

2001 CENSUS OF POPULATION

**REPORT ON THE
REVIEWS ON SECURITY AND
CONFIDENTIALITY**

and

**STATEMENT BY THE REGISTRARS GENERAL FOR
ENGLAND AND WALES, SCOTLAND,
AND NORTHERN IRELAND**

**Office for National Statistics
General Register Office for Scotland
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency**

**March 2001
© Crown Copyright
ISBN 1 85774 437 3**

2001 CENSUS OF POPULATION

REPORT ON THE

REVIEWS OF SECURITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

**STATEMENT ON THE SECURITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY OF THE 2001
CENSUS BY THE REGISTRARS GENERAL FOR ENGLAND AND WALES,
SCOTLAND, AND NORTHERN IRELAND**

Each of us has statutory responsibility for conducting the Census of Population in our respective areas. We take the security and confidentiality of the Census very seriously indeed. Everyone involved in the collection and processing of personal census information signs a declaration undertaking to respect its confidentiality and acknowledging a legal obligation not to divulge it

The information supplied by the public in this year's Census, when aggregated, will be essential to the planning and funding of local services over the next decade. The data are only used to produce statistics, and it is our duty to ensure that no information from the Census will be released in a form that would allow it to identify individuals or households.

To provide us with reassurance that the arrangements in place to protect Census data are rigorous and comprehensive, we commissioned two separate reviews from independent experts. One dealt with physical security and the steps taken to protect completed Census forms and the information extracted from them. The other examined the measures necessary to prevent disclosure of personal and household information when the results of the Census are published.

A report on the reviews is published with this statement. We are very grateful to the Review Teams for highlighting measures to safeguard the security and confidentiality of the 2001 Census. We have accepted all the recommendations and have acted on them accordingly or are taking action to ensure that they are implemented.

Everyone in the United Kingdom can be assured that all the information they provide in the Census on 29 April will remain secure and will be treated in strict confidence.

Len Cook, *Registrar General for England and Wales and National Statistician*

John Randall, *Registrar General for Scotland*

Norman Caven, *Registrar General for Northern Ireland*

2001 CENSUS OF POPULATION

REPORT ON THE REVIEWS OF SECURITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY

1 OVERVIEW

Security of the 2001 Census

- 1.4 The Census is administered by the three UK Census Offices – the Office for National Statistics, in England and Wales, the General Register Office for Scotland, and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency. Each must maintain the security and confidentiality of all personal information collected in the 2001 Census of Population in all circumstances. In the White Paper on the 2001 Census¹, the UK Government gave assurances that all the information given will be treated in strict confidence by the Census Offices. Similar assurances had been given about previous censuses. There is a well-established tradition of maintaining census confidentiality, which the UK Census Offices intend to uphold.
- 1.5 Recognising the value of the independent reviews which had been carried out on the 1971, 1981 and 1991 Censuses^{2,3,4} the UK Government stated in the White Paper that the Census Offices would undertake a similar review, or reviews, of the confidentiality and security arrangements for the 2001 Census and would publish the outcome of such reviews before the Census.
- 1.6 Consequently, the three Registrars General commissioned reviews from independent experts to assess the arrangements to safeguard:
- the physical and IT security of the data collection and processing operations (the *Security Review*); and
 - the statistical confidentiality of the published output (the *Statistical Confidentiality Review*).
- 1.7 The Security Review was undertaken by a team from HEDRA Ltd, independent consultants appointed by the Census Offices with help from the Central Computer and Telecommunications Agency (CCTA), and the review of statistical confidentiality was carried out by Dick Carter, Assistant Census Manager at Statistics Canada.

The Reviews

Security Review

1.8 The terms of reference for the Security Review were:

“To review the appropriateness and adequacy of the arrangements made by the Census Offices, or agents acting on their behalf, for the 2001 Census so far as they relate to the processing of data, taking into account the principles set out in the Data Protection Act 1998 and in appropriate Census legislation, the planned process by ONS, GROS and NISRA in collection and transportation of the physical forms to the processing site, the sensitivity of the information held, the risk of a breach of confidentiality, and the costs of any precautionary measures; and that a report of the review should be made by September 2000.”

1.9 The Security Review identified risks and made a number of recommendations relating to the detailed security arrangements for the Census. However, to preserve the high level of security guaranteed by the Registrars General it would not be prudent to publish the details. The Census Offices have accepted all the recommendations made and have taken all necessary action to implement protection against the risks identified in the Review.

Statistical Confidentiality Review

1.10 The terms of reference for the Statistical Confidentiality Review were:

“To review the processes in place to protect against inadvertent and systematic disclosure of information about identifiable households and people in output from the 2001 Censuses of the UK; and to produce a report of the review for the Registrars General of England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland or their representatives.”

1.11 The Statistical Confidentiality Review looked in detail at the planned disclosure control strategy. It made some recommendations to ensure that the strategy is appropriate to safeguard the confidentiality of respondents’ information in tabulations planned to be produced from the 2001 Census. The Census Offices have accepted these recommendations in full and have incorporated them into the procedures to be adopted.

Confidentiality principles

1.12 The Census Offices welcome this opportunity to re-affirm their determination to fulfil their obligation in law to protect the confidentiality of the information about individual persons and households given in the Census. While the Census collects information from each person and household in the country, it is not concerned with facts about *individuals* as such. Its purpose is to provide facts about the community, and groups within the community, as a whole. The public has a right to expect that information provided in confidence will be respected.

- 1.13 The information collected in the 2001 Census will be used solely for the production of statistics and research. Usage will comply fully with census legislation⁵ and the requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. There are legal penalties for the unlawful disclosure of personal census information. The following additional principles govern the treatment of the information given in the Census returns:
- (i) Only persons under the management of the Registrars General, or agents acting on their behalf for the purposes of the Census Acts, will have access to identifiable personal census information.
 - (ii) In most cases one form will cover all members of the household and will be returned by post; but people will, if they wish, be able to give personal information on a separate form in a way that will not reveal it to others in their household or establishment, or to the enumerator.
 - (iii) All members of the Census Offices and outside agents providing services to the Registrars General in connection with the Census Acts will be given strict instructions, and will be required to sign an undertaking that they recognise their legal obligation to protect the confidentiality of census data. They will be liable to prosecution for any breaches of the law.
 - (iv) Controls ensuring the physical security of census documents containing personal information held in the Census Offices, by field staff or by authorised agents will be strictly enforced.
 - (v) The computer systems handling census data will have strict safeguards to prevent unauthorised access to the information held.
 - (vi) In releasing statistics from the Census, all possible steps will be taken to prevent the inadvertent disclosure of information about identifiable individuals and households. Special precautions will apply particularly to statistical output for small areas.

References

- 1 *The 2001 Census of Population* (Cm 4253). ISBN 0 10 142532 5. The Stationery Office, 1999.
- 2 *Security of the Census of Population* (Cmnd 5365). HMSO, 1971.
- 3 *Security of the Census of Population* (Cmnd 8201). HMSO, 1981.
- 4 *1991 Census of Population: Confidentiality and Computing* (Cm 1447). ISBN 0 11 114472 5. HMSO, 1991.
- 5 The statutes under which the Census is taken - the *Census Act 1920* in Great Britain, and the *Census Act (Northern Ireland) 1969* - ensure confidentiality in two ways. First, under the Acts the results of the Census may only be used for either: (a) compiling into statistical reports laid before Parliament, or, at the discretion of the Registrars General, into other statistical abstracts, under Section 4 of the Acts; or (b) the preparation of statistics in respect of periods between one census and another, under Section 5 of the Acts. Second, the Acts (as amended by the *Census (Confidentiality) Act 1991* and the *Census (Confidentiality) (Northern Ireland) Order 1991*) provide legal penalties for unlawful disclosure of census information.