

“UK Longitudinal Study Unit Directors welcome Census 2021 announcement” – 28 March 2014

Directors of the Support Units of the three UK Census-based Longitudinal Studies have welcomed Thursday's announcements from the Office for National Statistics¹ and National Records of Scotland² recommending a predominantly online census in 2021, supplemented by the further use of administrative and survey data.

The announcements follow an extended period of consultation on the future approach for the census. The consultation response gave a clear indication of the value of census data both for research and for government and local authorities who rely on the data for service planning.

The three UK Longitudinal Studies (ONS Longitudinal Study of England and Wales, Scottish Longitudinal Study and Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study) take a sample of people from the census population and trace them anonymously across time, linking in other administrative data, to provide a uniquely rich research resource.

At the recent launch of the linkage of 2011 Census data into the Studies, Prof Paul Boyle (retiring CEO of the Economic and Social Research Council) hailed the three studies as: “robust examples of the safe use of pseudonymised linked data [that] should inform the government's plans for legislation” on the linkage of other Big Data.

Prof Chris Dibben, Director of the Scottish Longitudinal Study expressed his pleasure at Thursday's announcements: “The recommendations for a 2021 census based on both traditional census forms, though now online, with the addition of administrative data is extremely exciting for the Census Longitudinal Studies. It will allow us to continue to understand fundamental changes in the UK population, because we have 30-40 years of the same questions having been asked of all household across the country, but with the addition of new administrative data, it will also permit researchers to explore for the first time new more complex aspects of UK society.”

Dr Nicola Shelton, Director of the Centre for Longitudinal Study Information and User Support, said, “CeLSIUS welcomes the National Statistician's recommendation that a decennial census is conducted in 2021. The Longitudinal Studies in the UK are world-class research resources, and they rely on a census being conducted. With the focus on greater online data collection, the national statistical agencies will need to work hard to ensure that data is gathered from all parts of the population, but the move also brings many positive benefits, and exciting opportunities.”

Dr Ian Shuttleworth, Director of the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study Research Support Unit said, “the recommendation... is welcome. It will increase the temporal range of data held in the Longitudinal Studies and permit transitions from 2011 to 2021 to be traced. The possible use of administrative data might widen the range of data available for the Longitudinal Studies.”

In an extended blog post discussing the announcements³, Dr Oliver Duke-Williams, Co-Director of the Census & Administrative data Longitudinal Studies Hub (CALLS Hub) described the proposed 2021 census as “a new opportunity” for the Studies.

[SEE OVER FOR NOTES FOR EDITORS]

¹ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/who-ons-are/programmes-and-projects/beyond-2011/beyond-2011-report-on-autumn-2013-consultation--and-recommendations/index.html>

² <http://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/news/2014/plans-for-a-census-in-scotland-2021>

³ <https://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/celsius/2014/03/27/beyond-2021/>

NOTES FOR EDITORS

- The three UK Longitudinal Study Support Units are funded by grants from the Economic and Social Research Council.
- The Census & Administrative data Longitudinal Studies Hub (CALLS Hub) is responsible for the support and promotion of the three Support Units. CALLS is Directed by Prof Allan Findlay at University of St Andrews, with Co-Directors at the University of Edinburgh (Prof Chris Dibben) and UCL (Dr Oliver Duke-Williams).
- CeLSIUS is based at University College London, and supports academics using the ONS Longitudinal Study for England & Wales (ONS LS). ONS are responsible for creation of the ONS LS.
- The SLS-DSU (Scottish Longitudinal Study Development Support Unit) is a joint project of the University of Edinburgh, University of St Andrews and NRS, and is based within the offices of the National Records of Scotland (NRS) at Ladywell House, Edinburgh. SLS-DSU is responsible for both creation of the SLS and support for researchers who wish to use it.
- The NILS-RSU (Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study Research Support Unit) is based at Queen's University Belfast, with an office within the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), Belfast. The unit provides support for all users of the Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study. NISRA are responsible for creation of the NILS.
- Further detail on the Units and the Studies can be found on the CALLS Hub website: <http://calls.ac.uk/ls-units/>

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