**Methodological Assurance Review Panel – Terms of Reference**

**Version 2.0**

1. **Background**

In March 2014, the National Statistician made a recommendation that the census in 2021 should be predominantly online, making increased use of administrative data and surveys to enhance the statistics from the 2021 Census. This recommendation was endorsed by the Government’s formal response, which also set out its ambition that “censuses after 2021 will be conducted using other sources of data and providing more timely statistical information. However, any final decision on moving to the use only of administrative data beyond 2021 will be dependent on the dual running sufficiently validating the perceived feasibility of that approach.”

Following the National Statistician’s recommendation and the Government’s response, ONS established a programme in January 2015 to take forward three high level deliverables:

• A predominantly online census of all households and communal establishments in England and Wales

• Development of alternative administrative data census estimates, to be compared to the 2021 Census

• User focused, improved and expanded population statistics through increased use of administrative data and surveys

This document sets out the scope for an external expert panel to undertake a review of methods and research associated with the programme’s deliverables. The review will provide assurance to the National Statistician that:

* The statistics resulting from the 2021 Census will meet the code of practice for official statistics and therefore can be badged as National Statistics
* The online census is methodologically robust
* The evidence to show whether or not a transformed Population and Migration Statistics system which uses administrative data at its core is valid and enables the Government to make a decision after 2021 about the future of the census

These reviews are planned to take place between 2018 and 2023. Note, previous reviews were undertaken for the 2011 Census and Beyond 2011 programme.

1. **Purpose of the Review Panel**

The purpose of the review panel is to:

* Provide external, independent assurance and guidance on the statistical methodology underpinning 2021 Census outputs and those based on administrative sources
* Identify significant gaps and risks in methods and make suggestions for mitigation
* Review the methods being developed for the Population and Migration Statistics transformation and contribute to their continuous improvement.

The estimated time required from the review panel members is 6 or more days of meetings every year plus preparation time (20 or more days a year). This can be made up of smaller pieces of time if required. The Chair is appointed by the National Statistician. The Chair and other panel members should:

* Be available to attend face-to-face or online review meetings as scheduled, and have preparation time in advance to read papers, compile questions and contribute virtually in between meetings.
* Be independent of the Office for National Statistics throughout the review.

The ONS SRO is the Director of Methods. Data. Research. The panel will advise and assure the National Statistician and the Census SRO.

1. **Membership**

No single person will have the expertise or experience required to conduct the review alone.

The panel will consist of the Chair and up to five other members, selected to give appropriate breadth of experience and expertise.

The appointment of Panel members will be made, and if needed terminated, by the ONS SRO, normally acting in consultation with the Panel Chair.

1. **Costs**

All panel members will be reimbursed for their travel and subsistence expenses. Panel members will also be remunerated for their time at a rate of up to £500 per day, on a pro rata basis.

1. **Role Description**

The panel member skills and expertise should complement each other to ensure coverage of all the topics within scope.

The core panel (plus additional experts, if needed) will need the following experience and expertise:

* Census methodology, edit and imputation, estimation and disclosure control
* Survey design in the context of population and socio-demographic estimation
* Use/analysis of administrative data
* Statistical modelling
* Record linkage
* Combining administrative and survey data/small-area multivariate estimation
* Demography and specifically population estimation
* Experience in the use of population and small area socio-demographic statistics
* Experience in Data Science techniques, including Big Data
* Experience in questionnaire design, data collection and registers

1. **Review Scope**

Over the full period the review should consider the methodological aspects of the end to end design for the 2021 Census from data collection to outputs including additional outputs using administrative data, as well as all steps involved in the Population and Migration Statistics transformation and its evaluation including impacts on the Population Statistics System.

The focus of the reviews undertaken each year will change dependent on the Programme phase. The work programme will be agreed between the Chair and the ONS SRO, with the ONS SRO having the final say.

The Panel will be invited to give feedback on recommended methods, including requests for further work or information, and ONS will accommodate these wherever possible. ONS will then decide on the methods to implement given the feedback received.

1. **Not In Scope**

It will be out of scope to review:

* Detailed operational issues related to the Census and the Population and Migration statistics Transformation.
* Work undertaken within the stakeholder engagement project of the programme other than research on public acceptability
* Work undertaken on the Census programmes in Scotland and Northern Ireland but review findings will be shared with colleagues in NRS and NISRA

1. **Organisation / Transparency / Confidentiality**

**CRAG –** The review panel will be closely aligned to ONS’ Census Research Advisory Group which will be the primary source of papers summarising proposed methods. In addition, ONS will be developing a Population and Migration Statistics Transformation (PMST) work programme. A significant part of this programme will also link into CRAG and the panel.

Each review will be organised internally by the ONS Methodology Division. This will include:

* Organising an ‘induction’ briefing session for panel members to introduce the programme and provide an overview of the breadth of work the review will cover
* Setting the agenda for each review meeting
* Ensuring appropriate papers are provided by areas responsible for each item on the review agenda
* Gaining sign off of papers at Census Research Advisory Group (CRAG) in advance of each review
* Sending papers to the review panel ahead of the review
* Taking minutes of the panel discussions
* Briefing Census leadership on issues raised
* Monitoring progress on agreed actions from the recommendations made by the review panel
* All communications regarding the panel, the discussions and methods reviewed, by all involved, must be coordinated with ONS

The review panel will compile a report on an annual basis to reflect their findings, which will then be published. The report will include the action taken throughout the year to improve the census methodology.

Following each meeting, the panel minutes will be published alongside the papers considered by the panel.

The panel will be bound by the Census Confidentiality Undertaking, which they will sign as part of their appointment.