

The Census and Geodemographics Group submission in response to the Ministry of Justice consultation: Electoral Registers – Proposed Changes to the Edited Register

Introduction:

The Census and Geodemographics Group (CGG) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation. This response will focus on the questions identified in the consultation document that particularly relate to its areas of interest and expertise.

**Question 5. Is your preference for abolishing or retaining the Edited Register?
Please give reasons for your answer.**

Comments: From the point of view of the CGG, the edited register is of little value given that electors are able to self-select whether to be included in the register, the file has little relevance for any attempts to estimate population sample sizes and/or generate sampling frames for legitimate survey research. Our only interest is in the prospect that the full register may become available again under suitably restricted circumstances.

**Question 6. From the list below, which options are your most and least preferred?
Please give reasons.**

Options abolishing the Edited Register

Option 1: Abolish the Edited Register as soon as practicable.

Option 2: Set a timescale or 'trigger point' for abolition of the Edited Register.

Option 3: Abolish the Edited Register as soon as practicable, but extend access to the Full Register for other purposes to be decided in light of the consultation.

Options retaining the Edited Register

Option 4: Retain the Edited Register, but impose restrictions in legislation on who can purchase it and for what purposes.

Option 5: Replace the current 'opt out' provision with an 'opt in'.

Option 6: Improve guidance for the public about the Edited Register.

Comments: Our only interest at this stage is in advocating option 3, should the consultation recommend that Market Research and other population studies be included as an acceptable purpose. We would draw attention to the provisions made within the Distance Selling Directives and the provision of the Telephone Preference Service, this has regulated the use of publicly available telephone data, for the purpose of promoting sales, but has seen that telephone calls for market research purposes has been accepted and to date proved to be a workable distinction.

The UK government, its citizens and businesses have substantive benefits to gain from accurate and representative research of population requirements and demands. This is greatly facilitated by up to date and commonly available reference sets. This ensures that decisions and recommendations reflect underlying reality as fairly as possible and also facilitates straightforward comparisons between different studies. As the largest consumer of market research information the UK government is likely to be the biggest beneficiary of improved populations sizing and sample creation.

Question 7. **Do you have any comments and/or suggestions about how any of the options would work in practice, particularly taking into account the issues and questions raised in this consultation paper?**

Comments: We would recommend that access to the full register be suitably regulated by a nominated organisation, as indicated above the management of the Telephone Preference Service demonstrates a useful indication of where data can be circulated under controlled conditions. Unwarranted use of the electoral roll could be monitored by the conventional inclusion of “seeds”, records that are markers only present in specific supplied copies so that should this information appear it can be traced back to the original infringement.

Question 8. **Do you consider that the abolition of the Edited Register would affect you, your organisation, or those you represent positively or negatively? Please give as much detail as you can about you, your organisation, or those you represent and address the following:**

1. **exactly how you or your organisation could be affected.**
2. **what the cost (monetary or otherwise) to you, your organisation, or those you represent would be, explaining how this has been quantified where possible?**
3. **would others be affected and who, in what ways and what would the cost be?**

Comments: Abolition of the edited register would have little impact as methods have already been put into place by the Market and Population Research industries once access to the full register was curtailed in 2002. This consultation represents an opportunity to re-consider these restrictions in the light of recent experience.

Full name	Dr Tim Drye
Job title or capacity in which you are responding (e.g. member of the public etc.)	Representative of the Census and Geodemographics Group
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If you would like us to acknowledge receipt of your response, please tick this box	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (please tick box)

About the Census and Geodemographics Group:

Geodemographics can be broadly defined as ‘the analysis of people by where they live’, and involves the analysis of demographic data within small geographical areas, serving a wide range of clients in the public and private sectors. The annual turnover of geodemographic activities in the UK has been estimated at £200 million. The Census and Geodemographics Group (CGG) is an Advisory Board of The Market Research Society (MRS). CGG was founded in 1989 to represent the interests of researchers in census and related population statistics, and to advise MRS on such issues. The CGG includes specialists in market research, retail site location, market and database analysis, as well as census distributors and academic researchers.

The CGG is involved with government statistical services through representation on the ONS Business and Professional Interests Advisory Group, and through membership of the Statistics User Forum, as well as through an extensive network of contacts in the market research industry.