

Mr Peter Calver  
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Dear Mr Calver

Thank you for your email of 2 August addressed to the Rt Hon Francis Maude MP concerning the 2011 Census. I am replying as the Director General for the Office for National Statistics which has responsibility for conducting the census.

I am sure you will be pleased to know that the 2011 Census is going ahead on 27 March 2011.

The cost of the 2011 Census in England and Wales is estimated to be £482 million over the period 2005 – 2016. This equates to 87 pence per person per year and compares favourably with the equivalent costs of censuses in other countries. This amount includes the cost of innovations such as the development of an address register to enable post-out of questionnaires, questionnaire tracking, and online questionnaire completion. Growth in population and the number of households and inflation have also increased the cost from that of the 2001 Census.

Not since the 1951 Census has a question been asked for place of birth within England and Wales. Whilst it is appreciated that this would be useful for genealogical research when the census returns are opened to the public, the value of the original question to provide a measure of internal migration is nowadays very much reduced. Furthermore, the cost of coding over 40,000 place names would be disproportionately high to the benefit gained.

You have suggested that information could be collected at the registration of births, marriages and deaths. Information collected at such events is prescribed by legislation – the Births and Deaths Registration Act 1953 (as amended) and the Marriage Act 1949 (as amended). This legislation is the responsibility of the General Register Office, which is now part of the Identity and Passport Service, an Executive agency of the Home Office. I am copying this letter to the General Register Office for information in regard to any future review of civil registration.

Additional information is collected for statistical purposes at the time of registration under the terms of the Population Statistics Act. A change in this legislation would be required to collect any further information, but even so, this could not replace the comprehensive information collected in a census and would not allow the multivariate analyses that are only possible with a census.

You might like to know that the National Statistician together with the Registrars General of Scotland and Northern Ireland has recently instigated a project 'Beyond 2011' to investigate the feasibility of alternative methods of collecting census-type information.



Stephen Penneck  
Director General for ONS