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Proposals for the 2011 Census announced

Census day will be 27 March 2011 under proposals published in a Government White Paper today.

The proposals, made by the UK Statistics Authority, cover the questions to be asked in the census for England and Wales, including new questions proposed for the first time following a thorough process of consultation and testing over a three year period. The White Paper also gives an overview of the plans for collecting, processing and analysing the information to produce high quality statistics. Data security and confidentiality are top priorities in all of these plans.

The information is used by government to help shape central and local policy making by showing exactly where investment in public services is most needed and to help allocate funding to local government and health authorities. Information from the census is used for the allocation of around £100 billion of public funds each year.

The census has to try to meet user needs for accurate and detailed information about today's society at a local and national level.

To provide better information about migration patterns new questions are proposed to collect information about citizenship, date of entry into the UK and the length of intended stay in the UK.

Other new questions are proposed to collect information about national identity and language. Response categories to the question about ethnicity have also been updated. This information about the diversity of the population in England and Wales will allow local and national services to be planned and monitored effectively.

Reflecting changes in society since 2001, a new question about second residences is proposed and marital status will be extended to include civil partnerships. Questions asking about income and sexual identity were considered, but are not proposed for the 2011 Census.

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Karen Dunnell, National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority commented: "The questions proposed for the 2011 Census have been drawn up following much discussion and debate with different users.

"We balance the sometimes competing needs and points of view expressed during our three year process of consultation and testing and ensure that we are able to produce the high quality population estimates needed by every local authority, central government, and many businesses and individuals."

For the first time in 2011, census questionnaires will be posted to households and can then be completed and returned on paper or on line. Census staff will then visit households which do not return a form. Help will be available to support householders in fulfilling their legal obligation to fill in a questionnaire.

Glen Watson, 2011 Census Director, commented: "We have made some changes to the design of the census for 2011, learning from experience in 2001 and using technology to assist with our massive field operation, for example giving people the opportunity to fill the questionnaire in on line. What we have not changed, however, is our 200-year-long commitment to the security and confidentiality of personal census data."

BACKGROUND NOTES

1. A census, a count of all people and households, has been carried out every ten years since 1801 (except for 1941). It provides information about local areas and communities as well as a full national picture and is the most complete source of information about the population.
2. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is responsible for carrying out the census in England and Wales. Under the Statistics and Registration Services Act, with effect from 1 April 2008, strategic oversight of ONS and the authority to conduct the census rests with the UK Statistics Authority, which reports direct to Parliament. The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) is responsible for conducting the census in Northern Ireland. The General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) is responsible for carrying out the census in Scotland.
3. Consultation on the census questions began in 2005 and has included a formal 2005 consultation on content, a 2006/07 consultation on ethnicity, national identity, language and religion questions, written responses to online and postal consultation, meetings with the Equality and Human Rights Commission to review compliance with race equality legislation, open consultation meetings in varied locations during 2007, specialist meetings in 2007 with a range of stakeholders to consider issues of ethnic group, national identity, religion and belief.
4. The questions were developed and tested with the support of eight UK topic groups, six phases of cognitive question testing, a number of focus groups, a major test of 100,000 households in 2007, omnibus survey question testing, postal tests and a process of quality review and equality impact assessment.
5. A rehearsal for the census in England and Wales covering 135,000 households will take place on 11 October 2009 to test the procedures for delivery, collection and initial processing of the census forms. The rehearsal areas are Lancaster, Newham and the Isle of Anglesey (Ynys Môn). This builds upon the 2007 census test.
6. The UK Statistics Authority proposals for the date of the census, the people and the topics to be included for the census in England and Wales will be covered by a draft Order in Council put to Parliament for approval in autumn 2009. Following approval of the Census Order, the Census Regulations will be laid before Parliament and will include details of all aspects of the census operations and a copy of the questionnaires to be used. Separate Regulations covering the census in Wales will be made in the National Assembly for Wales.
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