

<b>Recommendation for approval by CSOD</b>	25/04/2019
<b>Name</b>	'Prefer Not to Say' and Question Order for Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation
Decision –	
<p><b>Background</b></p> <p>In December 2018, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) recommended Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation for inclusion in the 2021 Census (ONS, 2018). This would be the first time these topics have been included in a census in England and Wales.</p> <p>At present, Gender Identity data is not collected by the ONS. Sexual Orientation data is only collected through the Annual Population Survey (APS). On the APS, participants are allowed to spontaneously respond 'don't know' or refuse to answer the sexual orientation question. Within the response options, there is also a "Prefer Not to Say" option. The APS is an interviewer led questionnaire, with the mode of collection being either telephone or face-to-face.</p> <p>A small scale online quantitative test consisting of ten questions was conducted to examine the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The impact of including a "Prefer Not to Say" response option in addition to a statement that the question is voluntary;</li> <li>2. Whether the ordering of the Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation questions has any impact on the distribution of responses and response rate to these recommended census questions.</li> </ol> <p>The objective was to identify which approach resulted in the lowest item non-response to these questions, and therefore the highest quality data.</p> <p>To answer this, the sample was randomly assigned to four treatment groups.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Gender Identity followed by Sexual Orientation with a "Prefer Not to Say" response option and a "this question is voluntary" statement.</li> <li>2. Gender Identity followed by Sexual Orientation with only a "this question is voluntary" statement.</li> <li>3. Sexual Orientation followed by Gender Identity with a "Prefer Not to Say" response option and a "this question is voluntary" statement.</li> <li>4. Sexual Orientation followed by Gender Identity with only a "this question is voluntary" statement.</li> </ol> <p><b>Planned changes</b></p> <p>We recommend that</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation questions only includes a "this question is voluntary" statement. Do not include a "Prefer Not to Say" option.</li> </ol>	

2. Sexual Orientation is ordered before the Gender Identity question in the census.

**Reason for recommendations**

**'Prefer Not to Say'**

The primary purpose of the "Prefer Not to Say" response option is to give respondents the option to preserve their privacy. Theoretically, this is also provided by a voluntary label, but it may not be the case that everyone realises the question is voluntary as they may not read the 'this question is voluntary' statement. "Prefer Not to Say" is also a valid response option in itself, it could give ONS useful information about those who do not want to disclose information. However, the same could be said for those who choose to skip the question.

Our recent testing found the following results regarding the 'Prefer Not to Say' option:

- Across the treatments, "Prefer Not to Say" accounted for a small percentage of responses, around 2% on average. This is consistent with previous testing which has shown that around 2% of respondents select "Prefer Not to Say" when provided with the option. Previous testing has not featured a voluntary label.
- Across the treatments, skips for gender identity and sexual orientation accounted for around 2% of responses on average per condition. This was 5% lower than the percentage of respondents who opted to skip the religion question, both in this test and the 2011 Census (ONS, 2012).
- The percentages of people skipping or dropping out was higher in treatments without a "Prefer Not to Say" option for both Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation. However, in combination with "Prefer Not to Say" responses, the non-response rate was higher with a "Prefer Not to Say" response option. (See Table 1)
- This is consistent with previous testing into a "Prefer Not to Say" option for an earlier version of the Sexual Orientation question, which showed that non-response was higher for treatments with a "Prefer Not to Say" option although a voluntary label was not tested.

	Gender Identity ("Prefer Not to Say") (% and base number)	Gender Identity (No "Prefer Not to Say") (% and base number)	Sexual Orientation ("Prefer Not to Say") (% and base number)	Sexual Orientation (No "Prefer Not to Say") (% and base number)
Base Number	2136	2071	2136	2071
"Prefer Not to Say"	1.73	N/A	2.34	N/A
	37	N/A	50	N/A
Skips	1.83	2.32	1.73	2.66
	39	48	37	55
Drop Outs	0.23	0.10	0.05	0.05
	5	2	1	1

Total Non-Response	3.79	2.41	4.12	2.70
	81	50	88	56

Table 1. Responses rates for conditions with and without a “Prefer Not to Say” option

#### Data Validation

- Across all conditions, 16-24 years old were the age group most likely to select “Prefer Not to Say” for both gender identity and sexual orientation. This is potentially due to the fact that the percentage of those selecting “Prefer Not to Say” in older age groups is much lower than previous tests. Past research looking into the Sexual Orientation question showed around 1.3% of those over 35 selected “Prefer Not to Say” whereas in the current testing, around 0.6% selected this option. By comparison, the percentage of “Prefer Not to Say” amongst 16-24 years olds is consistent with previous testing.
- 16-24 years old were the age group most likely to skip both the gender identity and the sexual orientation question regardless of question order or the “Prefer Not to Say” option.
- In addition, 16-24 years were the age group most likely to identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) (See Table 3 and Table 4). This aligns with the findings from the ONS’ most recent release on Sexual Orientation (ONS, 2019) which showed around 4.2% of 16-24 years old identifying as Lesbian, Gay or Bisexual (LGB). Whilst the numbers in this test were much higher than this, they still represented the largest proportion of the LGB population.
- The percentage of people reporting as cisgender (having a gender that aligns with the sex they were registered at birth) decreased in treatments with a “Prefer Not to Say” option
- The percentage of people reporting as straight or heterosexual was slightly lower in treatments with a “Prefer Not to Say” option with an average difference of 1.4%. In previous testing, the heterosexual response rate has been lower in treatments with a “Prefer Not to Say” option. (See Appendices for link to full report).
- We can therefore conclude that not adding a “Prefer Not to Say” would lead to a lower non-response rate, providing more information from both questions, particularly from younger respondents who are more likely to identify as LGBT but were also more likely to skip or select “Prefer Not to Say”. Those who do not wish to report their sexual orientation or gender identity can skip the question as indicated by the voluntary statement.

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	Total
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>663</b>	<b>889</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>776</b>	<b>939</b>	<b>4207</b>
Yes	90.50	95.16	96.60	95.49	97.55	95.3
"No, please specify gender"	1.51	0.45	0.43	0.52	0.21	0.57
“Prefer Not to Say”	1.66	1.24	0.74	0.90	0.11	0.88
Skipped	3.92	2.36	1.28	1.93	1.38	2.07
Dropped out at this question	0.45	0.00	0.21	0.26	0.00	0.17
Dropped out at an earlier question	1.96	0.79	0.74	0.90	0.75	0.97

Table 2. Distribution of gender identity responses by age group across all four conditions (%).

	16-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55+	Total
<b>Sample Size</b>	<b>663</b>	<b>889</b>	<b>940</b>	<b>776</b>	<b>939</b>	<b>4207</b>
Straight or Heterosexual	74.96	83.35	87.87	89.05	91.59	85.93
Gay or Lesbian	4.37	4.50	4.79	3.99	2.88	4.09
Bisexual	9.95	6.52	3.94	3.09	2.24	4.90
"Other sexual orientation"	1.66	0.90	0.11	0.13	0.11	0.52
"Prefer Not to Say"	2.87	1.35	0.64	1.16	0.43	1.19
Skipped	3.77	2.47	1.70	1.42	1.92	2.19
Dropped out at this question	0.00	0.11	0.00	0.00	0.11	0.05
Dropped out at an earlier question	2.41	0.79	0.96	1.16	0.75	1.14

Table 3. Distribution of sexual orientation responses by age group across all four conditions (%).

### **Question Ordering**

Our recent testing found the following results regarding question ordering:

- In treatments where gender identity was placed first, non-response rates for gender identity were higher than treatments where gender identity was placed second.
- The percentage of people selecting "Prefer Not to Say" was lowest for the gender identity question when it was placed second.
- In treatments where sexual orientation was placed first, non-response rates for sexual orientation were higher than treatments where sexual orientation was placed second.
- However as shown in Table 4, the differences between responses for Sexual Orientation according to order is 0.9% (in non-response rates), for Gender Identity, the difference is 1.7%. Whichever question goes first, the response rate will be higher for that question – however, the impact is smaller for sexual orientation – hence we recommend it goes first.
- The percentage of skips and dropouts across both questions was higher when gender identity was first, totalling 4.64% compared to 4.30% when sexual orientation was placed first (see Table 4).
- The percentage of people reporting themselves as straight or heterosexual and cisgender remained consistent across the treatments regardless of the question ordering (See Appendices for link to full report).

	Gender Identity followed by Sexual Orientation (%)			Sexual Orientation followed by Gender Identity (%)		
	Gender Identity	Sexual Orientation	Total	Sexual Orientation	Gender Identity	Total
"Prefer Not to Say"	2.11	2.20	4.31	2.49	1.34	3.83
Skips and Drop Outs	2.69	1.95	4.64	2.54	1.76	4.30
Total non-response	4.8	4.15	8.95	5.03	3.1	8.13

Table 4. Response rates for conditions based on question order

### **Alignment with Northern Ireland and Scotland**

Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and National Records of Scotland (NRS)

were contacted prior to the procurement process and declined to be involved in testing. NRS currently proposes a non-binary sex question along with a gender identity question and a sexual orientation question on the 2021 Census in Scotland. NISRA currently does not ask a gender identity or sexual orientation question.

### **Recommendation**

1. Place the Sexual Orientation question before the Gender Identity question
2. Do not add a “Prefer Not to Say” response option for the 2021 Census questions for Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation.

### **Alternative consideration**

Include a “Prefer Not to Say” option.

Discounted because:

1. Sexual Orientation: The potential impact on the quality of information collected from the increased level of people skipping the question, dropping out of the survey or selecting ‘Prefer Not to Say’.
2. Gender Identity: The decreased response from the cisgender population when a ‘Prefer Not to Say’ option is included in the question response options.

Place the Gender Identity question first.

Discounted because:

1. Our research showed that more respondents did not respond to the gender identity and sexual orientation questions when the gender identity question was placed first.
2. Our research also showed that the percentage of people selecting “Prefer Not to Say” on the Gender Identity question increased when the gender identity question was placed first.

### **References**

Office for National Statistics (2018) Help Shape Our Future The 2021 Census of Population and Housing in England and Wales, December 2018

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-2021-census-of-population-and-housing-in-england-and-wales>

Office for National Statistics (2019) Sexual orientation, UK: 2017, January 2019.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/sexuality/bulletins/sexualidentityuk/2017>

Office for National Statistics (2012) Religion in England and Wales 2011.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/articles/religioninenglandandwales2011/2012-12-11>

**Annex**

Links to the following can be found below:

**A document showing the questionnaire screenshots**

[https://share.sp.ons.statistics.gov.uk/sites/PopStats/GenderIdentity/GI/Evidence\\_base/Research/Question%20Screenshots.docx?web=1](https://share.sp.ons.statistics.gov.uk/sites/PopStats/GenderIdentity/GI/Evidence_base/Research/Question%20Screenshots.docx?web=1)

**The research brief sent to the supplier**

[https://share.sp.ons.statistics.gov.uk/sites/PopStats/GenderIdentity/GI/Evidence\\_base/Research/Research%20Brief%20-%20SOGI%20PNTS%20-%20Final.docx?web=1](https://share.sp.ons.statistics.gov.uk/sites/PopStats/GenderIdentity/GI/Evidence_base/Research/Research%20Brief%20-%20SOGI%20PNTS%20-%20Final.docx?web=1)

**The supplier report**

[https://share.sp.ons.statistics.gov.uk/sites/PopStats/GenderIdentity/GI/Evidence\\_base/Research/Report%20-%20SOGI%20PNTS%20%20v4%20\(Received%2026th%20March\).docx?web=1](https://share.sp.ons.statistics.gov.uk/sites/PopStats/GenderIdentity/GI/Evidence_base/Research/Report%20-%20SOGI%20PNTS%20%20v4%20(Received%2026th%20March).docx?web=1)

**The raw data**

[https://share.sp.ons.statistics.gov.uk/sites/PopStats/GenderIdentity/GI/Evidence\\_base/Research/Clean%20data%20\(Received%2013th%20March\).xlsx?web=1](https://share.sp.ons.statistics.gov.uk/sites/PopStats/GenderIdentity/GI/Evidence_base/Research/Clean%20data%20(Received%2013th%20March).xlsx?web=1)

Agreed by:

Census Statistical Output Design Project Board  
(CSOD)

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