

## Data Management and Analysis Group

### Counting the Population: GLA Submission to the Treasury Sub-Committee Inquiry



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## **Counting the Population: GLA Submission to the Treasury Sub-Committee Inquiry**

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# **Counting the Population**

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### **Acknowledgement**

The GLA Submission was written by DMAG and approved by the Mayor's Office.

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# GLA Submission: Executive Summary

## Uses and definitions

1. ONS should make efforts to incorporate improved address list and property gazetteer data from both Ordnance Survey and IDeA into the small area estimation methodology.
2. The main problem with ONS population estimates as currently constructed is that there is insufficient confidence in the estimates of international migration flows. This is a particular problem for London.
3. ONS projections are critical to local authorities in England as CLG uses the projections in the allocation of the local authority grant settlement. Clearly when estimates of international migration and hence population are wrong, and are compounded when carried into projections, the result can be an unfair allocation of scarce resources between areas.
4. Comparing ONS international migration statistics with registrations of overseas nationals for National Insurance shows a major difference – of the order of 100 thousand a year. Either the international migration figures understate true levels of long-term migrant inflows or the difference indicates a large flow of short-stay temporary workers. Either way, local authorities see their costs rise to meet the demands from new migrants (whether long or short-term) for their services. It is therefore imperative that local estimates of short-term migrants are made alongside the mid-year estimates, which include only long-term migrants.
5. It is essential that local estimates are made of study and work stays in the UK of at least one month duration and that these are set alongside the conventional estimates.

## The role of the Census

6. The GLA would press strongly for ONS to pursue the option of a fourth page of individual questions per person on the Census form. This would increase the likelihood of including some very important questions for London, providing vital data on qualifications, industry, carers, language, full-time and part-time working, and a wider question on health. In particular, it is vital that we know about both qualifications and industry.
7. The GLA would strongly encourage the development of disclosure control and license arrangements that allow public sector users access (under strict licence conditions) to data - including ward level data - that meet their needs.

## Mid-year population estimates

8. The high degree of errors in London borough population estimates totally destroys confidence in the ONS data and in the analyses and outcomes based upon them. While the estimates are worse for boroughs in London than for any other region there are several urban areas of England with high migration turnover where similar problems exist.
9. The ONS methodology is basically sound – if only the data were available to support it. ONS is between a rock and a hard place – the data available on international migration flows are inadequate and there are no signs of early improvements. The methodological approaches taken to deal with international and internal migration must be more ‘joined up’ by utilising more fully the available NHS data on new registrants from overseas or by registering international immigrants.

10. The ONS-led Interdepartmental Taskforce offered several good suggestions of how to improve international migration data - mostly relating to inflows - but so far only limited resources have been found to implement the administrative changes and research necessary.
11. Neither ONS nor users wish to see a repeat of the large discrepancies between estimates and census results. However, without further pre-2011 revisions to the methodology and data inputs, ONS will be having to alter estimates for some London boroughs by similar amounts - up to 25% - as had to be done after the 2001 Census results had been fully absorbed into the system.

### **The role of survey and administrative data**

12. If survey data on international migration are to be improved, the sample in London needs to be significantly increased. The GLA hope this will be considered as part of the move towards the Integrated Household Survey (IHS).
13. Internal migration within the UK is built on the GP re-registrations and recorded changes of patient postcodes. Methods must be found to correct the biases caused by delayed registration to enhance the value of the data to the population estimates.

### **Cooperation with stakeholders**

14. The Statistics Commission contributed strongly to an informed, professional, and empathetic critique of ONS activities. It is important that the new Statistics Board maintains this critique, alongside other relevant bodies such as the Royal Statistical Society, the Statistics User Forum, and topic user groups.

# GLA Detailed Submission

***The GLA submission follows the order of the five sections specified, and treats each point made by the Sub-Committee, listed at the top of each section.***

## 1. Uses and definitions

- *What are the uses of population estimates, and how far do current population estimates meet the needs associated with those uses? What are the effects of inaccuracies or inadequacies in such estimates?*
- *How appropriate is a definition of the population based on the usually resident population in the context of the needs of the users?*
- *How does the quality and range of population statistics in England and Wales compare with that available in Scotland, Northern Ireland and internationally?*

### *General*

- 1.1. ONS provides population estimates on a number of geographies; this submission will concentrate on local authority level estimates but, at the outset, make some observations on the estimates for wards and super output areas.
- 1.2. The sub-local authority estimates made by ONS are constrained to the estimates at LA level, so everything that follows pertaining to the higher level will have influence at the lower levels.
- 1.3. ONS small area estimates are important for local government as they are used by CLG to underpin the Indices of Deprivation.
- 1.4. Small area estimates suffer from lack of good datasets below LA level; therefore they are understood to be less accurate. However, the key variable in small area population change is the local housing stock – its volume, type and utilisation. Small area estimates must take on board local data that show this. Most local authorities have good council tax records as local finance depends upon it. Address lists and property gazetteers have been a major problem in the past, but with both Ordnance Survey and the Improvement and Development Agency offering products in this area – with both due to be used in the 2011 Census – data are improving and efforts should be made by ONS to incorporate this data in the small area estimation methodology.

### *Uses by GLA*

- 1.5. The Greater London Authority makes significant use of ONS estimates, not necessarily because they are thought to be sufficiently accurate but because they provide a consistent set of data across all authorities in England and Wales. Therefore when comparing London, or parts of London, with the rest of the country or other parts of the country there is consistency and the GLA is using data to which everyone has access. The range of uses includes using the estimates (either for total population or parts of the population) as denominators in indicators of unemployment, poverty, deprivation or crime.

- 1.6. One of the main uses of the estimates is not to do with the estimates themselves but the detailed components of annual changes – births, deaths, UK migration, international migration, etc. Births and deaths are the most reliable as they are sourced from administrative information; internal migration is also based on administrative data but there are known biases. All three components are used directly in GLA demographic models. However the estimates of international migration flows are carefully scrutinised before being used, as these are the most likely parts of the estimation process to be in error or to carry wide confidence intervals.
- 1.7. If authorities cannot sign-up to the accuracy of ONS estimates for their areas or parts of their areas, there will be difficulty in convincing government departments of the need to consider their own in-house alternative population data.
- 1.8. The main problem with the estimates as currently constructed is that there is insufficient confidence in the estimates of international migration flows. This is a particular problem for London as it receives about 40% of UK net international migration and alternate administrative data give different interpretations of where the international immigrants settle.

#### *Uses by others with impacts on the GLA*

- 1.9. There are many uses to which the estimates are put by government departments and agencies that have a direct impact on the GLA. The CLG uses the estimates for super output areas to underpin the Indices of Deprivation. These are used in support of funding priorities. ONS uses the estimates as bases for its own subnational population projections. Any error in the estimates is therefore introduced in the projections doubly – first at the base and second in the migration components that steer the projections. These projections are critical to local authorities in England as CLG uses them in the allocation of the local authority grant settlement. Therefore in the current CLG allocation, errors in the estimates for mid-2004 may have a significant impact on future funding for three financial years ahead, ie 2008-11.
- 1.10. Clearly when estimates of international migration and hence population are wrong, and are compounded when carried into projections, the result can be an unfair allocation of scarce resources between areas. Some areas will receive insufficient and others too much.

#### *Usual Resident Definition*

- 1.11. Until quite recently nobody was concerned that the definition of a usual resident required migrants from overseas to be intending to remain in the UK for at least a year. The 2001 Census did not make this definition sufficiently clear to the population that was being enumerated and it is likely that many people were included who had not been in the UK for 12 months or who were not intending to stay for more than 12 months but who, nevertheless, had settled temporarily in the country. It is likely that many of these people were in London. However, in the last few years, particularly since the enlargement of the EU in 2004, it is noticeable that many more migrant workers are in the UK than the official ONS population estimates indicate. Comparing ONS international migration statistics

with registrations of overseas nationals for National Insurance shows a major difference – of the order of 100 thousand a year. Either the international migration figures are understating the true levels of long-term migrant inflows or the difference indicates a large flow of temporary workers intending to stay for less than a year.

- 1.12. Whichever the case, local authorities are seeing their costs rise to meet the demands from new migrants (whether long or short-term) for their services. While it is acknowledged that ONS has recently issued some experimental statistics relating to short-term migrants in the period mid-2003 to mid-2005, the estimates look inadequate against what is being seen in London in 2007. It is therefore imperative that local estimates of short-term migrants are made alongside the mid-year estimates, which include only long-term migrants. This will enable appropriate planning and funding of the additional services likely to be required, some of which are extremely expensive to provide. Most short-term visitors to the UK are on family visits or are tourists and are putting resources into the economy by paying for their stays of a few weeks. On the other hand there are many short-term labour migrants who are contributing to the UK economy and to the Exchequer while staying for several months but who are presenting to local and health authorities for housing, medical, legal, translation and other services. There are also short-term study visits to the UK. These students require accommodation, mainly in the private sector, and add pressure to local housing capacity.
- 1.13. It is essential that local estimates are made of study and work stays in the UK of at least one month duration and that these are set alongside the conventional estimates.
- 1.14. Another major omission from the definition of the mid-year estimates is any acknowledgement of those persons who spend part of their time at one address and part at another. Nobody can have more than one usual residence, but there are many people who live in two homes in separate parts of the country in the course of the working week. Some may genuinely own two homes but others may live with friends or in rented accommodation near to work from Monday to Friday and return to the family home at weekends. This again puts a burden on local housing capacity and local services without necessarily putting anything back to the locality of the second residence. The travel to work patterns of these people are not correctly picked up in the 2001 Census data so transport planning accuracy is compromised. The 2011 Census may investigate the two-residence problem but meanwhile there is little administrative data that can indicate the extent of the issue. Second-home council tax discounts cover only part of the population with two residences.

#### *Quality Comparisons*

- 1.15. It is very difficult to comment with authority on comparisons with other parts of the UK and overseas, but a few observations are offered.
- 1.16. In Scotland the definitions used are broadly consistent with those in England & Wales, and therefore the same broad problems of definition and accuracy pertain. However, international migration is less of an issue in Scotland and therefore one expects greater accuracy. The short-term migrant issue is,

however, one that has also reached Scotland if one takes National Insurance and Worker Registration Scheme data as guides. Scotland does have one major advantage over England & Wales in that GROS produces its estimates about three months earlier than does ONS.

- 1.17. Internationally there is one great advantage that several European countries have over the UK. Population registration has been carried out in many northern European countries for decades. Such systems enable a very accurate track to be made of residents as registration acts as a one-stop shop for most local and central government services. In addition some European countries allow for the population register and administrative sources such as tax and health to be linked. Hence most individuals can be accurately and quickly tracked as they move within the country and, to a certain extent, across its borders. A population register has a second advantage of virtually eliminating the need for regular full censuses and also acts as an accurate sampling frame for large social surveys.

## **2. The role of the Census**

- *How does the Census contribute to the creation of population statistics? Is the current frequency of Censuses appropriate and, if not, how frequent should Censuses be?*
- *What lessons have been learnt from the Test Census carried out on 13 May 2007? What methods should be employed for the distribution and completion of Census forms, including the use of the Internet?*
- *What steps should be taken to increase the rate of responses to the Census, particularly in hard-to-reach areas? How effective are plans to measure the extent of non-response to the 2011 Census?*
- *To what extent is there a trade-off between the length of the Census form and its role in providing population information? What questions should be included in the 2011 Census?*
- *To what extent should Census questions and statistical information be coordinated across the United Kingdom and how effective are plans to ensure such coordination?*
- *What forms should the outputs of the 2011 Census take, how and when should they be made available and how should they be integrated and coordinated with other information on population?*

### *Creating Population Estimates*

- 2.1. The Census is fundamental to the creation of population statistics. It is the only source for statistics for small areas. It has been used as a benchmark every decade to check the estimates. The Census provides the only reliable data we have on international immigration and the most comprehensive analysis of the structure of all migration flows within the UK.
- 2.2. If the frequency of censuses were increased to every fifth year it would improve the accuracy of population statistics, as they would be brought into line more often. This would avoid potentially crippling financial shocks to local authorities.

### *Test Census Lessons*

- 2.3. Posting the forms out will provide resources for a better follow up in harder to count areas and is a sensible way forward, as long as the resources are then targeted to the right hard-to-count areas and in the right way. For example, some areas will need enumerators who speak particular languages. Experience of the 2001 Census fieldwork has shown that Muslim enumerators will get better response rates in some areas.
- 2.4. While completion and submission of forms via the Internet would appear to be a sensible option to offer, it has not yet been tested and experience in the United States Census in 2000 has shown that it is expensive to set up and was only used by a very small proportion of the population. Much better value for money, in terms of the statistics collected, might be gained from spending £22 million on a fourth page of individual questions (see paragraph 2.7 below).

### *Increase the response*

- 2.5. Improved response will be facilitated by ensuring that there is enough time allowed for follow up of non-responding addresses. In 2001 there was very little, if any, follow up in some areas (especially in parts of London) because of delays in the main fieldwork and the time for the planned follow up was spent continuing with the main fieldwork. It is of concern that targets of 94 per cent coverage (ie no worse than in 2001) appear to have been set already. The target should be to include everyone. The knowledge of a reduced expectation may become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Publicity is also important leading up to the Census and there should be wide coverage in the press/radio and television. The Internet might also be useful. Advertising on Google, Facebook, eBay and, with rapid change in this area, sites unknown in 2007, might have even more effect in reaching younger people, especially young men.
- 2.6. A further response problem is that in 2001 many forms were returned only part completed and the additional data had to be imputed. Better follow-up procedures and form tracking are necessary to attempt to get more total completion on all forms.

### *Length of form and question content*

- 2.7. The discussions are currently centred on three or four pages of individual questions. ONS has been working on the assumption of three pages per person and based its bid to the Treasury for funding on this assumption. Testing has since shown that having four pages instead of three has no noticeable effect on response rates. In the light of this we would press strongly for ONS to pursue the option of the fourth page. There are some very important statistics at stake, as the inclusion of questions on qualifications, industry, carers, language, full-time and part-time working, a wider question on health and, possibly, income are all dependent upon there being a fourth page, and they are all very important to London. In particular, it is vital to know about both qualifications and industry. There is no other source of this information for small areas and London's plans and strategies rely on knowledge of the skills and qualification

levels of the population and the industrial base in London. Other questions such as year of arrival in the UK are important in gaining a better understanding of the population and likely future population change. These questions are all higher priority than a question on income.

- 2.8. Some new questions currently planned for the first three pages (and hence squeezing space for other topics), have been chosen specifically to get a better understanding of the size and distribution of the resident and short-term populations. Details of second residences are important and there is value in asking year and month of arrival in the UK. However a question on the intended length of stay appears to be out of place on the Census form and a question on national identity does not appear to contribute to counting the population or understanding population structure and dynamics.

#### *UK Co-ordination*

- 2.9. It is unrealistic to expect complete co-ordination of statistics across the UK when some questions are asked differently and others are only asked in some countries. Apart from some measures, such as population by age and sex required by Eurostat, there will be essential differences. The devolved administrations have been given the power to decide on questions relevant to them and this is a good thing. But the perceived effect of this in the GLA is that we always seem to be under pressure to accept compromises in questions that are relevant to London so that we can fit in with what is being asked in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. There is no equivalent voice supporting the need for questions in England that are relevant for us. We fully support the requirements on questions on Welsh language in Wales and other things relevant to Scotland. But the unique and diverse population in London means that we have very different needs for questions. We have little interest in how many Londoners speak Welsh and do not like to see the space on the form left blank in England (as it was in 2001 and is planned to be in 2011) when it could be used to ask a question more relevant to languages spoken in England. This is especially important given the hundreds of languages spoken in London. To do our jobs effectively we need different information and would not willingly sacrifice this just to get a UK figure. The national comparisons used are *UK* when possible but *England and Wales* is acceptable for characteristics that are not a priority in Scotland and Northern Ireland and, on occasions, just a figure for *England* is used for comparison, particularly when comparing for purposes of local government finance.

#### *2011 Outputs*

- 2.10. Outputs from the 2001 Census are likely to be many and varied. There is a need for basic sets of tables that are consistent and comparable for all local authority districts and wards in England and, sometimes, England and Wales. This is important for local government because of the competition for resources and grants in which local authorities are involved. As CLG (which is the main government department involved) is only responsible for England, this is not required by local authorities to be a UK dataset. A particular issue here is that of geography, and the decision by ONS to use the output areas designed in 2001 as the main geographical base. This means that accurate ward level data are not planned as part of the standard outputs. Local authorities need data at ward

level in addition to output areas and lower layer super output areas. This is not only because local councillors represent electoral wards but also because wards are the only areas that are both subdivisions of local authority districts and are large enough to allow publication of the wide range of tabulations that are needed, for example by ethnic group and country of birth.

- 2.11. The GLA will strongly encourage the development of disclosure control and license arrangements that allow public sector users access to the data that meets their needs. This includes ward level data as well as a range of datasets such as the origin-destination statistics on migration and travel to work. These datasets for wards and output areas in 2001 were very badly damaged by the disclosure control procedures applied to the data. In fact the output area data was, by general opinion, not fit for purpose and was not widely used because of this. License arrangements, allowing access to data that might be considered disclosive if made publicly available, should be made so that approved public sector and other users can access the data they need under strict license conditions.

### **3. Mid-year population estimates**

- *How accurate and useful are the mid-year population estimates for England and Wales, including information available for local authorities and Strategic Health Authorities?*
- *How appropriate is the methodology by which mid-year population estimates are reached?*
- *What are the most appropriate ways to ensure a common level of accuracy in mid-year population estimates for different areas and what steps should be taken to improve the accuracy in areas where population is hard to measure?*
- *What is the right process for making revisions to mid-year population estimates so as to meet the needs of users?*

#### *Accuracy and Utility*

- 3.1. For England and Wales the accuracy of the population estimates is good. The inputs on births and deaths are highly accurate. Even the problems of UK migration based on GP re-registrations are minimised as only cross-border moves with Scotland and Northern Ireland need to be considered. The major uncertainty remains international migration. However at the national level the 95% confidence intervals in the inflows and outflows as measured by the International Passenger Survey are plus or minus 4% to 5%. This means that, at the most extreme worst case, the error in the net flow would be of the order of 33 thousand, about 14% of the flow. This translates to an annual error in the total population of less than 0.07% ie well under 1% over a decade even in the unlikely circumstance of all annual errors being accumulated rather than compensatory.
- 3.2. At the local authority level the problems start to become noticeable and, potentially, critical. Considering just London boroughs and comparing the ONS estimates for mid-2006 with GLA's own estimates based on vital statistics and monitored housing availability, one finds differences ranging between +8 thousand and -25 thousand, equivalent to between +4% and -11%. On the plus side, of the 32 boroughs the differences are less than 2% in nineteen boroughs,

and in twelve of these it is less than 1%. However, there are three inner London boroughs in which the ONS estimates appear to be between 6% and 11% too high, and a further four where the estimates are 3% to 4% too low. Apart from just comparing migration-based ONS estimates with development-led GLA estimates, other data can be used to get strong impressions of the inaccuracy of some ONS estimates. Demographic measures such as the General Fertility Rate (births per thousand female residents aged 15-44) can be used to show how the estimates for some boroughs become gradually more inaccurate since 2001.

- 3.3. Inaccuracy levels such as those described above are similar to those that were corrected by ONS after the results of the 2001 Census were fully analysed. In that instance the estimate for Westminster had been overstated by about 50 thousand residents (about 25%). The degree of errors in London boroughs described here totally destroys confidence in the ONS data and in the analyses and outcomes based upon them – such as the ONS projections used by CLG for local authority grant settlement. While the estimates are worse for boroughs in London than for any other region there are several urban areas of England with high migration turnover where similar problems exist.

#### *Methodology*

- 3.4. The ONS methodology is basically sound – if only the data were available to support it. Those elements that are based on vital registration are very accurate. Some of the administrative data are good, but the use of NHS GP re-registrations data needs more work to correct for biases.
- 3.5. The use of survey data as the major input to international migration flows and distribution still leaves much to be desired, even after the methodology overhaul that was introduced in 2007. ONS is between a rock and a hard place – the data available are inadequate and there are no signs of early improvements. In 2005 the International Passenger Survey (IPS) only contacted 3000 migrants coming into the country and 800 emigrants. The distribution to regions is now achieved using three years of data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) amounting to about 2000 contacts. While confidence intervals for the IPS are published at regional level, so far ONS has not issued confidence intervals for its Total International Migration (TIM) flows at any geographic level. The ONS-led Interdepartmental Taskforce offered several good suggestions of how to improve international migration data - mostly relating to inflows – but so far only limited resources have been found to implement the administrative changes and research necessary.
- 3.6. ONS is fully aware of the inadequacies of its estimates and projections for areas of high migration, as described in the following quote from a letter sent by the ONS Director Social Reporting and Analysis to the ODPM Director of Local Government Finance in December 2005. 'Although we acknowledge that there are issues with the population estimates, the published mid-year estimates remain the best estimate of the population. Until our research has concluded you may wish to consider how the estimates and projections are used and whether there is any scope for recognising the particular uncertainty for those parts of the country that are affected by relatively high levels of migration.' ONS has the skills to improve methodology, but only within the constraints of the available data.

- 3.7. A key methodological improvement would be to 'join up' international and internal migration more adequately. At present the first registration of international immigrants into the NHS is not used to ascertain residence within the mid-year estimates methodology. However, the onward flows of international immigrants within the UK are picked up by the present system as internal moves based upon changes in GP registration. This 'gap' in the methodology can lead to a situation in which areas 'lose' population in the estimates that had never been assigned to them and other areas retain population that had never settled in that area. The new ONS methodology of using the Labour Force Survey to distribute immigrants at regional level partly tackles this problem, but nowhere near adequately enough at local authority level within regions. This problem is basically intractable until new migrants to the UK are in some way registered on entry and that registration is carried forward to registration with the NHS.

#### *Ensuring and Improving Accuracy*

- 3.8. As indicated above more effort must be made across government to improve data on migration, particularly international migration, both directly and indirectly. The Taskforce offered suggestions of what should be done.
- 3.9. More attention should be paid to data already collected, and not analysed, on landing cards for non-EU citizens and better understanding should be made of the registrations of overseas nationals for employment (National Insurance numbers) and health (NHS Flag 4s). National Pupil Dataset and State Pensions claimants are also useful for the young and the old. None of these data offer a different figure due to definitional issues, but they do offer alternate views of trends.
- 3.10. While waiting for better data ONS should engage in quality assurance of the trends so far calculated between mid-2001 and mid-2006. As mentioned earlier demographic analyses can play a part. Studies of local trends in General Fertility Rates, Standardised Mortality Rates and gender ratios by age should be undertaken and allowed to feed back into amended estimates. If trends in one area are out of synchronisation with national and regional trends this should be a trigger to further investigation as to why – with the basic premise that the most likely reason is inaccuracy in the estimates.
- 3.11. Other data that can be used for QA are those collected by local and regional authorities, most of which relate to dwellings and homes.

#### *Revisions Process*

- 3.12. Having reached mid-2006 estimates, with a base of mid-2001, there is scope to make a wholesale revision of estimates back to mid-2001 following extensive QA as outlined above. While users want to have the best estimates available, under whatever definition of population is adopted, it is not desirable to have many sets of revisions. It is recognised that estimates for 2002 to 2005 were revised in 2007 and ONS has said that it would not offer any more revisions for at least two years.

- 3.13. The most appropriate course of action is to develop a QA strategy for estimates using as much administrative data and as many demographic measures as possible and to implement this with a view to revising all existing estimates back to a fixed point at mid-2001. This is unlikely to be able to be implemented before 2009 by which time ONS has indicated a review of internal migration estimates. After a wholesale review the QA strategy should be employed annually as part of the estimates process prior to release.
- 3.14. ONS has said that it does not wish to see the large discrepancies at mid-2010 of estimates made without and with the 2011 Census results such as were seen after the 2001 Census was published. Nor do the users. Without further pre-2011 revisions to the methodology and data inputs ONS will be having to alter estimates for some London boroughs by similar amounts as had to be done after the 2001 Census results had been fully absorbed into the system.

#### **4. The role of survey and administrative data**

- *What role can and should be played by survey data in the compilation of population statistics?*
- *What role can and should be played by data from General Practitioners and other health service data in the compilation of population statistics?*
- *What other data sources can and should be used in the compilation of population statistics?*

##### *Role of Survey data*

- 4.1. Unfortunately it is survey data that causes the main problems in the current estimates.
- 4.2. Currently, the Annual Population Survey/Labour Force Survey (APS/LFS), which will become the cornerstone of the Integrated Household Survey (IHS), offers a range of data on migration, country of birth, year of arrival and nationality. Indeed, ONS currently use estimates from the Labour Force Survey, as one of the inputs to the international migration methodology.
- 4.3. However, the LFS/APS is limited in its application due to problems in relation to coverage of the population. Many residents living in communal establishments are not covered by the sample, and the coverage of short-term or recently arrived migrants is not comprehensive and thought to be poor. Grossing procedures muddy the water further, as while the APS may well pick up short-term migrants during fieldwork, and go on to include some of them in the survey sample, the population weighting methodology does not include them.
- 4.4. Coverage issues are made generally worse in London as response rates on the APS are lower in London than outside London<sup>1</sup>, increasing the likelihood of bias and poor coverage of certain population groups. Further, sample size on the LFS/APS is lower for London boroughs relative to other local authorities, making local area estimates drawn from the survey less reliable. If survey data on international migration are to be improved, the sample in London needs to be

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the response rate for wave 1 of the quarterly Labour Force Survey (a key component of the APS) during April-June 2006 was 61.6% in London and 72.3% in the rest of England.

significantly increased. The GLA hopes this will be considered as part of the move towards the full implementation of the IHS in 2008/09.

- 4.5. The quality of the final survey estimates is, of course, ultimately dependent on the accuracy of the population data used for grossing the survey sample, which themselves are highly problematic, particularly in London (as explained in Section 3).
- 4.6. While survey data will always have limitations, there is undoubtedly scope to improve the potential applications of the Integrated Household Survey by tackling these issues. Further, questions to international migrants about their reasons for migration and immigration status could usefully be included in the IHS. This would improve the ability to triangulate and verify data from administrative and survey sources. Survey data are of use only where there is a lack of administrative data to feed into the estimates. The major improvement would come with setting up a Population Register and having better border control of international migration.

#### *GP/Health Data*

- 4.7. Health service data are of two broad types – stocks of registered patients and flows of persons onto the register and within the register. The stocks data are notoriously error-prone due to problems in getting persons who change their address within the UK to re-register promptly. In 2001 the ONS quality assurance process for the Census populations used the health register of the area but the biases that remain in the register made comparisons very difficult for working age adults.
- 4.8. Delay in re-registration is a particular problem with students and especially young single adult males. The excessive delays in recording a change of address lead to biases in the age/gender structure of moves and, if the delay straddled the 2001 Census, can lead to the ONS estimates ‘moving’ people from an area that they had not been attached to by the Census enumeration, eg a person registered with a GP in Wales but actually living unregistered in London at the time of the Census would effectively be counted as a London resident in the mid-2001 estimates. When moving and re-registering with a GP in Surrey the next mid-year estimates would move a person from Wales to Surrey but not change London. There would therefore be a ‘loss’ to Wales of a person never actually resident and London would ‘retain’ a person who had moved on. This process is, of course, totally anonymised but the statistical principle pertains.
- 4.9. Another problem with the data is that people moving overseas are not required to de-register. Hence they remain on the register and inflate it. Pruning the registers is done by health authorities but there will be delays in making adequate corrections.
- 4.10. Internal migration within the UK is built on the GP re-registrations and recorded changes of patient postcodes. Methods must be found to correct the biases caused by delayed registration to enhance the value of the data to the population estimates.

- 4.11. One, as yet underutilised, aspect of GP registration that is proving useful is the recording of new registrations of people from outside the UK – referred to as Flag 4s. The total numbers of Flag 4s accord well with international inflows but the geographic distribution around the country is quite different to that used by ONS in the population estimates in many areas, particularly as between city centre boroughs and surrounding boroughs. More research on this data source needs to be carried out to incorporate it within the methodology. When new NHS computer systems are implemented it is to be hoped that complete recording of these ‘international migrants’ will be available. At present the ‘Flag 4’ is lost at a subsequent recorded move and the total numbers of new overseas registrations cannot be determined.

#### *Other data*

- 4.12. Very few administrative data sources actually measure total population or changes in the population, but several are good comparators of change in a locality. Local authorities have good records of council tax properties (including certain estimates of vacancy and second residences), new housing developments, houses in multiple occupation and children in schools. These sources can be compared as time series with ONS estimates to determine potential problems of consistency of estimates of change since 2001. While the electoral register does not cover all adults of overseas origin it may also be used as a comparator to estimated changes in the adult population.

### **5. Cooperation with stakeholders**

- *How effectively has the Office for National Statistics cooperated with stakeholders with an interest in and information relating to population statistics and how can cooperation be improved by the Statistics Board and by its Executive Office?*

#### *Cooperation with Stakeholders*

- 5.1. For many years, ONS has had a system of maintaining contact with stakeholders, which – on paper – appeared reasonable and adequate. Those at the receiving end have occasionally found the appearance deceptive. GLA staff have played significant roles in Census, population and labour market groups, often representing broader interests such as local government users, or public sector users.
- 5.2. Among many problems with this complex structure of advisory groups, a few stand out:
- The ONS approach can feel like ‘divide and rule’, as it liaises separately with various user sectors – eg academics, local and central government, business, health, etc.
  - To the new user, ONS may appear to be ‘the voice of central government’, but it has to deal with the Government Statistical Service, the devolved administrations, and other government departments, not least the Treasury. Thus a frequent response has always been “we can’t afford it”. As an example, demands for a larger sample, or other improvements to the International Passenger

Survey, have been around for decades. In the same vein, ONS recognises the difficulties of, effectively, four separate UK censuses but does not have the power to impose a solution.

- ONS rarely, if ever, **uses** the data it collects and produces, and therefore does not comprehend or appreciate the genuine concerns raised by users (examples abound in the area of census dissemination).
- Somewhat late in the day, ONS has come to appreciate the importance of population counts and estimates, and their significance to the funding and targeting of services. The political and public concern over the rise in international migration over the last decade, and particularly since 2004, has brought about this change. Government statisticians are now suffering – often unfairly – because the political heat has been turned up under their figures. However, the reasons for this are understandable, and reflect in part the frustration at an apparent earlier lack of response.

5.3. The Statistics Commission, particularly under Professor David Rhind, contributed strongly in its relatively brief life, to an informed, professional, and empathetic critique of ONS activities. Significant reports include:

- A Code of Practise for National Statistics
- The 2001 Census in Westminster
- Counting on Success: The 2011 Census - Managing the Risks
- The Use Made of Official Statistics

5.4. It is important to maintain this critique, alongside other relevant bodies such as the Royal Statistical Society, the Statistics User Forum, and topic user groups. The Statistics Board needs to ensure a coherent overall approach that uses its professional integrity and influence to harness sectoral/sectional interests to maximum effect.

# Treasury Sub-Committee

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21 September 2007

## **Treasury Sub-Committee invites written evidence for new inquiry into Counting the Population**

The Treasury Sub-Committee invites written evidence as part of its new inquiry into Counting the Population. The inquiry will examine the collection of statistics by the Office for National Statistics relating to the size, age, sex and distribution of people, the accuracy of such statistics and the role and value of such statistics.

The Sub-Committee will consider in particular:

- (i) The uses of population estimates, the definition of the population and the impact of any inaccuracies or inadequacies in population estimates;
- (ii) The role of the Census in the provision of population statistics and preparations for the 2011 Census in England and Wales;
- (iii) The preparation and accuracy of the mid-year population estimates for England and Wales;
- (iv) The role of survey and administrative data in compiling population statistics; and
- (v) Cooperation between the ONS (and its successors) and stakeholders.

### **1. Uses and definitions**

- What are the uses of population estimates, and how far do current population estimates meet the needs associated with those uses? What are the effects of inaccuracies or inadequacies in such estimates?
- How appropriate is a definition of the population based on the usually resident population in the context of the needs of the users?
- How does the quality and range of population statistics in England and Wales compare with that available in Scotland, Northern Ireland and internationally?

### **2. The role of the Census**

- How does the Census contribute to the creation of population statistics? Is the current frequency of Censuses appropriate and, if not, how frequent should Censuses be?
- What lessons have been learnt from the Test Census carried out on 13 May 2007? What methods should be employed for the distribution and completion of Census forms, including the use of the Internet?
- What steps should be taken to increase the rate of responses to the Census, particularly in hard-to-reach areas? How effective are plans to measure the extent of non-response to the 2011 Census?

- To what extent is there a trade-off between the length of the Census form and its role in providing population information? What questions should be included in the 2011 Census?
- To what extent should Census questions and statistical information be coordinated across the United Kingdom and how effective are plans to ensure such coordination?
- What forms should the outputs of the 2011 Census take, how and when should they be made available and how should they be integrated and coordinated with other information on population?

### **3. Mid-year population estimates**

- How accurate and useful are the mid-year population estimates for England and Wales, including information available for local authorities and Strategic Health Authorities?
- How appropriate is the methodology by which mid-year population estimates are reached?
- What are the most appropriate ways to ensure a common level of accuracy in mid-year population estimates for different areas and what steps should be taken to improve the accuracy in areas where population is hard to measure?
- What is the right process for making revisions to mid-year population estimates so as to meet the needs of users?

### **4. The role of survey and administrative data**

- What role can and should be played by survey data in the compilation of population statistics?
- What role can and should be played by data from General Practitioners and other health service data in the compilation of population statistics?
- What other data sources can and should be used in the compilation of population statistics?

### **5. Cooperation with stakeholders**

- How effectively has the Office for National Statistics cooperated with stakeholders with an interest in and information relating to population statistics and how can cooperation be improved by the Statistics Board and by its Executive Office?

## **NOTES:**

### **1. Notes for submitters:**

- Written evidence should be in Word or rich text format and sent by e-mail to [treascom@parliament.uk](mailto:treascom@parliament.uk).
- The body of the e-mail must include a contact name, telephone number and postal address. The e-mail should also make clear who the submission is from.
- The deadline is 12 noon on 28 November 2007.
- Submissions should be in the format of a self-contained memorandum and should not exceed 10,000 words in length. Paragraphs should be numbered for ease of reference, and the document must include an executive summary, ideally no more than one page long.

- Committees make public much of the evidence they receive during inquiries. If you do not wish your submission to be published, you must clearly say so.
- If you wish to include private or confidential information in your submission to the Committee, please contact the Clerk of the Committee to discuss this. Please bear in mind that Committees are not able to investigate individual cases.
- Personal information, such as address and contact details, should be provided separately from the body of your submission.
- You should be aware that there may be circumstances in which the House of Commons will be required to communicate information to third parties on request, in order to comply with its obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.
- Submissions should be original work, not previously published or circulated elsewhere. Once submitted, no public use should be made of the submission unless you have first obtained permission from the Clerk of the Committee.
- For further information on evidence to select committees, see the guide for witnesses available at:
- [http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary\\_committees/witness.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/witness.cfm)

**2. Sub-Committee Membership is as follows:** Mr Michael Fallon (Sub-Committee Chairman), Mr Graham Brady, Mr Colin Breed, Jim Cousins, Angela Eagle, Mr Philip Dunne, Ms Sally Keeble, Mr Andrew Love, Rt Hon John McFall (Chairman of the Main Committee), Mr George Mudie, Mr Siôn Simon, John Thurso, Mr Mark Todd, Peter Viggers.

# Treasury Sub-Committee

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28 November 2007

## Counting the Population

Thank you for your submission to the Treasury Committee's inquiry into Counting the Population. Your submission will be made available to members of the Committee.

The Committee may make use of your evidence for the purpose of carrying out its inquiry, including—if it wishes—printing and publishing your evidence, or making it available for public inspection in the Parliamentary Archives. The Committee will not publish or otherwise disclose personal postal or e-mail addresses or telephone numbers.

The Committee has decided that witnesses can themselves publish or otherwise make use of their own evidence, but they should make it clear that it has been submitted as evidence to the Treasury Committee in connection with this inquiry.

If, on further consideration, there is information in your submission which you believe to be sensitive, you should contact the Clerk to explain what harm you believe would result from its disclosure. The Committee will take this into account when deciding whether to publish the evidence.

Details of the programme for the inquiry will appear in press notices published on the Treasury Committee website at:

[http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary\\_committees/treasury\\_committee.cfm](http://www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/treasury_committee.cfm).

You will be notified by email once the Committee announces oral evidence sessions. If you have any queries, please feel free to contact me.

Yours sincerely

**Michelle Edney**  
**Committee Secretary**  
**Treasury Committee**  
**Tel: 020 7219 5768**



## Regular Briefings from the GLA Data Management and Analysis Group (DMAG)

Recent *DMAG Briefings*:

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2007-02	Claimant Count Model 2007: Technical Note	Lorna Spence / Caroline Hall
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2007-04	Who Benefits?	Lovedeep Vaid / PSU Health
2007-05	Disabled People and the Labour Market in London	Lorna Spence
2007-06	Demography Team Workplan 2007/08	Demography Team
2007-07	Education Team Workplan 2007/08	Education Team
2007-08	Social Exclusion Data Team Workplan 2007/08	Social Exclusion Data Team
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2007-10	Summary of Social Trends 2007	Elizabeth Williams
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A full list of DMAG Briefings is available to internal customers through the GLA Intranet; otherwise please contact [dmag.info@london.gov.uk](mailto:dmag.info@london.gov.uk). A CD containing PDF versions of the Briefings, or hard copies, can be provided.

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