

SCOTTISH POPULATION SURVEYS CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE

LONG TERM STRATEGY FOR POPULATION SURVEYS IN SCOTLAND 2009 -2019

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 1 The previous 'Long Term Strategy' covered the period 2005-08. There are marked changes in the survey world including a gradual movement to core and modular structure and (where money and design allowed) unclustered sampling. There are also changes in the political landscape, particularly the Concordat between Local and Central Government. These require a new long term strategy for population surveys for 2009 onwards.

- 2 **Scottish Population Surveys Co-ordinating Committee Progress**
 - 2.1 The SPSCC has representatives from Scottish Government, Scottish Local Authorities, NHS Health Scotland, the Office for National Statistics and the General Register Office for Scotland. The committee has made progress since it's inception in 2003 with work being taken forward by the Scottish Harmonisation Working Group (SHWG).
 - 2.2 To date, the work has focussed on four large scale cross-sectional Scottish Government surveys:
 - The Scottish Household Survey
 - The Scottish House Condition Survey
 - The Scottish Health Survey
 - The Scottish Crime and Justice Survey
 - 2.3 Other large scale Great Britain or United Kingdom wide surveys that are boosted in Scotland, in particular the Labour Force Survey, are also considered by the committee to ensure harmonisation as far as possible.
 - 2.4 A core element of the work of the SHWG has been to introduce a standard set of socio economic questions for use in surveys. The introduction of a standard set of questions will increase comparability across surveys and is the first step toward allowing survey samples to be combined to produce robust estimates of rarely occurring characteristics at a national level and other characteristics at small area level.
 - 2.5 The SHWG have met ten times and the SPSCC has endorsed the 20 topics that a socio-economic core of questions should include. So far 12

questions have been finalised with a further 8 still to be approved (see appendix 1).

3 Office for National Statistics' Integrated Household Survey

- 3.1 The Integrated Household Survey (IHS) is a composite survey combining a number of ONS social surveys and a 'Core' set of questions. The IHS Core contains around 100 questions, but a respondent would only be asked a proportion of those depending on routing from answers to questions. The aim of the IHS is to produce high-level estimates for particular themes to a higher precision and lower geographic region than current ONS Social Surveys. The themes broadly cover Economic Activity, Education, Health, Identity and Income. The more robust local information would improve inter-censal monitoring of key variables for a range of policy purposes.
- 3.2 A set of 'Core' questions have been introduced to 4 surveys at present; the General Lifestyle Survey (GLF), Living Cost and Food Survey (LCF), Opinions (OPN) and the English Housing Survey (EHS). The Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Annual Population Survey (APS) will be included in the IHS from April 2009. It is proposed that the Life Opportunities Survey (LOS) will be incorporated into the IHS when it is launched in July 2009.
- 3.3 The Scottish Government has fully engaged with the harmonisation work of ONS and will continue to actively engage on UK level harmonisation.
- 3.4 When the Long Term Strategy 2005-08 was developed there was an assessment of the Scottish Governments major cross-sectional population surveys in light of ONS work on the integrated household survey. A decision was made that the data needs of government in Scotland would be better served by the major surveys remaining distinct surveys that harmonise with each other rather than integrating them all into one large and modular survey. We will continue to engage with the ONS integration work to ensure we learn from their experience and can adopt any appropriate elements in Scotland.

4 Census 2011 and Census Alternative Sources Work

- 4.1 To improve the quality and frequency of population statistics the General Register Office for Scotland is exploring the scope for using administrative and survey sources, integrated around a central population 'spine', as an alternative way of providing the information currently produced by census enumeration. Key stages of this feasibility work will run in parallel to the traditional Census. Access to records from Scottish Government large scale surveys will be required to take the work forward.

5 The National Performance Framework: Purpose Targets, National Indicators and Single Outcome Agreements

- 5.1 The Scottish Government's National Performance Framework was introduced to cover the period 2007-2017 and set out the new administrations desired outcomes for Scotland. Focusing on outcomes presents a challenging opportunity for Scottish surveys as key sources for outcomes data: one quarter of the 45 National Indicators come directly from the 4 large scale cross-sectional surveys that are the subject of the harmonisation agenda. In addition, four of the seven purpose targets are supported by survey data.
- 5.2 The Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) initiative is still developing between Local Authorities and Central Government. The implications for surveys and the harmonisation agenda are still emerging.
- 5.3 Local surveys are the main source of data in SOAs and we are investigating how much of this data is available from national surveys. It is important to identify the most appropriate source for each SOA indicator, whether it is a local or a national survey source, and there may be merit in developing an SOA survey module. It is essential that local and national government co-ordinate their surveys to ensure data is collected in the most efficient way possible and any strategy must look at meeting the data needs of both local and national government.
- 5.4 This strategy is to take us until 2019 beyond the period of the current National Performance Framework so wider strategic information needs of both local and national government also need to be considered.

6 Field capacity issues

- 6.1 The large scale surveys are all continuous with increased sample sizes for the Health and Crime and Justice Surveys. Limited field capacity can be an issue if surveys are not coordinated and a joined up approach not used.

7 Respondent burden and declining response rates

- 7.1 The move to continuous surveying and larger samples also has serious implications for respondent burden. We need to consider the number of surveys people might be chosen for as well as the length of individual surveys.
- 7.2 There is concern about declining response rates, the impact this has on the usefulness of data and the associated cost implication. We need to investigate why response rates are declining and what can be done to counteract the decline.

8 Resources

- 8.1 In light of the current economic conditions, Government resources are likely to be very tight over the period of the strategy and all decisions will need to carefully balance data needs with available resources.

9 Data Issues

- 9.1 Data issues include security, utility, retention, quality assurance, consistency, linking, sharing, access, timeliness and respondent consent to use the data. The main priority is data security and compliance with legal requirements.
- 9.2 A review of data security amongst contractors carrying out research on behalf of the Scottish Government found that clearer guidance was required in data retention and deletion and there is a greater need for encryption of laptops and USB sticks. The review identified 32 recommendations for research contractors and 12 recommendations for the Scottish Government.

10 Longitudinal research

- 10.1 Strategic analytical planning in support of policy development, performance monitoring and outcome measurement extends beyond consideration of large scale cross-sectional population surveys. Longitudinal (panel and cohort) studies have a particular role to play and they share many of the technical challenges addressed in the Long Term Strategy for 2009-2019. A revised co-ordination structure linking the Longitudinal Research and Analysis Network more directly with the SPSCC will ensure that there is alignment and shared learning between the teams responsible for the different surveys.

LONG TERM STRATEGY FOR POPULATION SURVEYS IN SCOTLAND 2009 – 2019

1 The two strategic aims of the 2009-2019 Long Term Strategy are:

1.1.1 To ensure that the Scottish Government’s population surveys meet key information needs while maximising the analytical potential of the data they generate, the precision of estimates and value for money.

1.1.2 To give full consideration to issues of survey participation, respondent burden, data quality and data security and to make recommendations that align survey practice across Government and promote good practice to other public bodies.

1.2 The timescale of this strategy is 10 years to tie in with the National Performance Framework, Census 2021 and the long-term nature of many survey contracts. It is anticipated that the Strategy will be reviewed and revised as necessary, with the shorter term objectives being updated by the SPSCC biennially.

1.3 The strategy is designed to improve the way population surveys are run and to increase the availability and use of survey data, both at a national and local level. The improvements achieved will help support the long term census alternatives work.

1.4 Due to the current contractual situation of the large scale surveys, we propose that the next 2-4 years will see a continuation of the principles of the Long Term Strategy 2005-08.

1.5 In order to meet the two strategic aims work will focus on:

- 1) Harmonised core questions
- 2) Data management
- 3) Respondent burden and response rates
- 4) Analysis and dissemination
- 5) The Scottish Household Survey

2 Harmonised Core Questions

2.1 The work on the harmonised core questions has progressed steadily over the past two years and will be continued under the new strategy. The main purpose is to increase comparability across surveys. This would allow survey samples to be combined to produce a large enough sample size for

robust estimates of rarely occurring characteristics at a national level and of other characteristics at a small area level. There are three short term objectives:

- 2.1.1 Complete the socio-economic core of 20 questions: This work will be completed through the existing Scottish Harmonisation Working Group and will be embedded into all Scottish Government Surveys as soon as is sensible. Work will subsequently commence on encouraging smaller surveys, local surveys and administrative data collection vehicles to adopt the harmonised core questions. Work will expand to consider the application of harmonised questions to different data collection modes.
- 2.1.2 Extend the core: During the work on the current core other questions have been identified which would also benefit from harmonisation. Different surveys have different purposes and users have different information needs so the harmonisation of non-core questions will be done on a case by case basis. An extended set of harmonised questions would not be mandatory questions but would form a bank of recommended questions.
- 2.1.3 Investigate the contribution that harmonisation can make to the National Performance Framework and Single Outcome Agreements: work will be done to establish which questions could benefit from harmonisation to allow better monitoring of indicators at a national and local level and provide a wider understanding of policy outcomes.
- 2.2 It may be beneficial to develop a common set of principles for the procurement of surveys over and above general government procurement principles. In partnership with survey managers we will review the procurement procedures of the major surveys to assess current practice and consider the development of a common set of procurement principles.

3 Data Management

- 3.1 If several major cross sectional surveys a) ask respondents the same core questions and b) harmonise their samples and do not overlap, it would be possible to combine the samples and produce estimates for smaller geographic areas and smaller population groups such as minority ethnic groups. To combine samples it will be necessary to create a larger dataset of harmonised core questions and there must be a process to ensure samples do not overlap.
- 3.2 One solution to allow samples to be pooled would be to create a more centralised management system for sampling and data storage. A centralised system would allow the Scottish Government to sample for all our large scale surveys, providing non-overlapping estimates, and allowing respondent burden to be managed and allow samples to be combined. It may also be necessary to align the methodologies of the large scale cross-sectional surveys to simplify analysis. There are other solutions that could

allow samples to be combined and there are many methodological and logistical issues that require a full investigation before any decision is made.

- 3.3 Unclustered sampling increases the precision of survey results. A detailed investigation of the costs and benefits of clustering in surveys will inform any future decisions on the use of clustering in Scottish Government population surveys.
- 3.4 Effective data management ensures survey data is collected, stored and analysed efficiently and accurately. It may be beneficial to provide standard data management guidance to support the major surveys. A detailed assessment of the data management procedures of the major population surveys is required to ensure any standard guidance recognises the differing purposes and users of each survey.
- 3.5 To fully explore the potential of centralised data management and alternative solutions there are three short term objectives:
 - 3.5.1 Assess the costs and benefits, including the risks of data loss/leakage, of the different solutions that allow pooled sample estimates to be produced;
 - 3.5.2 Assess the data management procedures of the major surveys;
 - 3.5.3 Consider the methodological and ethical issues associated with an expanded sampling frame that could be used for specialist and/or longitudinal research.

4 Respondent Burden and Response Rates

- 4.1 There is concern over falling response rates and the impact on data usefulness and costs. Falling response rates are a significant risk to the future use of population surveys. We will investigate the impact of declining response rates on the quality of data, looking at differential response rates and the bias non-response adds to the data. We will consider options for increasing response rates.
- 4.2 With the move to continuous surveys and larger samples there are concerns over respondent burden. We will investigate the impact of increased respondent burden and consider ways to reduce the burden of surveys on members of the public in Scotland.

5 Analysis and Dissemination

- 5.1 Disseminating data from the major population surveys in a range of formats to a range of audiences ensures maximum value is extracted from the data. To improve dissemination practices and increase the use of survey data we will, in partnership with the major surveys:
 - 5.1.1 Review the dissemination and data access procedures of the major population surveys and consider the development of harmonised dissemination and data access processes, taking into account the different user groups of the major population surveys;

- 5.1.2 Promote the data collected through the Scottish Government population surveys;
- 5.1.3 Provide support to data users to understand, analyse and interpret survey data;
- 5.1.4 Develop informed consent and permissions statements to benefit our respondents and facilitate better analysis;
- 5.1.5 Consider the methodological and ethical issues associated with data linkage to advance the Census alternatives work;
- 5.1.6 Develop a dissemination strategy for pooled samples;
- 5.1.7 Review the meta data the major surveys attach to data and look to harmonise meta data standards.

6 The Scottish Household Survey

- 6.1 In light of the Single Outcome Agreements and the outcomes based approach, Communities Analytical Services Division is planning a full scale review of the purpose of the Scottish Household Survey.
- 6.2 Depending on the outcome of the review the SHS has the potential to become:
 - 6.2.1 Completely core and modular, following the model set out in the 2005 review of the SHS;
 - 6.2.2 Provide a vehicle for the Scottish Government to respond to policy needs allowing modular questionnaires to be included removing the need for separately commissioned surveys;
 - 6.2.3 Serve local government in providing a rich source of information annually at local authority level.
- 6.3 Any possible changes to the SHS would need to be considered alongside other options for responding quickly to policy information needs, including increasing the use of administrative data and possible omnibus surveys.

7 Delivery Plan

- 7.1 This strategy represents a significant and important body of work, intended to encompass a wide arrange of surveys including the four major Scottish Government cross sectional population surveys (Scottish Household Survey, Scottish House Condition Survey, Scottish Crime and Justice Survey and Scottish Health Survey) as well as other large scale population surveys owned or part-owned by the Scottish Government (e.g. Growing Up in Scotland, the Family Resources Survey, the Annual Population Survey, Understanding Society) and potentially population surveys run by local authorities and other public bodies.

- 7.2 The Scottish Population Surveys Co-ordinating Committee (SPSCC) will be the strategic group tasked with the delivery of the strategy. The SPSCC will agree a work plan to take the strategy forward and will meet twice a year to review progress. The agreed work plan will be costed and prioritised.
- 7.3 Under the SPSCC, the Scottish Population Surveys Working Group (SPSWG) will form an operational group taking the work plan forward. It will encourage cross analytical working and will seek expert input as necessary.
- 7.4 Appendix 2 gives the revised structure of the SPSCC and associated working groups and networks.
- 7.5 All stakeholders will be kept informed of progress and given the opportunity to feed in through ScotStat. All users registered with an interest in any of the population surveys on the ScotStat register will be invited to view the minutes and papers from the SPSCC meetings and will be welcome to respond.

APPENDIX 1

SOCIO-ECONOMIC CORE

QUESTION STATUS

(M) – mandatory core question – major Scottish Government population surveys must be able to harmonise outputs for these questions

(R) – recommended core question – it is recommended the major Scottish Government population surveys harmonise outputs for these questions

Finalised Questions

Gender (M)
Age last Birthday (M) & DOB (R)
Ethnic group (M)
Religion (R)
Accommodation Size: No of rooms (R)
Accommodation Size: Number of bedroom (R)
Accommodation Type (R)
Tenure (M)
Highest Qualification Held/Qualifications Held (M)
Self Perception of General Health (R)
Employment/Economic Status (incorporating ILO unemployment) (M)

Questions in Progress

(Legal) Marital Status (M) & Living in a Couple (R)
Limited Long term illness & disability (M)
Access to car/van (M)
Education status (M)
Full/part time (M)
Banded Household Income (R)
Residence 1 year ago (R)
Mode of transport to work/school (R)

Questions not started yet by SHWG

Attendance on government training programme (R)
Household relationship matrix (R)

APPENDIX 2

SPSCC STRUCTURE AND REMIT

TO BE ADDED WHEN THE REMITS AND MEMBERSHIP FOR THE SCOTTISH POPULATION SURVEYS CO-ORDINATING COMMITTEE AND THE SCOTTISH POPULATION SURVEYS WORKING GROUP HAVE BEEN FINALISED