

ONS Mid-year Estimates for London Boroughs: Some Concerns

Key points

- The note outlines issues of concern in the current sequence of ONS mid-year estimates for London and the London boroughs from 1991 to 2003.
- Reference is also made to the extension of some of these problems into the ONS 2003-based subnational projections.

Background

The publication of the revised estimates for 2001 and 2002, together with the new estimates for 2003 (September 2004), led to GLA being contacted by several borough officers with concerns about what was happening to the estimates for their areas. GLA had already identified some potential problems with the estimates and these were confirmed with the new revisions to 1992 to 2000 (October 2004).

There are three main problem areas:

- Inconsistency between births in the previous 12 months and the estimates of under-1s
- Gender balance of the annual changes
- Assignment of international migrants amongst the boroughs

Under-1s

GLA compared at borough level the numbers of births in the year to mid-year and the estimates of infants. This was done for the years 1991 to 2002, using the estimates available early in 2004 (Demography Update 2004/02). This comparison was sent to ONS in the summer of 2004 when work was underway that would lead to the review of all estimates between 1992 and 2002. The main point of the comparisons was that in many boroughs there was a serious discontinuity at 2001, in most this implied that the retention of infants had fallen and in a few it had risen. The trends of the 1990s appeared to have returned in the 2002 estimates. This discontinuity in the estimates causes a problem for local education authorities in planning for reception class places. Reliance must be made upon the mid-year estimates that are also the base for population projections. While the problem was most apparent for infants there appeared to be similar problems for other pre-school ages. ONS responded that the 2001 MYE was based upon the Census and that single year of age estimates are less reliable. ONS consider that this problem is related to births to non-UK resident mothers and it is planned for this to be investigated in the coming months. A further possibility is the mis-allocation of the migration of infants between local authorities within former health authority areas since the patient register migration methodology does not pick up moves of under 1s. It was agreed that Jonathan Swan (ONS) and John Hollis (GLA) would prepare a guidance note for boroughs after ONS had produced the 1992-2003 estimates in Autumn 2004. GLA has recalculated using the latest estimates for 1991 to 2003 (see *Demography Update 2004/07*) and will be contacting Jonathan to forward this.

Gender Balance

Through the 1990s the mid-year estimates for London consistently whittled away the female population so that while there was estimated to be about 186 thousand more females in 1991, by 2000 there were just 11 thousand more females than males. The original estimates for 2001 reinstated a female majority of 229 thousand. The post-2001 revision of the 1991 estimate shows there to have been 236 thousand more women than men. The September 2004 revision of the 2001 estimate now shows just 128 thousand more women following the LS adjustments and LA Studies, but already by mid-2003 this has been reduced to 92 thousand.

To divert discussion from estimates to projections illustrates the problem. ONS subnational population projections produced during the 1990s and also the 2003-based set issued on 25 November extend the impact of the estimates. The mid-1996 subnational projection for London started off with 114 thousand more women and reduced this surplus to 80 thousand by 2001 and 21 thousand at 2016. The mid-2003 ONS projection shows there to be 52 thousand *fewer* women than men in London in 2016, with a growth of 430 thousands males since 2001 and only 250 thousand females.

The discrepancies in the gender balance in London have serious consequences. First, it is likely that the ONS projection of the number of births for London and hence the child population is too low. Second, the conversion of population to households by ODPM is likely to show too many households for the size of the adult population since male rates of household representation are higher than those for women, and this leads the projected average household size to be too low. The latter is compounded by there being too few children in the projection. The problems that are caused for authorities planning resources for education and housing are obvious, and the discussions that regularly ensue between government departments and the GLA and the boroughs on these issues tend to be based upon a need for the local authorities to defend their own projections against the ONS and ODPM 'benchmarks'.

The seat of the problem must lie in the estimates of migration, particularly migration within the UK. The well-known problem of males failing to re-register (or report a new address) with a GP means that men resident in London in 2001 are less likely to be migrated out of London than women, and also that males arriving in London are less likely to be reported. However, as London is at present showing a net loss of over 100 thousand persons annually to the rest of the UK, it means that the 'excess' outflow of women is impacting seriously on the estimates, just as it did during the 1990s. It is most likely that these women will be 'found' in the regions to which most Londoners move, the East and South East, but this has not yet been investigated.

Partly because of the under-registration of males GLA demographic modelling uses the same internal migration totals post-2001 as ONS but distributes them using age and gender data based upon the Census.

The Longitudinal Study adjustments added about 100 thousand males aged 20-49 to London's mid-2001 estimate. The rest of the country received about 60 thousand more males. This addition made a huge impact on the gender balance of the London population and is part of the underlying concerns about gender balance in the 2001 Census and subsequent estimates.

These concerns have been discussed with ONS and both GLA and ONS are considering whether we can usefully work together to investigate this issue.

International Migration

It is acknowledged that international migration is the most difficult part of the estimates process and that work is underway to improve the data. However the 2001 Census, backed up by the LS

Adjustments and LA Studies, has shown that up to 2000 the estimates for several boroughs were seriously flawed, notable those of Westminster and Kensington & Chelsea as being too high and several inner London boroughs being too low. The cause of these flaws is almost certainly due to a mixture of the misallocation of international immigrants and the internal migration system not picking up the onward movements of international immigrants who had not registered with a GP. While the IPS is only a small sample and needs to be grossed by a factor of several hundred to estimate the gross inflows to local authorities it consistently reports the first boroughs of residence of the incomers as being in central London and a few other boroughs, notably Barnet and Richmond upon Thames. It was not surprising that the four boroughs mentioned above were shown by the Census to have been amongst the most overestimated areas of England.

The use of 'Unattributable Population Change' (UPC) for the original mid-2002 estimates for London boroughs was a welcome step in trying to prevent 'estimate drift' through the 2000s similar to what had occurred through the 1990s. However, for other parts of the country, where difficulties of estimation are not caused by being the stated area of first residence of incomers, ONS considered that UPC made the estimates less accurate.

The subsequent dropping of UPC in the latest sequence of estimates is, at least as far as the distribution within London is concerned, a retrograde step. ONS agrees that for London the influence of UPC was different to the rest of the country and, having ceased to use it, is also concerned about how it leaves the London borough estimates if that pattern is continued into the future. This is illustrated when we see that between 2002 and 2003 80% of London's growth is found in just two boroughs, Kensington & Chelsea and Westminster. This problem also shows up most clearly in the ONS 2003-based subnational projections. The use of the 2003 estimate as the base population and raw 1998-2003 migration levels as the starting points for the projections brings up the most unlikely scenario of Westminster growing from 203 thousand in 2001 to 309 thousand in 2016. While nobody expects projections to be accurate they should not veer so far from reason and hence devalue the results of the whole exercise, certainly within London.

At the London level were UPC to be recalculated using the latest revision of the mid-2001 estimates it would be of the order of 100 but at the borough level it would range from -5,100 (Westminster) and -3,700 (Kensington & Chelsea) to +1,800 (Brent) and +2,100 (Southwark). Table 1 shows the impact of applying these recalculated levels of UPC to the ONS 2002 and 2003 estimates. There are four big 'losers', Westminster, Kensington & Chelsea, Barnet and Richmond upon Thames. These are the same four boroughs for which the GLA decided to reduce the population estimates when doing the initial work on the *London Plan* in 2000. The 'winners' are more spread but the top four are all, broadly, inner boroughs, Southwark, Brent, Tower Hamlets and Newham, all with high BME populations.

While UPC was not entirely scientific and was treating an unexplained residual as a factor of change it was serving a very useful purpose within London. It is strongly suggested that ONS look at this problem to seek ways of overcoming further 'estimate' drift.

There are some more sophisticated ways of using UPC that ONS might consider using for the estimates within London. For example, rather than being a constant number for each borough UPC could be related to the cumulative estimates of international inflows to each borough in 1991-2001 and this proportion applied to the annual estimates of the international inflow to create an adjustment. Alternatively, the borough UPC could be related to the cumulative estimates of total international migration into London, or to the whole of the UK, during 1991 and 2001 and then used to create similar adjustments to annual international migration estimates.

Table 1 Alternative Mid-year Estimates

LA name	ONS Mid-2001 Population (Sept 2004)	GLA Revision Unattributable Population Change (UPC)	ONS Mid-2002 Population (Sept 2004)	Revised Mid-2002 Population (by adding revised UPC)	ONS Mid-2003 Population (Sept 2004)	Revised Mid-2003 Population (by adding revised UPC)	Mid-2003 Difference between ONS and Revised
CITY OF LONDON	7359	71	7696	7767	8043	8185	142
BARKING & DAGENHAM	165654	1106	165938	167044	165862	168075	2213
BARNET	319481	-2636	322267	319631	324370	319098	-5272
BEXLEY	218757	202	218623	218825	219079	219483	404
BRENT	269620	1791	269749	271540	267766	271347	3581
BROMLEY	296218	-302	297086	296784	298339	297735	-604
CAMDEN	202567	-554	207009	206456	210661	209554	-1107
CROYDON	335112	118	335895	336013	336688	336924	236
EALING	307276	-263	307835	307572	305019	304494	-525
ENFIELD	277266	1346	280028	281374	280349	283040	2691
GREENWICH	217460	-51	221097	221047	223686	223585	-101
HACKNEY	207246	775	208889	209664	208365	209914	1549
HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM	169374	52	172710	172762	174204	174309	105
HARINGEY	221251	264	224307	224571	224728	225255	527
HARROW	210044	-206	211278	211072	210745	210333	-412
HAVERING	224717	-282	224533	224251	224582	224018	-564
HILLINGDON	245616	-542	246817	246275	247649	246564	-1085
HOUNSLOW	215976	713	215395	216108	212911	214337	1426
ISLINGTON	179387	340	180157	180497	180113	180792	679
KENSINGTON & CHELSEA	162199	-3737	168361	164624	174359	166885	-7474
KINGSTON UPON THAMES	149045	-218	150112	149894	150407	149971	-436
LAMBETH	273372	-90	271057	270967	268546	268366	-180
LEWISHAM	254336	1309	251918	253227	248329	250947	2618
MERTON	191106	135	191706	191841	191398	191668	270
NEWHAM	249411	1508	251823	253331	250649	253666	3017
REDBRIDGE	241893	1197	242408	243605	245125	247519	2394
RICHMOND UPON THAMES	174311	-2323	176528	174205	179211	174566	-4645
SOUTHWARK	256712	2064	255445	257509	253814	257942	4128
SUTTON	181461	569	180160	180729	178539	179676	1137
TOWER HAMLETS	201090	1667	204574	206241	206589	209922	3333
WALTHAM FOREST	222015	790	221933	222723	221577	223158	1581
WANDSWORTH	271742	405	273518	273923	274148	274958	810
WESTMINSTER	203329	-5089	214387	209298	222018	211839	-10179
GREATER LONDON	7322403	128	7371239	7371367	7387868	7388124	256
London Plan Sub-regions:							
Central	1549308	-6661	1569934	1563273	1583659	1570337	-13322
East and Thames Gateway	1987923	7502	1997499	2005001	2000309	2015314	15005
West	1417906	1545	1423784	1425329	1418294	1421384	3090
North	1040013	-237	1048535	1048298	1051024	1050551	-473
South	1327253	-2021	1331487	1329466	1334582	1330539	-4043

GLA is grateful for the ONS comments that have been assembled by Joy Dobbs and incorporated in the final version of this Update.

Comments or further information:

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