

Issues raised at the 2007 Open meetings on Census Content

1. Summary

A series of open meetings were held during March 2007 in Sheffield, London and Cardiff to present ONS' current view on the likely content of the 2011 Census. The presentation slides can be found at <http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/collecting-info/dev-questionnaires/view-content.ppt>

This section summarises the main issues that delegates raised. The detailed questions and answers are located in the later sections.

Housing questions

- Some attendees raised concerns over how well the state of repairs question would be answered.
- The relationship matrix generated some discussion, particularly around the confusion of using the term same-sex civil partner.

Individual questions

- There was general agreement on the core content that ONS proposed, However, for the remaining 3/4 column very different views were expressed on the relative importance of 2001 topics.
- A number of attendees expressed their disappointment that a question on sexual orientation had been ruled out without testing a question.
- Some attendees questioned the requirement to include civil partnership categories in the marital status question. There was some consensus that this question could be shortened to save space.
- There was general agreement that the collection of information on second residences would be useful.
- A number of attendees were surprised that there was lack of interest in hours worked and put in a plea for it to be included. A number of attendees would be satisfied with a question that distinguished full and part time working.
- A few attendees supported the inclusion of a question on qualifications, although it was questioned why highest qualification could not be asked.
- There were some concerns over the suggestion to exclude a question on industry.
- There was a suggestion to allow people doing voluntary work to be able to report this on the questionnaire which received some support.
- There was a fairly strong demand to retain a question on carers.
- Some attendees questioned the lack of reference to questions on disability.
- Only a few attendees supported the inclusion of a question on income. Some attendees were concerned that the current question is not very useful because the income bands are not high enough.

Ethnicity, identity, language and religion

- There were lengthy discussions around the addition of extra tick boxes in the ethnicity question. Tick boxes for Black British, Kashmiri, Cornish and Gypsies/travellers were expressed particularly strongly. It was noted that merging the categories of Romany, Gypsy and Irish Traveller makes it difficult to measure these groups separately. There was recognition that comparability with 2001 is important.
- A significant number of people questioned the need for national identity although some recognised that it does complement the ethnicity question to allow respondents to provide a fuller picture of their identity.
- There were requests for a Pagan tick box to be added to the religion question. There were also concerns over the quality of the 2001 data; particularly the over reporting of the number of Christians.
- Some attendees questioned the requirement for a question on Welsh language proficiency and why this space could not be used in English questionnaire.
- There was fairly strong support for a language question although many recognised the limitations of the 2007 Test question. Views were expressed on the inclusion of Cornish language and there was general agreement that more than one other write in box would be better. Some attendees felt the part of the question asking about BSL was not useful in its current form. There was some disagreement about whether the question should cover English language proficiency or languages spoken at home.

General Issues

- There were a significant number of questions raised on the length of the questionnaire and whether there was anything users could do to increase the questionnaire to 4 pages per person.
- There were a number of questions on how ONS plan to enumerate difficult to count groups e.g. gypsies, homeless, disabled people etc.
- A number of attendees questioned why there are plans to increase from 5 people to 6 people on the questionnaire.

2. Questions and answers

This section summarises the questions raised at these meetings and provides detailed answers to the questions or concerns that were raised by delegates.

Please note that this document reflects the position as it stood in March 2007 at the time of the meetings and does not reflect any changes to the proposed content of the census since March 2007.

2.1 Population Issues

Why can't definitions of usual residence be harmonised across ONS?

ONS Population Estimates use the United Nations (UN) definition to define usual residence which only counts people as usual residents if they intend to spend twelve months or more in the UK. They also include people as usual residents where they spend the majority of their time. The Census has traditionally used a six month usual residence definition and counts people at their permanent or home address as this provides valuable information on households and family relationships. It also helps to reduce the opportunity for people to 'opt out' of the census. Work is currently being carried out within ONS to review definitions of usual residence.

Where on the 2001 Census questionnaire did it state that a person had to have lived in the country for 6 months or more to complete the Census questionnaire?

This was not specified on the 2001 questionnaire, however if people called up with queries the six month definition was used as guidance. The Population Definitions and Bases topic group are still considering what definition to use in the 2011 Census, but the intention is to be much more explicit with definitions on the questionnaire for 2011.

How would parents who have separated know which is the usual residence for their children and which is the second residence?

The guidance will be to include children of separated parents as usually resident where they spend the majority of time. In situations where children spend equal amounts of time with each parent, an instruction will advise respondents to include the child at the address where they are present on Census night and to record the other parent's address as a second residence.

How will the Census identify how many second residences exist?

The second residence question will not provide a complete count of second homes because some people will own second residences that they do not spend any time at. The information collected from the second address question in the census will help to identify areas where people are spending time away from their usual residence and might be using services etc. Information will also be collected by enumerators on 'dummy forms' for addresses where no questionnaire is returned. These will distinguish vacant properties from second residences and holiday accommodation.

Can we track where people live at weekends compared to during the week?

ONS have been testing a question on time spent at a second address, however it only gives an approximation of time spent. It will not provide detailed information on whether someone stays during the week or at the weekend. Testing of this question has highlighted some difficulties and its inclusion in the census will be dependent on further testing.

What does the term resident visitor mean?

The term 'resident visitor' will not appear on the Census questionnaire. It is a term used to describe those people who are usual residents of the UK but at the time of the census have no usual address, e.g. people who have sold their house but not yet moved into another and staying with friends. It is important that these people are not missed, so testing is being conducted to help find the best way to ensure this group of people are included in the census usual resident count.

Will guidelines be included on the Census questionnaire to help identify visitors and resident visitors?

Extensive testing has been carried out to improve the questions that collect information on usual residents, resident visitors and visitors. It is very important that resident visitors are not missed as it is believed that there was an undercount of this type of people in the 2001 Census.

Is there an intention to collect visitor information from communal establishments?

The current plan is to collect visitor information from Communal establishments.

2.2 Household questions

Tenure

There was a problem in 2001 with people incorrectly selecting the 'lives here rent free' category in the tenure question. How will this be resolved for 2011?

The issue in 2001 was that people whose rent was paid by a council sometimes chose this option because they did not pay any rent themselves, even though there was still rent being paid on the property. This issue is being considered through the census housing topic group with the aim of resolving the issue prior to 2011.

State of Repairs

The state of repairs question seems difficult to answer. A landlord or home owner may be able to answer this question much more accurately than a tenant.

This question was introduced because responders to the 2005 census content consultation expressed a need for an additional quality of housing measure. ONS recognise that this question may be difficult to answer and are exploring such issues through cognitive testing.

Relationship matrix

There is no need to include 'same sex' in 'same sex civil partnership' as you cannot have opposite sex civil partnerships.

The word 'same-sex' has been included before civil partner because there is an issue with understanding of civil partnership terminology amongst the general public. Wording it in this way avoids any confusion for those people that think it is referring to co-habitation or civil marriages. This wording will be reviewed before the 2011 Census.

Why does the relationship matrix have a category for same sex civil partner but not same sex partner?

The demography topic group have been considering the inclusion of 'same sex partner' category but the difficulty with this is that a 'partner' category would then also be required for heterosexual couples unless another suitable wording

could be developed. This creates two categories that are not mutually exclusive and risks the possibility of multiple responses being provided.

Energy Efficiency

Have you considered including a question on energy efficiency?

The 2005 consultation identified very little requirement for information on energy efficiency. It is also considered to be a topic that would be very difficult to develop a question for that would work well on a self completion survey such as the census.

Central heating

Will there be any follow-up to the central heating question to ask about the type of heating people have?

The current testing of a central heating question has focused on a question that is similar to the 2001 question. The housing topic group will be considering the best suite of housing questions to be included in the census.

Number of cars

Why are bikes not included in the question on cars or vans owned or used by the household?

The user requirement for information on number of vehicles owned is for transport planning purposes so the key need is for a count of cars and vans only.

Surely this information is held by the DVLA?

The DVLA does hold some information on vehicles owned but they include business vehicles where they are registered rather than with the owner and cannot provide the small area data that census users require.

2.3 Individual questions

Sexual orientation

Why are sexual orientation questions not being tested?

A user need has been identified to collect information on sexual orientation in the census but the current view is that a census is not the right vehicle to collect the information for the first time. There are issues around acceptability, quality of data and the potential impact on response. Outside of the census division, ONS are currently testing questions to explore issues of acceptability and understanding. It is hoped to be able to introduce a question into an ONS Survey in 2009.

There was a high response rate for questions in the 2001 Census. Is this likely to change if ONS include a question on sexual orientation?

ONS are concerned about the potential impact on response by including a question on sexual orientation in the census, particularly before it has been tested in other surveys.

If ONS had the funding for a 4th page of census questions per individual would sexual orientation be considered for inclusion?

The current thinking is that sexual orientation would not be included even if a 4th page of questions was available.

Marital/civil partnership status

There is no reason to add civil partnerships to the marital status question as gender and the relationship matrix will give the necessary information

Although the relationship matrix will provide information on same-sex civil partnerships, the marital status question is about legal partnership status and is

therefore able to collect information on people in dissolved civil partnerships etc. It is important that civil partnerships are given parity with traditional marriages.

Hours worked

Even if a lack of interest has been shown in hours worked would it still be possible to collect information on full or part time working?

The consultation revealed less interest in this topic than some other topics. Current thinking is that more accurate and detailed information can be collected from the Labour Force Survey.

It was noted that a number of delegates expressed an interest in retaining a question on hours worked

Qualifications

Why can the qualifications question not just ask highest qualification?

There has been a large amount of consultation with the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) on the development of this question. Previous research has shown that determining the highest qualification is very difficult for some people, particularly those that obtained their qualifications a long time ago. It is thought that the best approach is to collect information on all qualifications held so that ONS can then derive the necessary information on highest qualification.

Industry

It was noted that a number of delegates expressed an interest in retaining a question on industry.

Carers

Why is the carers question now a category two topic when it was previously a category one topic?

With the restrictions on space on the census questionnaire and the strong demand for a number of new topics to be collected, the main Government departments were asked to prioritise the topics. Although there was still a strong need to collect information on carers, it was a lower priority overall than some of the other new topics such as the new migration topics.

It was noted that a number of delegates expressed a need to recognise the contributions of carers and retain a question on carers in the census.

Welsh language proficiency

Will a question on Welsh language be included in England?

No, this question is specific to Wales and will not be included in England. This was also the case in the 2001 Census.

Income

Will an income question be included in the 2011 Census?

ONS acknowledge that there was strong demand for information on income during the 2005 consultation. However, with the restrictions on space on the census questionnaire and the strong demand for a number of new topics, the main Government departments have prioritised other topics for inclusion over income at this stage. A question on income is being included in the 2007 Census Test to assess any impact on response and a decision on its inclusion will be made after the test has been analysed and the programme of consultation completed.

Disability

What will the disability question look like?

There are questions on long term illness/disability and nature of disability in the 2007 Test. ONS are about to start further consultation on the disability questions. It may be possible that a disability survey will collect detailed information on disability which would enable a smaller question to be asked in the Census.

Voluntary work

The Government has no understanding of the voluntary sector. Can a question be included on voluntary work?

The user consultation did not reveal a strong demand for a question on voluntary work so at this stage there are no plans to include a separate question. It may be possible to investigate whether a tick box could be incorporated into the economic activity questions.

Ethnicity

In 2001, 70,000 people wrote in Black British in the ethnicity question. Will a Black British tick box be included in the ethnicity question in 2011?

ONS have recently carried out a consultation exercise on ethnicity, identity, language and religion topics. An Equality Impact Assessment has also been conducted. The question that is currently being tested includes a Black British tick box and cognitive testing will show if this works. A final decision on the categories for inclusion will be made in 2008.

Who has been consulted regarding the ethnic group question?

ONS carried out a public consultation in 2005 on all census topics. This has been followed by a topic specification consultation on ethnicity, identity, language and religion. The open meetings also form part of that consultation and are open to anyone who wishes to be involved. The invitation to be involved in the consultation had been available on the website and was sent out to over 500 groups, including central government, local government, academics, and community groups.

Will there be a breakdown of groups within the African category?

Some users have requested that this category should be split into sub groups. If there is strong and well defined user requirement for this information then it will be considered, however at this stage with the space constraints on the census questionnaire, ONS consider this unlikely. A prioritisation exercise will be conducted to determine which groups have a tick box option and which groups will be expected to use the write-in boxes.

Kashmiris have their own language and qualify with all of the criteria under the House of Lords definition of an ethnic group. Will a Kashmiri tick box be included in the 2011 Census?

ONS have been consulting with user groups to identify user requirements for collection of information in the Census. Each tick box that has been identified through user consultation will then undergo a prioritisation exercise. It is not possible for the Census to provide every group with a tick box, there are many ethnic groups, recognised in case law for which it will not be possible to include a tick box. However, ONS will consider the output requirements of certain groups and may be able to provide a count of those who use the write in option.

Could the ethnic group question be amended to remove all the tick boxes and allow everyone to write-in their ethnicity?

The cost of coding and processing write in responses is significantly higher than for tick box questions. Additionally, any comparability with the 2001 question would be lost with this approach, so it is not something that ONS are pursuing at this time.

The ethnic group question seems to mix cultural background, origin and colour

Collecting information on ethnic group in a self-completion questionnaire is very difficult. Ethnicity is a subjective term and cognitive testing has shown that people do think of a number of concepts when describing their ethnicity. The Census question is designed to meet the requirements of the Race Relations (amendment) Act.

In the 1991 Census, 11000 people wrote in Irish and a tick box was included in 2001. 37000 people wrote in Cornish in the 2001 Census. Will there be a Cornish tick box in the 2011 Census?

One of the key uses of the ethnic group question is to monitor discrimination. Evidence has shown that the Irish can be a group that suffer discrimination which is why a tick box was included in 2001. ONS acknowledge that in the 2001 Census to identify as Cornish, people had to deny that they were British. The inclusion of the national identity question for 2011 means this will not be an issue. The tick boxes that will be included in 2011 are still under development, however people will be able to identify themselves as Cornish by using the write in option in the national identity question or the ethnicity question. There are a number of criteria to consider when deciding which tick boxes should be included in a census question, size of the group is only one factor that is considered.

Will the 'other white' category be disaggregated?

Some users have identified a need to disaggregate the 'other white' category e.g. to identify certain Eastern European ethnicities. Each potential tick box category will under go a prioritisation exercise, however at this stage the user requirement for this information is less strong than for other groups. It is also expected that the full suite of census questions will provide further information on such groups, e.g. using country of birth, national identity and citizenship if it is included.

The Chinese category has been moved since the 2001 Census. Will this limit comparability of the information?

The Chinese category has moved from the other ethnic group section in 2001 to the Asian category. Analysis of the 2007 Test and small scale cognitive testing will help to identify the effect of moving this group.

Scotland has tested a question that replaces colour terminology with geographical identification. Is this approach being considered in England and Wales?

Scotland conducted a consultation exercise and changed their question as a result of reports that the use of colour terminology was not acceptable. Harmonisation across the UK is important and in addition to the consultation on ethnicity, ONS have carried out an extensive testing program, including focus groups, stakeholder meetings and small scale cognitive testing to look at the acceptability of colour terminology. A final decision on the wording of the question will not be made until the programme of consultation and testing is complete.

Will a tick box be included for Gypsies?

ONS included a tick box for Gypsy/Romany/Irish Traveller in the 2007 Census Test and are continuing to test a tick box for Gypsies/Irish travellers. We recognise that this group can suffer disadvantage and there can be language difficulties which make the use of a write in option less preferable.

There are important differences between Gypsy/Romany/Traveller. Why are these groups merged into one category?

ONS recognise the difference between these groups. However, ONS have not received strong enough user requirements to warrant splitting out these groups.

National Identity

Why is a question on national identity necessary?

National identity has been included on surveys since 2001. It was first considered following public and political concerns that the 2001 census did not allow people to record their identities accurately. Research has shown that the inclusion of a national identity question improves responses to the ethnicity question which follows on from it. It allows ethnic minority populations to express their affiliation with countries in the UK, particularly those that were born in the UK. It also allows people with a White British background to express their affiliation with one of the devolved administrations.

Will the inclusion of questions on national identity, ethnicity, country of birth and citizenship make the respondent feel that questions are being repeated?

ONS understand the concerns on this issue. The migration and ethnicity topic groups are working closely together and are testing these issues with the general public in the small scale testing conducted by the Data Collection Methodology team. If a citizenship question is included it is possible that UK born people will be routed away from this question to avoid perceived repetition.

Will a Northern Irish tick box be included in the national identity question?

A Northern Irish tick box was included in the 2007 Test questionnaire and it is expected that the box will also be in the 2011 Census.

Is any consideration given to the fact that it is a subjective question and may not be completed by the person themselves if the householder completes the form?

ONS instruct a householder to complete the questionnaire and we hope that individuals will be consulted on their answers. ONS are aware of the issues of proxy completion; this has always been an issue for the census.

Can someone write in Cornish in the national identity question even though this is not a nation?

The national identity question is subjective and is different from legal nationality or citizenship. If someone strongly feels that they identify as Cornish then it is acceptable for them to write this in.

A national identity questions with multiple tick boxes should read - what do you consider your national identities to be?

The Data Collection Methodology team carry out thorough testing on the wording and instructions of questions and make recommendations to Census. This suggestion will be passed to them for consideration.

If someone is deaf then this is their identity, this should be included as an option.

The question is attempting to measure national identity and the countries that people feel connected to rather than identity in general.

Religion

Pagans are a large and fast growing religious group. Will a pagan tick box be included in 2011?

ONS have carried out an extensive consultation exercise on the ethnicity, identity, language and religion topics. The inclusion of a pagan tick box will depend on the priority of this information against other religious categories. ONS

are using the Omnibus survey to test the success of a pagan tick box but its inclusion in 2011 may depend on the space available for tick boxes in the religion question.

If a Pagan category is included, this should be subdivided further e.g. Wicca

It is very unlikely that there will be space to split religions into their denominations.

Is it true that many people reported their religion as Jedi in 2001?

Yes, in 2001, 273000 people recorded their religion as Jedi. It is a legal requirement that respondents complete the Census questionnaire accurately. A large amount of government funds are allocated to local areas based on the results of the Census and therefore it is essential that accurate data is collected. Unfortunately we can do little to control those who choose to misreport their details on the Census but we hope that an effective publicity strategy will help to prevent this in 2011.

Which category should I use as a Methodist?

In the current religion question it would be necessary to use the other religion tick box and write in boxes to record this.

Could the religion question be expanded to cover what religion were you brought up with and what religion you are involved in or practice now?

The religion question is aiming to measure religious affiliation rather than religious practice and the key requirement is for information on current religion rather than religious upbringing. ONS recognise that people could say they have a religion even if they only have a loose cultural affiliation and don't practice. Comparability with the 2001 Census is important for many users and space restrictions mean it will not be possible to include two questions on religion.

How would you record the different religions such as Jehovah Witness?

The write in box can be used to record any religion that is not covered by a tick box.

The question would be better worded "what is your religion or belief?"

ONS recognise that new equality legislation prevents discrimination on the grounds of religion or non-religious belief. There is further testing to be carried out and ONS will look into the new legislation and any implications for the religion question.

Why isn't the Christian category broken down?

Although some users who responded to the consultation requested that the Christian category should be broken down there was not a strong requirement for this information and is not being considered by ONS at the current time.

Language

There is only space in the language question to write in one language. This is not sufficient.

ONS recognise that this is not adequate and are currently testing a question that allows more space for write in answers. However, due to space restrictions it is not always possible to include the ideal amount of space for write in responses for a number of questions.

The focus of language needs seems to be on deprivation and negative factors. The positive factors such as how the use of language can enrich a society seem to have been ignored.

The requirements mentioned at the open meetings are those that ONS have received through the consultation exercises that have been conducted. This phase of consultation is not complete and any other user needs including those raised at these meetings will be taken into account.

The 2007 Test question does not differentiate level of proficiency. Someone could be fluent in a language or only have a basic level of understanding.

ONS recognise that the question requires more clarity and are working on simplifying the question. Analysis of the 2007 test data and further cognitive testing will reveal how well the question is working and whether it needs to be improved.

If you decide not to use the language question in the Census, how will the user requirement be met?

If language is not included on the Census then ONS will look into another way to meet the user needs for this information, possibility through a survey such as the Integrated Household Survey (IHS).

I think this is the wrong question, perhaps the question should be what is the language spoken at home?

The key requirement identified to date is to understand whether people can communicate in English, and if not which language they can communicate in for the purpose of service provision etc. However, there are also a number of other user needs that have been identified and meeting them all in one question will not be possible. ONS will be carrying out further research and analysis to identify the most appropriate language question to use if a decision is taken to include a language question in the census.

2.4 General questions

Will the evaluation of the Census Test be done in house or externally?

The evaluation work will be completed in house by Census research staff.

Are there reports available for the 2001 Census?

Yes, quality reports are available on the National Statistics website.

How likely is it that questions will change after the Test?

The 2007 Test will be used to try out new and modified questions but there are some questions that won't be included that are likely to be included in the 2011 Census e.g. labour market questions. The decisions on the final content for the 2011 Census will be made in 2009 after the completion of the programme of consultation and testing.

Will there be three or four pages of individual questions for the 2011 Census?

No decision has yet been made on the length of the questionnaire. The 2007 Test will be four pages long and will provide the opportunity to test new questions. One of the key decisions affecting the length of the questionnaire will be the impact on response rate. It is anticipated that a decision upon length of questionnaire will be reached by June 08.

I am concerned that important information will not be collected if the three page option is used. How do we campaign for four pages?

ONS are fully aware of the need for information that would require four pages of questions per person. The decision will depend on factors such as the costs involved, and the effect that questionnaire length has upon response rate.

Could a different strategy be adopted for adults and children, i.e. four pages of questions for adults and fewer pages for children?

It was noted that this was an interesting idea, but that it would be very complex for large households and could result in people being missed. It was also agreed that this would be more difficult due to post-out/post-back methodology which is being considered for 2011.

What percentage of households needs a six person questionnaire?

Of the households requesting extra questionnaires for the 2001 Census, 75 per cent requested this for one additional person only. This worked out at three or four percent of the population. A questionnaire containing space for six individuals would eliminate this problem. As the 2011 Census expects to use mainly postal distribution, there is concern that people will not call up to request additional questionnaires so a 6 person questionnaire is being considered to improve the chance of getting a more accurate population count.

Has the colour been tested as it looks difficult for partially sighted people to read?

The questionnaire for the Test has been passed through the RNIB who have approved of the colours used. The colour will be reviewed again before 2011.

Has there been any consideration for returns on the internet?

Current thinking is that internet completion will be offered for the 2011 Census.

What does the law do to a person who does not want to fill in the form and for a person who lives with someone who disagrees/objects to filling in the Census?

It is the householder that is legally responsible for completing the Census questionnaire and ensuring that individual questions are completed for each member of the household. If the householder consistently refuses to cooperate then they will be prosecuted.

We've seen the English version of the Census Test questionnaire, will there be a Welsh version?

In England there will be an English version of the questionnaire only. Every household in Wales will be provided with an English and a Welsh questionnaire.

Why is it necessary to put England and Wales on the front of the questionnaire instead of just Census?

ONS conducts the Census for England and Wales. As there are separate questionnaires for England and Wales it is necessary to identify each questionnaire type on the front of the questionnaire.