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Achievements and Challenges: An Overview of Data Collection Methodology at the UK Office for National Statistics

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Abstract

In the mid 1990s the first question testing unit was set-up in the UK Office for National Statistics (ONS). The key objective of the unit was to develop and test the questions and questionnaire for the 2001 Census. Since the establishment of this unit the area has been expanded into a Data Collection Methodology (DCM) Centre of Expertise which now sits in the Methodology Directorate. The DCM centre has three branches which support DCM work for social surveys, business surveys, the Census and external organisations.

In the past ten years DCM has achieved a variety of things. For example, introduced survey methodology involvement in the development and testing of business survey question(naire)s; introduced a mix-method approach to the development of questions and questionnaires; developed and implemented standards e.g. for the 2011 census questionnaire & showcards; and developed and delivered DCM training events.

This paper will provide an overview of data collection methodology at the ONS from the perspective of achievements and challenges. It will cover areas such as methods, staff (e.g. recruitment, development and field security), and integration with the survey process.

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