

census
2021

Census 2021

Response to Actionable Findings from Phase 1 of the National Statistics Accreditation

15th June 2020

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1. Introduction

1.1 Assessment of the 2021 Censuses

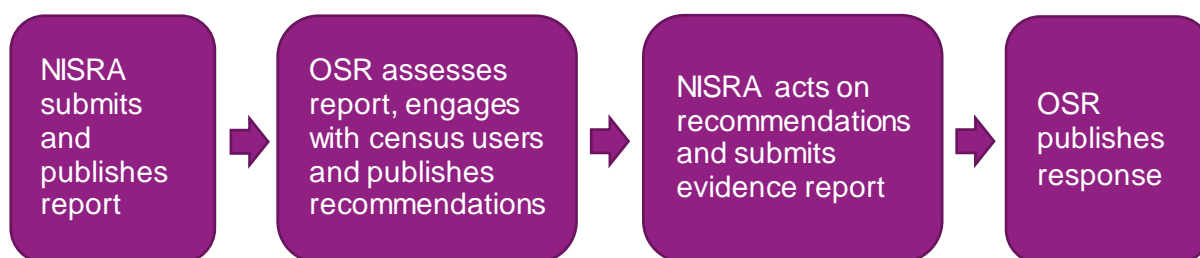
The Office for Statistics Regulation (OSR) is assessing the 2021 Censuses in the UK being conducted by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), National Records of Scotland (NRS) and Office for National Statistics (ONS) in Northern Ireland (NI), Scotland and England and Wales, respectively. The purpose of the assessment is to inform the OSR recommendation on whether the Census 2021 outputs should be designated as National Statistics, in accordance with the requirements of the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007, when they are first released.

Census statistics on people and households in the UK are an important resource for a variety of users including government, local authorities, academics, the commercial sector and the general public. Therefore, it is essential that the data meet the standards set out in the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#) (hereafter referred to as the Code).

Compliance with the Code provides users and the public confidence that the Census 2021 statistics are of public value, are high quality and are produced by an organisation that is worthy of trust.

1.2 Assessment process

The entire NI Census 2021 programme will be assessed, from the initial planning stages through to the production of the final standard outputs. The assessment is split into three phases, each comprising the following elements:



At the end of Phase 2 of the assessment after the Census has taken place, OSR plans to publish a report, upon which it will recommend whether the Census 2021 outputs should be designated as National Statistics, thereby retaining the badging from Census 2011.

1.3 Assessment timeline

This report forms part of the evidence base being supplied by NISRA to OSR during Phase 1 of the Census 2021 National Statistics assessment. In June 2019, we published our initial report ["How NISRA is ensuring that Census 2021 will serve the public"](#), which

was a first step towards measuring progress against the three pillars underpinning the Code, namely Trustworthiness, Quality and Value. This coincided with similar reports published by [ONS](#) and [NRS](#).

Alongside consideration of the initial report, OSR engaged with users and other stakeholders about their views on Census 2021 plans, progress and outputs. We wish to thank those individuals and organisations who have willingly engaged with OSR and provided feedback for the assessment. The information presented to and gathered by OSR informed its first report published in October 2019, which detailed preliminary findings from the assessment to that point. The report, entitled "[2021 Censuses in the UK – Preliminary findings](#)" considered the extent to which planning, engagement and development activities undertaken by the three Census offices in preparation for Census 2021 were compliant with the Code.

While OSR identified areas of strength and were encouraged by progress and future plans, it highlighted specific areas for the different Census offices to focus on going forward. These are set out in a number of actionable findings, which NISRA, NRS and ONS are required to address to improve compliance with the Code. This report describes how NISRA is building upon existing plans and practices to address the OSR recommendations, which will help to deliver a high quality Census. It also highlights the strong working relationships between the three Census offices, which harness the collective expertise and experience within each organisation to benefit the overall Census 2021 programme.

2. Detailed response to actionable findings

The report is structured around the seven actionable findings presented by OSR in its preliminary findings report from Phase 1 of the assessment.

2.1 Accessibility of information and website content

OSR finding: Census offices should consider the accessibility of research and other Census information on their websites and consider aligning website design and content where possible to provide a common user experience.

The [NISRA website](#) is the principal channel for disseminating NI census information; therefore, we operate the census section of the website within the organisation-level design principles governing NISRA's overall online presence. The main census [landing page](#) can be easily navigated to from the NISRA home page; it provides links for the 2021 and 2011 Censuses, as well as earlier censuses including those on an all-Ireland basis pre 1921. The [Census 2021 webpage](#) includes links for News and Events, and Planning,

with the latter providing clear information on key elements such as overall design, the 2019 rehearsal, legislation, consultations and data security.

We believe that the design and layout of the Census 2021 webpages lend themselves to easy navigation by users looking for specific information or seeking to learn about the latest developments. For those interested in the previous two censuses, there is online access to a wide range of outputs and supporting information such as evaluation reports, methodology documents and research papers. We update the Census 2021 webpages to provide users with the latest information on plans, developments and progress. This is done in compliance with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, an internationally recognised set of recommendations for improving web accessibility.

In response to the actionable findings from Phase 1 of the OSR assessment, we have added further content relating to the following:

- Assurance
- UK Census data
- Census 2021 milestones

Much of this content was developed via consultation with the other UK Census offices, with the aim of using consistent layout and wording where possible to provide a common experience for UK-level users who access Census 2021 information from the NISRA, [Scotland's Census](#) and [ONS](#) websites.

As we move towards and beyond Census Day, additional content will be added to the Census 2021 website. With methods and processes being finalised and implemented, there will be scope to provide more definitive and clear information to users. The development of a modern and fit-for-purpose outputs dissemination platform, accessible via the NISRA website, which meets the data needs of a wide range of users will be an important focus. To achieve this, we are learning from best practice in the UK and internationally.

Regarding the other Census offices, ONS and NRS have specific plans for their Census 2021 websites; the development of a Census 2021 outputs website is a key area of activity. The aim for ONS is to integrate the new outputs website into its existing online landscape by using a common set of channels, products and tools rather than having it exist as a standalone service. NRS, meanwhile, has enlisted the services of a Scottish digital transformation consultancy, to deliver the new Scotland's Census outputs website; its design will be strongly influenced by user input to ensure it best meets their information and data requirements. The new outputs websites for ONS and NRS will be

delivered in line with the Government Digital Service and Digital First Service Standards models, respectively.

While NISRA, NRS and ONS recognise the need to deliver as streamlined a service as possible to users of UK-wide census data, it is not practical to have a fully aligned website design without the three offices having a single approach to digital dissemination. To ensure we consider possible ways to align elements of website design, within the constraints of our own digital landscapes, there will be engagement between NISRA, NRS and ONS to discuss plans and identify specific areas where alignment may be feasible.

It is more achievable to harmonise aspects of website content and this will continue to be a focus of efforts across the three Census offices. For example, work is ongoing to produce a harmonised UK Census data webpage that has broadly similar content on the respective websites (see section 2.3.1). It is important that in providing key harmonisation information, the different UK Census websites use appropriate cross-site linking and signposting to maximise ease of navigation for users and pinpoint equivalent information across the different countries.

2.2 Census questions and guidance

OSR finding: Census offices should be open and transparent on their decision-making processes and in their decisions on Census questions and guidance, particularly in relation to any areas of contention.

NISRA has consulted widely on the questionnaire content for Census 2021 in NI via formal advisory committees, topic-related working groups and a [public consultation](#). Consideration has been given to national and international good practice in census design and content, while a comprehensive programme of testing and research has provided valuable understanding of the public's perception of question wording and questionnaire design.

The "[2021 Census Northern Ireland Proposals Document](#)", published in April 2019, details the rationale behind the selection of proposed questions for Census 2021. Particular focus is given to the new topics, with a description of user need and the consideration process employed by NISRA. Among the new topics, the person-level questions on sexual orientation and UK armed forces veterans are potentially contentious owing to privacy and public acceptability issues. In response to this, NISRA published [reports](#) on each topic alongside the Proposals Document, which provide transparency on the decision-making process around these proposed questions.

NISRA has engaged with users pursuing the inclusion of specific questions or seeking clarification on the rationale for the design of particular questions proposed for Census 2021. During 2018 and 2019, there was dialogue with a topic expert group of UK academics with links to community groups across NI regarding the main language question. They were concerned that the proposed language question would not fully capture the diversity of languages spoken in NI and provided alternative question formats they believed would enhance the quality and utility of the data. We met with the group in question in addition to a series of correspondence, which allowed them to present their case. After considering their suggestions and assessing user demand for information on this topic, we outlined the rationale for maintaining the original question, namely the need to align with the rest of the UK and to maintain comparability with Census 2011.

Since early 2020, NISRA has been communicating with a research group from an NI university about the design of the proposed health conditions question in Census 2021, specifically around the learning disability response categories. We have responded in detail to a number of queries, providing evidence that supports the use of certain terminology in different response options in the expectation of improving the quality and utility of the collected data.

The census rehearsal, carried out during autumn 2019, provided a valuable opportunity to assess the performance of the proposed questions for Census 2021. Details of this will be made available to the public in the rehearsal evaluation report, expected to be published in summer 2020. A further example of transparency and willingness to engage on the part of NISRA concerned a query from a user group shortly after the rehearsal on the guidance for the sex question. We held a productive meeting with the group in question, acknowledging their concerns, outlining the rationale for the question guidance developed for the rehearsal and agreeing to consider their recommendations when finalising the guidance for Census 2021.

On 18 March 2020, NISRA appeared before the NI Assembly Committee for Finance; among the agenda items was the presentation of evidence in relation to the Census Order (Northern Ireland) 2020, one of the fundamental parts of the legislation required to conduct Census 2021. The Committee was provided with a comprehensive overview of the planned Census operation and its delivery to support their consideration of the Census Order; the Committee had no objections to the policy implications of the proposed legislation and the Order has progressed to the next stage of the legislative process. Regarding proposed Census questions, there was interest from the Committee in Irish and Ulster-Scots proficiency, with NISRA officials outlining the quality measures taken to verify the accuracy of the response data. NISRA welcomed the opportunity for transparency through presentation of its plans for Census 2021 to a key stakeholder

group. With the Committee session also being available to [view online](#), wider census users, stakeholders and the general public are also able to gain an insight on plans for Census 2021.

2.3 Needs of UK Census data users

2.3.1 Engaging with UK Census data users and coordinating activities

OSR finding: Census offices should consider how best to engage with users and stakeholders of UK Census data and statistics users and coordinate activities as appropriate.

The three Census offices have built a strong evidence base on the requirements around UK census data via specific consultation and engagement with users and stakeholders on this subject. [ONS](#) and [NISRA](#) included sections on UK harmonisation and statistics in their Census 2021 outputs consultations, while NRS did likewise in its [Outputs Stakeholder events](#). This highlighted the considerable value and utility placed on UK census data by a wide range of users.

To supplement the aforementioned engagement, ONS, in its lead role in coordinating and disseminating UK-level outputs from Census 2021, conducted further research on UK census data requirements. Firstly, a sample of users who responded to the UK census data questions in the outputs consultation were interviewed, using questions developed by the three offices, to gain an insight on how UK data are applied and preferences with regard to accessing these data and supporting information. Secondly, as part of its census roadshows during 2019, ONS included an interactive study for attendees to capture their user journey from accessing to downloading UK-level census data. Through sharing the research findings with NRS and NISRA, there is a greater collective understanding of the needs of census users at a UK level.

In addition, the ongoing assessment of the 2021 UK Censuses by OSR has provided the three offices with valuable intelligence on the requirements of users interested in UK-level data. As part of the assessment, OSR received feedback from a range of UK data users, which has been shared with the relevant Census office, where authorised to do so.

In response to considering how best to engage with user of UK census data and coordinating activities as appropriate, the three Census offices have introduced a number of initiatives:

Establishment of the UK Census Data working group – This group has the specific aim of collaborating and aligning activities to address the actionable findings in section 2.3.1 and

2.3.3. The group meet on a monthly basis to identify ways in which the findings can be addressed, ensure consistency in approach and discuss progress.

Addition of UK Census data webpage – Each of the Census offices have added or are in the process of adding a UK Census section to their respective websites. This includes background information on Census 2021 in the constituent countries and provides an overview of the wide range of harmonisation activities; plans for UK-level outputs will also be outlined as they are developed and finalised. In addition, the webpage promotes engagement with UK census users by encouraging feedback on their specific requirements for Census 2021 outputs.

Cross-office attendance at user events - The three offices have committed to attending each other's stakeholder and user events where relevant and practical. This will involve introducing census colleagues from other parts of the UK to attendees and encouraging engagement to discuss their respective countries Census or the Census from a UK perspective. For example, colleagues from ONS and NISRA attended the [NRS Statistical Methodology Stakeholder event](#) in Edinburgh in February 2020 and were introduced to the attendees.

Potential UK-wide stakeholder event – The UK Census Data working group have held discussions about organising a UK-level stakeholder event in each of the constituent countries. Group members have reviewed the research undertaken by ONS to date, as well as findings from discussions with UK data users after OSR shared feedback from the Phase 1 assessment, and concluded that additional UK level events at this time would not add value to understanding user needs.

Although there is a growing body of evidence demonstrating the needs of UK data users in England, it is worth noting that at the time of publication, no UK data users in NI have made themselves known to NISRA, or to ONS or NRS. While there is a collective recognition of the importance of harmonising census outputs, where possible and practical, to produce consistent and comparable UK-level statistics, a key priority for each Census office is to meet the specific user and respondent needs in the part of the UK that it has responsibility for. We continue to try and identify NI-based UK census users to add to the collective understanding of their data requirements. If you are a UK data user based in NI and wish to engage with NISRA, please contact us at census@nisra.gov.uk to help us understand your needs for Census 2021.

2.3.2 Awareness of impact of decision-making on UK Census data

OSR finding: Census offices should be clear about the impact of country-specific decision making for UK Census data and statistics and work together to provide greater transparency around their plans and decision making in meeting the needs of users interested in UK Census outputs.

While NISRA, NRS and ONS are responsible for and focusing on delivering Census 2021 in NI, Scotland and England and Wales, respectively, the three organisations are working in unison to ensure that the Censuses are successful in providing high quality population and housing statistics for the UK, meeting the needs of data users and satisfying international obligations. This is demonstrated by the statement of agreement between the National Statistician and the Registrars General for Scotland and NI about the conduct of the 2021 Censuses. It sets out the elements of the Census that the three offices are aiming to harmonise, where it is practical and in the interest of users and the public good more generally.

The [initial statement of agreement](#) was published in October 2015, and this has been followed by progress updates released in [November 2016](#) and [January 2020](#). The documents are structured around three broad aspects of Census 2021 that are a strong focus of harmonisation, namely outputs, census procedures and governance. Within each section, clear information is provided on key elements such as common topics and questions, statistical methods, use of administrative data and publicity campaigns; this highlights to users the considerable progress made to date on harmonisation.

The UK Census Committee (UKCC), which NISRA, NRS and ONS are members of, has an important role with regard to harmonisation of Census 2021 activities across the UK. Among its main purposes is to agree the Census delivery approaches and plans in a way that takes full advantage of harmonisation of working practices and sharing of research and resources. The UKCC also agrees the scope of cross-UK working and co-ordination and provides strategic input to this work, taking into account a number of factors including the need to meet users' and international obligations through the harmonisation of UK outputs.

Ongoing effective collaboration provides a platform for understanding the impact of country-specific decisions on UK outputs from Census 2021, while also ensuring that opportunities for harmonisation are identified and implemented. Harmonisation working groups (HWGs) are a significant part of the daily workings of the three Census offices, supporting all levels of the census programmes from management through to specific work areas. Covering the majority of census topics, design and delivery, HWGs aim to maximise harmonisation through sharing ideas, best practice and methodologies. Importantly, HWGs help to understand any impacts on UK level data where harmonisation is not possible.

The UK Census Data working group are compiling a descriptive list of all the HWGs and activities contributed to by the UK Census offices to capture the magnitude of work that goes in to UK harmonisation. Once compiled, it is intended that this information will be

shared on our respective websites to aid transparency in the work being done on UK harmonisation. Similarly, a series of workshops will be held to review the harmonisation of definitions, classifications and outputs. Upon finalisation of harmonisation approaches in these key elements of Census 2021, the three offices will be better placed to communicate firm plans and impacts to users and stakeholders, especially those interested in UK outputs.

As referred to in section 2.3.1, the three Census offices worked together to design and develop content for a UK Census section on the [NISRA](#), [NRS](#) and [ONS](#) websites. New content will be added and existing content updated as we move towards and beyond March 2021. Regarding UK harmonisation, there is information on:

- why we harmonise
- what we are doing to harmonise
- further relevant information

In relation to UK census data, the webpage will evolve to provide information on:

- plans for UK outputs from Census 2021
- how UK data are used
- Census 2011 UK data and supporting information

2.3.3 Information on harmonisation of Census questions

OSR finding: Census offices should provide users, stakeholders and decision makers with information on harmonisation of Census questions and the impact on outputs at UK level to help inform users and support decision making.

There has been effective collaboration in developing questions for inclusion in Census 2021 between NI, Scotland and England and Wales. While each Census office strives to meet the specific user and respondent needs in the relevant part(s) of the UK, there is a collective recognition of the importance of harmonising census questions and topics, where possible and practical, to produce consistent and comparable UK-level statistics. A prime example is the area of census content and questionnaire design, which has seen the three offices build a strong working relationship via the Question Product Working Group, established early in the Census 2021 programme. This work will be taken towards completion via a series of UK-level workshops planned for spring 2020.

Work is ongoing to produce a clear understanding of the harmonisation of Census 2021 questions across the UK; this includes highlighting where differences exist, the underlying reasons, and the resultant effect on UK-level outputs. This work cannot be completed until the Census Order and Census Regulations have been approved by the respective legislatures, upon which the Census 2021 questions will be finalised. Therefore, the

expectation is for this information to be published in 2021 so data users are fully informed at the earliest opportunity and well in advance of the publication of first census outputs in March 2022 by ONS. In the meantime, ONS plans to publish a series of question development reports, which will include details of the differences in the Census 2021 questionnaires between NI, Scotland and England and Wales.

2.4 Quality assurance of administrative data

OSR finding: Census offices should build their awareness of the relative strengths and limitations of any administrative, commercial or other data sources used in the production of Census outputs, by regular engagement with suppliers. This should be undertaken on an ongoing basis and as part of a normal way of working.

NISRA is using administrative data to support and enhance key elements of Census 2021, as outlined in the 2019 publication ["2021 Census - Use of Administrative Data"](#). This builds upon the successful employment of administrative data in Census 2011 and aligns with the approach being adopted by many traditional census-taking countries internationally. We are well placed in this context, having a solid administrative data infrastructure that has been developed over the past decade and utilised by a dedicated, well-resourced and highly-skilled team.

NISRA has built strong, trusting and long-term working relationships with administrative data suppliers. The relative small size of NI is advantageous in this regard as it often facilitates more effective communication channels, while NISRA has personnel out-posted to many of the data supplying departments and organisations. We routinely engage with secondary data suppliers to improve our understanding of data quality and provide feedback on quality issues encountered through inspection and processing of the data. Therefore, we are very aware of the relative strengths and limitations of the administrative sources in question. The following are examples of some of the quality assurance (QA) activities undertaken as part of the integration of administrative data into the Census 2021 process.

Quality Assurance of Administrative Data – NISRA uses the OSR guidance on Quality Assurance of Administrative Data (QAAD) to support QA of administrative data that we handle. This includes acquiring QAAD reports from each key data supplier (for example, [Department for the Economy data on training and apprenticeships](#)) and metadata documents where available to get a better understanding of strengths and limitations of both datasets as a whole and individual variables. Quality assurance is carried out on data when they are received and checks are regularly reviewed and updated. Knowledge obtained through QA of the data and the supplier QAAD is then summarised and disseminated to the rest of the office. This is an ongoing process with

priority given to those datasets that make up the core of our administrative data solution for use in Census 2021.

A key element of the administrative data infrastructure is the statistical person database (SPD) of address and basic demographic information, created from linkage of multiple administrative sources. The QAAD approach underpins QA of the individual sources, while we have sought guidance from OSR on an appropriate and proportionate QAAD method for the linked data product, the SPD.

Data quality assessment – NISRA maintains a detailed log of quality issues for each administrative source as the data are ingested to its secure IT system. Data quality reports are produced for each key source, which are updated as additional data extracts are received; these inform discussions with data suppliers with the aim of identifying and resolving observed quality issues. A prime example is the monthly quality report we produce for the Pointer data received from Land and Property Services (LPS). Pointer is the main address database for NI and is used as the spine of the address register being developed to support the Census 2021 operation. The quality report identifies issues such as missing values, invalid values, unexpected formatting and duplication of records, thereby highlighting to LPS where remedial action is required. This iterative process has resulted in improvements to Pointer data quality over time.

Quality Assurance against comparator data sources – We have produced an internal report on a QA exercise on the SPD in which household-level demographic information was compared to corresponding household survey data collected by NISRA Central Survey Unit. Future work will assess the accuracy of person-level demographic information in the SPD using a variety of data sources.

In addition to data suppliers, regular engagement with other statistics offices and topic-expert groups increases our awareness and understanding of the strengths and limitations of administrative data. A key aim of the administrative data work for Census 2021 is to develop an authoritative SPD. This relies on a statistically robust data linkage methodology based on match-keys, which we have developed and refined over time. There is a strong focus on assessing the quality of the linked data; in addition to following the OSR QAAD guidance, NISRA is engaged with the wider statistical network on how best to implement this via the following forums:

- attendance at the Government Statistical Service (GSS) data linkage symposium
- involvement in the National Statistician's Quality Review on data linkage
- participation in relevant GSS initiatives:
- Data Linkage group on Slack
- Census Harmonisation group

- Population and Census Strategic Group
- involvement in the International Census Forum, in particular with Statistics New Zealand, a world leading statistical agency in utilising administrative data in a traditional census
- regular Four Nations meetings with ONS, NRS and the Central Statistics Office in Ireland, focussing on the use of administrative data in the census

2.5 Methodology and quality assurance information

OSR finding: Census offices should make information on the methodology and quality assurance arrangements available to users at the earliest opportunity.

Census 2021 will be the first in which NISRA designs, develops and conducts data processing independently. For the previous two censuses, ONS carried out the processing of NI response data, with NISRA responsible for thorough QA of the data at each stage before generating outputs from the processed data. We have made considerable progress in developing methods and systems for the various stages of census data processing (broadly classed as data cleansing, edit and imputation, and coverage estimation and adjustment), with the successfully applied methodology from Census 2011 serving as a template for many elements. A key milestone is a comprehensive rehearsal of the data processing system, using pooled raw response data from the 2019 rehearsal and Census 2011. Following this exercise and assessment of the processed data, we will be better placed to publish definitive information for users on the methods being employed for processing of Census 2021 data, likely to be in advance of the live operation in 2021. This will build upon the overview of the data processing methods provided in section 4.2 of the [initial report](#) published by NISRA for the National Statistics assessment of Census 2021.

NISRA is currently developing its QA approach for Census 2021. It focuses on the two main strands, namely QA of the processes from address register development right through to outputs generation, and validation of the census estimates. In terms of informing users about QA plans, the expectation is that a QA strategy document will be published in due course. NISRA is confident in its ability to develop and implement an effective QA process for Census 2021 that ensures outputs are a reliable basis for decision-making and are trusted by users.

The QA approach will be underpinned by the wide availability of administrative data sources, draw upon the effective methods implemented in Census 2011, and consider some of the tools being developed by ONS and NRS; the latter is facilitated through our participation in the UK Statistical Quality working group, which facilitates harmonisation of our approach to statistical QA where possible. The working group meets once a quarter

to share methodologies, best practice and lessons learned. Regular communications also take place between meetings to keep up to date on work in the respective UK Census offices, and to identify areas for alignment and joint working. In addition, we continue to avail of the collective expertise offered through membership of the International Census Forum, comprised of census organisations in Republic of Ireland, Canada, United States of America, Australia and New Zealand. Regular meetings facilitate sharing of statistical QA best practice and lessons learned across census operations.

Regarding the Census 2021 operation, we are developing data collection approaches with the aim of maximising the response rate and ensuring that it is consistent across geographic areas. Valuable intelligence gained during the 2019 rehearsal is a key element in refining the methods. Section 4 of the [2021 Census Proposals document](#) provides a high-level description of the data collection operation, with the methods outlined currently maturing towards finalisation. The expectation is that we will hold public information events during winter 2020/21, at which census users, stakeholders and the general public will be able to learn about the planned data collection operation.

2.6 Census 2021 milestones

OSR finding: Census offices should provide users with an indication of future Census milestones – including future user engagement opportunities, publication of further research or reporting, and legislative milestones – to provide an added level of transparency and support trustworthiness and public confidence.

NISRA has added a detailed Census 2021 [timeline](#) to the census website to inform users of milestones alongside anticipated dates. This includes completion of the different elements of the legislative process, key publications such as the 2019 rehearsal evaluation, planned stakeholder engagement events and essential components of the data collection operation such as recruitment of field staff and the advertising campaign. While the detailed outputs release schedule will not be finalised until later in the Census 2021 programme, the timeline provided gives a broad indication of the period during which the standard and other outputs, as well as specialist products, are expected to be released.

The timeline will evolve over the period up to and beyond Census Day in 2021. Currently, many of the dates for the various milestones, events and publications are approximate; definitive dates will be added once finalised. In addition, the timeline will be updated to include relevant new elements. This will ensure that users are fully informed in terms of when to expect key milestones and deliverables along the Census 2021 lifecycle, thereby providing greater transparency and encouraging trust and public confidence.

2.7 Assurance mechanisms for Census 2021

OSR finding: Census offices should be clear to users what assurance mechanisms are in place and be open about identified areas for improvement in a way that is a proportionate and accessible to users.

A dedicated [page](#) has been added to the Census 2021 section of the NISRA website, describing the different levels of assurance in place to underpin the successful delivery of Census 2021 in NI. Information is provided on the internal and external oversight, including the Census Assurance Panel drawn from the NI Civil Service and the Demographic Statistics Advisory Group (DSAG) made up of experts from academia and business. Minutes from the DSAG meetings, held every nine to 12 months are [published](#) on the NISRA website.

The 2019 rehearsal was an important assurance mechanism as it enabled a rigorous assessment of the main systems and services to be used in Census 2021. The sample size of circa twenty thousand households, spread across three areas in NI, facilitated a relatively small-scale, yet realistic simulation of the Census 2021 live operation. This provided NISRA with valuable insights on the performance of the systems and processes supporting the enumeration and helped to identify what worked well and where improvements are needed for the main event. The plan is to publish a comprehensive rehearsal evaluation in summer 2020, focusing on the data collection operation; this will be followed by an evaluation of the data processing system at a later date using response data from both the rehearsal and Census 2011.

As evident from this report, the UK Statistics Authority (UKSA), via OSR, has commenced work on the re-accreditation of Censuses across the UK for National Statistics status. The re-accreditation process involves three phases covering planning and consultation, plans for developing and disseminating outputs and, finally, an assessment of user needs versus outputs, post-publication. The assessment process will inform the ultimate recommendation by UKSA, and in the event of retaining National Statistics status will provide external assurance that NISRA complied with the Code in planning and delivering Census 2021.

3. Impact of Covid-19

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic presents a serious challenge to the timelines associated with the three Census offices fully addressing the actionable findings from Phase 1 of the OSR assessment. NISRA, NRS and ONS continue to work closely to assess the impact on, specifically, deliverables for the assessment and, more broadly, the Census 2021 programmes across the UK.

NISRA aims to keep users fully informed on the impact of the Covid-19 situation on services and statistical production. To that end, there are links to detailed information on the NISRA website.