

**census**  
2021

# 2019 Census Rehearsal: Handbook

The rehearsal takes place on  
Sunday **13 October 2019**

This handbook explains what the rehearsal is all about, why it matters and how you can help spread the word within your council and community.

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Dear reader

Welcome to your handbook, which outlines our plans for the census rehearsal in England and Wales. This handbook explains why it's important to run the 2019 Rehearsal, and how you can help us to make the rehearsal a success in your area and for your community.

Population statistics are vital to our country nationally, locally and within communities. Once every 10 years, the census provides an opportunity to build a detailed and comprehensive picture of the nation. The census is for everyone. The whole population has the chance to provide the information that can help to ensure communities are well served.

When government organisations provide financial support to fund services, census data are one of the information sources used to determine allocations. Getting the best possible response rates for the census will make sure these allocations are based on accurate, high-quality data.

This handbook explains what's new for the 2019 Rehearsal and the 2021 Census. We've outlined some of the challenges ONS faces in making sure census estimates truly represent the make-up of communities and numbers of people within them. We've also highlighted the areas where community leaders can provide support and encouragement to local people.

Understanding the needs of communities is one of our main focuses. By working together, we can make sure your communities' needs are properly understood and appropriately reflected in census data.

Running a rehearsal is an important way for us to test that all of our processes, systems and services are effective and working as they should before Census 2021. This will help us make sure the census runs smoothly and that it represents everyone.

The 2019 Rehearsal will take place in four local authority areas within England and Wales. This way, we can rehearse our processes with different population groups across a mix of urban and rural locations. The areas we've chosen are Carlisle, Ceredigion, Hackney and Tower Hamlets.

We're working closely with your local authority to co-ordinate rehearsal activities in their area. We're also working with local community groups and charities, helping them to spread the word about the rehearsal and enabling them to support their communities.

Thank you, in advance, for supporting the rehearsal – and for encouraging people in your local community to take part in the census rehearsal this autumn.



*Peter Benton.*

Peter Benton  
Director of Census Operations  
Office for National Statistics



# Why we have a census

Every 10 years, the census gives us a complete picture of the nation. It allows us to compare different groups of people across the United Kingdom because the same questions are asked, and the information is recorded, in the same way throughout England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

At the Office for National Statistics (ONS), we're responsible for planning and running the census in England and Wales. We work closely with the census offices in Scotland and Northern Ireland, who run their own censuses. This booklet covers the census for England and Wales.

Census population estimates are vital in helping to shape the communities in which we live and work. Census statistics:

- underpin policy-making and council funding allocation from central government
- provide information to help plan and prioritise service delivery
- give a benchmark for estimates of population between censuses
- are unique in providing detailed demographic information about local small area populations

The 2011 Census succeeded in achieving a 94% per cent response rate overall, with every local authority exceeding 80%. This meant data users, such as local authorities, could have confidence that we produced accurate estimates for all local areas.

We could not have achieved this without the help and support of local authorities and community groups. The next census takes place in March 2021 and we will again be looking to work in partnership with councils and communities. To help ensure a successful census in 2021 we are holding a rehearsal in October 2019.

## **The link between census estimates and public service funding**

Billions of pounds a year are allocated for local services using census-based population data.

It's important that census estimates are accurate, so these funds can be allocated effectively. To get these accurate estimates, we need a good response to the census from all areas and communities.

## **What is the census rehearsal?**

The census rehearsal is a bit like a "mini-census". It's an end-to-end test of just about everything we'll need to do for the real thing. However, rather than covering the whole of England and Wales as the census does, the rehearsal will take place in just a few selected areas. We'll invite households in these areas to take part by filling in a census rehearsal questionnaire.

## **Why ONS needs to hold a rehearsal**

The rehearsal is an important way for us to test that all our processes, systems and services are effective and working as they should before the 2021 Census.

The census is important to all of us. The information it collects helps the government and local authorities plan services like schools, health services, roads and libraries. By running a rehearsal, we can make sure the census runs smoothly and that it represents everyone.

Up to now, we've carried out a couple of different census tests to help us prepare for 2021 – but nothing quite on the scale of the rehearsal. This will also be the final major test we'll be doing before the main event.

## **Who needs to take part**

We'll be contacting people who live within one of our four chosen areas, at the time of the rehearsal. We will send them a letter asking them to fill in the questionnaire.

The more people who respond, the more accurate information we'll have to help us plan for the census.

## **Why was my area chosen?**

The rehearsal will take place in four different local authority areas within England and Wales: Carlisle, Ceredigion, Hackney and Tower Hamlets. We've chosen these areas so we can rehearse our processes with different population groups and types of housing across a mix of urban and rural locations. You can read more about how and why your area was chosen on our 2019 Rehearsal web pages at [www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/2019rehearsal](http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/2019rehearsal).

# What's new for the 2019 Rehearsal and the 2021 Census?

It's vital that the census sheds light on long-term trends, while also reflecting the society in which we live today. So, we're planning a few changes for the next census:

## A "digital-first" census

For the first time, the census will be predominantly online, but with help available for those unable to fill in the census online. We'll send households a letter with a unique access code they can use to securely access the online questionnaire.

To make sure the census is as inclusive as possible, we'll offer a full range of support services, including:

- comprehensive guidance online
- face-to-face support for people who have difficulties with getting online
- a contact centre that will provide help via telephone and digital services such as web chat and social media
- field staff visiting households that have not yet responded
- accessible census questionnaires (for example in Braille)
- targeted supporting materials

Paper questionnaires will be issued as the initial contact in some areas, based on the likelihood of take-up of an online option or where residents are highly likely to prefer paper. These paper questionnaires will also contain a unique access code (UAC) to allow for online completion, so anyone who wishes to complete online can do so. Similarly, anyone who wants to complete a paper questionnaire can request one through the public support channels.

## **New questions to reflect the needs of society**

Following public consultation and after careful consideration based on evidence from research and stakeholder engagement, we've proposed to collect, for the first time, information on three new topics. These are:

- UK Armed Forces
- gender identity
- sexual orientation

The UK Armed Forces question will gather data on past service in the UK Armed Forces. These data will help service providers, such as local authorities, to support veterans in accordance with the Armed Forces Covenant – a promise between the country and those who serve or have served it.

ONS has also proposed questions on sexual orientation and gender identity (in addition to the current question on sex). These questions will collect data to meet the need for better quality information on the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) populations, to monitor inequalities and to inform the delivery of public services and support for these groups. Both questions will only be asked of persons aged 16 years and over. Any person

will be able to confidentially request an individual census questionnaire and provide confidential answers independently of anyone else in their household, if they want to. Provisions are being made to make these two questions voluntary in the 2021 Census so no one will be forced to answer these questions if they do not want to.

## **Read more about our proposals for the 2021 Census**

On 14 December 2018, the White Paper outlining ONS's recommendations for the 2021 Census was published on GOV.UK, along with the associated Equality Impact Assessment. To read these documents, visit

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-2021-census-of-population-and-housing-in-england-and-wales](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-2021-census-of-population-and-housing-in-england-and-wales).

## **How will ONS maximise participation?**

There are many different things we'll be doing to make sure we get a high level of response to the 2021 Census including:

### **Following up missing questionnaires**

We will be following up missing questionnaires with reminders and a flexible field team who will carry out intensive follow-up activity targeted at areas where high numbers of households have not returned their questionnaires.

## **An accessible census**

We want to make sure everyone has the support they need to be able to take part in the census. That's why we'll be providing a range of support services such as advice and guidance in many languages, online help, a dedicated contact centre and local face-to-face help with getting online.

## **Local authority partnerships**

Our partnerships with local councils will be vital to the success of the census. It's important we work together to:

- raise public awareness of the census
- make sure the address register is accurate
- share local intelligence which will inform and support our field force operations

## **Specialist Field Staff**

We've introduced a new Census Engagement Manager (CEM) role for 2021 and we're testing this in the rehearsal. CEMs will work in partnership with local authorities and community leaders to promote the benefits of the census and gain support for it.

We will also employ Community Advisers (CAs) whose role is to engage with specific communities that have been identified as needing extra support and encouragement to understand the benefit of the census and to encourage completion of the census questionnaire. For the rehearsal we have 2 CAs based in Tower Hamlets and Hackney, one is working with the Bangladeshi community and the other with the Somali community.

## Local marketing campaign

To support the Census in 2021, there will be an extensive advertising campaign. This will include adverts in newspapers, online, on social media, physical adverts on bus shelters, posters and adverts on radio. Some of these won't be used in the 2019 Rehearsal because it does not cover all the country – we don't want to confuse the public in areas outside the rehearsal.

Some adverts will be targeted at the general population, others at certain groups for whom we think a slightly different message is needed.

The campaign will have phases:

- The first will be awareness raising (the Rehearsal is coming, what it's all about),
- then a call to action (complete your return),
- followed by a reminder (it's not too late to do it, do you need any help).
- Finally, the messaging will thank people for participating and tell them what comes next (the Census itself).

## Working with communities for the 2019 Rehearsal

We have asked the chief executives of each of the four local authorities included in the census rehearsal to appoint a census liaison manager (CLM) and an assistant census liaison manager (ACLM). These roles are highly effective in co-ordinating census planning and activity within local authorities.

Our partnership with local councils is designed to maximise response rates across the four rehearsal areas and for all population groups. Rehearsing census processes and procedures will help us produce high-quality, accurate estimates and reliable demographic information when it comes to the real census in 2021.

In drawing up our plans we have worked with local authorities through our Census Advisory groups, and our Local Authority Operational Management Group. Their views have helped us to shape our plans and procedures.

The following sectors are represented in these groups:

- central government departments
- local authorities
- the health service
- the business sector and professional interest groups
- the academic community
- organisations with interests in diversity, religion, ethnicity, special needs and minority populations
- users in Wales

We're focusing on building relationships with sectors of the population that may be reluctant, or find it difficult to take part. We need to be able to tap into local knowledge and understanding to deal sensitively with the issues faced by these groups. This is why we're asking local councils and community organisations to work with us to promote, explain and support both the 2019 Rehearsal and Census 2021.

# How local organisations can support the census and the census rehearsal

## Building community links

We'd like to build on the relationships your council already has with the community and voluntary groups. By working together, we'll be able to target and tailor our community engagement.

We know that by building our understanding of local communities, we can better encourage people to take part in the census. We want to identify local groups we can work with in different ways when it comes to carrying out the census, community engagement and publicity. Groups include those representing:

- non-English speakers
- faith groups
- elderly or infirm people
- Traveller, Gypsy and Roma groups
- short-term migrant workers
- asylum seekers

## Promoting the census in your area

For the 2019 Rehearsal, we're using a mix of local advertising, public and media relations. This will highlight the importance of the census and explain why and how people should take part. We'll also use targeted communications for specific population groups.

## **Recruitment of field staff**

For the rehearsal, we'll employ around 400 temporary field staff in England and Wales, including census officers, operational managers, engagement managers, community advisers.

We advertise these roles through [www.censusjobs.co.uk](http://www.censusjobs.co.uk). We also provide information for your council to publicise census field staff opportunities to local community groups and similar organisations. We are looking to publicise these jobs as widely as we can to ensure we recruit the best people and that our team reflects the diverse nature of local communities. Jobs can be promoted through a range of channels including newsletters, social media, emails, libraries, community centres, websites and local events.

## **Supporting online and "Assisted Digital"**

The 2019 Rehearsal will be primarily online, but we know there are people who find going online challenging. That's why we'll be making help available at a network of local online support centres.

People who are not confident or don't have access to the internet can go to their nearest centre to get help with accessing the online questionnaire. They'll be located in trusted places within communities so that people can get the help they need as part of their daily routine.

## Data protection and privacy

We're particularly aware of the need to protect people through very secure handling of their data. So, we make sure that no individual can be identified in our statistics.

The proposals for Census 2021 ensure that personal data captured electronically will be handled on systems securely managed to UK government security specifications and within ONS control. Paper forms will be securely scanned and passed to ONS by a contractor meeting ONS security requirements.

You can read more about how ONS protects your data in Chapter 6 of the White Paper outlining ONS's recommendations for the 2021 Census at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-2021-census-of-population-and-housing-in-england-and-wales>.

### Useful links

Local authority and community resources:  
[www.census.gov.uk](http://www.census.gov.uk)

Information about our plans for the 2019 Rehearsal: [www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/2019rehearsal](http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/2019rehearsal)

ONS census webpage: [www.ons.gov.uk/census](http://www.ons.gov.uk/census)

# Contacts and keeping in touch

If you have any queries about our partnership activities with local authorities and community liaison, please email us at [2021Census.LA.Liaison@ons.gov.uk](mailto:2021Census.LA.Liaison@ons.gov.uk).

Your local authority's census liaison manager and assistant census liaison manager are your internal census contacts.

If you'd like to link up with our community engagement team please email us at [2021Census.Engagement@ons.gov.uk](mailto:2021Census.Engagement@ons.gov.uk).

You can also keep up to date with developments by signing up for our newsletters. To keep in touch Register for email updates at <https://public.govdelivery.com/accounts/UKONS/subscribers/new>. You will be asked to choose what information you would like to receive. You can select any / all of the categories below;

- Historical Census Data
- 2021 Census Topics and Questions
- 2021 Census Outputs
- How the 2021 Census Will Work