


Census Rehearsal 2019 Evaluation Report

July 2020

NI Census 2021
6 November at 15:41

NISRA census staff are visiting homes in the rehearsal areas where we've no record of forms being completed.
Our staff are there to help you, answer questions and offer advice.
Working Hours:... See more




NI Census 2021
CENSUS.GOV.UK/NI [Learn More](#)


NI Census 2021
CENSUS.GOV.UK/NI

NI Census 2021
18 October at 15:18

By completing the census rehearsal, you're playing an important role in making sure we get the census in 2021 right.
Follow the instructions on your census rehearsal letter. We're counting on you.



Census 2021 Rehearsal
CENSUS.GOV.UK/NI [Learn More](#)



I count
because I help shape housing
in South & East Belfast.

You may have been chosen for the census rehearsal.
If you've received a letter, please complete the questionnaire now.
census.gov.uk/ni

census
2021

Executive Summary

1. A rehearsal for the 2021 Census took place during Autumn 2019 (Census Rehearsal Day was Sunday 13th October 2019). In Northern Ireland the rehearsal covered three geographical areas with just over 19,000 households selected. In these areas a small sample (11) of communal establishments were also included.
2. In undertaking the 2019 Rehearsal and preparing for the 2021 Census the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) work closely with the Office for National Statistics (ONS). This relationship is longstanding and a significant number of the systems and services used for the Northern Ireland Census are acquired through joint procurement initiatives with the ONS.
3. The rehearsal tested the new method of census delivery with the majority of households sent an invitation to fill out an online questionnaire. The remainder received a paper questionnaire. The invitations were delivered in late September.
4. In total just over 9,000 household responses were received of which two-thirds were online. The rehearsal therefore successfully provided a large-scale test of processes and systems being prepared for the 2021 Census.
5. The purpose of the 2019 Rehearsal was to conduct a live test of the census operation in selected locations, focusing on the proposed enumeration methodology, associated systems, supporting public engagement services, and aspects of data processing.
6. Overall the rehearsal was successful in testing many of the elements which will be used for the census due to take place of 21st March 2021 and it helped to bring out some key learning points for improvements which can be implemented ahead of Census Day.
7. The remainder of this report sets out the key messages and findings from the rehearsal and the steps that need to be taken to address these.

Introduction

1. A population census is a large-scale data collection, data processing and data dissemination exercise. Typically, in the United Kingdom the census is run every ten years. To undertake a census, detailed research and planning are conducted to ensure its successful delivery. A key milestone in the planning process is a rehearsal, typically carried out 18-24 months prior to Census Day. The rehearsal provides a large-scale test of processes and systems being developed for the main census.
2. The rehearsal is particularly important given the major design changes from the last census in 2011. These included the move from traditional paper-based data collection to online data collection, the associated modernisation of field processes, the use of administrative data to underpin the census process and the commitment to conducting post-collection data processing within NISRA. This paper evaluates the 2019 Rehearsal in terms of objectives, purpose and scope, design and timeline.
3. The main aims of the rehearsal were to:
 - Confirm the viability of the proposed 2021 census field methodologies, data collection services and management arrangements. This will help ensure that these elements are fit-for-purpose and meet the strategic aims of the Census;
 - Assess the quality of the collected data arising from the new and innovative methodologies and systems being developed for the 2021 Census; and
 - Provide NISRA, its partners and suppliers with exposure to, and experience of, the range of situations likely to be met in the 2021 Census operation so that improvements can be implemented where necessary.

4. The rehearsal sample size was just over 19,000 households – a substantial increase from the 5,000 households rehearsed in 2009 for the 2011 Census. There were three rehearsal locations in the following Local Government Districts (LGDs):
- Belfast – Ravenhill and Queens
 - Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon – Craigavon
 - Fermanagh and Omagh – West Fermanagh
5. These locations were chosen to test specific elements of the census and to provide sufficient data to assess their impact. They were chosen based on a number of criteria relating to key objectives, including:
- Mixture of urban and rural areas
 - Area with limited broadband coverage/limited mobile coverage
 - Area with residents from ethnic minority groups
 - Area with a library to test the proposed Assisted Digital service
 - Area with communal establishments to test the associated enumeration approach
6. The rehearsal areas were divided up into 47 Enumeration Districts (EDs), 18 of which were in Fermanagh and Omagh LGD, specifically in West Fermanagh - regions along the border with the Republic of Ireland were chosen to test how mobile communication devices worked. An area in Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon LGD (in and around Craigavon) was picked and split into 16 EDs – this area helped to test the communications with members of the ethnic minority community. Finally two areas in Belfast LGD were selected - an area around Queens University and a suburban area around Ravenhill. The Queens area included 8 EDs and was used to test our student engagement and enumeration. Finally the Ravenhill area included 5 EDs and was chosen as a baseline group.

7. NISRA implemented a Wave of Contact model, designed to maximise the response rate in the 2019 Rehearsal to enable an assessment of its effectiveness. The main activities for the 2019 Rehearsal, along with the associated time scales, are shown in [Annex 1](#). More details on the Wave of Contact approach is given in the [Method](#) section.
8. This report evaluates different areas of the rehearsal and looks at the lessons learned. The areas evaluated were:
- [Stakeholder Engagement](#)
 - [Public support](#)
 - [Address Register](#)
 - [Testing](#)
 - [Public documents](#)
 - [Paper Services](#)
 - [Field operations](#)
 - [Questionnaire Performance](#)
 - [Incident and Operational Management](#)

The processing rehearsal is currently underway and will complete late in 2020 after which an evaluation will be carried out.

Method

1. The census rehearsal began in earnest in August 2019 with the appointment of 53 field staff and managers. This was followed by a period of training for those staff. The field staff began work with an address check of the area they were assigned to. During the rehearsal period field staff also undertook a number of follow-up visits to encourage householders to complete their census questionnaire.
2. To help anyone with queries during the rehearsal both respondent online help and a contact centre were available and these were advertised on leaflets, websites and through social media.
3. An address list of 19,000 properties within the rehearsal areas was compiled. All households were initially sent a postcard to inform the householder they were in one of the chosen areas and that they would soon receive an invitation letter to take part. Householders then received either a letter with a unique access code to complete online or a paper questionnaire around 25th September. This was followed by another postcard around the 8th October reminding householders to take part in the census, this was timed to be just prior to the census rehearsal date of Sunday 13th October.
4. In the rehearsal a wave of contact approach was used which contained three different action plans. Households were split into the three different waves depending on age of the householders, broadband coverage and response levels from the 2011 Census. The three waves were:
 1. Paper questionnaire (PQ) with standard follow-up
 2. Electronic Questionnaire (eQ)¹ with early follow-up
 3. Electronic Questionnaire (eQ)¹ with standard follow-up

¹ People in this wave of contact group were sent a letter with a unique access code to complete an online/electronic questionnaire.

These waves were also sent additional letters and had follow-up visits by the field staff.

5. In the rehearsal 12% of households received a paper questionnaire initially (1), 27% were assigned to the eQ (early follow-up) wave (2) and the remaining 61% were in the eQ (standard follow-up) wave (3).

6. Table 1a,b,c, & d show the number of households by area along with the number and percentage assigned to each wave of contact. Most of Belfast – Ravenhill was assigned to eQ (standard follow-up) wave (3). Belfast – Queens, with a large student population had more households in eQ (early follow-up) wave (2) than any other area. In West Fermanagh, an area with relatively low broadband coverage, more homes were assigned paper questionnaires wave (1).

Table 1: Number and percentage of households included in each wave of contact by Area

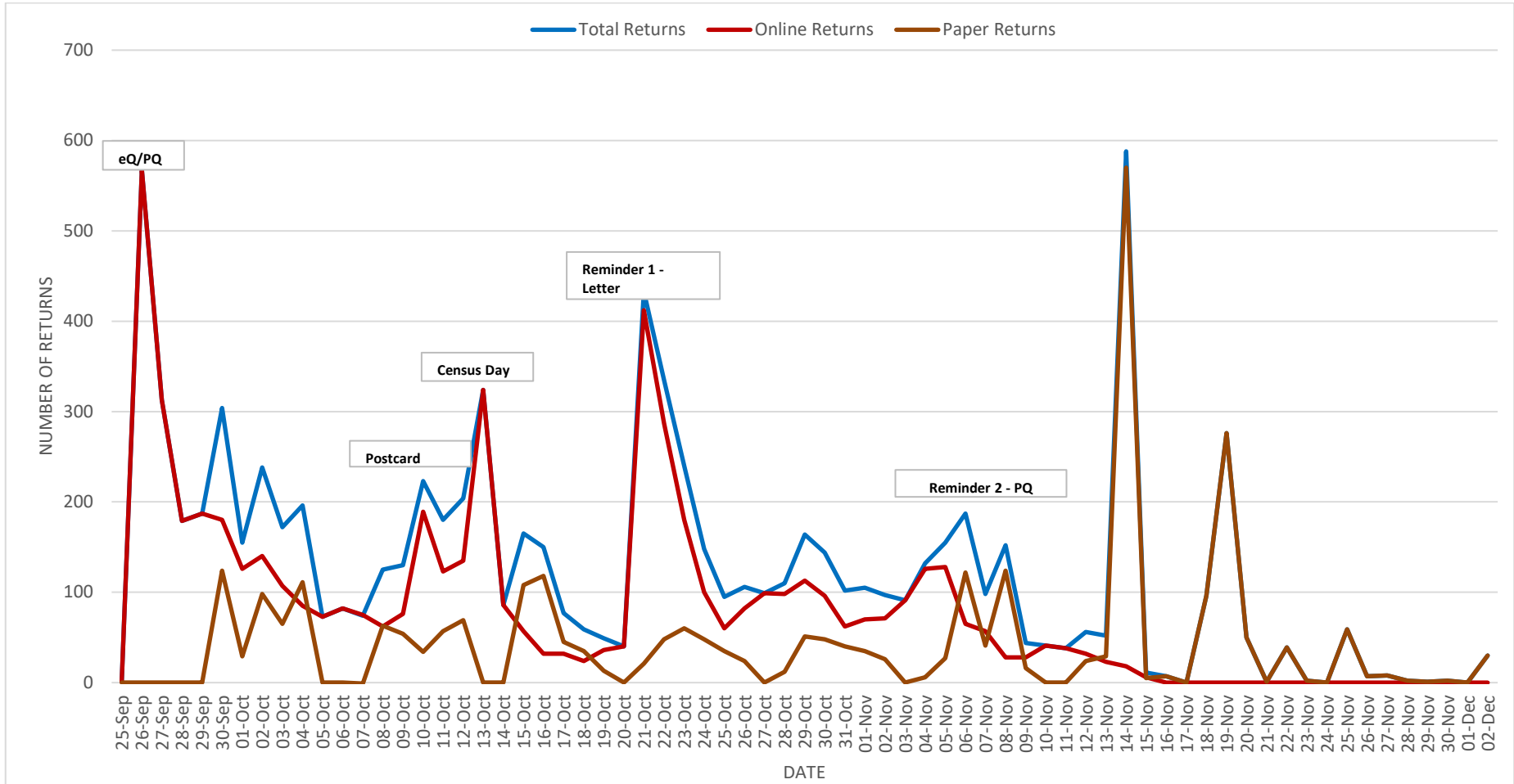
Wave of Contact	Paper questionnaire		eQ (early follow-up)		eQ (standard follow-up)		Total
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.
Belfast – Ravenhill	412	15%	546	20%	1,785	65%	2,743
Belfast – Queens	275	6%	2,183	45%	2,347	49%	4,805
West Fermanagh	712	16%	657	15%	2,999	69%	4,368
Craigavon	970	13%	1,784	24%	4,625	63%	7,379
Total	2,369	12%	5,170	27%	11,756	61%	19,295

7. The online questionnaire remained open until 14 November 2019 after which paper questionnaires were accepted until the end of December. The collection phase was followed by a period of data processing and also a Census Coverage Survey (CCS) which took place in January 2020 to test the accuracy and coverage of the rehearsal. Neither the data processing nor the CCS are included in this evaluation, which focuses only on the operational period and activities.

Results

8. A total of 19,000 households were included in the rehearsal and around 9,500 returns were received, giving a return rate of 50%. This was higher than the 29% response rate in the 2009 Rehearsal prior to the 2011 Census. Around two-thirds of respondents completed the questionnaire online and the remaining one-third completed a paper questionnaire.
9. It should be noted that unlike the 2021 Census, the rehearsal was voluntary and the areas covered by the rehearsal were chosen to test specific things. The rehearsal is therefore not representative of the population of Northern Ireland. It was not the intention of the rehearsal to undertake a statistical analysis of the results but to test systems and services used in the 2021 Census. Therefore only a summary of the results are presented here. A more detailed rehearsal of the post-collection Data Processing is ongoing – this will look at the challenges and provide more detail on statistical matters.
10. The return rate varied across the areas from 59% in Belfast – Ravenhill to 25% in Belfast – Queens, with West Fermanagh having 50% and Craigavon 51%.
11. Chart 1 below shows the daily responses both online and by paper for each day throughout the rehearsal period along with the postcards, letters and reminders sent. It shows an increase in the response rates following a reminder.
12. Eleven communal establishments (CEs) were included in the rehearsal. This process was managed by NISRA Census HQ and managers were asked to fill in a questionnaire about their establishment and provide details of the number of residents, type of establishment and details (name, sex and DOB) of all residents. There was an excellent response from communal establishments with 9 out of the 11 CEs completing the manager's questionnaire, however response from individual residents in communal establishments was patchy. In the rehearsal there was no option for residents in communal establishments to complete online, this will be available for 2021.

Chart 1: Number of paper and online returns by date



Stakeholder Engagement

13. For the 2019 Census Rehearsal, a three month intensive period of community liaison was carried out. This was concentrated in the rehearsal areas, although umbrella groups were included where a local contact for a 'hard to reach' group was not available. In total 79 organisations were contacted and meaningful engagement was achieved with around one third of these groups. Engagement was more successful when it was face to face and some useful networking events took place.

14. For 2021, a more detailed plan for contacting and communicating with stakeholders and community groups is needed and where possible the communications should be aimed at named individuals rather than generic email addresses. A suite of products will be designed with messages tailored to specific 'hard to reach' groups which address specific concerns, language or accessibility needs. Early engagement will be key to ensure that as many potential relationships as possible can be built.

15. The census rehearsal media campaign ran from 30 September to 13 November 2019 and included radio advertising, print in regional newspapers in the rehearsal areas, outdoor advertising and digital programmatic advertisements on Google search, Belfast Live, Facebook, Instagram, etc... It is estimated that 53% of the NI adult population were exposed to the campaign at least once.

16. Access to the analytics, or reports provided, will be useful for the 2021 Census campaign to help review website traffic to gain a better understanding of how best to engage the public.

Public support

17. During the rehearsal a Contact Centre was operated with operators available Monday to Saturday and also on Census Rehearsal Sunday. The operators answered calls, held webchats and answered social media queries. In addition Interactive Voice Response (IVR) was available continually (24/7) with an automated paper questionnaire request service.
18. Online help was available throughout the rehearsal period, Assisted Digital sessions were held to provide help to those who wanted to complete their questionnaire online, a census campaign website, social media accounts on Facebook and Twitter and a suite of accessibility products and translation booklets were also produced. NISRA ran a paid advertising campaign to deliver advertising for the rehearsal. Advertising included outdoor, radio, press, online and paid social media (Facebook & Instagram, Google ads etc.) Advertising was targeted within the rehearsal areas as much as possible and tailored for age and language.
19. During the rehearsal just over 1,000 contacts were made to the contact centre, the majority answered by the operators involved the member of public asking for a paper questionnaire or refusing to take part. Around a third of all contacts were answered by the IVR and less than 100 contacts were made via webchat or social media.
20. Overall the contact centre worked well. The quality of the training material meant that very few calls were escalated to census HQ during the rehearsal. The online help was a useful source of information both for the contact centre staff and the public. Many of the social media posts were shared by stakeholders and had a high level of positivity. Feedback from the advertising company showed good audience reach with the radio, print, digital and outdoor campaigns. The assisted digital sessions, however, were much less successful with no direct public engagement.

21. During the rehearsal NISRA had no direct access to the Content Management System (CMS) to change the online help system. This situation is being addressed to improve the process for the 2021 Census. In addition, the web analytics data was based on a sample of all hits and this led to challenges in evaluating the online help. Improved methods will be required for the 2021 Census to better understand how engaged audiences are.

Address Register

22. The Address Register is central to the operational design of the census rehearsal. Having an accurate and complete address register is required for both the delivery of questionnaires and for the field staff to use during follow-up.
23. The Land and Property Services (LPS) Pointer product was used as the base for the register, along with information from a large number of other sources such as the Valuation List, Royal Mail Postal Address File and administrative data held by the public sector.
24. A desk based checking exercise was carried out on addresses in the register for the rehearsal areas. Properties were given an occupiable score (based on LPS address lifecycle classification and activity in administrative datasets such as someone from that address registering a birth). Only addresses with high scores or identified as occupiable through the address checking exercise were included in the register. In order to have everything printed and ready to post the address register was finalised in May 2019.
25. Overall the coverage of addresses was excellent and the address register was 97% accurate (an improvement from the overall level in 2011). During the rehearsal, field staff found an additional 117 addresses – of these only one-third were not known to census HQ staff at the start of the enumeration². To improve in 2021, census HQ have asked local councils to be involved in checking which addresses to exclude and supplying any address listings they hold. The file for 2021 will need to be finalised by September 2020, however additional updates are planned in early 2021 for any changes which occur thereafter.

² In creating the address register decisions are taken which addresses to include – as the classification or status of addresses is sometimes unknown.

26. In just 0.6% of addresses the householder indicated that the address appearing on the front of the questionnaire they received was incorrect and they provided a different address. In a very small number of cases the postcode or house number was changed. This shows that letters were delivered to the correct address accurately in the vast majority of cases. Evidence in the rehearsal, particularly people in West Fermanagh, suggested people identified their address from the locality more than the postal town (Enniskillen) so locality should be used in 2021 particularly in Fermanagh.

27. During the rehearsal, over 43,000 letters were delivered to the addresses on the address register and around 2% came back as undelivered as addressed (UAA). Almost 8% of addresses in West Fermanagh had returned UAA mail. However, over two-thirds of those addresses were subsequently found by field staff during follow-up. A previous postal test carried out by the census team showed that a higher but still small proportion of misdeliveries occurred with addresses that had suffixes, for example, building number 9A or 9B etc. Therefore for the 2021 Census all addresses using suffixes will be in the same wave of contact group to help reduce the number of UAAs³.

³ The method here is that if the two addresses 9A and 9B are in the same wave of contact they will usually receive the same mail type and this will be on the same day. This will act to lower the number of misdeliveries as the post service will have two pieces of mail for the two addresses on the same day.

Testing

28. Ahead of the rehearsal there was testing on data capture and coding and non-functional requirements, such as routing of the online questionnaire. Testing was carried out on how to securely transfer data between NISRA, ONS and third parties suppliers who required it for processing. Secure data supply pipelines were also established to transfer rehearsal responses from ONS to NISRA.
29. As the rehearsal was to be primarily online the online questionnaire needed to be rigorously tested prior to the website being launched for the public. Given the number of questions and various browsers and devices that could be used to access the online questionnaire this work took a significant amount of time and staff to test. Unfortunately the timetable of deliverables for online questionnaire testing was delayed and therefore not all the minor issues discovered in testing were resolved prior to 'go live'. This will be addressed for 2021 with a key requirement being that the final testing window is retained.
30. Operational pressures meant that data types and data dictionaries were not fully specified before the data was sent and this caused issues with data being in the wrong format. This was solvable in live but again more testing is required. Also given time constraints several areas including receipt of incremental updates, image files, response management feeds and diagnostic reports were not fully rehearsed.
31. The key message is that a clear timetable for testing needs to be established as soon as possible for 2021. Sufficient time and staff need to be available to fully test and where possible testing must be simulated with large volumes of data well in advance of the start of the 2021 operational period so there is adequate time to resolve any issues discovered.

Public documents

32. During the rehearsal a number of documents (postcards, letters and leaflets) were sent to households following a planned wave of contact method which divided the households into three groups (eQ standard follow-up, eQ early follow-up, PQ) based on demography, broadband coverage and 2011 response rates.
33. Following the rehearsal a number of interviews were conducted with people in rehearsal areas. There were no negative comments received about any of the documents, although some respondents could not remember very much about the materials they received. Many of the documents included a line to say ‘the questionnaire will take as little as 20 minutes to complete online’. This was accurate with the median time less than 20 minutes. Operationally, based on subsequent response rates, the post-delivery postcard and the first reminder letter had marked impact, the second reminder letter less so.
34. The information provided in terms of Census Day was a little confusing - some people thought they could not complete the census questionnaire until Census Day, while others thought they could not complete it until after Census Day had passed. Follow-up interviews were carried out with some residents in the rehearsal areas and some of those in the initial eQ wave of contact did not know they could request a paper questionnaire if they were unable or did not want to complete online. These issues will need to be addressed in the 2021 communications.
35. Overall the rehearsal showed that the wording on the initial contact letter needs further work to be clearer in terms of letting people know that they should now complete their online questionnaire or how they can get a paper questionnaire. It is also important that the design of all communications is eye-catching and also includes the appropriate level of content.

36. The wave of contact method worked well with the small number of households for the rehearsal, but now needs to be expanded for the whole of Northern Ireland. Analysis showed that the response rate for students remains low and further consideration is needed on how best to enumerate this group. Additional messages will be placed on the outbound envelopes to highlight the importance and urgency of completing your census in 2021 to try to improve response rates.

Paper Services

37. For the rehearsal, a variety of printed products were produced including:

- paper questionnaire packs
- initial contact letter packs
- reminder packs (for addresses from which no response had been received, produced as directed by the wave of contact model)
- pre-delivery and post-delivery postcards

38. A number of other materials were produced to support Field Operations, for example, 'Sorry I Missed You' cards, and those materials requested by the public during the rehearsal period, for example, translation booklets. Generally speaking, the rehearsal print solution worked very well, all deadlines were met and all requirements were fulfilled.

39. Another important component of paper services work area is the handling of returned paper questionnaires, including the:

- 'receipting' of all returned paper questionnaires
- transmission of this data
- delivery of the physical questionnaires to the data capture centre

40. Receipt information is key to informing Field Operations that follow-up for those addresses is not required and to allow NISRA to monitor the return rate throughout the rehearsal period. The return service for paper questionnaires worked well throughout the rehearsal period.

41. During the rehearsal the capturing and coding of census data from paper questionnaires took place at a secure data capture centre. This work included the:

- scanning of all returned paper questionnaires
- capture of data from images of paper questionnaires
- coding of write-in responses
- provision of all captured and coded data to our processing systems

42. The operational systems at the data capture centre worked as required, allowing the data to be captured and coded accurately for all paper questionnaires received, and within timescales.

Field operations

43. During the rehearsal, a wide variety of activities were carried out, to enable a team of field staff to follow-up those in the rehearsal areas who had not yet responded to the rehearsal. These included recruitment, setting up a payroll solution, delivering training, providing the staff with technical and non-technical materials and managing the staff. During the rehearsal the field staff included one Census Regional Manager (CRM) – who was from census HQ, six Census Team Coordinators (CTCs) and 47 enumerators. Each of the enumerators were allocated to a different Enumeration District (ED). For the first time a mobile device with an application called the Field Work Management Tool (FWMT) was used by the enumerators, to assign them a daily workload.
44. The advertising, interviewing and recruitment processes worked well and attracted sufficiently skilled candidates to carry out all roles. The ratio of CTCs to enumerators was felt to be reasonable. There were no issues with the system used for paying Enumerators or in relation to the workload and technology provided to the enumerators.
45. During the process and evaluation some key points were noted. Namely the Candidate Information Booklets, produced as part of the advertising process, could have been clearer about the roles, tasks and the time commitment required during each phase of follow-up. The CTCs were in charge of allocating enumerators to an ED but they did not always allocate the ED closest to enumerator's home address. While the payroll system worked well for the rehearsal, using the Northern Ireland Civil Service system HRConnect, it was felt this could not be scaled up to deal with the 2,000 staff that will be needed for the 2021 Census and a new solution has been found.

46. The enumerators were initially asked to carry out an address checking exercise to both familiarise themselves with their ED and to look for any properties missed or any invalid addresses where a response was not expected, such as derelict houses, in their address list. The census team identified one address in each ED which they were very confident of, but only one third of these addresses were found by enumerators. This suggests that a full field address check may not be effective and plans will need to be made to deal with this in 2021⁴.
47. The data collected from the new field technology showed a relatively low response rate to door knocks from enumerators during follow-up (25%). There was some minor signal/coverage issues, mainly within rural West Fermanagh, with the mobile devices but the nature of the technology, the FWMT, with cached services, meant that this did not cause problems.
48. Whilst the rehearsal only needed one Census Regional Manager (CRM) given the small scaled size of the rehearsal this would not be feasible for 2021 and a Census Area Manager role, previously used in 2011, will also be used between the CRM and the CTCs. Given the poor contact rate on the door step different initiatives need to be investigated such as – what is the best time to carry out field visits, identifying field staff more clearly, better use of community and social media groups to let people know enumerators are in their area. Student areas in particular had a low response rate, so census office are investigating bringing forward follow-up in 2021 to try to contact students before the Easter break.

⁴ The main position here is to include addresses even if census office are unsure whether they are occupiable. This is easier for enumerators to find as they are looking for something to switch off as opposed to finding new properties.

Questionnaire Performance

49. During the rehearsal, respondents could complete online or use paper questionnaires. Around two-thirds completed online and of those 57% did so on a mobile and 13% via a tablet. The average completion time online was approximately 20 minutes.
50. There were three new questions added (that were not previously asked in 2011) on renewable energy systems, frequency of using Irish and Ulster-Scots and sexual orientation⁵. These questions were answered well, although on around 8% of questionnaires the renewable energy, Irish and Ulster-Scots' questions were left blank and 11% of people chose not to answer the sexual orientation question with a further 4% reported that they 'Prefer Not To Say'.
51. Overall the filtering and routing on questions worked well, however, there were a small number of contradictory answers to questions which will need to be dealt with in the validation rules for 2021. In general, the quality of the data in the online questionnaire is a significant improvement from the 2011 Census and this will help make the final data quality in 2021 of a higher standard.
52. During the rehearsal, some student areas around Queen's in Belfast, were specifically targeted as this is often a difficult group to enumerate. This area had the lowest response rate at around 25%. In order to gather improved data on students in 2021 parents/guardians will also be asked about student children living away from home to ensure as many of their details are recorded as possible.

⁵ Whilst a question on Armed Forces veterans was also included in the rehearsal, at the same time census office have been running large-scale focus group tests of this question with local veterans. This work has shown that such a question would not be acceptable in a local context – further work evaluating the rehearsal question alongside administrative data from the MoD has shown this to be case. NISRA will produce a separate document describing the position taken on the Armed Forces question in the 2021 Census. In summary the policy position is that census type statistics on veterans will be published by linking administrative data on veterans to the census data collected in the field.

Incident and Management Information

53. An Incident Management register was used to record any incidents and a daily meeting occurred between NISRA and ONS. NISRA senior managers also held daily meetings throughout the rehearsal period.
54. The Incident Management register was effective in recording incidents, however the categorisation of some incidents was not consistent and incidents were often categorised and later downgraded. An improved classification of what is an issue and what is an incident and how high a priority each incident should be given should be determined ahead of the 2021 Census.
55. During the rehearsal, daily operational Management Information (MI) was produced for senior management. This included responses, fulfilment requests, contact centre figures, social media metrics, online help usage and information from the FWMT.
56. MI was heavily reliant on a few key individuals and technology which did not work smoothly at all times and therefore workarounds were needed. This meant that delivery of MI was at times delayed. A large range of MI was produced daily during the rehearsal and this was digestible given the small number of EDs. However, this would not be scalable and usable in a timely manner in 2021 to deliver a similar amount. Therefore a clear plan of what MI is needed, by when and to whom needs thought through as soon as possible for 2021.

Conclusion

57. Overall the Census Rehearsal proved to have many successes:

- No significant problems with systems;
- Internet data capture, online help and the contact centre all ran smoothly;
- Paper questionnaires printed and delivered successfully;
- Questionnaire receipting and tracking worked: centrally and locally, there was accurate information on which addresses had (and had not) returned a questionnaire;
- Field staff recruited and trained in the required numbers;
- Field staff paid accurately and on time; and
- Publicity campaign reached public & key population groups

58. However, it is anticipated that the 2021 Census will be harder than ever before and therefore a number of improvements are needed:

- Having full control of the NI online presence and help pages;
- Increasing community engagement activities;
- Having an accurate and comprehensive address register to use for the Wave of Contact approach;
- Having a well-defined, structured and tested approach to data transfers
- Having timely information on undelivered mail;
- Putting a greater proportion of resources into areas where achieving high return rates is thought to be more challenging;
- Improving student enumeration; and
- Having a much improved system for MI

Key Recommendations and improvements for 2021

Area	Key Recommendations and Improvement for 2021
<p>Public Support</p>	<p>During the rehearsal there were a number of changes NISRA needed made to online help and guidance on the eQ. As NISRA did not have local control of the NI part of the on-line help content management system (CMS) these changes had to be requested through ONS. This took time to manage and to get changes made - this increases delay and the risk of updates not been applied accurately. NISRA working with ONS will plan to have more complete access to the NI portion of the CMS for the 2021 Census.</p> <p>Census office worked closely with Libraries NI offered a total of 34 assisted digital sessions, to help householders complete their census online, in 3 library locations – Enniskillen, Portadown and Ormeau Road, Belfast. There was no uptake at any of these sessions, so a different approach will be taken for 2021. In 2021 NISRA will focus on community centred support. These may involve local events run by community groups.</p>
<p>Address Management</p>	<p>Having an accurate and comprehensive address register will greatly help operations in the census. A number of improvements are suggested to aid this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New addresses – explore the possibility of sending a cut of new addresses to be added to the address register (whether identified by desk or field checks) closer to Census Day and look at the options of how the field tool can update Response Management. • Address changes – the address register must be capable of changing a property from communal establishment to household and vice versa and assigning communal establishment or household status to all new addresses during live operations. <p>Address updates – vanity changes are not relevant to processing and they will not be updated onto the address frame. Census office will try to cut down some of the</p>

Area	Key Recommendations and Improvement for 2021
Address Management (continued)	misdeliveries by assigning any properties with suffixes to the same wave of contact.
Data transfers	<p><u>Flow of data from ONS to NISRA</u></p> <p>During the rehearsal NISRA received response data from ONS, however there were teething issues with the method. There were also issues relating to the structure and content of the data. These resulted in reviews with fixes and data redeliveries. The data transfer mechanism worked but to scale the operation for the census (i.e. larger deliveries) a more structured, well defined and tested approach to communicating data availability and acceptance is needed.</p>
Undelivered As Addressed	<p>In the rehearsal UAA items took longer to arrive back for processing than anticipated, therefore information was not available as expected for the field operation. The delay in receiving this information prevented staff from doing anything to affect the process for those addresses.</p> <p>In 2021, census office, will need to know about UAAs from the initial contact mailings i.e. (from 1 March 2021). This is important as census office plan to keep sending mail to that address under the assumption that the UAA may have been erroneous.</p> <p>Thus key UAA information from the first delivery round will be sent to enumerators on the FWMT prior to Census Day. This will enable checks to be made on UAA addresses and a paper questionnaire to be delivered where necessary. This functionality is being developed further for use in the 2021 Census. Investigation using data available from the rehearsal shows that the majority of UAAs were in rural Fermanagh, to help address the Wave of Contact approach has been adjusted for rural West Fermanagh to make the initial contact a paper questionnaire for all households in the area rather than an initial contact letter. This is because evidence from the rehearsal showed that paper questionnaires were returned as UAAs more quickly.</p>

Area	Key Recommendations and Improvement for 2021
Field Operations	<p data-bbox="432 237 879 271"><u>Improving contact on the doorstep</u></p> <p data-bbox="432 286 1374 472">During the rehearsal only 25% of knocks on the door resulted in contact being made. Some of this may have been down to daylight hours in October/November with people reluctant to answer their doors, but improvements need to be made for 2021. Changes planned are:</p> <ul data-bbox="480 510 1366 1317" style="list-style-type: none"> • Better Communications – using social media ideally with input from PSNI social media; • Tap into established social media groups, for example, by using Next door Neighbour (http://nextdoor.co.uk) to highlight that field staff are out and about in the area. • Encourage sharing of social media messages (or other tailored ones) by regional advocates and special interest groups. • Have specific advertising that highlights field staff. • Signpost field staff during community engagements events. • Aim to have specific more detailed engagement with the PSNI. • Have local social media stories highlighting the importance of census data - the local GAA/rugby team, planning for new schools, funding for universities, etc. • High visibility vests worn by enumerators to distinguish them from, say, a utility provider employee. Possibly use census colours. <p data-bbox="432 1379 635 1413"><u>Out in the Field</u></p> <ul data-bbox="480 1447 1382 1939" style="list-style-type: none"> • Call between 4pm and 7pm - For the first time field managers had information about the times of day the enumerators made their visits and the outcomes of these visits. The best time to call seemed to be around teatime/end of work day, between 4pm and 7pm. For 2021, census office will direct enumerators to do the majority of their visits during these times. • Weekends also generate more contact however there was no improvement in contact by calling on a Sunday. Enumerators are also being directed to return at a different time of the day to a previous visit.

Area	Key Recommendations and Improvement for 2021
Field Operations (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An improved doorstep routine – providing guidance on knocking the door more than once, waiting an adequate amount of time to allow the householder to answer the door. Provide enumerators with more detailed “lines to take” if someone does answer so they are better equipped to deal with common questions/concerns expressed by householders. • Coordinate wave of contact approach for gated communities so that enumerator can cover the entire group of non-responding addresses on the same visit. • Recruit more staff than needed so that there is a geographically spread reserve – and have additional staff on standby if needed.
Student enumeration	<p>Students are difficult to enumerate, some initiatives to improve this may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Run a large scale communications plan with students at the main universities. • Ensure that parents/guardians fill out full student details of “schoolchildren or students away from home” at their home address – change in questionnaire at question 6 <p>5 Are you a schoolchild or student in full-time education?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No ➔ GO TO 7</p> <p>6 During term time, where do you usually live?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> At the address on the front of this questionnaire</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> At another address ➔ GO TO 44</p> <p>[In 2021 census office will remove the go to question 44 filter at question 6]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Split Enumeration Districts (EDs) with greater than 30% student populations in 2011 into two districts (as a way of putting in more field staff up front into student areas) and have pre census day engagement. • Give consideration to running a kiosk type events (exact nature/timing/venue to be decided).

Area	Key Recommendations and Improvement for 2021
Incidents and Operational Management	<p>Timely and useful MI is key during the live census period. It is essential that senior management have the information they need in order to be able to react in a timely and appropriate manner with field staff, communications, etc. In the rehearsal most of the MI was accessible through data via a secure web-based collaborative platform. A more efficient delivery will be required for the 2021 Census.</p> <p>Census office will also require a daily download of information from Response Management. Ideally census office may use ONS MI solutions via NISRA devices as this would alleviate any issues with accessing collaborative platforms. NISRA will continue to work with ONS to get a satisfactory solution for MI in 2021.</p>

Annex 1 - Timeline for the 2019 Rehearsal in Northern Ireland

Action	2019					2020			
	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr
Appointment of field staff	■	■	■						
Training of field staff	■	■	■	■	■				
Address check by field staff			■	■	■				
Respondent online help operational			■	■	■	■			
Contact centre operational			■	■	■	■			
Pre-/post-delivery postcard		■							
Initial contact letter or paper questionnaire ¹		■							
Follow-up visit ²				■	■				
Reminder letter ³				■	■				
Online questionnaire operational			■	■	■	■			
Paper data capture operational			■	■	■	■	■		
Coverage Survey data capture						■	■		
Data processing			■	■	■	■	■	■	■
Production of evaluation report								■	■

¹ Will depend on wave of contact action plan

² Three or four visits depending on wave of contact

³ Second reminder will be a paper questionnaire

■ Census Rehearsal Day (Sun 13 Oct)