

Date: 9 December 2020

Time: 2:00pm

Location: Virtually via Zoom

Present	Dr David Marshall (Chair) Sandy Fitzpatrick Siobhan Carey Dr Daniel McConville Dr John Power Prof Adele Marshall Aidan Campbell Colin McIlheney Dr Dermot O'Reilly Michael Gallagher Dr Ian Shuttleworth Jahnet Brown Prof David Martin Virginia McVea Tony Dignan	NISRA, Director of Census and Population Statistics NISRA, Head of Census NISRA Chief Executive and Registrar General NISRA Census Office Research & Information Service, NI Assembly Queens University Rural Community Network PricewaterhouseCoopers Queens' University Derry & Strabane Council School of Natural and Built Environment, Queen's University NI Housing Executive University of Southampton NI Electoral Office Economic Research & Evaluation
Secretary	Mark Hunter	NISRA Census Office
Apologies	Simon Hookham Dr Esmond Birnie Christine Robinson	Equality Commission for NI Ulster University Belfast City Council

1. Welcome and apologies

Dr Marshall welcomed members and invited Siobhan Carey, NISRA Chief Executive and Registrar General to open the meeting. Siobhan also welcomed members and acknowledged the huge amount of work that has been undertaken already in preparation for Census 2021. Siobhan recorded her appreciation to members for the time they have taken to provide input into the project. Siobhan noted that the Census is a collective team effort and members were thanked for the significant contributions they have made.

2. Introductions

Karly Greene has now left NI Housing Executive and her place on DSAG has been taken by Jahnet Brown who was invited by Dr Marshall to introduce herself to members.

3. Minutes from previous meeting/Action Points

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 17 January 2020 were agreed without amendment.

Dr Marshall explained that the Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) are the regulatory arm of the UK Statistics Authority. OSR are interested in the work of DSAG to support the 2021 Census and review the published minutes from DSAG meetings. Permission was sought from members to publish papers from the meeting today in advance of the official minute of the meeting, given OSR interest, and this was agreed.

There were no outstanding Action Points from previous meetings.

4. Northern Ireland 2021 Census – update

Sandy Fitzpatrick gave a detailed update on the Northern Ireland 2021 Census.

2019 Rehearsal Evaluation – this was carried out in two parts. There was the operational phase where testing took place of systems, services, technology, management information and the wave of contact method. In addition, there was a data processing rehearsal which is still ongoing.

The Rehearsal covered 19,000 households in parts of Belfast, Craigavon and South West Fermanagh. The response rate was 50% of which approximately two thirds were submitted online. Of these online returns, over half were submitted on a mobile device.

There were a number of key learning points which has shaped the final design for 2021 census. A key finding was that the address check found only a small number of additional addresses. It had been planned to complete a universal address check in the 2021 Census. However, given the limited value of the address check during rehearsal, improvements in the address register and restrictions related to the Covid-19 pandemic, a new desk based approach to address quality assurance was adapted during 2020. This was carried out by the entire Census Office team. The desk address check was supported through the development of an in house software tool to review existing and new addresses. Census Area Managers have carried out a detailed review of new developments within their areas to assess if they are occupied or are likely to be occupied by Census Day. Sandy ended by informing members that the Rehearsal Evaluation Report has been published on the NISRA website.

In response to a question from Virginia McVeigh, Sandy gave a detailed explanation of the address check work and additional addresses found. There has been a heavy investment in the Quality Assurance of the addresses register as it is the key building block of Census 2021.

2021 Legislation Order and Regulations - The Census Order was approved by the Assembly on 5 May 2020 and came into force on 6 May 2020. The Census Regulations

were made on 23 June 2020 and came into operation on 17 July 2020. This included the questions to be asked in 2021 and included the versions to be asked in Irish and Ulster Scots.

Published Papers - A question on Armed Forces veterans was included in the 2019 census rehearsal. In parallel Census Office held focus groups to establish the views of local veterans to the proposed question. This work has shown that such a question would not be acceptable to local veterans. Further work evaluating the responses to the rehearsal question alongside administrative data from the MoD has shown the veterans question was not answered accurately in the Rehearsal. NISRA plan to produce a separate report describing the position taken on the Armed Forces question in the 2021 Census. The policy position is that census type statistics on veterans will be published by linking administrative data on veterans to the data collected in the census returns.

Sandy also reported that an independent information assurance review, OSR review and definitions document have been published.

Output Consultation – NISRA has considered the responses provided by users against the following criteria: accessibility and flexibility, timeliness, user acceptability and public confidence. NISRA will continue to consider how best to deliver a flexible dissemination system, bearing in mind feedback received. In relation to Geography, there was a mixed response to the consultation. Therefore, the plan is to investigate a dual geography outputs approach and further engagement with service users can be expected when this work is progressed.

NISRA will endeavour to publish results as soon as they are available and robustly quality assured. The provision of a flexible dissemination tool may also speed up the release of 2021 Census data, however, it is important to note that the COVID-19 pandemic may impact our ability to release according to the originally proposed timescale.

England and Wales (2021) - full engagement continues on delivering the England and Wales census as planned in spring 2021. NISRA is working closely with ONS and suppliers to make all the preparations necessary.

Scotland (2022) - prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, the Scotland programme for delivering 2021 census was facing a number of challenges. Given the pandemic, National Records Scotland relatively quickly came to the conclusion that delivering a census in 2021 was not achievable. National Records of Scotland then put that recommendation to their Minister with the result that the postponement until 2022 was announced in July. This obviously impacts on all UK outputs and has further wide ranging impacts. The three offices along with the Welsh Government will identify and work through these and aim to keep users informed.

Republic of Ireland (2022) – Central Statistics Office reviewed their position given that their census was a hand deliver and hand collect model that requires a large amount of household interaction. After taking advice from their Chief Medical Officer they took the decision to postpone their 2021 census. Therefore, the Ireland-Northern Ireland joint report, while still planned, will also need to be delayed.

Address Register – a smart address register has been created building in data from a number of sources. This was cutting edge work and a good investment in the NISRA technical infrastructure which will stand NISRA in good stead in the long term for household surveys.

Administrative Data Contingency – this data infrastructure has continued to be developed with plans to use for non-respondent households with data and methodologies being developed and tested. Work is ongoing with ONS and local suppliers to secure additional data.

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions on these updates either verbally or in written form using the “Slido” interaction system that allows for questions to be written down as the meeting progressed.

Dr O’Reilly asked if there were problems envisaged for older people completing the questionnaire online. In response, Sandy provided details of the comprehensive Wave of Contact and explained that 20% of households will receive a paper questionnaire where the household has been identified as containing elderly members or where there is poor broadband connection. This is an area that will be dealt with in more detail later in the Agenda.

A query was made on whether Census Area Managers will be engaging with Local Government Planning departments on occupancy of new housing. Sandy responded by explaining that engagement has taken place with Councils. Each area received Household, Communal Establishment and “unsure” addresses and the feedback received was incorporated into the final Address Register.

Michael Gallagher asked if an early message should go to the community/voluntary sector about the online first approach and that multiple platforms can be used to complete online. It was agreed that engagement will take place before their meeting at the end of February.

Aidan Campbell emphasised broadband difficulties in rural areas and that raising awareness would be a good idea. He will be happy to cascade any Census 2021 related communications.

5. 2021 Census – Content

Dr McConville gave an update on the census questionnaire and online guidance including online demonstrations. There were a number of queries in relation to these areas.

Professor Martin asked what the strategy is for the enumeration of students. Dr Marshall explained that students will be enumerated at both term time and home addresses (with a mechanism to de-duplicate in the post-collection processing). In response to a further question, it was explained that ONS are also approaching student enumeration in this way.

Dr O’Reilly asked why no progress bar existed as he felt that this would be useful as people may get tired and exit the questionnaire. Dr McConville explained that in development a progress bar has been ruled out due to the combinations and permutations of routing online which made it impossible.

Tony Dignan asked why there is no question on the number of bedrooms available for use by a household. Dr McConville explained that Admin Data provides a more accurate answer to this and the intention is to merge LPS data with census information.

Jahnet Brown had a query about questions which may be subject to a pandemic spike e.g. employment with the current furlough and job loss. Dr McConville explained that this subject will be included in online help.

The recent correspondence from Professor Alice Sullivan to DSAG members was discussed. The correspondence covered the implications for data quality of proposed guidance to accompany the sex question in the 2021 Census. Dr Marshall explained the NISRA position that there will be no gender identity question in the 2021 Census and that therefore guidance to the sex question could be similar to the guidance for the question on name (using the concept of official documents). Dr Marshall noted that he would write back to Professor Sullivan in advance of the 2021 Census.

AP – Dr Marshall to write to Professor Sullivan in advance of Census 2021 setting out the NISRA position. In advance of this, DSAG secretariat to write to Professor Sullivan to inform that NISRA will respond.

6. Census 2021 Operations

Dr Marshall gave a presentation including timeline, use of new technology, Field processes/recruitment and Communication, Marketing and Engagement. Following the presentation, there were a number of suggestions and queries.

Colin McIlheney felt that “vox pops” from members of the public stating how quickly and easy it was to complete the questionnaire would be useful. Michael Gallagher asked about plans for census follow-up/reminders and messaging for non-respondents. Siobhan Carey explained that forceful messaging may not help completion rates. In response to a query from Adele Marshall, Sandy Fitzpatrick explained that the online system has been built to handle one million concurrent users in any 1 hour period and the expectation is that online demand can be met.

7. AOB

Dr Marshall asked members for their support in delivering NI Census 2021 and Siobhan Carey brought to meeting to a close by thanking DSAG for their assistance and overview of the Census.

Mark Hunter (Secretary)

January 2021