

I'm Stephen, and I was a co-ordinator in the 2011 Census. I had been made redundant a few years earlier, and I'd taken a part-time job as an antique's dealer. I looked online and found the advertisement for the census co-ordinator. I sent my application away, and then I think on a Thursday evening I got a phone call saying, "Are you still interested?"

We had a weekend training in a hotel in Reading, where they explained the process to us, and did a little role playing. Explained the things that might go wrong. And really explained the whole process, which is something that enthused us I think.

As a co-ordinator, I was looking after about 12 fieldworkers who were collecting unreturned census forms. I had to arrange their visits, and I had a lot of IT work. But it was also dealing with all sorts of other things that came up. I was visiting homes for the elderly. I was liaising with Army barracks. I was taking publicity material to libraries, all sorts of things. The range of the things I had to do was really good.

The training course was in January. The paid work, if you like, started in February and lasted until May, so it was about six to eight weeks either side of the census. I'd say my time was equally split between being in the field and working on the computer, on the IT side.

I accompanied each of the fieldworkers for half a day, which gave a great sense of meeting some of the people that we had to meet. There were two things in particular I can remember. I went with a fieldworker to one flat, and there was a very elderly lady in there, very frail, and obviously in a great deal of pain. Fortunately, she had her care worker with her. We did what we had to do, collected the census form. To strike a cheery note on the way out, I said, "Well, thank you very much, and I daresay that we'll see you again in 10 years." She looked at me with a twinkle in her eye and said, "Young man, I sincerely hope I won't have to put you to that trouble."

I think that people of any age can do the census, whether they're interested in local history, whether they're interested in doing a job that they can put on their CV as something they've done. The important thing is to have the enthusiasm for it. If you do it and embrace it, you're going to get a lot out of it.