



House of Commons
Public Administration Select
Committee (PASC)

**Too soon to scrap the
Census**

Fifteenth Report of Session 2013–14

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the Report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 9 April 2014*

The Public Administration Select Committee (PASC)

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Summary

At the start of this Parliament, the Minister for the Cabinet Office indicated the ten-yearly census should be axed and the 2011 census should be the last. The census needs to change, but it is too soon to decide whether or not to scrap the census. Population estimates are of fundamental importance to the statistical system, policy makers and society more widely. The days of the traditional, paper-based census in Britain and elsewhere are numbered. The Government should make better use of its wealth of detailed administrative data which is currently unexploited and which could provide information to improve the nation's knowledge of its population. The National Statistician has recently recommended that there should be a traditional census in 2021, albeit conducted primarily online, but that there should be at the same time greater use of administrative data and surveys. Cabinet Office Minister Francis Maude MP expressed strong doubts about keeping the traditional census, but the Government would be wrong to cancel the 2021 census. The alternative options for the collection of population statistics are not sufficiently advanced to provide a proper replacement. Most of the respondents to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) consultation and our short inquiry agreed that the decennial census should be kept, and we agree. Witnesses emphasised, among other things, the great financial benefits to business provided by census data and these have been quantified. However, the increasing cost and deficiencies of a traditional census must be recognised. The Government must get the highest quality and most granular population statistics out of the information it already holds before we can be sure that there can be, eventually, a full and proper replacement for the traditional census. For this to be delivered will require much more work to be done. We are concerned that the ONS's work on the future of the census has to date been limited and conducted in isolation. We recommend that the ONS now scope and set out a more ambitious vision for the creative and full use of administrative data to provide rich and valuable population statistics, which could potentially be more accurate and up-to-date than the census, and cover new topics. We also recommend that the Government now embark upon a public information campaign to communicate the benefits of increased data sharing for statistical purposes, and the safeguards which will be in place to protect people's personal information and privacy. The Minister's objective of "better, quicker information, more frequently and cheaper" depends upon this. However, these new methods of counting people could be additional to the census, not instead of it.

1 Introduction

Background

1. The census is the most extensive source of demographic and social statistics available in the UK today and is at the heart of the British statistical system. The census provides vital information on the number and characteristics of people and households in the country that is relied upon by Government, Parliament, local authorities, the health service, the education sector, the academic community, business and the public. Regular censuses have taken place every ten years since 1801, with the exception of 1941 during the Second World War. The latest census was carried out in March 2011.

2. Criticisms of the census have long existed, with concerns in recent decades about whether the perceived quality, accessibility and speed of delivery of resulting data has kept up with expectations. Professor David Coleman from Oxford University, in written evidence to the Treasury Select Committee in 2008, wrote “the UK has not had a satisfactory census since 1981”.¹ The Minister for the Cabinet Office, the Rt Hon Francis Maude MP, reported in an article entitled “National Census to be axed after 200 years”, said that “there are ways, I believe, of doing this which will provide better, quicker information, more frequently and cheaper” and that census data was “out of date almost before it has been done.”²

3. The purpose of our short study was to look at the value and benefits of the 2011 census, and consider the options for collecting population data in the future, including those set out by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in their consultation on the future of the census, part of their “Beyond 2011” programme of work.³ The ONS is responsible for the census in England and Wales but similar exercises are carried out independently in Scotland and Northern Ireland.

4. The National Statistician recently published her recommendation about the future of the census: that there should be an online census in 2021, with increased use of administrative data and surveys. Our study, including an evidence session, aimed to inform the current debate about the census. We hope that the ONS will consider our Report as they continue their work on improving population statistics. We held one oral evidence session where we heard from: Professor Jane Falkingham at the University of Southampton; Professor Chris Skinner at the London School of Economics; Professor Les Mayhew from City University; John Pullinger, the President of the Royal Statistical Society; Juliet Whitworth from the Local Government Association; Sarah Henry from Manchester City Council; Piers Elias from Tees Valley Unlimited, who advises several local authorities in the North East; and Keith Dugmore of the Demographics User Group. We did not call for written evidence in advance of the session, given that the ONS’s consultation on the future of the census had

1 Treasury Committee, Eleventh Report of Session 2007-08, HC183-I, Ev191

2 National census to be axed after 200 years, Daily Telegraph, 9 July 2010

3 Office for National Statistics, Beyond 2011 programme

only just closed in December 2013, although some of the witnesses have submitted written evidence after the oral evidence session, which has been published on our website. We have also not sought the comments of Ministers at this stage. They can now consider this report alongside the conclusions of the National Statistician.

5. This study forms part of our wider programme of work on statistics and their use in Government. A full description of these studies is set out on our website at www.parliament.uk/pasc. We are grateful to our Specialist Adviser, Simon Briscoe, for his help with this inquiry and to Dr Diana Tlupova, a secondee to us from the National Audit Office, for her support to this inquiry.

2 Options for the future of the census

6. Every country in the world wants to know the size and characteristics of its population, and the United Nations and other bodies require the data to be collected.⁴ But the detail of what is collected and how it is collected varies considerably between countries. Some have a one-off census at a given moment in time, every five or ten years, or sporadically. Others conduct a census in a different part of the country every year, covering the whole area in rotation. Some predominantly use administrative records including population registers rather than collecting data on forms. Relatively infrequent censuses are supplemented in many countries by sample surveys or other information to derive more frequent, often annual, statistics. The questions asked, methods of data collection and publication details have evolved in the UK but the fundamental core of the country's population estimates—the ten-yearly census—has been unchanged since its inception in 1801.

7. In 2008, the Treasury select committee, which had responsibility for scrutinising statistical matters before this responsibility was transferred to PASC, looked into the adequacy of population statistics in England and Wales.⁵ In their Report, “Counting the population”, they expressed concerns that there were “substantial problems in generating accurate population estimates in some areas during the 2001 census”, and that the 2011 census should be “the last census in the UK where the population is counted through the collection of census forms.”⁶

8. The Science and Technology select committee also looked at the census in 2012. Their inquiry considered “the use of data from the census by the Government and whether there were elements of the census that would be irreplaceable by other means if the business of Government would be seriously impacted if census data was lost or changed.”⁷ The Committee concluded:

We have concerns that social science could suffer if the census was to be discontinued without serious consideration as to how this data would be replaced. We have been told that surveys and administrative data can be used effectively but we have concerns that this would not easily scale to a nationwide coverage. There would need to be a serious consideration of how administrative data could be brought to a national standard to allow it to be more easily used as a replacement for census data.⁸

However, they envisaged some benefits if the census were to be discontinued:

4 See 2010 World Population and Census Programme, website of the United Nations Statistical Division

5 Treasury Committee, Eleventh Report of Session 2007-08, Counting the population, HC183-I

6 As above, p4

7 Science and Technology Committee, Third Report of Session 2012-13, The Census and social science, HC322, incorporating HC1666-i to -iii

8 As above, Summary, p3

However, we anticipate that the absence of a census would also potentially stimulate a considerable amount of innovation in social science and examination of how to produce social data of an equivalent standard, but to much quicker timescales, than the current census data.⁹

9. The Minister for the Cabinet Office, the Rt Hon Francis Maude MP, has said “the census was an expensive and inaccurate way of measuring the number of people in Britain”, telling The Telegraph newspaper that the Government was looking for a “fundamentally” better way of doing the census.¹⁰ John Pullinger, the President of the Royal Statistical Society, told us

[The Minister for the Cabinet Office] starts from the position that the plethora of open data and administrative data ought to make it possible to do a census in a much cheaper and quicker way. We all agree with that. The test is one of practicality now.¹¹

10. As it is currently conducted, the census does not in fact count every member of the population. In 2011, the census response rate in England and Wales was estimated by the ONS to be 94%, which implies several million people did not complete the form.¹² It is likely that many of those who did not complete the form were harder-to-reach people—the poor, elderly, non-English speaking or less well-educated in deprived areas, damaging the accuracy of the data in the very places of arguably most interest to policy makers. Policy makers cannot be certain of the accuracy of the data as not all forms are fully completed and even when responses are given, they might be questionable; for example, in 2011, 176,632 respondents to the census described their religion as “Jedi knight”.¹³

9 As above, Summary, p4

10 National census to be axed after 200 years, The Telegraph, 9 July 2010

11 Q71

12 Office for National Statistics, Response rates in the 2011 census, December 2012, accessible at Response and imputation rates

13 Office for National Statistics, 2011 census, table QS2010EW “2011 Census: Religion (Detailed), local authorities in England and Wales” accessible at Key Statistics for Local Authorities in England and Wales

Office for National Statistics' work on the future of the census

11. The ONS has always had an eye on how the census could evolve or be enhanced. More recently it has been carrying out a programme to look at the options for the future of the census since April 2011: the Beyond 2011 programme. A three-month consultation, launched in September 2013, proposed two options for census taking in future:

- Once a decade, like that conducted in 2011, but primarily online; or
- Using existing Government data [“administrative data”] and compulsory annual surveys.¹⁴

The ONS defines administrative data as that “data already held by Government [which] would be used by ONS to produce an annual estimate of the population in local areas. Sources currently being researched include those held by the Department of Health, the Department for Work and Pensions, HM Revenue and Customs, the Department for Education, the Higher Education Statistics Agency, NHS Wales and the Welsh Government.”¹⁵

12. The ONS set out their analysis of the “strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and risks” of the two options in their consultation document:¹⁶

	Online census once a decade	Census using administrative data and surveys
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivers a rich set of statistics for a range of geographic areas. Proven ability to delivery detailed statistics for small geographic areas. A familiar and tested approach High degree of continuity. Single, high-quality “snapshot” of the nation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Annual; changes and trends could be identified much more quickly. Would cost less than an online census. Would reduce the burden on households.
Weaknesses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only every 10 years. Online census costs more than using administrative data and surveys. Scale and cyclical nature of the census makes the build-up and run-down of the operation challenging. Imposes a burden on all households. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would never produce the most detailed statistics available from an online census once a decade. The date to which the statistics refer would be less clear. Would not result in the detailed historical record of people and households used by family historians and other historical researchers. New legislation would be required.

14 The census and future provision of population statistics in England and Wales, ONS consultation document, September 2013

15 As above, p7

16 As above, pp8-11

Opportunities	Faster and more efficient data processing if online.	<p>It should be possible to extend the use of administrative data to cover topics not covered by the survey.</p> <p>Potential to be more flexible than an online census in the questions that are asked.</p> <p>New opportunities for historical research in 100 years' time.</p>
Risks	<p>Increasingly difficult to achieve high levels of response to a census.</p> <p>Online approach risks excluding some people and households.</p> <p>Some consider census to be an invasion of privacy.</p>	<p>Would depend on a number of new and partially untested methods.</p> <p>Would lead to some discontinuities from statistics produced previously.</p> <p>Would rely on access to the required administrative data.</p> <p>Would be difficult to achieve the required response rate to the new surveys.</p> <p>Would require public acceptance of the use of administrative data for statistical purposes—privacy concerns.</p>

The role of Parliament

13. Parliament has an explicit role to play in determining the future of the census. This reflects both the requirements for legislation and the cost of the exercise. The 2011 census cost about £500m for England and Wales, more than double the annual ONS budget. The Telegraph has recently suggested that the 2021 census could cost “more than £800 million in today’s money, or £1billion in practice”.¹⁷ The ONS explains some of the legislation required: “Existing primary legislation allows a census to take place, but does not require a census. As with the 2011 Census, an online census in 2021 would require Parliament to agree specific secondary legislation, setting out the census date and the questions to be asked for example. A census method based on administrative data and surveys would require Parliament to agree new primary legislation, to enable easier data access for ONS and to make it a legal requirement for households to respond to any new surveys.”¹⁸

The ONS’s recommendation on the future of the census

14. The ONS consultation received over 700 responses and a report on the consultation was published in March 2014, together with the consultation responses.¹⁹ Around four in ten the responses were from individuals concerned about the loss of information for family research purposes.²⁰ Such significant public interest in and support for the census should not be lightly dismissed. The ONS analysed the main messages as follows:

- there was continuing widespread demand for detailed information about small areas and small populations offered by the decennial census;
- there was a strong concern that a much smaller annual survey, supporting the use of administrative data, would not meet these needs;
- more frequent statistics that could be provided between censuses by the use of administrative data and annual surveys would be welcomed, but not at the expense of the detailed statistics;
- the methods for using administrative data and surveys were not yet mature enough to replace the census; and
- there should be a hybrid approach, making the best of both approaches.²¹

15. Also in March 2014, on the same day the ONS consultation report was published, the National Statistician set out her recommendation to the Board of the UK Statistics

17 Telegraph online, Officials ask for access to personal data to improve national census, 28 March 2014

18 Beyond 2011 programme website, Office for National Statistics

19 Office for National Statistics, The Census and Future Provision of Population Statistics in England and Wales: Report on the Public Consultation, March 2014 and Office for National Statistics website, Responses to the consultation

20 As above. 306 individuals out of 715 total responses (or 43%) stated that their main use of population statistics was for family history research.

21 Office for National Statistics, The Census and Future Provision of Population Statistics in England and Wales: Report on the Public Consultation, March 2014

Authority (UKSA) “for the future provision of population statistics and the next census”.²² She recommended that there should be an online census of all households and communal establishments in 2021, and increased use of administrative data surveys “in order to enhance the statistics from the 2021 census and improve annual statistics between censuses”.²³

Increased use of administrative data

16. Many of our witnesses agreed with the analysis in the ONS consultation document that the current system, of a census every 10 years, had many disadvantages. John Pullinger, President of the Royal Statistical Society, expressed the concerns of many around timeliness and cost of the current census. He told us

It is becoming harder to do a census purely in a traditional way. Sometimes it is going to be necessary to think laterally about whether there are cheaper, certainly, but also more creative ways of counting the population, particularly in complex areas such as Westminster, in a timely way. If it is possible to harness administrative data that is available in real time then so much the better.²⁴

17. Juliet Whitworth, from the Local Government Association, said that the administrative data option “seems a really sensible way to go. Local Government would really like more frequent data, if that was possible”.²⁵ However, witnesses also described to us some of the possible disadvantages of the administrative data option too: that it might be difficult to get the kind of “small, granular” estimates at a very local level which the traditional census gives, that it might be hard to compare differences over time, that there is a lack of clarity about what legislation would be needed to enable greater data sharing within Government.²⁶ Juliet Whitworth told us that “we should not rush into it before we know it is good enough.”²⁷

Scope of the administrative option

18. Whilst some witnesses were generally positive about the way in which the ONS had carried out the Beyond 2011 programme and the recent consultation, many of them thought that the administrative future option set out in the consultation was “unambitious”.²⁸ Keith Dugmore, founder and Director of the Demographics User Group, which represents the needs of commercial users of information, described it as “a very

22 Office for National Statistics, The Census and Future Provision of Population Statistics in England and Wales: Recommendation from the National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority, 27 March 2014

23 As above

24 Q44

25 Q111

26 Q48 [Professor Skinner], Q53 [Professor Skinner], Q62 [John Pullinger], Q74 [Keith Dugmore], Q93 [Les Mayhew]

27 Q111

28 Q48 [Chris Skinner], Q49 [John Pullinger], Q122 [Professor Mayhew]

cautious option”.²⁹ Professor Chris Skinner, from the London School of Economics, who carried out an independent review of the Beyond 2011 programme methodology, told us

In some ways, it is a slightly unambitious option, in that it is only looking to the administrative data for population counts—the number of people within age group, sex group, and areas. At this stage, it is not attempting to make use of other information, such as income from tax records, or the administrative data that some users think would make this option much more attractive. It is basically sticking with the administrative data for population counts, and then having this large, rolling, annual survey for all the other information.³⁰

19. Professor Mayhew, from City University, said “there is absolutely no doubt that central Government data systems could provide a good population count and even a household count if you did it properly”. He cautioned however that “whether you would get all the attributes you needed that you get in the census, I doubt. However, you would also get other attributes that you do not currently get”.³¹ He outlined his own research work, which he argued demonstrates the potential of administrative data.³² Keith Dugmore told us “one thing about administrative data [...] is that it can offer us new topics that we do not get at the moment. It is not just a matter of replacing questions in the census”.³³

How advanced are the systems for exploiting administrative data for population statistics?

20. Witnesses thought that much more work needed to be done in order to exploit fully the administrative data already held by Government, and cautioned against ending the ten-yearly census just yet. John Pullinger told us

We ought to do much better [...] we have got data coming out of our ears in all sorts of places, and we ought to be able to bring them together to create the kind of data that we need from the census. That is tantalisingly close, but it is not there yet and that is the risk.³⁴

29 Q122

30 Beyond 2011: Independent Review of Methodology, by Chris Skinner, John Hollis and Mike Murphy, accessible at Reports and Publications page of Beyond 2011 section of ONS website. See also Q48.

31 Q93

32 FOC0002 [Professor Mayhew]

33 Q111

34 Q46

Professor Skinner agreed, telling us that that

the research that has been undertaken so far has not yet demonstrated that [the administrative option] would definitely be fully reliable in terms of the estimates that would be produced [...] to ditch the census entirely, and to proceed with this administrative option when it has not yet been fully demonstrated, would be reckless.³⁵

Sarah Henry, Head of Research and Intelligence at Manchester City Council, said “we are nowhere near replacing the census with administrative data yet”.³⁶ Although Professor Skinner thought that the ONS “have been doing a lot of innovative research on possibilities for administrative data” it was “still at a relatively early stage”.³⁷ John Pullinger agreed, telling us that “the ONS needs to make much more rapid progress with looking at the potential for the administrative data option”.³⁸ Professor Falkingham, from the University of Southampton, was more optimistic; she said she was “fairly confident” that the ONS was tackling the issue with sufficient urgency. She said they “know what the problems are and they are working hard to find the solutions”.³⁹

21. The Office for National Statistics has not provided detailed information about what data, other than a head count, could be harvested from the various administrative sources. We recommend that the Office for National Statistics lists all the public and quasi-public sources that could be tapped for data, the data that could be forthcoming from them and the administrative, technical and legal barriers to the use of, and ultimately linking of, that data.

A hybrid approach?

22. Several of our witnesses felt that, rather than choosing between either a traditional ten yearly census, conducted primarily online, or using administrative data plus smaller scale surveys, a hybrid approach would be more sensible. This is indeed what the National Statistician, endorsed by UKSA, now proposes.⁴⁰ Professor Falkingham told us that “we can draw strength from some of the administrative data to improve the census estimates. Equally, we can draw strength from the census to improve some of our administrative data.”⁴¹

23. The hybrid approach, but one more ambitious than that proposed by the National Statistician would involve much more extensive use of administrative data, to give more frequent and richer information about the population. This could be complemented by

35 Q53

36 Q77

37 Q67

38 Q57

39 Q68

40 Office for National Statistics, *The Census and Future Provision of Population Statistics in England and Wales: Recommendation from the National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority*, 27 March 2014

41 Q46

smaller scale, more local surveys, to verify the accuracy of the centrally produced data and to add information in key areas that would not be accessible from administration records.

24. The ONS, in consultation with the Market Research Society and others, estimated that the economic benefit to the private sector of continuing with a traditional 10-yearly census, largely online, as £3.67bn over the 10 years, compared to £2.1bn over 10 years for the alternative of moving to administrative data.⁴²

25. In one sense the 2011 census was already a hybrid. Responding to the criticism that the census in 2001 omitted some entire blocks or housing developments, the ONS built an address register for use in 2011. Sarah Henry explained that in 2011, the ONS worked with local authorities to help improve the census accuracy, using administrative data in addition to the address registers.⁴³

26. The use of an address register in 2011 was a very good example of using administrative records to enhance the accuracy of population statistics. Other administrative data was also apparently used. We recommend the Office for National Statistics sets out what data it used in 2011, the impact it had on the resulting estimates, the lessons learnt from this experience and how such additional sources can be used more widely and effectively.

27. Population estimates are of fundamental importance to the statistical system, policy makers and society more widely, but the days of the traditional, ten-yearly, paper-based census are numbered. The Government has a wealth of detailed administrative data which is currently unexploited and which could provide a rich seam of information to improve the nation's knowledge of its population and boost the quality of public services. Data from administrative sources can be richer, broader, cheaper and timelier than the equivalent from a traditional census; it can be made available far more frequently than every ten years. The National Statistician has recently recommended that there should be a census in 2021, albeit conducted where possible online, and that there should be greater use of administrative data and surveys. It is too soon to decide whether to scrap the census. We believe that it is right to have a census in 2021; as insufficient effort has been made in recent years, the alternative options for the collection of population statistics have not been adequately tested and plans are not sufficiently advanced to provide a proper replacement, given the importance of the resulting data.

28. However, in order to get the most use out of the information already held by the Government, for the purposes of high quality and granular population statistics, and before we can be sure that there can be, eventually, a full and proper replacement for the traditional census, much more work must be done. We are concerned that the work on the future of the census has been done in isolation.

42 Market Research Society response to ONS consultation on the future of the census, December 2013

43 Q96

29. We recommend that the Office for National Statistics, under strong leadership from the board of the UK Statistics Authority, now scope and set out a more ambitious vision for the creative and full use of administrative data to provide rich and valuable population statistics. The Office for National Statistics should explain how the outputs will be different if administrative data were to be used in place of much of the census, explaining clearly the advantages and disadvantages.

3 Public concerns about data sharing

30. If greater use were to be made of the administrative data already held by the Government, there would undoubtedly be concerns from some members of the public about whether the data were to be shared appropriately. The recent public concerns about the “care.data” programme, which plans to share anonymised patient data within the NHS and to some researchers, demonstrates the risks in attempting to share data if the process is not clearly explained and people are not consulted: public concerns led to the Government’s decision in February 2014 to delay its rollout. As John Pullinger told us,

even if you legislated for it, there is a big question about public acceptability: whether people would want the data from the GP register to be merged with data from the benefits system and the school system [...] the risk is that people would be even more anxious if a central public authority was bringing together their data from all these sources without their consent.⁴⁴

However, he added “from a statistical establishment point of view [...] I would hope that that public argument would be able to be won. I do not think it has been yet.”⁴⁵

31. Piers Elias, a Demographics and Modelling Officer from Tees Valley Unlimited, who works with a five local authorities in the north east, pointed out that some data-sharing does already exist. He said that “[the ONS] do actually link individual data between the GP patient register and the higher education data on students to try to improve their methodology on migration.”⁴⁶ Professor Mayhew was optimistic that appropriate controls could be put in place to manage the privacy risks of data sharing:

The challenge is to actually clear the bureaucratic undergrowth to enable these things to happen automatically, instead of having all these disputes between different data owners, sometimes under the guise of data protection and things like that. All these things could be done in a data safe haven. People can be accredited to use this kind of data, and the outputs that come from these processes could be fully de-identified and anonymised as well. That is something that we do very regularly, so we know it is possible.⁴⁷

32. As part of their work on the future of the census, the ONS carried out research into public attitudes about various issues to do with the collection of population statistics.⁴⁸ This included attitudes towards the use of personal data, data linkage and the creation of linked datasets. ONS’s analysis of the research findings concluded that “around three quarters of people do not object to data held by other Government departments being shared with ONS” and that “nearly half of the public assume that Government already routinely links

44 Q46

45 Q46

46 Q77

47 Q97

48 Office for National Statistics, *The Census and Future Provision of Population Statistics in England and Wales: Public attitudes to the use of personal data for official statistics*, March 2014

data about the population from multiple sources in a central data store”.⁴⁹ However, according to ONS, “any objections to the use of personal data are largely related to security and privacy concerns”, describing these concerns as “strong”, but they suggest that “the police are supportive of data sharing when personal or public benefit can be demonstrated and these are communicated effectively”.⁵⁰

33. Public concerns about data sharing must be addressed and must not be a barrier to making the most of the information already collected and held by the Government. The Minister’s objective of “better, quicker information, more frequently and cheaper” depends upon this.

34. The Cabinet Office and the Office for National Statistics must make every effort to publicise the benefits of greater sharing of administrative data within Government and to the wider world, in order to realise the considerable benefits of using administrative data for policy-making, policy understanding and efficiency, and of course for the production of population statistics. The Government should use the lessons learnt from the problems with the “care.data” rollout to embark upon a public information campaign about the future of the census in order to raise understanding of the benefits of sharing administrative data, give information about the safeguards which will be in place to protect people’s personal information and privacy, in order to smooth the way for its greater use.

49 As above, p3

50 As above, p3

Conclusions and recommendations

How advanced are the systems for exploiting administrative data for population statistics?

1. *The Office for National Statistics has not provided detailed information about what data, other than a head count, could be harvested from the various administrative sources. We recommend that the Office for National Statistics lists all the public and quasi-public sources that could be tapped for data, the data that could be forthcoming from them and the administrative, technical and legal barriers to the use of, and ultimately linking of, that data. (Paragraph 21)*

A hybrid approach?

2. *The use of an address register in 2011 was a very good example of using administrative records to enhance the accuracy of population statistics. Other administrative data was also apparently used. We recommend the Office for National Statistics sets out what data it used in 2011, the impact it had on the resulting estimates, the lessons learnt from this experience and how such additional sources can be used more widely and effectively. (Paragraph 26)*
3. Population estimates are of fundamental importance to the statistical system, policy makers and society more widely, but the days of the traditional, ten-yearly, paper-based census are numbered. The Government has a wealth of detailed administrative data which is currently unexploited and which could provide a rich seam of information to improve the nation's knowledge of its population and boost the quality of public services. Data from administrative sources can be richer, broader, cheaper and timelier than the equivalent from a traditional census; it can be made available far more frequently than every ten years. The National Statistician has recently recommended that there should be a census in 2021, albeit conducted where possible online, and that there should be greater use of administrative data and surveys. It is too soon to decide whether to scrap the census. We believe that it is right to have a census in 2021; as insufficient effort has been made in recent years, the alternative options for the collection of population statistics have not been adequately tested and plans are not sufficiently advanced to provide a proper replacement, given the importance of the resulting data. (Paragraph 27)
4. However, in order to get the most use out of the information already held by the Government, for the purposes of high quality and granular population statistics, and before we can be sure that there can be, eventually, a full and proper replacement for the traditional census, much more work must be done. We are concerned that the work on the future of the census has been done in isolation. (Paragraph 28)

5. *We recommend that the Office for National Statistics, under strong leadership from the board of the UK Statistics Authority, now scope and set out a more ambitious vision for the creative and full use of administrative data to provide rich and valuable population statistics. The Office for National Statistics should explain how the outputs will be different if administrative data were to be used in place of much of the census, explaining clearly the advantages and disadvantages. (Paragraph 29)*
6. Public concerns about data sharing must be addressed and must not be a barrier to making the most of the information already collected and held by the Government. The Minister's objective of "better, quicker information, more frequently and cheaper" depends upon this. (Paragraph 33)
7. *The Cabinet Office and the Office for National Statistics must make every effort to publicise the benefits of greater sharing of administrative data within Government and to the wider world, in order to realise the considerable benefits of using administrative data for policy-making, policy understanding and efficiency, and of course for the production of population statistics. The Government should use the lessons learnt from the problems with the "care.data" rollout to embark upon a public information campaign about the future of the census in order to raise understanding of the benefits of sharing administrative data, give information about the safeguards which will be in place to protect people's personal information and privacy, in order to smooth the way for its greater use. (Paragraph 34)*

Formal Minutes

Wednesday 9 April 2014

Members present:

Mr Bernard Jenkin, in the Chair

Paul Flynn
Sheila Gilmore

Kelvin Hopkins

Draft Report (*Too soon to scrap the Census*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Draft Report (*The future of the census*), proposed by Paul Flynn, brought up and read as follows:

1. Conservative inertia of the statistics establishment distorts judgement of census reform for 2021 as it dominated consideration of the 2011 by this committee a decade ago.
2. Major national decisions are routinely based on minute samples as low as 0.0001%. The cost of the next census will be £1billion. Only the ten year census is a 100% sample sought. This is wasteful and irrational. Frequently a distorted impression is created that rapidly loses its value in ten years between censuses.
3. The evidence from statistics establishment sought the comfort blanket of the status. One claimed that the manager of a supermarket would use census information to order next week's cabbages rather than information on how many cabbages are sold this week. Much of the evidence was sentimentally loyal to the tradition of an annual census.
4. Little assessment has been made an alternative rolling census that could be based on a small sample but updated from existing sources on a monthly or annual basis. These results could be incorporated into now routine publication of statistics. These reports would avoid the attempted manipulations of the census by groups such as the Jedi knights.

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the Chair's draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.-(The Chair.)

Amendment proposed, to leave out "Chair's draft Report" and insert "draft Report proposed by Paul Flynn".-(Paul Flynn.)

Question put, That the Amendment be made.

The Committee divided.

Ayes, 1

Noes, 2

Paul Flynn

Sheila Gilmore
Kelvin Hopkins

Main Question put and agreed to.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 34 read and agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Fifteenth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available (Standing Order No. 134).

[Adjourned till Tuesday 29 April at 9.15am

Witnesses

The following witnesses gave evidence. Transcripts can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry page at www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/public-administration-select-committee/inquiries/parliament-2010/statistics/future-of-the-census/.

Tuesday 25 February 2014

Question number

Professor Jane Falkingham, University of Southampton,
Professor Chris Skinner, Professor of Statistics, London School of
Economics, **John Pullinger**, President, Royal Statistical Society;

Keith Dugmore Director of Demographics User Group, Demographic
Decisions Ltd, **Sarah Henry**, Head of Intelligence and Performance,
Manchester City Council, **Juliet Whitworth**, Research and Information
Manager, LGA, **Piers Elias**, Demography and Modelling Officer, Tees Valley
Unlimited and **Professor Les Mayhew**, Professor of Statistics, City
University

Q1-134

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry web page at www.parliament.uk/pasc. FOC numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

Demographic Decisions LTD (FOC0001)

Les Mayhew (FOC0002)

Local Government Association (FOC0007)

Manchester City Council (FOC0005)

Piers Elias (FOC0004)

Ron Johnston (FOC0006)

Sam Smith (FOC0003)

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/pasc. The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2013–14

First Special Report	Public Trust in Government Statistics: A review of the operation of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007: Government and UK Statistics Authority Responses to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2012–13	HC 77
Second Special Report	Special advisers in the thick of it: Government Response to the Committee's Sixth Report of Session 2012–13	HC 515
First Report	Communicating statistics: not just true but also fair	HC 190 (<i>HC 573</i>)
Second Report	Public engagement in policy-making	HC 75 (<i>HC 986</i>)
Third Report	The role of the Charity Commission and "public benefit": Post-Legislative scrutiny of the Charities Act 2006	HC 76 (<i>HC 927</i>)
Fourth Report	Engaging the public in National Strategy	HC 435 (<i>HC 986</i>)
Fifth Report	Appointment of the Chair of the Committee on Standards in Public Life	HC 516
Sixth Report	Government Procurement	HC 123 (<i>HC 1015</i>)
Seventh Report	Migration Statistics	HC 523
Eighth Report	Truth to Power: how Civil Service reform can succeed	HC 74 (<i>HC 955</i>)
Ninth Report	Latest proposals for ministerial involvement in permanent secretary appointments: PASC's recommendations	HC 1041
Tenth Report	Statistics and Open Data: Harvesting unused knowledge, empowering citizens and improving public services	HC 564
Eleventh Report	The failure of the Cabinet Office to respond to our Report on the Business Appointment Rules	HC 1156
Twelfth Report	More complaints please!	HC 229
Thirteenth Report	Caught red-handed: Why we can't count on Police Recorded Crime statistics	HC 760

Session 2012–13

First Special Report	Public Appointments: regulation, recruitment and pay: Government Response to the Committee's Fourteenth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 18
Second Special Report	Leadership of change: new arrangements for the roles of the Head of the Civil Service and the Cabinet Secretary: Further Report: Government Response to the Committee's Twenty Third Report of Session 2010–12	HC 313
Third Special Report	Strategic thinking in Government: without National Strategy, can viable Government strategy emerge? Government Response to the Committee's Twenty Fourth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 573
Fifth Special Report	The Prime Minister's Adviser on Ministers' Interests: independent or not? Government Response to the Committee's Twenty Second Report of Session 2010–12	HC 976
First Report	The Big Society: Further Report with the Government Response to the Committee's Seventeenth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 98
Second Report	The Honours System	HC 19
Third Report	Business Appointment Rules	HC 404
Fourth Report	Appointment of the Chair of the Charity Commission	HC 315-I
Fifth Report	End of term report: 2011–12	HC 316
Sixth Report	Special advisers in the thick of it	HC 134
Seventh Report	The Honours System: Further Report with the Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2012–13	HC 728
Eighth Report	The Role of the Cabinet Secretary and the Resignation of the Chief Whip	HC 864 (HC 968)
Ninth Report	Public Trust in Government Statistics, A review of the operation of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007	HC 406

Session 2010–12

First Report	Who does UK National Strategy?	HC 435 (<i>HC 713</i>)
Second Report	Government Responses to the Committee's Eighth and Ninth Reports of Session 2009–10: Goats and Tsars: Ministerial and other appointments from outside Parliament and Too Many Ministers?	HC 150
Third Report	Equitable Life	HC 485 (<i>Cm 7960</i>)
Fourth Report	Pre-appointment hearing for the dual post of First Civil Service Commissioner and Commissioner for Public Appointments	HC 601
Fifth Report	Smaller Government: Shrinking the Quango State	HC 537 (<i>Cm 8044</i>)
Sixth Report	Who Does UK National Strategy? Further Report with the Government Response to the Committee's First Report of Session 2010–11	HC 713
Seventh Report	Smaller Government: What do Ministers do?	HC 530 (<i>HC 1540</i>)
Eighth Report	Cabinet Manual	HC 900 (<i>HC 1127, Cm 8213</i>)
First Special Report	Cabinet Manual: Government Interim Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 1127
Ninth Report	Pre-appointment hearing for the post of Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman	HC 1220-I
Tenth Report	Remuneration of the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman	HC 1350
Eleventh Report	Good Governance and Civil Service Reform: 'End of Term' report on Whitehall plans for structural reform	HC 901 (<i>HC 1746</i>)
Twelfth Report	Government and IT — "a recipe for rip-offs": time for a new approach	HC 715-I (<i>HC 1724</i>)
Thirteenth Report	Change in Government: the agenda for leadership	HC 714 (<i>HC 1746</i>)
Fourteenth Report	Public Appointments: regulation, recruitment and pay	HC 1389
Fifteenth Report	Smaller Government: What do Ministers do? Further Report with the Government Response to the Committee's Seventh Report of Session 2010–12	HC 1540 (<i>HC 1746</i>)
Sixteenth Report	Appointment of the Chair of the UK Statistics Authority	HC 910
Seventeenth Report	The Big Society	HC 902
Eighteenth Report	Change in Government: the agenda for leadership: Further Report, with the Government Responses to the Committee's Eleventh, Thirteenth and Fifteenth Reports of Session 2010–12	HC 1746
Nineteenth Report	Leadership of change: new arrangements for the roles of the Head of the Civil Service and the Cabinet Secretary	HC 1582
Twentieth Report	Government and IT—"a recipe for rip-offs": time for a new approach: Further Report, with the Government response to the Committee's Twelfth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 1724
Twenty First Report	Future oversight of administrative justice: the proposed abolition of the Administrative Justice and Tribunals Council	HC 1621
Twenty Second Report	The Prime Minister's adviser on Ministers' interests: independent or not?	HC 1761
Twenty Third Report	Leadership of change: new arrangements for the roles of the Head of the Civil Service and the Cabinet Secretary, Further Report, with the Government Response to the Committee's Nineteenth Report of Session 2010–12	HC 1914
Twenty Fourth Report	Strategic thinking in Government: without National Strategy, can viable Government strategy emerge?	HC 1625