

## ONS' Sexual Identity Project – Progress Update May 2008

### Work completed prior to June 2007

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) was made aware of a strong user requirement for information on sexual identity through the consultation on the content of the 2011 Census. As announced in spring 2006, a question on sexual identity was not considered suitable to be included in the 2011 Census and, as a result, the sexual identity project was established.

ONS initially held an exploratory meeting in April 2006 with interested parties, including representatives from other Government departments and non-governmental organisations, academics, researchers and lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) groups. These parties agreed that the focus of the project should initially be on measuring sexual identity (rather than sexual attraction or behaviour).

### Objectives of the project

Following the initial exploratory meeting, the sexual identity project established a clear set of objectives. These are:

- Question development – the development of a question (or set of questions) on sexual identity that can be used on social surveys and possibly for use in equality monitoring purposes
- Question testing & implementation – to test and evaluate (both quantitatively and qualitatively) the questioning to ensure that where possible they meet user requirements; are acceptable to respondents; and provide information of reasonable quality/accuracy. If acceptable questioning can be developed, it will be added to the Integrated Household Survey (IHS), which combines most ONS household surveys into one. This will allow for experimental estimates of the size and characteristics of the lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) populations to be produced and evaluated.
- Guidance – to provide guidance for those wishing to administer the questioning, and those wishing to analyse the data.

### Establishment of user/stakeholder and expert research groups

Two groups were formed to assist the project:

- User/stakeholder group – made up primarily of representatives from different government departments and LGB groups
- Expert research group – made up primarily of academics and researchers with experience in this field

These groups first met in the summer of 2006 and continue to operate via meetings, as well as providing advice and comment through correspondence and one-to-one discussions.

### Defining the concept of sexual orientation/sexual identity

Sexual Orientation, as defined by the *Equalities Act 2006*, refers to "an individual's sexual orientation towards - (a) persons of the same sex as him or her (b) persons of the opposite sex, or (c) both".

Research shows that the concept of sexual orientation encompasses different dimensions, including attraction, behaviour, fantasy, emotion and identity.

The definition of the concept that needs to be measured and the understanding of user requirements have been, and continue to be, developed by ONS through the user/stakeholder group and the expert research group. Based on the views of these groups, ONS aims to develop questioning to measure respondents' self-perceived sexual identity. That is, how respondents would categorise themselves in terms of their sexual identity, rather than how other people might categorise them.

## Work completed May 2007 – May 2008

In May 2007 a paper was presented at the 62<sup>nd</sup> Annual Conference of the American Association of Public Opinion Research. The paper entitled 'In search of a question on sexual identity' discussed the background to the project, the data collection issues surrounding implementation, and the proposed methodology to be employed on the project. The paper is available on the National Statistics website at <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/measuring-equality/sexual-identity/question-development.asp>

### **A review of sexual identity/orientation questions on other surveys**

A review of the experiences of organisations, both in the UK and internationally, which have recently administered survey questions about sexual identity/orientation was undertaken. The first report 'UK experiences of administering survey questions on sexual identity/orientation' was published in January 2008, whilst the second paper 'Review of international organisations' experiences of administering question on sexual identity/orientation' was published in May 2008. Both publications are available on the National Statistics website at: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/measuring-equality/sexual-identity/question-development.asp>

Internationally estimates of those responding as LGB were between 4.6 per cent and 0.9 per cent while UK estimates varied between 3 per cent and 0.3 per cent.

### **Focus groups studies**

Six focus groups were held throughout October and November 2007 to investigate people's attitudes to being asked questions on sexual identity, particularly in the context of a general purpose household survey that included questions on a range of social topics. The focus groups consisted separately of heterosexual men, heterosexual women, gay men, gay/lesbian women, bisexual men and bisexual women. The groups explored topics relating to the conceptualisation of sexual identity/orientation; terminology used and understood; administration in different contexts; confidentiality and acceptability. Results of the focus group studies will be published in summer 2008.

### **NS Omnibus Survey trials**

Periodically since July 2006 a series of trials have been carried out on the National Statistics (NS) Omnibus Survey to test different versions of sexual identity questions and different ways of administering these questions in a survey context. Results of the first two trials were published in January 2008. All reports can be found on the National Statistics website at: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/measuring-equality/sexual-identity/question-testing.asp> The results of the third and fourth trials will be published in summer 2008.

### **Proxy responses**

On some surveys, people answer questions on behalf of somebody else in their household; these are known as 'proxy' interviews/responses. ONS have been investigating the consequences of asking, or not asking, the sexual identity question by proxy. The investigation involves assessing the proportion of proxy interviews that are taken on the main ONS surveys and how the characteristics of proxy respondents differ from those of other respondents. Analysis completed so far has mapped the demographic characteristics of proxy respondents, including their relationship with the person in the household who answered on their behalf. Further work is being conducted to assess whether proxy respondents differ systematically from respondents who are interviewed in person to assess the likelihood of the estimates being biased if the question were not asked by proxy. This is because observations from the focus groups show widespread objection to others in the household providing a response on their behalf or vice versa. A report on this work will be available in summer 2008.

### **Precision and reliability of estimates at regional and local levels**

Analysis is being undertaken to assess the number of years of IHS data that would need to be pooled to produce reliable regional and local level LGB estimates to an acceptable level of statistical precision. Results of this work will be published in summer 2008.

## **Future work (May 2008 – April 2009)**

### **Development of prototype questioning**

Using the findings from the work carried out to date, prototype questioning has been designed for cognitive testing and quantitative trialling (see below). The design will encompass the question wording, response categories, administration in different survey modes and environments, and instructions for interviewers. Further changes to the design may be required as a result of the cognitive and quantitative testing.

### **Cognitive testing**

Cognitive testing takes place in the course of one-to-one interviews. It explores the mental process by which respondents reach an answer to a question and in so doing it can show whether or not the question is working as intended.

Cognitive interviews are scheduled for June and July 2008 and will be combined with in-depth enquiry to further explore conceptual and administration issues related to the question sets, where appropriate. Small sub-groups for which it was unfeasible or inappropriate from a methodological perspective to include in the focus groups will be covered at this stage of the project. For example those in the youngest and oldest age-groups, those with certain religious or cultural beliefs, those living in more rural communities, those with compound diversity issues, such as severe disabilities, and the transgender community.

### **Full quantitative trial**

Since April 2008 a prototype question has progressed into field trials on ONS' General Lifestyle Survey (GLF). The trial utilises a split sample design (where half the sample is asked the sexual identity question and the other half is not asked). Results from the trial will be analysed before introducing it more widely on the IHS. In particular, the project will assess the likely impact of the inclusion of the question on response rates and how the question works in a concurrent interview setting (where several household members may be interviewed at the same time).

The results of the full quantitative trial will be reported in winter 2008. The evidence from the field trial will inform the decision whether or not to implement the question on sexual identity on the IHS from April 2009 onwards. This will also mark the end of the Sexual Identity project and the start of the implementation phase.

### **User guide**

The aim is to provide guidance to both users of statistics, as well as those organisations collecting data on sexual orientation. A draft report will be prepared by early 2009 with the aim of publishing in April 2009, after peer-reviewing by the expert research and the user/stakeholder groups.

## **Data quality review (2009 – 11)**

As this will be the first time that a question on sexual identity will be asked on a large-scale survey in Britain, the quality of the data will be monitored closely over the first few years of implementation. This will include an evaluation stage, where over this period (2009-11) it is envisaged that a statistical evaluation report will be published alongside the release of data as experimental statistics. The first set of estimates of the LGB population is expected to be available in autumn 2010.

## PROJECT MILESTONES

<b>QUESTION DEVELOPMENT</b>	
'In Search of a Question on Sexual Identity' Paper	Paper published May 2007
Review of UK experiences of administering survey questions on sexual identity/orientation	Report published January 2008
Review of the legislative context	Report published May 2008
Review of international organisations experiences of administering survey questions on sexual identity/orientation	Report published May 2008
Cognitive testing	Scheduled for June – July 2008
<b>QUESTION TESTING AND IMPLEMENTATION</b>	
NS Omnibus Survey Trials 1 & 2	Report published January 2008
NS Omnibus Survey Trial 3	Report to be published summer 2008
NS Omnibus Survey Trial 4	This trial is being run on the NS Omnibus Survey in November and December 2007 and January 2008. Findings will be published in summer 2008
Focus groups	Focus groups took place between October and November 2007. Findings will be published summer 2008.
Proxy response report	Report to be published summer 2008
Estimating precision and reliability report	Report to be published summer 2008
Full quantitative trial on ONS General Household Survey Longitudinal (GSL)	The trial will run from April to September 2008. Report will be published winter 2008.
<b>USER GUIDANCE</b>	
Guide on collecting data on sexual identity	Scheduled for April 2009
<b>DATA QUALITY REVIEW</b>	
Experimental statistics first release	Scheduled for autumn 2010
Statistical evaluation report	Scheduled for autumn 2010

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### References

Published reports and latest information on the ONS Sexual Identity Project is available on the National Statistics website at:

### Website

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/data/measuring-equality/sexual-identity/default.asp>