



## **2011 Census**

### **What's happening on 27 March 2011?**

The next census for England and Wales will be taken on 27 March 2011. And it's going to be a really big event. More than 25 million households will be taking part. And if you include Scotland and Northern Ireland who'll also run censuses on the same day – the 2011 Census will be collecting information from roughly 60 million people.

### **What's it all about?**

It's quite simple really. By understanding who we are as a nation, the people who provide us with local services can do a better job of shaping them around our needs. Services we all take for granted – like schools, transport and healthcare – all depend on accurate census estimates about the numbers, types and lifestyles of all the people living in our area.

Ever since 1801 (apart from 1941 during World War II), a census has been taken to find out more about the people who live in England and Wales, and about the make-up of local neighbourhoods.

### **How does it work?**

That's simple too, except that the scale of the census means there's a big job to do in telling people about it and making sure they know what to do.

During March 2011 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) will be posting out a questionnaire for your household to complete. We'll be asking all kinds of questions about the household itself, and about work, nationality, ethnic background, marital status, babies, children, students, older people, people with disabilities, and more. You too will be included as a member of the household.

All this information is vital for the census to be able to paint a true picture of today's society and identify the services people need in their neighbourhoods.

It'll be your mum's, dad's or guardian's job to complete the questionnaire – and, for the first time, they'll be able to do that online. Or they can just fill it in by hand and post it back to us.

### **What happens to the data?**

ONS will scan in all the data from the online and paper questionnaires, count up all the results and produce a set of statistics that describes the population at national, regional and local levels.

And it's all about the numbers. No personal information is included in the estimates, microfiche copies of the questionnaires safely locked away for 100 years and the original paper questionnaires are securely destroyed.

### **Who's the information for?**

The amount of money each local authority gets to run public services is based on how many people the census says live in the area. Local authorities use census estimates to work out what kind of services local people need – such as schools, hospitals, childcare, community care, transport and more. For example,

- How many nursery, primary and secondary school places do we need? Where do we need to provide after-school clubs, play schemes, parks and school buses?
- Where and how should we improve roads and public transport, or provide cycleways?
- Where do we have a skills shortage and/or large numbers of people looking for work? How can we encourage businesses to invest in our area to help?
- What provision should we be making for long-term care and assisted living as people get older?
- How can we help newcomers adjust to life in the UK?
- Do we have a housing shortage? What type of developments should we be planning, and where? How will that affect our transport services and other amenities, such as medical centres and schools?

Census estimates also help to track and analyse social and economic trends, to help thousands of voluntary organisations and businesses to place their services where they're most needed. And for a vast army of family historians, in 100 years' time the records will open up a fascinating insight in the lives of their ancestors.

If the census misses anyone, some people in your community could lose out. That's why we need to get as close as we can to a 100 per cent return rate, everywhere. And why, in February 2011, we'll be making a big push to get our message out there on TV, radio, newspapers and big outdoor billboards.

By 27 March 2011, everyone will know what the census is all about and why they need to take part.

### **Ancient wisdom still holds true for the census**

The census is an idea that has endured for almost 6,000 years. The Babylonians, Chinese, Romans, even the Incas, all used censuses to help collect taxes and build their armies. The Egyptians used theirs to find workers to build the pyramids.

Although today's census has nothing to do with taxation, not that much has changed in terms of how they're taken. The most famous census in British history is the Domesday Book, a vast work in Latin ordered by William the Conqueror in 1086 to find out what land and resources were owned in England and define what taxes he could raise against the owners to fund his vast army. At the National Archives in Kew, the Domesday Book lives on to give a fascinating and detailed sense of how life was in Norman Britain.

Starting with Quebec in 1666, many countries woke up to the idea that a national census was the best way of finding out about the numbers and make-up of their people.

It took a while longer for Britain. Churchgoers believed the census was ungodly and threatened to bring disaster on the people. Others felt it would disclose too much information about the size of Britain's armed forces to its enemies.

All that changed after demographer Thomas Malthus published his *Essay on the Principle of Population* in 1798. He suggested that the country would soon have more people than it could feed, ultimately falling victim to famine, disease and other disasters. Any opposition to the census soon evaporated and the census bill won an easy passage through Parliament.

The Census Act was passed in 1800 and the first official census of England and Wales took place on 10 March 1801.

Information was collected from every household by the Overseers of the Poor, with the help of constables, tithing men, headboroughs and other officers of the peace. The exercise revealed that Great Britain's population at the time was just 10.5 million.

However, it was the 1841 Census that shaped the census as we know it today, when the first Registrar General of England and Wales, John Lister, was made responsible for its organisation.

For the first time, the head of each household was given a form to fill in on behalf of everyone in the household on a certain day. And this is still how we, and most other countries around the world, take censuses today.

Over the years, new questions have been added and others left out, in order to reflect changes in society and to make sure census estimates truly reflect the diversity of our people.

New technologies have come along to speed up and streamline the work of capturing and processing the data, but on census day everyone will still have a questionnaire to complete and return. Just as they did in 1841.

For further information visit [www.census.gov.uk](http://www.census.gov.uk).