



Northern Ireland
Statistics &
Research
Agency

2001 Census Review and Evaluation

Data Collection Support Evaluation Report: Executive Summary

A detailed Review and Evaluation of the 2001 Census is underway, and information on projects within the 2001 Census is gradually being released.

This report covers the key Census Support elements of Recruitment, Community Liaison and Payroll.

Each report is written in isolation and is subject to amendments as processing progresses and further information comes to light.

Reports will be released on the NISRA website in the form of a high level Executive Summary and a more detailed Evaluation Report.

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Evaluation of Data Collection Support

Executive Summary

Strategic Aims and Objectives

Census Data Collection was designed to contribute to the strategic aims of the Census as laid out in the 2001 Census of Population White Paper (1999) including “to ensure all aspects of the census data collection operation.....are acceptable to the public and comply with Data Protection law”. To this end the primary goals of the Data Collection Project included:

- To attempt to achieve completeness of coverage of the population by delivering appropriate census forms to every household and communal establishment with an efficient use of resources;
- To design, produce and distribute materials that are fit for purpose to the field force;
- To maximise the overall level of quality of incoming data;
- To enable respondents to post back their census forms or have them collected for processing in a secure manner;
- To provide assistance and help to the public where and when need;
- To ensure the field force was instructed, trained and managed to meet project objectives;
- To maintain confidentiality and security of information collected from the public;
- To manage the census operation in a cost effective and efficient manner to achieve Census enumeration on 29th April 2001.

The Data Collection Support evaluation covers the key elements of Recruitment, Community Liaison and Payroll and will be updated as relevant information from other sources becomes available. Objectives particular to the Data Collection Support Project are outlined below.

Project Objectives

Recruitment

To have the right number of people recruited and trained to appropriate standards in the right place at the right time.

Background

In Northern Ireland recruitment was directed from Census Office through the Northern Ireland Civil Service's Recruitment Service. This provided access to a central professional resource who had extensive experience of the Northern Ireland Equality and Fair Employment recruitment standards.

Methodology (Recruitment)

For the recruitment of Census field staff, NISRA complied with procedures consistent with those necessary to satisfy the standards applicable to an Equal Opportunities Employer. Competency based assessment techniques were used to select field staff. In NI, all selection panels convened for interviewing applicants for field staff posts, consisted of at least two people who were matched on equal opportunity criteria.

Posts were advertised widely to recruit 6 Census Area Managers (CAMs), 97 Census District Managers (CDMs) and 281 Census Team Leaders (CTLs) and around 2,600 Enumerators. Management tiers were interviewed by a combination of CAMs and Civil Servants and Census District Managers were provided with competency based

interviewer training before conducting Enumerator interviews. All field staff were required to provide evidence of competencies relating to communication and interpersonal skills and planning and organisation skills.

Northern Ireland differed from Great Britain in that the Recruitment Service administered and managed key elements of the recruitment process, interfacing as necessary with Census Office and Census field staff managers.

Community Liaison

Project Objectives

- To assist and encourage those with practical difficulties, concerns and lack of motivation to complete their census forms;
- To provide practical support to the various groups through the provision of appropriate aids and assistance with Census form-filling; and
- To maximise local knowledge and expertise of the Community and Voluntary Sectors and encourage them to participate in the Census.

Background

The need to encourage participation, to enhance data quality and to improve access led to a much greater emphasis being placed on the Community Liaison programme in the 2001 Census relative to 1991. This was directed to (i) those groups with Special Needs such as the visually impaired and those with auditory difficulties (ii) ethnic minorities, including Irish Travellers (iii) groups such as the homeless where special enumeration procedures were required (iv) wider community initiatives to increase awareness and provide assistance e.g., among the elderly or those with literacy problems. The inclusion for the first time in Northern Ireland of an ethnic group question

(including an Irish Travellers category) gave added importance to taking a more proactive approach to the enumeration of these groups. There was also an imperative to reach out to those such as the disabled and others with special needs who might have difficulty completing their census forms. In addition to Census field staff, the community and voluntary sector represented a valuable resource which could provide assistance to those with practical difficulties such as the elderly, those with literacy problems and the housebound.

Methodology (Community Liaison)

Representatives of a diverse range of client groups were invited to a Census Office seminar in October 2000 to explain the objectives of the project and to seek their support. This was then followed up by a series of bilateral briefings to work out arrangements with Special Needs Groups, representatives of ethnic minorities including Irish Travellers, representatives of the Homeless etc.

Special Needs Groups

Facilities provided through the help of organisations such as the RNIB and the Blind Centre, included Braille and large print versions of Information leaflets and the NI Household Form (Person 1 Only), audio tapes for the visually impaired and signed videos. A telephone Helpline and text phone for the deaf were also made available. Census Enumerators were trained to be aware of special needs groups and to lend what support they could.

The RNIB in Great Britain launched a 'Census Day of Action' on 4 April calling for everyone with a sight problem to have the right to complete census forms, independently and privately using their preferred method of communication, and not to have to rely on other sources such as a friend or census enumerator to complete the form on their behalf. This did not receive widespread attention in Northern Ireland.

Wider Community Initiatives

Census Area Managers were provided with a regional contact database in January 2001 to commence briefing and disseminate information on the Census. A parallel initiative involving contact with all local government community sector staff was undertaken. Census District Managers made more detailed local arrangements with their voluntary sector contacts to provide assistance to members of client groups who encountered difficulty in completing census forms. Enumerators who came across anyone requiring assistance could channel the request to the CDM to initiate action either directly or through the client group representative. Similarly, where a request for assistance was made through the Helpline, Census field staff could be dispatched or assistance requested from the relevant voluntary sector representative. Arrangements were also made with Advice Centre organisations to ensure that staff encountering persons with literacy or comprehension problems regarding the Census had a contact person to refer to if necessary. Articles on the Census were also placed in magazines for the elderly, the voluntary sector, homeless organisations and local newspapers for the wider public emphasising the importance of the Census and providing information on the assistance available.

Ethnic Minority Groups

To increase awareness of the Census amongst the ethnic minorities, translation leaflets were issued in eight languages – Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi, Bengali, Irish and Ulster Scots. Interpreters were made available for non-English speakers. There was liaison between Census Office staff and representatives of ethnic minority organisations in Northern Ireland to encourage participation and identify any access problems. A joint initiative was undertaken between Census Office and the Chief Executive of the Chinese Welfare Association (CWA) to encourage the Chinese community to

participate in the 2001 Census.

Payroll

Project Objective

To pay the field staff employed in taking the 2001 Census in an adequate and timely manner.

Background

For the 2001 Census NISRA employed 97 Census District Managers, 281 Census Team Leaders and over 2,500 Census Enumerators.

A review of census procedures was carried out in 1994 and identified census field staff payroll as a candidate for outsourcing. The UK Census Committee considered this a possibility and subsequently a test was held in 1997. It was subsequently decided that the payroll function would be outsourced for the 2001 Census and would include Northern Ireland.

Methodology (Payroll)

In light of the decision to outsource the Census payroll an advertisement was placed in the Official Journal of the European Community and, after the procurement procedures were concluded, the contract was awarded to Chessington Computer Service Limited (CCSL).

A Census Rehearsal was held in 1999 during which the proposed methods for the 2001 Census were tested. This included the testing of payroll forms, validation, authorisation and submission procedures and conclusions were subsequently drawn which were pertinent to all three Census Offices.

In light of the Rehearsal a number of changes were adopted including a reduction in the number of payroll forms and their simplification. A detailed service specification was subsequently agreed with the contractor which included details on form

types, submission and processing procedures, validation rules, the number of field staff, fees and expenses to be paid to each grade, and payment dates.

The fee for each grade was derived from a detailed task analysis of the hours expected to be worked and calculated using the UK hourly rates. Enumerators received 55p for each new address identified and £1.12 for each household requiring follow up visit(s) plus expenses.

Central District Manager claim forms were checked and authorised by Census Area Managers. Census Team Leader and Enumerator claims were checked and authorised by Census District Managers. Batches of Authorised claim forms were then posted by CDMs to the Contractor for processing. This arrangement did create some problems in that control over the forms was lost from the moment they entered the postal system.

It was found necessary to prolong the Census enumeration period resulting in an extension to a number of Census Enumerator contracts. An additional stage payment to Enumerators was introduced and agreed with the Contractor with payments made as required.

Lessons Learned

Recruitment

Early planning for recruitment of field staff is essential. Failure to have the appropriate number of trained staff and a reasonable contingency provision in place on time has serious implications for the Census, particularly the data collection phase.

The need to ensure that staff are trained in competency based interviewing techniques, adhere to the employment equality guidelines and procedures meet Census confidentiality requirements, inevitably extends the time between advertising posts and appointing staff. The longer this period

the greater the drop out rates and this undoubtedly contributed to the difficulties of Enumerator recruitment. Northern Ireland typically commenced advertising a month before Great Britain.

Recruitment Service procedures adapted well to the unique circumstances of the Census recruitment and the hard work of an excellent team fully justified the decision to use their assistance. There were inevitable tensions between Recruitment Service and CDMs in a dynamic environment. Recruitment necessarily occurred simultaneously at some 35 locations across Northern Ireland leading to some resource pressures.

There may be further scope for ensuring that greater attention is paid to the interface between Recruitment Service and Census District Managers to enable them to respond flexibly to each other's needs.

The need to ensure interviewers were matched along equal opportunity criteria meant that a considerable number of CDMs did not recruit in their own district. Some CDMs felt this disadvantaged them in not being able to pick their own team while others recognised the need for transparency and equity of the recruitment procedures.

The filling of vacancies at all levels other than Enumerator was completed within the planning timescale. However, while Enumerators were recruited on time for the vast majority of areas, there were locations where great difficulty was experienced in immediately filling the required complement. While satisfactory arrangements were arrived at in good time for all areas, special initiatives were required for Newry and Mourne District Council and in parts of North and West Belfast. This resulted in approximately 4% of Enumerators carrying out the enumeration of two Enumeration Districts (EDs).

Community Liaison

Liaison with the Community and Voluntary

Sector network was a new and important part of the 2001 Census. The effort involved in establishing a regional database of community and voluntary sector contacts for CDMs proved worthwhile and should be retained. The take-up of assistance varied across Census Districts and was a function of a number of factors including the level of demand, the enthusiasm of the field manager in establishing contacts and the availability of local resources. The availability of contacts nevertheless represented an important support for District Managers to draw on as required, but ultimately participation was voluntary. Community liaison planning would be rewarded by an earlier start, and firming up commitments to assist as early as possible. Information and publicity materials should be available on time to facilitate this. Once data needs are established, this should be an extension of the consultative process.

The Central office for Information provided excellent support in translating Information leaflets and no complaints were received from local groups regarding the nature or quality of the translations. Although there was limited information on the distribution of minority groups across Northern Ireland, the distribution of supplies appears to have worked reasonably well with CDMs and CAMs re-distributing material as needed. Census Office needs to have sufficient resource to undertake and carry-through the requirements of a meaningful community liaison programme without raising peoples expectations and not being subsequently able to deliver.

Subject to the policy decision being taken, planning will need to take into account how to provide the visually impaired and blind with alternative means of completing their census forms without prejudicing their independence or privacy. Early finalisation of Census form content will also facilitate the provision of such measures, e.g.. large print requirements for those with sight difficulties.

Payroll

Evaluation of the payroll contract is ongoing. However, some provisional remarks can be made at this stage.

During live running, a number of problems arose (e.g. localised postal strikes) which interfered with the smooth operation of the payroll. Additional control procedures adopted by NISRA reduced the impact of these problems. In some cases, NISRA made advances to field staff that experienced payment delays. The Contractor recovered these when the actual payments were subsequently made. Census Office staff also provided a contact point to answer any queries on pay.

Payments were made to 94.3% of Census field staff within two weeks of the due date. A further 3.2% of payments were paid within two weeks of receipt of a valid claim. While the vast majority of field staff received payments within a reasonable time period, some delays occurred in making the remainder. This occurred as a result of a number of factors including poor completion by some enumerators, scanning difficulties and mistakes due to keying errors. However, the relatively small scale of the NISRA exercise allowed Census Office to keep in close contact with CAMs and CDMs regarding the processing of claim forms. NISRA also kept duplicates of personnel records which facilitated the tracking of claims. These advantages resulted in Northern Ireland limiting the impact of any delays.

It is clear that difficulties emerged where the control of claim forms was lost, for example, once they entered the postal system. In the early stages of the fieldwork this proved problematic and in future consideration should be given to allow full tracking of claim forms.

The use of geography control files to verify and validate payees was very successful and should be considered again.

The use of the BACS for making payments was also very successful and could be used again.

In spite of the pruning carried out after the Census test the general feed-back from field staff was that there were still too many forms. Census Office Northern Ireland provided a Guide to Payroll and included additional training sessions for CDMs emphasising the importance of accurate completion of payroll materials. This assisted in reducing Northern Ireland error rates and training should play an essential role in ensuring the success of any future payroll system.

Over three quarters of CDMs surveyed indicated that they felt the payroll documentation and the timing of payments was either good or very good. About 60% of those surveyed indicated that the payment levels were adequate. This may also have been a factor contributing to the difficulties experienced in recruiting Enumerators.