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Georgia Gould MP  
Parliamentary Secretary  
Cabinet Office

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Dear Georgia Gould,

The UK Statistics Authority has recently shared with me its proposed recommendations on the future of population and migration statistics in Wales and England.

I welcome the recommendations to plan for a questionnaire-based census of population and housing in Wales and England in 2031, as well as the further development of statistical outputs using administrative data. Not only will this ensure that the statistics that the ONS produces about Wales are more frequent and timelier but will also ensure that they continue to meet user needs for inclusive, accurate and granular statistics, building on the successes and lessons learnt from Census 2021.

At the same time, I am aware of the challenges faced by traditional statistical production techniques in recent years. Therefore, the continued commitment to develop the use of administrative data is fundamental. It ensures we have a statistical system which is able to provide the data we need to understand and improve the social, economic, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales and make decisions in the years ahead, particularly in areas where the census cannot capture particular topics.

The Welsh Government will commit to the third recommendation to provide a regular, reliable and ongoing flow of the critical administrative datasets. I recognise the importance of seamless data flows for the ONS to be able develop sustainable administrative-based statistical outputs. Officials will continue to work with the ONS and with our partners here in Wales to support this recommendation. We have already demonstrated our commitment to this over the years, for example in our work in supplying datasets to ONS to support the delivery and quality assurance of Census 2021.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

I also encourage UK government departments to work closely with the ONS to ensure data they hold on the Welsh and English population are unlocked to make this work as successful as possible.

When considering the plans for the 2031 census of population it is critical the ONS builds on engagement with Welsh users and consider at the earliest stage the Welsh context for the content and conduct of the census. I hope the ONS can learn from the handling of specific issues which arose in Wales during Census 2021 on the ethnicity question and bilingual addressing. I note the reference in the recommendation to the UK government's digital ambitions and the potential for developments in digital identification to support the future statistical system. Our Chief Digital Officer will work closely with the UK government on these plans and consider how Welsh services can benefit from common platforms. But nevertheless, the ONS must be mindful of where such plans may relate to English services only and ensure the quality of Welsh statistical estimates also remains a priority.

The recommendation for a further questionnaire-based census will allow continuation of our measurement of Welsh speakers and progress towards our *Cymraeg 2050* targets. It will be important the ONS continues the work undertaken with the Chief Statistician to understand the difference between the estimates produced by the census and other surveys.

The success of the digital-first census in 2021 has highlighted people are willing to respond to an online census. There may be potential to push the boundaries even further in 2031 to use the flexibility offered by a digital solution to deliver more innovation in what questions are asked, as well as greater integration of administrative datasets. However, as was the case in 2021, it will be critical to ensure those people who are not able to respond digitally – either through a lack of confidence or their access to the internet – are given every opportunity do so through other means. As ever, officials will work closely with the ONS to develop the best communication and engagement strategies for population groups in Wales.

I will be issuing a written statement to the Senedd welcoming these recommendations when they are published, which will include a copy of this letter. I look forward to hearing the UK government's response.

Yours sincerely,



**Mark Drakeford AS/MS**

Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Gyllid a'r Gymraeg  
Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Welsh Language