



## **Information paper**

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The 2011 Census: Assessment of initial user requirements on content for England and Wales

-Sexual orientation

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## 1. Summary

In May 2005 ONS published a consultation document 'The 2011 Census: Initial view on content for England and Wales'. Responses were received from nearly 500 users, presenting arguments for the inclusion of around 70 topics (over 2,000 'topic responses').

Each topic was evaluated using the criteria detailed in the consultation document and a scoring system based on the criteria was used to rank the topics according to the strength of user requirement.

This paper provides a summary of the user requirements, and the score given, for the following topic:

- Sexual orientation

## 2. Sexual orientation: Total score = 74

### 2.1 Introduction

In the ONS consultation document published in May 2005, the topic of sexual orientation was placed in category 3, meaning that ONS believed that there was insufficient evidence of user demand to justify inclusion in the 2011 Census.

Over 100 responses were received commenting on the subject of sexual orientation from a variety of central government, local authority and other data users, including Stonewall.

### 2.2 User Need: Score = 7

A range of potential uses of information on sexual orientation have been identified from across the Census user community.

A key use of information on sexual orientation would be ensuring fair access to services for the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) community. A large number of users comment specifically on health issues and the inequalities that the LGB population face. Information on sexual orientation could be used to plan and provide health care services, including sexual health provision and mental health care. The Department of Health (DH) states that, *"without an indication of what percentage of the population identifies themselves as Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual, it is very difficult for the health service to appropriately address the needs of the LGB people through both policy development and service delivery"*. Other key services that are mentioned by users include: education, employment, housing, social services and homophobic crime reduction services. Stonewall states that the Census will provide an opportunity to *"properly assess at a national level whether or not LGB people's life chances are equal to their heterosexual counterparts, enabling service providers to plan, design and deliver their service equitably and allocate resources appropriately"*.

A number of central government departments, local authorities, health service providers, education services and police authorities agree that collecting information on sexual orientation in the Census would allow effective and targeted allocation of resources. The South East Regional Public Health Group states that, *"at national, regional and local levels there is a need to plan resources (health, housing and social care) according to this group's needs. Their needs appear to be different and in some cases they have greater resource implications than the general population"*.

Another key use of data on sexual orientation is in ensuring equality for the LGB population. The Equality South West Board states, *"in order to recognise and represent sexual orientation equally with the other equality strands, and to tackle multiple discriminations and exclusions, it is imperative to have accurate data on the demographics and social composition of the LGB population"*. Stonewall states that, *"LGB people are among the most discriminated-against social groups...they are more likely to be bullied and leave school at 16 than heterosexual pupils"*. They also comment that, *"young LGB people are vulnerable to domestic abuse, increasing their likelihood of becoming homeless"*. Polari states that, *"the Census could assist the identification of future areas that require new development of policy to address disadvantage and discrimination"*.

A number of users suggest that the LGB community may face social exclusion. In particular Stonewall states that, *"The Social Exclusion Unit has identified older LGB people as a group which suffers severe social exclusion"*. Collection of information on sexual orientation will allow the development and monitoring of policies that tackle the issues of social exclusion. A number of other respondents also discuss the use of the information in policy development and monitoring, focusing on equality of opportunity and ensuring diversity in the workforce. The Cabinet Office states that a *"key Public Sector Agreement (PSA) target is for the Civil Service to become more representative of the population it serves.... We feel it is essential that the 2011 Census... attempts to capture sexuality data (and not only in terms of partnerships) to enable judgement about how far the Civil Service is moving towards being fully representative"*.

LGB individuals and the community as a whole have historically suffered discrimination and there are concerns that this group is currently ignored in terms of policy and service provision. The Department of Trade and Industry Women and Equality Unit states, *"the lack of statistics about LGB people at present often leads to their invisibility in policy making. In public debate the void has often been filled by less reliable research, or long-standing presumptions about the LGB population"*. Users feel that collecting information on sexual orientation will help to implement current and emerging equality legislation, regulation and practice. Current legislation providing recognition and protection for the LGB community includes, the Employment Equality (sexual orientation) regulations 2003, which outlaws discrimination at work on the grounds of sexual orientation. The British Medical Association states that, *"in order for employers to comply with this legislation it will be necessary for them to have reliable baseline data on the LGB population"*.

A large number of users also mention the Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) which is due to be operational in 2006. This commission will recognise sexual orientation as a diversity strand of equal importance to race, gender, age, disability and religion. Currently, all five other strands are monitored in the Census. The Department of Trade and Industry Women and Equality Unit comments that the CEHR *"will also be required to produce a periodic "state of the nation" report on broad equality and human rights goals in society, and the progress that has been made towards them"*. The Women's Resource Centre states, *"if sexual orientation is omitted from the Census, it will seriously hamper the CEHR's capacity to understand the demographic makeup of and provide a fair and equal service to LGB citizens"*. A number of users also raise the issue of the Single Equality Act. The Department of Health state that, *"with the current review of all UK discrimination law with a view to introducing a Single Equality Act, it is possible the Government will legislate for the monitoring of all 'equality strands' including sexual orientation (either or both for employment and service delivery) before 2011"*. This Single Equality Act will introduce protection from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation. It is thought that these and

other future policy developments will be constrained by absence of reliable information about the size and characteristics of the LGB population.

### **2.3 Small Geographies and Populations: Score = 7**

Information on sexual orientation would be required for small geographies to allow targeted resource allocation and service provision. Accord Housing association state that they *"require local information in order to assess local need and appropriate resource requirements, and the tailoring of services to local conditions"*.

A number of users state that although it is important for the Census to provide data on the population as a whole, it is also important to provide information on local areas where LGB people cluster. There is a particular interest in the differences between rural and urban areas. Stonewall state that, *"LGB people living in rural areas, where attitudes may be less tolerant and LGB communities less visible than in urban areas, are likely to experience acute isolation"*. Generally, local authorities require small area information to gain an accurate picture of the communities they serve.

The Equal Opportunities Commission states, *"Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people are thought to form a relatively small percentage of the population. The Census would provide urgently needed baseline data on the number and geographic distribution of people in these groups"*. Users agree however, that at present it is difficult to determine whether LGB people are a small population group due to lack of any reliable data.

### **2.4 Alternative Sources: Score = 9**

Generally, respondents have concluded that there are no alternative sources that collect reliable and comprehensive information about the LGB community. The Department of Health states, *"at the moment there is no 'next best alternative' available"*.

Several respondents refer to small scale surveys, but these only represent the visible LGB population in a specific geographical area, so often cannot be used by organisations in other areas. Oxleas NHS trust states that, *"the impact of using existing sources would be the continued discrimination of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people in accessing health services as we would be unable to allocate resources to service the specific health needs of the LGB population"*.

A possible alternative would be to use data on civil partnerships but this would provide an unrepresentative figure as it excludes single people and couples who choose not to register their partnership.

The National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles collects some information on sexual orientation. However, Sigma research at the University of Portsmouth state, *"[it] recruited too few gay people to describe their geographic distribution, household structure, occupation or any other measures the Census can supply. Using this next best alternative provides no advances in the reasons the data is needed"*.

Stonewall goes so far as to state, *"exclusion of sexual orientation from the Census may result in its exclusion from other quantitative research. This would further reduce the likelihood of there being alternative sources of sexual orientation information"*.

### **2.5 Multivariate Analysis: Score = 10**

Information on sexual orientation would be analysed with almost all other Census variables to achieve the uses outlined in the User Need section of this document.

Analyses with basic demographics, household composition, tenure, ethnicity, religion, qualifications, health, labour market variables, NS-SEC, income and disability are of particular interest. Such information will help determine whether the LGB population are suffering from multiple deprivation and discrimination.

Accord Housing Association states that, *"information from a future Census would facilitate the innovation or enhancement of our services to the LGB community, especially through the use of multivariate analyses, to vulnerable sections within that community"*.

## **2.6 UK Comparability: Score = 8**

Although the majority of respondents require data at a local level to allow targeted service provision, a large number of respondents state that sexual orientation data is required for the whole of the UK. This would ensure a full understanding of the LGB population and allow the data to be analysed nationally in a consistent and comparable manner. The Equal Opportunities Commission state that, *"The Commission for Equality and Human Rights (CEHR) remit will cover England, Scotland and Wales, hence consistent and comparable information will be required from both England and Wales and Scotland Censuses (as well as the compilation of statistics for Great Britain)"*.

## **2.7 Continuity: Score = 0**

Sexual orientation has not been included in any previous UK Census.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

The consultation responses identified many different uses for information on sexual orientation from a variety of respondents. Of these uses, service provision and monitoring of equality objectives are the most common reasons that respondents cited for requiring the information. A number of users also suggest that sexual orientation data could be used to aid resource allocation and policy development. There is no firm data on the size of the LGB population but they are thought to form a small population group. Small area data will help to identify the needs of the LGB community.

No alternative sources of sexual orientation data were identified that could fully satisfy the user requirements. A strong case was made for using the data for multivariate analysis, and it is apparent that the information is required across the UK for consistency and comparability reasons. No question on sexual orientation has been asked in any previous UK Census.

On the strength of the user requirements this topic would have been placed in category 2. However, the ONS view remains that such questions are not suitable for the 2011 Census. ONS has significant concerns surrounding the issues of privacy, acceptability, accuracy, conceptual definitions and the effect that such a question could have on the overall response to the Census. This topic therefore has a special category 3\*. Despite the above concerns, the increasing requirement for the information is clear and must be addressed by ONS and others. A programme of work will be established to determine the most suitable way to meet this need. The first meeting of key interested parties across government and the UK will take place in April 2006.