge of both arms of the Authority.** (The National Statistician of course also leads the Government Statistical Service).

Some key milestones on the journey

- 2014: UK Govt said 2021 to be last Census (as we know it)
- 2021: Decennial Census (Scotland 2022)
- 2023 (June-Oct) – ONS Consultation on the future of population and migration stats
- Spring 2024 – we *expected* to publish recommendation...but General Election announced
- Jan 2025 Statistics Assembly – as proposed by Lievesley
- June 2025: Recommendation published

Context for the Board:

- The 'historical' context of an expectation that 2021 Census would be the last 'traditional Census'
- ONS conducted a successful 2021 Census in E&W
- ONS has been continuously developing and investing in improving population and migration statistics using admin data and has had real success
- Equally, clear from consultation with users that they get the potential benefits, but concern about maturity, and whether 'admin based Census' could deliver enough and in time.

The Board's criteria for evaluating decision on the future:

- Plans to be supported by users as meeting core user needs
- Flexible and resilient enough to respond at pace to future and emerging user needs
- Methods + approaches are peer-reviewed and compliant with relevant legislative and ethical considerations. Plans accepted by the public

In practice, the Board's questions/issues:

- Flow of admin data: secure? reliable? sufficient quality?
- Providing information on characteristics and sections of population not well covered in admin data
- The need for info by relatively small geographic areas
- Importance of coherence in estimates across the UK
- Future needs of family and social historians

Population and migration statistics recommendation

Recommendation 1: an England and Wales census in 2031

The Authority recommends that: the UK Government commission and resource the ONS to conduct a mandatory questionnaire-based census of the whole population and housing for England and Wales in 2031. This census should support coherent UK outputs and maximise the benefits from the ONS's work with administrative data to date, enabling further delivery of such benefits in the future.

Population and migration statistics recommendation

Recommendation 2: continue to resource administrative-based population and migration statistics

The Authority recommends that: the UK Government commission and resource the ONS to develop statistical outputs using administrative data which provide more frequent estimates and are inclusive in representing society. This should include an administrative-based census of the population.

Population and migration statistics recommendation

Recommendation 3: commit to the flow of critical administrative data

The Authority recommends that: the UK and Welsh Governments provide a commitment to the regular, reliable and ongoing flow of the critical administrative datasets required, ensuring that data owners deliver on that commitment, and invest in the required improvements to those sources and address the known points of friction that prevent data transfer.

In summary

- The Authority Board endorses the National Statistician's advice on the future development of population and migration in England and Wales
- The Board believes that this recommendation is aligned with the needs expressed by a wide range of users.
- The census in 2031 will combine the strength of census and admin data, by commissioning a questionnaire-based census and committing to commissioning and resourcing the ONS to develop statistical outputs using admin-data which provide more frequent estimates and are inclusive in representing society

Looking forward..

- Recommendation is the easy bit...mobilisation, topics, extent of use of admin data in the Census
- Further user engagement – eg on topics
- The Authority proposes to establish a focused sub-committee of the Board, with a remit to advise the Board regularly on progress on the full breadth of the population statistics system
- And just a reminder - the power to call a census sits with the government

Thank you

