

Response ID ANON-6MXE-MWFG-H

Submitted to Consultation on the future of population and migration statistics in England and Wales
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About you

Full name

Full name:
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Email address

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Are you answering this questionnaire on behalf of an organisation?

Yes

About you

What is the name of the organisation?

What is the name of the organisation?:
Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

What sector does the organisation belong to?

Academia or research

If you selected 'Other', please provide your organisation's sector below.

If you selected 'Other', please provide your organisation's sector below.:

About you

In the last 12 months, approximately how often have you used or referred to statistics from the ONS?

A few times a year

What do you currently use the ONS's population and migration statistics for?

Academic research, Service provision or business planning, Other (please state below)

What do you currently use the ONS's population statistics for?:

Educational uses

Your population and migration statistical needs

Please explain how you currently use the ONS's population and migration statistics?

Please explain how you currently use ONS population and migration statistics? :

We are responding on behalf of, and following consultation with, our members. These include researchers and professionals from national and local government, academia and the private sector who use these data in a wide of contexts. Many have been involved in the development and use of administrative data. Our comments are general.

Your population and migration statistical needs

To what extent do these proposals meet your needs?

The proposals meet some of my needs

Your population and migration statistical needs

Are your current information needs better met by these proposals?

No

Your population and migration statistical needs

Would these proposals allow you to do anything new that you have not previously been able to do?

Not Answered

Please explain the reasons for your answer.

Please explain the reasons for your answer.:

Your population and migration statistical needs

Which of your current needs would not be met by these proposals? Please include reasons for your answer. For example, information around levels of detail, accuracy, timeliness or geography.

Which of your current needs would not be met by these proposals? Please include reasons for your answer. For example, information around levels of detail, accuracy, timeliness or geography.:

Surveys will not provide us with reliable neighbourhood-level information – for example to identify sub-district inequalities between ethnic groups. This will be a problem for academic researchers, but also for Local Authority analysts, etc.

Impact on your information needs

Do the proposed levels of geographic breakdown meet your information needs?

No

What additional geographic breakdowns would you need? Please explain the reasons for your answer.

What additional geographic breakdowns would you need? Please explain the reasons for your answer.:

LSOAs

Impact on your information needs

Would this change in available detail still meet your needs?

Not Answered

What impact would this change in available detail have on your use of our population and migration statistics? Please explain your answer.

What impact would this change in available detail have on your use of our population and migration statistics? Please explain your answer.:

Population definitions and estimates

Do you need definitions for population and migration estimates other than 'usual resident'?

Not Answered

Delivering future population estimates

For the usual resident population how frequently would you like population estimates? Please select the most important frequency for you.

Not Answered

If you ticked 'Other', please specify

If you ticked 'Other', please specify :

Please explain the reasons for your selected frequency and how it would meet your needs.

Please explain the reasons for your selected frequency and how it would meet your needs.:

Delivering future population estimates

How timely would you like population estimates to be?

Not Answered

Please explain the reason for your answer.

Please explain the reason for your answer.:

Data needs for genealogy and social history

What details from population and social characteristics data do you see as being important to be preserved for future generations, if any? Please explain why this data is important to be preserved.

What details from population and social characteristics data do you see as being important to be preserved for future generations, if any? Please explain why this data is important to be preserved.:

Other comments

Is there anything else about the population and migration statistics proposal that you wish to add to your response?

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We agree with the consultation that progress has been made towards counting the population with administrative data using the Dynamic Population Model. However, much less progress has been made towards replacing the other roles played by the census including the provision of small area social, economic and housing statistics.

The proposals bring benefits in terms of data timeliness but represent serious constraints in terms of detail, accuracy and geography.

The key concerns of the community are:

1. Scale: The "baseline objective" in the proposal is to deliver annual statistics at the local authority level for all topics covered by the census. This does not meet user needs because: (i) a key role of the census is to deliver statistics for small areas within local authorities (the proposal guarantees this for only a subset of topics); (ii) delivering this full range of statistics requires an ongoing role for social surveys, but this role has not been specified; (iii) the precision of the outputs cannot be predicted.

Following the Beyond 2011 decision it was envisaged that there would be parallel administrative-based outputs to compare to the traditional census. Whilst some administrative-based research outputs have been published, the quality of many important outputs from the proposed system are unknown.

The community also raised questions about what measures will be in place / what is the confidence in a representative approach across all types of LA's and characteristics of interest? Who will be under-represented by the proposed approach?

2. Evolution: The decennial census has a central role in the national statistics system that is much wider than its direct outputs. The census offers a regular cycle on which to reconsider data collection, adding new questions and refining others (e.g. the evolution of the question on ethnicity). How these functions would be fulfilled by the proposed population statistics system is not fully described in the consultation.

3. Access: We have concerns over the robustness of access to and control over administrative data. To deliver quality official statistics, users expect that ONS can exert control over the data collection process. This would include the right and the means to access central government data on an agreed timetable, an influence over what data is collected (such that new data could be collected), control over the quality of that data and a robust system for cross-departmental data linkage. The legislative, technological and managerial systems are not in place to deliver this, which puts the proposed administrative-based system on a fragile footing. This is a particular concern across the devolved nations.

4. Longitudinal data: The proposal to replace the longitudinal and historical outputs of the census is underdeveloped. Aspirations to fully replace these outputs are included in the consultation document but require more detail to assure users.

5. Cost: The consultation document estimates that the proposed new system would "cost less than half the cost of a 2031 census over a ten-year period". Yet key aspects of the system are unspecified, so it is unclear on what basis this estimate has been made. The costs and benefits of proposed new system cannot be comprehensively evaluated as the system has not yet been fully designed. From a user point of view, we are concerned that the system will be designed to fit the budget, leaving key statistical outputs vulnerable to underfunding.

6. Trust: The vast majority of UK residents take part in the census. With each census media interest peaks and the nation engages with current local and national population issues and concerns. Social surveys, in contrast, are experiencing a collapse in response rates globally and relying on them presents significant risks. The system relies upon public acceptability of administrative data linkage and opt out mechanisms, both currently and in the future.

Associated trust issues were also raised with regard to the reuse of data. How are ethical questions of reuse being taken into account, and how will this be explained to the public?

7. The community would suggest that medium-term future of population and migration statistics continue to require a decennial census alongside the further development of administrative data sources and methods and, critically, the linking and sharing of these data sets. The proposal is not sufficient

to meet user needs for quality population, migration, social, economic and housing statistics in time to replace a census in 2031.

Other comments

Which of these geographies do you mainly use ONS population statistics for? If you use more than one, please select all that apply.

Other comments

Thank you for taking the time to complete this consultation. Can the ONS contact you for further information on your answers?

Not Answered