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Sir Andrew Dilnot CBE
Non-executive Chairman
UK Statistics Authority
Government Buildings
Cardiff Road
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Dear Andrew,

Government's response to the National Statistician's recommendation

Thank you for your letter of 27 March regarding the census and future provision of population statistics in England and Wales. The Government welcomes the recommendation for a predominantly online census in 2021 supplemented by further use of administrative and survey data.

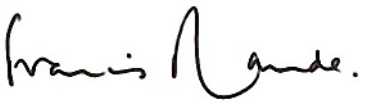
Government recognises the value of the census and its history as a bedrock of statistical infrastructure. The census provides information on the population that is of fundamental importance to society. At the same time, Government has long said that the census in its current form is outdated and – with modern technology – could be delivered more effectively and more cheaply. Modernising the approach could significantly improve the speed of analysis and outputs. In addition, we are not making the best use of the considerable data that government already collects.

We agree with the recommendation for an online census in 2021 as a modern successor to the traditional paper-based decennial census, with support for those who are unable to complete the census online. We welcome the increased use of administrative data in producing the census in 2021 and other population statistics, and to improve statistics between censuses, since this would make the best use of all available data and provide a sound basis for the greater use of administrative data and surveys in the future. We welcome ONS plans for further research to determine the most appropriate blend of methods and data sources for the 2021 census. However, our support for the dual running of an online (decennial) census with increased use of administrative data is only relevant to 2021 and not for future censuses. Our ambition is that censuses after 2021 will be conducted using other sources of data and providing more timely statistical information. However, any final decision on moving to the use only of administrative data beyond 2021 will be dependent on the dual running sufficiently validating the perceived feasibility of that approach. In the period up to 2021

UKSA's plans should include ensuring that adequate research into the use of administrative data and surveys is carried out to enable a decision about the future methodology for capturing population and census data.

The Government recognises that the public must be assured of privacy and confidentiality with the use of administrative data for statistical purposes, which is why we have launched an open policy making process. We are working in a collaborative and open manner with civil society organisations and the wider Public Sector as well as groups with a specific interest in individual privacy. This process will explore how government data can be better used to improve national statistics and our understanding of the economy and society. Colleagues from ONS are fully engaged in this work.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you and the UKSA Board for the work on this important matter and look forward to receiving the detailed financial estimates which underpin these recommendations.



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