

Meeting 8
City Hall, London
04 February 2011**Attendees:**

Chris Ashford (Chair) (ONS, Census)
Richard M Smith (ONS)
Steven Alder (ONS)
Tom Pearson (BBC)
Andrew Sansom (ONS, NeSS)
Gee-Mei Redgwell (ONS, Geography)
Bill Gillon (ONS, NeSS)
Justin Hayes (CDU)
Rob Dymond-Green (CDU)
Mark Ireland (NOMIS)
Oliver Duke-Williams (DFN)
Rob Collins (GROS)
Alan Lewis (SASPAC)
Brendan Davis (ONS, Census)
Paul Richards (ONS IM)
Aodh O'Lionaird (BBC)
James Crone (EDINA)

Apologies:

Rachel Moreton (DCLG)
Ed Turnball (GROS)
Bill Oates (WAG)
Richard Elliot (NISRA)
D'arcy Harmer-Manning (OS
OpenSpace)
Mahendra Mahey (JISC, devCSI)
Callum Foster (ONS)

1. Minutes of last meeting and actions arising

The action from the November meeting - to agree an approach to engage user communities and ensure these API needs are not discounted in favour of known power users - was subsumed into ongoing work within the ONS Website Development Programme to identify and engage with a broader user base as part of the overall approach of the ONS Web Strategy.

2. Updates from group members

Brief verbal updates were provided by the group members represented (NeSS, ONS Web Development Programme (WDP), NOMIS, EDINA, SASPAC, GROS).

Updates provided in advance of the meeting for NeSS and ONS Geography are available at

http://cswwg.wikidot.com/local--files/cswswgm:meetings-and-events/CWSWG_meeting_8_member_summary_04_02_11.pdf

Other updates reviewed recent activities and development progress of each service, and highlighted a number of useful topics and issues discussed during demonstrations of applications developed to test the ONS Alpha API, covered later in the agenda.

3. Review of recent stage of ONS API testing

Building on the earlier phase of API testing, the ONS Web Development Programme and three Census partners – MIMAS, Nomis and SASPAC - conducted further testing of an Alpha version of the API during the last two months of 2010. The testing involved minor amendments to previous iterations of the API, and focused on providing access to a substantial range of test data which better represents a potential shape for 2011 Census data. The test data was based on 2001 data that was re-engineered by MIMAS to specifications from ONS, and each dataset consisted of 10 dimensions at Local Authority level.

In a relatively short testing period, each of the three partners developed applications which queried the test data via the API, merged it with data from other sources, and presented the results in a range of visualizations or report presentations.

The main aims of the testing were:

- to build upon the API developed and tested in Spring 2010
- to conduct new tests and regression test the API modifications made since the first tests
- to develop an API to load and access large and complex datasets
- to test potential 2011 data structures
- to familiarise Census Partners with the API as it continues to be developed and enhanced
- to demonstrate the use of a variety of tools for the presentation of the data queried via the API
- to gather additional or more detail partner requirements for further API development
- to understand the limitations of the technology and the data structures

Each of the three applications developed by MIMAS, Nomis and SASPAC have been demonstrated to Census senior management and met with general approval and good feedback.

The applications were demonstrated to the group as an indicator of what can be achieved in a relatively short period of time, providing the base for good discussion of the progress made so far, the issues identified, and the potential for future and ongoing work.

Please note that although the applications were available and accessible at the time of the meeting, any URLs quoted are no longer valid.

The key issues identified and lessons learned during the testing are:

- that the ONS write API can directly import multidimensional data and make it available to the externally facing read API for consumption by users
- the planned inclusion of Output Area level datasets could not be implemented due to issues arising with the import process - more work is required in this area to load these very large datasets
- the externally deployed read API performs well but areas were identified which will require further improvement
- the management of geographical hierarchies and relationships in classifications should be an area in which to concentrate efforts in future tests
- the partner client applications were and can be developed very quickly – the API approach allows users to start with application development than data processing

ONS plans to continue to work with the Census partners in future rounds of API testing. Future tests should include more datasets, including larger Output Area level datasets, and might potentially include some form of enhanced metadata. Development and testing will also focus on the issues identified and reported so far by the partners.

The ONS plans to launch a new website in the summer of 2011 and resources dedicated to this endeavour mean that precise scheduling of future API testing cannot be confirmed at this time. More information about future tests will be provided at the next CWSWG meeting.

Action: Nomis to provide detailed feedback on the deficiencies of using XHTML as the discovery format in the FR03 Alpha API, to inform discussions for future development.

Action: Nomis, MIMAS and SASPAC to provide a full list of prioritised issues identified with the FR03 Alpha API functionality discovered during the recent testing.

Action: Chris Ashford to organise a wash-up session with all the API test partners covering the FR03 API test.

4. BBC presentation and discussion

Tom Pearson, Senior developer, BBC

Aodh O'Lionaird, Software developer, BBC

The BBC has a rich history of developing intuitive visualisations of data and information for presentation in its broadcast media. Tom outlined the recent history and current BBC website publishing platform, providing context for how this form of infographic presentation continues to be developed to provide additional online data visualisations and elements of interactivity.

There will be considerable interest from the BBC is consuming and re-provisioning the rich Census data when it is available, though not necessarily consuming data made available via an API under the current model.

5. Next meeting

The next CWSWG meeting was tentatively scheduled for early May 2011. Subsequently two 2011 Census dissemination events (In London and Manchester) were arranged for 16th and 17th of May. The planned CWSWG was deferred until August.

The slides presented at the dissemination events, together with a record of the Q&A at each event, are available to download from

<http://www.ukcensusoutputs.net/cwswgm:census-diss-events-2011>

Subsequently the 9th CWSWG meeting was again deferred until early October to coincide with the next stage of ONS API testing with external partners and allow for substantial updates on progress.