

Richard Leonard MSP
Convener, Public Audit Committee
Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH
EH99 1SP

By Email

13th March 2023

Dear Convener

The 2021/22 audit of National Records of Scotland

Thank you for your letter of 10 February to Paul Lowe and Linda Sinclair seeking further information from National Records of Scotland (NRS) as part of your scrutiny of the above Section 22 Report. I have taken over from Paul Lowe as Interim Chief Executive and Senior Responsible Officer for the Census Programme, and so am responding on behalf of NRS.

Administrative Data

You asked for confirmation of our plans in securing the administrative data that we require to produce high-quality census outputs. NRS is pleased to confirm that permissions are in place and that NRS has secured the administrative data which was identified as a priority by the International Steering Group.

Digital Exclusion

The Committee were also interested in our evaluation work and the impact of digital exclusion on Census completion. NRS are keen to reflect all lessons learned, including the issues raised by the Committee and the Auditor General for Scotland regarding digital exclusion. As previously noted, NRS will set out these lessons upon conclusion of the census programme, in our evaluation report which will be laid before Parliament in 2024. However, in the interim I will set out the approach taken through the Census last year to maximise response and ensure an inclusive approach.

The census collection phase took place between 28 February and 1 June 2022 and saw significant engagement across Scotland. The digital online collection worked well with a range of other options for those who didn't wish to, or were not able to, respond online. As well as online services and paper questionnaires, we offered help and support over the phone and on the doorstep. Around 2.3 million households completed the census, 89% of which did so online (over 2 million households). The Office for National Statistics also saw 89% of households submitting their census returns online in 2021. Our design in Scotland was to achieve at least 70% of all completions online which we exceeded.

In developing a census which is inclusive, NRS consulted a wide range of stakeholders around census development and testing to ensure the census was easy for all people in Scotland to complete. Our Design did specifically acknowledge that response rates vary by location and NRS understood that not everyone would be able to complete their census online. Subsequently, additional provisions were made for specific groups within the population who had been identified as less likely to complete, or less likely to complete online. Our user research identified the following groups:

- a) Young adults (not living with parents) – both students and non-students
- b) DE socio-economic groups/high deprivation/low income
- c) Parents of young children (aged up to 5 years old)
- d) Those aged 75+
- e) Those in Minority Ethnic communities
- f) Those with physical, emotional, or learning disabilities/difficulties
- g) Gaelic speakers
- h) Those living in rural locations.

This research informed our marketing campaign, engagement strategy and the overall service offer. The implemented design supported people to return online, via paper forms (including large print versions), telephone completion and, at the end of the Census collect period, doorstep completion. Online completion could be progressed via laptops, smart phones, tablets, PCs etc and that these could belong to the individual, a family member, a friend of neighbour or a community group etc.

Other provisions that were made included:

- a. A free dedicated helpline that could be used for Help or Support when completing the census. This helpline was available Monday to Friday: 8am to 8pm and weekends 9am to 4pm.
- b. A free dedicated language translation service that provided language support and interpretation services.
 - i. This service was promoted via the Household Information Leaflet to all Households.
 - ii. The top 5 languages that were requested through this service were Polish (35%), Arabic (30%), Urdu (17%), Romanian (9%) and Mandarin (9%).
- c. Guidance available in 16 languages and could be accessed online or requested via the contact centre.
- d. Online collection available in both English and Gaelic.
- e. A Telephone Data Capture (TDC) service was also offered – with over 13,000 responses being completed in this way.
- f. Help and support available in number of different formats including BSL videos (available online and via DVD, USB), Easy Read, braille, audio and large print.
- g. A text relay service available on 18001 0800 030 8308 and British Sign Language users could also use contactSCOTLAND-BSL.org

During the collection phase we sent out over 9 million letters and other correspondence across Scotland. This included over:

- 2.7 million initial contact letters
- 1.4 million initial reminders in late March
- 1.1 million second reminders in April
- 679,000 further reminders
- 340,000 paper questionnaires that were requested by households or individuals
- 115,000 paper questionnaires we proactively sent out to help people to complete their census

A multi-faceted public awareness campaign was developed to reach as high a proportion of the adult population across Scotland as possible. This included extensive TV, radio, print and physical advertising, engagement with a range of partner organisations to use their communication channels. This included targeted activity to reach groups of the population identified in research as likely to need more encouragement and support to complete the census. Over 200 organisations, including a range of older people's organisations, partnered with Scotland's Census to promote and share census information and the help and support available for completion.

In the latter stages of collection, and specifically through the extension period, our field force activity was focused on areas of low return rates. A number of field events took place to encourage census completion where possible. These events were focused on engaging with young people and students, as well as minority ethnic communities. Locations included faith centres, supermarkets and universities, with field staff available to assist with census completion at each site. Events were covered in local and national media. A full list of events can be found at Annex A.

A further burst of partnership activity was delivered across the extension period, communicating directly to over 580 contacts at a range of partner organisations including Local Authorities, charities, universities and colleges.

At the end of May, census field staff asked around 1,200 householders why they had not yet completed the census. The most popular reason was that they were too busy.

I hope this gives a sense of the scale and breadth of activity. NRS will provide further analysis and evaluation in our 2024 report.

Costs

In relation to costs, I can confirm, the estimated costs in relation to the additional spend of £6m was incurred on the Census Programme in 2022/23. The Committee will recall that the Accountable Officer template process was used with Scottish Government to secure these additional funds for the programme, following agreement that the Collect period of the 2022

Census should be extended to maximise the return rate. The process concluded with Ministerial approval to spend up to £9.78m to extend the Census Collect period by an additional 4 weeks. During that period spend was managed and savings were made by focusing spend on essential areas that provided the highest return. As a result, the additional cost to the programme in 2022/23 is £5.9m. This spend is ringfenced to the Collect extension period with all other spend in relation to the 2022 Census Programme being managed within budget and reported in line with financial management principles and managing public funds guidance as set out in the Scottish Public Finance Manual, to ensure value for money.

NRS secured £4m of the £5.9m from SG through a Corporate transfer with the remaining £1.9m being met by NRS. Additional savings from the Census Programme were realised through in year resource savings and efficiencies from robust budget management.

Going forward the Census budget for 2023/24 and 2024/25 is significantly less than prior years, as we move to the next stages in the lifecycle of the Census Programme. As part of the Resource Spending Review the Census Programme has been allocated £3.1m and £1.4m respectively, which is in line with the requirements set out in the 2019 programme re-plan and will be used to fund the resource requirement of the Programme through the Outputs stages to conclusion of the 2022 Census Programme. The same financial management principles will be applied to budgets going forward to ensure the programme is delivered within the total lifecycle budget and value for money is achieved.

Temporary Staff

The final point raised was around the proportion and costs of temporary staff within NRS, reflecting the short-term contractors working on the census and specialist IT projects. The Committee asks about our arrangements for knowledge transfer and a further breakdown of the temporary staff costs noted in 2021/22.

A key part of knowledge transfer is capturing the lessons learned from Census 2022 and using these to improve and build upon. The Lessons Learned and Evaluation work has been a critical part of Census 2022 and is being delivered at both a detailed project level, as well as at an overarching strategic level. From the initial Collect phase of the Programme, we have collated over 400 individual lessons learned which cover both project and cross cutting lessons. This is vital not only to inform the design and delivery of future Censuses but also to feed into wider NRS significant programmes and projects.

NRS has appointed a Delivery Director to establish an NRS Delivery and Change function that will oversee strategic change initiatives going forward. We are building internal project, programme, change and analytical expertise in the Delivery Directorate to mature NRS' capacity and capability for delivering complex change. The Census 2022 PMO is being absorbed into the Delivery Directorate, along with its experience and skills around transition

documentation and processes important for both future Censuses and NRS-wide change initiatives.

One area of focus throughout the Programme has been on knowledge transfer and building skills and capability into NRS. This has included specific business case skills, digital first skills, benefits management and project and programme management skills. With many of these skills, specialists were brought in for a defined period within a specific work package, to work alongside NRS colleagues to support, upskill and develop capabilities for the future.

Our activity includes:

- The NRS Workforce Planning Group (WFP) refers any requests for new or extensions to Census 2022 Project resource to the Delivery Directorate to consider if alternative internal permanent resource is available.
- WFP has also been managing a robust process to manage interim resources rolling off the Census 2022 programme to identify alternative NRS roles to maintain knowledge and skills.
- Focused knowledge transfer sessions with Census 2022 experts are being held with colleagues across NRS – not just in terms of programme management but also around Contract Management, Resource Planning, Procurement, Digital First, Cyber security.

In addition to the above, NRS will continue to leverage its' partnerships with ONS, NISRA and the International Census Forum (ICF) to share thoughts on Census Futures and their transition plans, plus engage key stakeholders across the wider public sector ecosystem.

With regards the use of contractors in the delivery of Census and IT projects, in 2021/22 total staff related costs were £34.8m, of which £20.2m was in relation to permanent staff and £14.6m for temporary staff. Of the 42% staff costs that related to temporary staff £8.4m was incurred on the census programme. The remaining £6.2m was incurred on temporary staff within NRS core operations, including IT and other professional skills.

NRS has been reducing the numbers and spend on staff on the Census Programme since the closure of Collect and Archive and Decommissioning phases late last year. As such our proportion of spend on contractors will reduce moving in to 2023/24. This year's spend will be reported in our Annual Report and Accounts and will be impacted by the delivery of Census in this financial year. NRS remains committed to deploy a range of value for money resourcing routes to ensure we have the appropriate skills in place to deliver our requirements.

I hope that this information assists the Committee in their consideration.

Yours sincerely

Dr Janet Egdell

Interim Chief Executive

Registrar General for Scotland and Keeper of the Records of Scotland

Stakeholder Engagement: List of Field and Partnership Events

Event	Date	Location
Awareness/Collect/Live Period		
Stakeholder awareness sessions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27 October 2021 • 3 November 2021 • 10 November 2021 • 17 November 2021 • 24 November 2021 • 1 December 2021 • 8 December 2021 • 15 December 2021 • 12 January 2022 • 19 January 2022 	Online event
Stakeholder support webinar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 March 2022 • 9 March 2022 • 16 March 2022 	Online event
Field stand event	4 March 2022	Glasgow - St Enoch Square,
Field stand event	5 March 2022	Hawick - Heritage Hub
Field stand event	6 March 2022	Irvine - Outside Rivergate Shopping Centre
Field stand event	7 March 2022	Glenrothes - Kingdom Shopping Centre
Field stand event	8 March 2022	Cumbernauld - Antonine Shopping Centre
Field stand event	9 March 2022	Hamilton - Castle Street
Field stand event	10 March 2022	Aberdeen – Union Square
Field stand event	15 March 2022	Oban – Station Square
Field stand event	16 March 2022	Inverness – Falcon Square
Field stand event	18 March 2022	Dundee – City Square
Field stand event	19 March 2022	Perth – King Edward Street
Field stand event	20 March 2022	Edinburgh – Castle Street

Event	Date	Location
Extension Period		
Community support event	14 May 2022	Glasgow - Central Mosque
Community support event	15 May 2022	Glasgow – Hillhead Library
Community support event	17 May 2022	Dundee - Abertay University
Community support event	18 May 2022	Dundee – University of Dundee
Community support event	19 May 2022	Edinburgh – University of Edinburgh
Community support event	20 May 2022	Glasgow - Central Mosque
Community support event	20 May 2022	Glasgow - University of Strathclyde Union
Community support event	21 May 2022	Glasgow – Asda (Govan)
Community support event	22 May 2022	Glasgow – Asda (Toryglen)
Community support event	22 May 2022	Glasgow – Glasgow Hindu Mandir
Community support event	22 May 2022	Edinburgh - Edinburgh Hindu Mandir and Cultural Centre
Community support event	23 May 2022	Lanarkshire – New College Lanarkshire
Community support event	24 May 2022	Glasgow – Langside Library
Community support event	24 May 2022	North Ayrshire - Whitlees Community Centre
Community support event	24 May 2022	Fife - Cupar Library
Community support event	24 May 2022	North Ayrshire – The Portal
Community support event	25 May 2022	Fife - Methil Library
Community support event	25 May 2022	North Lanarkshire - Kirkshaws Community Centre
Community support event	25 May 2022	North Ayrshire - Ardeer Community Centre
Community support event	25 May 2022	North Ayrshire - Auchendarvie Leisure Centre
Community support event	26 May 2022	Greater Glasgow – Glasgow Powerleague
Community support event	26 May 2022	Fife - Methil Library
Community support event	26 May 2022	Fife - St. Andrews Cosmos Centre
Community support event	26 May 2022	Dundee - Dundee Carers Centre
Community support event	26 May 2022	North Lanarkshire - Shawhead Community Centre
Community support event	27 May 2022	Irvine – Rivergate Shopping Centre

Event	Date	Location
Community support event	27 May 2022	Glasgow - Central Mosque
Community support event	27 May 2022	Fife - Cupar Library
Community support event	27 May 2022	Dundee - Dundee Carers Centre
Community support event	27 May 2022	Dundee - Overgate Shopping Centre
Community support event	28 May 2022	Glasgow – Asda Parkhead Forge
Community support event	28 May 2022	Fife - Kingdom Shopping Centre
Community support event	28 May 2022	Dundee - Tayside Hindu Cultural Centre
Community support event	29 May 2022	West Dunbartonshire – Asda Clydebank
Community support event	29 May 2022	Glasgow – The Hindu Temple of Scotland
Community support event	29 May 2022	Aberdeen – Aberdeen Hindu Temple
Community support event	29 May 2022	Dundee - Tayside Hindu Cultural Centre
Community support event	30 May 2022	Dundee – Overgate Shopping Centre
Community support event	30 May 2022	Dundee - Dundee Carers Centre