

## Development of the Ethnicity, Identity, Language and Religion questions for the 2011 Census

### 1. Background

1 The Office for National Statistics (ONS) is in the process of finalising its recommendations for the Ethnicity, Identity, Language and Religion (EILR) questions for the 2011 Census in England and Wales (see timetable overleaf).

2 Key to the ethnic group question development process has been the desire to balance relevance, acceptability and clarity with continuity over time and UK harmonisation. The recommendations are the culmination of a programme of research, consultation and testing including:

(a) *Consultation with data users and providers:*

- 'The 2011 Census: Assessment of Initial User Requirements on content for England and Wales' (2006<sup>1</sup>);
- 2011 EILR Consultation (2006/7<sup>2</sup>);
- 2011 Census Road Shows (March 2007);
- Ad hoc meetings between ONS and stakeholders organisations (including lobby groups and Parliamentarians);
- Public and ministerial correspondence and parliamentary questions; and
- Meeting with the National Statistics Working Group on Ethnicity and Identity (made up of government stakeholders) and the EILR Academic Advisory Group.

(b) *Qualitative and quantitative question testing*, including:

- 2007 Census Test carried out in four local authorities;
- Six waves of cognitive testing (2007/08);
- Focus group on acceptability of colour terminology (March 2007);
- Postal test (April 2007); and
- Testing on Omnibus Survey (September/October/December 2007/ May 2008)

(c) *Carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment*

ONS has conducted an Equality Impact Assessment on the EILR questions that are being developed for inclusion in the 2011 Census for England and Wales (see Paper AG(08)07). The EIA includes a number of recommendations to assist ONS to comply with its statutory duties to promote race, disability and gender equality.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.statistics.gov.uk/about/consultations/2011Census\\_response.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/consultations/2011Census_response.asp)

<sup>2</sup> [www.statistics.gov.uk/census/2011Census/Consultations/ethnicidntconsultation.asp](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/census/2011Census/Consultations/ethnicidntconsultation.asp),

(d) *Work to harmonise with Scotland and Northern Ireland where possible*

- In 2005, the Registrars General of each of the UK countries signed an agreement to work towards a harmonised set of questions, definitions and outputs, across the three UK Censuses where possible and where this allows the needs of individual countries to be met.
- The Census Offices have agreed UK-wide guiding principles against which to fairly and transparently select specific tick-box categories for ethnic groups.
- The Census Offices meet regularly to discuss progress through the monthly EILR Topic Group, the UK Census Questionnaire Design Group and other ad hoc meetings and workshops.
- Evidence findings, consultation, research and question testing is shared across the UK.
- ONS asked for opinions on the 2006 Scottish Test questions in its EILR own consultation.
- The Census Offices have been working together to compromise on terminology

3 Recommendations for the England and Wales Ethnic Group and National Identity questions and the Scottish Ethnic Group question were presented to the UK Census Committee (UKCC) which consists of the National Statistician and the Registrars General for Scotland and Northern Ireland together with senior officials from the three UK Census Offices and the Welsh Assembly Government) on 22 February 2008.

**Next steps for question development**

4 The timetable for the next steps for question development is:

2008

April	2011 Census topics agreed by Karen Dunnell
June	Final draft of White Paper for 2011 Census agreed
Oct	Census Rehearsal questionnaire finalised
Nov/Dec	White Paper for 2011 Census published and laid before Parliament

2009

October	2011 Questionnaire finalised
Autumn	Draft Census Order finalised
End	Draft Census Regulations finalised

**Other work planned**

5 After the EILR Topic group has finalised all question recommendations in autumn/ winter 2008, ONS expects to begin a number of relevant pieces of work including:

- Publication of paper describing the conceptual basis for measuring ethnicity, identity, language and religion in quantitative surveys, the legal framework for doing so in the UK, and lessons from previous censuses, question testing and practice in other countries.
- Publishing guidance on monitoring, including variations of the Census questions
- Looking at how more detailed outputs can be produced from 2011 write-in answers and combinations of Census questions on ethnic group, country of birth, citizenship, national identity, religion etc.
- Revising the coding rules for write-in responses to EILR questions.
- Looking at guidance for National Statistics harmonised EILR questions in social surveys.
- Programme of community liaison explaining decisions and encouraging use of the write-in spaces.

## Key Issues

### Ethnic Group

6 More than 80 per cent of respondents to the 2006/07 Census Stakeholders Consultation stated that they had a requirement for an ethnic group question on the 2011 Census. There is a wide range of potential uses of ethnic group data, such as:

- to enable organisations to meet their statutory obligations to the Race Relations Act 1976 and Race Relations (Amendment) 2000 and equal opportunities legislation - where other sources are inadequate to provide accurate data for small, geographically dispersed ethnic minority populations to the extent that the Census can;
- in the formulae for grant allocation by Central and Local Government;
- to inform policy development and monitoring; and
- to provide public bodies with a better understanding of the communities they serve and hence inform service provision

7 The main requirements from users were changes in the terminology used in the question and information on additional groups. A work programme was set up to review and improve the 2001 Census ethnic group question given the lessons learnt in 2001, the changes in population composition, user needs, clarity, and acceptability.

8 ONS received many more requests for tick-boxes than could possibly be included on the Census form and so developed a set of principles with which tick-box categories for ethnic groups could be fairly and transparently prioritised. These principles were based on the following themes (in no particular order):

- strength of need for information on an ethnic group;
- lack of alternative sources of information on ethnic group;
- clarity and quality of the information collected;
- acceptability to respondents;
- comparability with ethnicity data derived from the 2001 Census; and
- operational considerations such as length of question(s), speed and cost-effectiveness of processing, and ability to collect comparable information in surveys.

9 The question that will be recommended for inclusion in the 2011 Census is shown in Fig 1.

Changes from the 2001 question include:

- addition of Gypsy or Irish Traveller and Arab tick boxes;
- 'British' tick box renamed 'English/Welsh/\* Scottish/Northern Irish/British' ;
- Mixed heading renamed 'Mixed/ multiple ethnic groups';
- 'Black or Black British' heading renamed 'Black/ African/ Caribbean/ Black British'; and
- 'Chinese' tick box moved under 'Asian/ Asian British' heading.

Fig 1 Recommended Ethnic Group question (England)

**16** What is your ethnic group?  
Choose **one** section from A to E, then tick **one** box to best describe your ethnic group or background

**A White**

- English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Any other White background, write in

**B Mixed / multiple ethnic groups**

- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other mixed/multiple ethnic background, write in

**C Asian / Asian British**

- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background, write in

**D Black / African / Caribbean / Black British**

- African
- Caribbean
- Any other African / Caribbean / Black background,

**E Other ethnic group**

- Arab
- Any other ethnic group, write in

\* In Wales 'English' and 'Welsh' would be transposed in the first tick box

10 There are a number of strategies that ONS will be implementing to promote the completion of the ethnic group question and to respond to the disappointment of those groups for whom a separate specific tick box cannot be accommodated. These include:

- The ONS Community Liaison team to maintain/create contacts with community organisations and keep them informed of the Census developments, particularly promoting good relationships with communities and focusing on the importance of completing the ethnic group question on the Census, even if a specific ethnic group tick box is not provided.
- In areas with a high proportion of population from certain ethnic groups ONS will be seeking to appoint field staff from the same/similar ethnic backgrounds.
- ONS will look into production of more extensive outputs of write-in answers to meet specific user demand.
- ONS will update its *Guide to the classification and collection of ethnic group data* which specifies how other data collectors who are subject to less space constraints can collect more detailed ethnic group data whilst maintaining comparability with 2011 Census

### National Identity

11 Some 58 per cent of respondents to the 2006/07 Census Stakeholders Consultation stated a requirement for a national identity question (75 per cent of respondents in Wales). The national identity question meets user requirements by:

- increasing acceptability of the ethnic group question by allowing differentiation of the 'White British' [now 'White English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British'] ethnic category;
- increasing acceptability of the ethnic group question by allowing ethnic minorities to identify with UK national identities;
- providing a better understanding of local populations and communities; and
- providing a measure of community cohesion.

12 The following question has been recommended for inclusion in the 2011 Census:

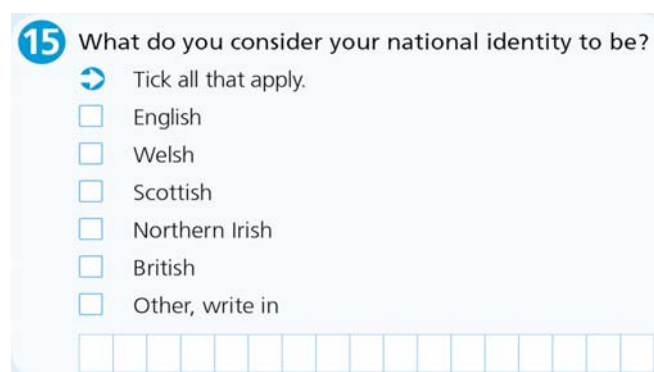


Fig 2 Recommended National Identity Group question (England)

NB: In Wales the English and Welsh tick boxes will be transposed.

13 ONS is still considering whether to include examples for the 'other, write in' option.

14 In the final wave of cognitive testing, ONS will be testing the alternative question wording "How would you describe your national identity?" as previous testing with the current singular wording did not elicit multiple responses, and alternative questions that use plural wording (for example, 'Which national identity or identities do you feel most connected to?') did not allow space for a 'Tick all that apply' instruction.

## Religion

15 More than 80 per cent of respondents to the 2006/07 Census Stakeholders Consultation stated that they had a requirement for a religion question on the 2011 Census. Three quarters of respondents felt the 2001 religion categories would provide respondents with the information that they require. Three quarters of respondents to the consultation felt that comparability with the 2001 question was essential.

16 Respondents cited a variety of reasons for the need for a religious question in the census, which included:

- to provide a clearer view of society and gain a better understanding of certain ethnic groups;
- to improve understanding of local populations and markets for service planning; and
- to promote legal obligations to prevent discrimination and promote equality.

17 Reasons why respondents did not think the question on religion would meet their needs included:

- (a) The Christian and Muslim categories are too broad.
- (b) Need for information on additional religions and non-religious beliefs (the EILR Equality Impact Assessment also recommended that that ONS investigates whether the religion question could be rephrased to collect information other (including non-religious) belief systems).
- (c) Religious practice should be distinguished from affiliation/identity.

18 In relation into points (a) and (b) space constraints have meant that ONS will be unable to provide additional tick boxes for other religions or to further break down existing categories.

19 ONS did explore whether the question could be reworded to reflect the wording used in the Equalities Act and tested 'What is your religion or belief?'. However cognitive testing indicated that respondents were putting more emphasis on religious belief when interpreting the question than with the 2001 question ('What is your religion?') thereby compromising comparability with 2001 data without any real improvement to data collected.

20 In relation to (c) ONS acknowledges that the Census question does not measure religious practice, and that for some user needs (particularly for service planning) a measure of practice may be useful. However, ONS does not believe that a single religion question can be changed in a way that would capture this information suitably and in a way that would justify losing comparability with 2001.

21 Instead, ONS believes the existing question will meet other user needs (understanding populations, monitoring inequalities) and a two-part question (such as 'What is your religion even if you are not practising?'/ 'Are you practising?') asked in social surveys would be the best way to capture practice.

The image shows a screenshot of a census form titled '20 What is your religion?'. It includes a blue arrow icon and the text 'This question is voluntary'. Below this are several radio button options: 'No religion', 'Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)', 'Buddhist', 'Hindu', 'Jewish', 'Muslim', and 'Sikh'. The final option is 'Any other religion, write in', followed by a series of empty boxes for text entry.

Fig 3 Religion question (England)

22 Fig 3 shows the question that is likely to be recommended for inclusion in the 2011 Census. (NB: In Wales the 'Christian' examples will be reduced to 'including all denominations' to be clear and relevant to respondents there. )

## Language

23 A question on Welsh language proficiency has been included in previous censuses in Wales. ONS proposes to continue to measure Welsh language proficiency in Wales in 2011. However, proficiency in other languages has not been recorded in previous censuses in England and Wales, but will be included in 2011.

24 Almost 90 per cent of expert, community and special interest group respondents to the 2006/07 Census Stakeholders Consultation stated that they had a requirement for a language question on the 2011 Census. There are a number of reasons why this is so:

- in order to provide services in appropriate languages where English is not understood including English as a Second Language (ESOL) provision (by far the highest priority);
- to monitor the usage of minority national languages like Welsh, Gaelic, Scots and Cornish for which there is an interest in increasing uptake;
- to better understand the ethno-religious diversity of the UK population;
- to understand the impact of English (or Welsh) language ability on employment and other social inclusion indicators (including for people for whom English or Welsh is their first language);
- to identify linguistic resources in the UK for business reasons.

25 However, the complexity of concepts that can be measured combined with space constraints and concerns about interaction with the Welsh language question has made developing a suitable question difficult.

26 After exploring a large number of different options, ONS believes the following question in Fig 4, asking about main language and spoken English language ability, would meet the key user needs. ONS is about to test the question in the Omnibus survey and in a final wave of cognitive testing. ONS will also be further contacting Deaf and BSL organisations to ascertain their views on the question.

18 What is your main language?

English **GO TO** 20

Other, write in (include sign languages)

19 How well do you speak English?

Very well Well Not well Not at all

Fig 4: Working Language question (England)

NB: In Wales 'English' in the first part would be replaced with 'English or Welsh'

27 In the final wave of cognitive testing ONS will also be testing the question 'Do you speak a language other than English or Welsh at home?' (Fig 5) to understand whether or not this works better in terms of clarity to respondents and collection of most useful data for users.

**18** Do you speak a language other than English or Welsh at home?

No **GO TO** **20**

Yes, write in main other language below (including sign languages)

**19** How well do you speak English?

Very well      Well      Not well      Not at all

Fig 5 Alternative Language question (England)

**Action**

28 Advisory Group members are invited to note the key issues set out in this paper in relation to the proposed 2011 Census questions on ethnicity, identity, religion and language, and to comment at the round for forthcoming meetings.

**Office for National Statistics**  
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