

Topic guide: Sex Question Guidance

Introduction

- Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. We really value the help of members of the public.
- **Introduce yourself:** Hi, my name is _____ and I will be your interviewer for today, and this is _____ observer's name _____ and they will be observing today. We work for ONS – the office responsible for producing official statistics on many areas of society and the economy in the UK today; we also conduct the Census which counts the population of England and Wales.
- **Background and aims:** We are preparing for the next Census which will be carried out in 2021. Every household in the country is required by law to complete the Census. The Census asks questions about who the members of the household are, and the accommodation they live in.
- The next Census will be conducted mainly online. The purpose of this interview is to check how well the instructions for completing the questions work, what people think of them and whether any changes need to be made. We are also interested in your views around social media and online forums. We'll have a brief chat about that first.
- After that, I will share my screen with you and show you some questions, I would like you to explain how you would answer these questions and any thoughts you have while you are answering.
- I'll then be asking you some questions which will help us understand whether the instructions are working.
 - it's your views which are important. I didn't write the instructions; it is my role to test them. So please talk freely.
 - I will ask open questions – if any answers seem obvious it's because I don't want to make any assumptions about what people think. I'm not trying to catch you out.
 - There are no right and wrong answers.
- I would like to **record the interview**. It makes our analysis much easier and of better quality than if I had to take notes of everything said. But it will only be available to my small research team. Everything will be kept **confidential** - we'll produce a report on all the interviews, but it won't include any information which could identify you. Then the recording will be deleted. *[If any objection – ask for explanation and try to counter/reassure].*
- **[Administer the information sheet and explain that the incentive would be provided by the recruitment agency or ██████████.]**
- Any **questions** before we start?

START RECORDING!!!!

1. Social media

Interviewer: Take a conversational approach to this. If participant isn't engaging in this topic or becomes defensive, move on to the Census questions at the end of this section.

Great, thanks again for agreeing to help us out. We will first have a discussion about social media. We're interested in understanding how our customers and the public engage with us through social media.

- **What would you define as social media?**
- **Do you use any social media apps or platforms?**
 - **If yes: Would you describe yourself as a frequent, moderate or occasional user of social media?**

- **Next we'd like to know about how you engage with social media**
 - Do you use it for any of the following?
 - keeping in touch with friends and family?
 - keeping up to date with news and events?
 - promoting a business, charity or social group?
 - participating in private online discussion forums?
 - engaging in public discussion threads such as comments on news sites, You Tube, Instagram, Reddit or Twitter?
 - Expressing your own political, religious or cultural views?
 - Following particular topics, people, groups or organisations? What topics most interest you on social media?
 - Signing or circulating petitions against an organisation, opinion or activity.
- Have you ever been influenced by social media campaigns initiated by others, for example by a prominent voice in a particular community?

What type of campaign was this? What happened?

- **Have you ever seen social media posts about us, the Office for National Statistics?**
 - Do you remember what was it about?
 - If gives details: Did you reply/comment on it?
- **Have you engaged with public organisations like the ONS via social media in the past?**
 - (Can you give me an example?)
- **Do you, or would you consider, using social media to give feedback to organisations, for example on their products, services or policies?**
- **Are there other ways you would provide feedback to organisations and businesses?**

Thanks - that was really useful. If you don't have anything else to add we'll move on to the second part of the interview on census?

- **Have you heard of the Census before we talked about it just now?**
- **What are your views on the Census?**
- **Do you remember the 2011 Census, did you interact with social media posts about the 2011 Census at that time? (for example, the Jedi campaign).**

Self-completion and observations

- So, for this next stage I am going to show you some questions and I need you to **'think aloud'** so when you see the question come up on the screen – be vocal and just say whatever comes to mind.
- Please then tell me what answer you would give to the question, I won't be able to help you choose your answer, because we want to see how people would manage in the normal situation of completing it independently.
- If you are not sure of the correct answer just tell me what you are considering and then continue how you feel best.

Instructions for interviewer

1. **SHARE the SEX QUESTION;** remind them to think aloud and say how they would answer the question, if they answer it go to step 4.
2. **PARTICIPANT ASKS TO CLICK HELP BUTTON:** If asked say it would lead to additional Guidance. Display Guidance A, remind them to think aloud.
 - a. Make a note that they have looked at the guidance.
 - b. Make a note if the participant expresses any need for help but does not ask you to click the help button.
3. **PARTICIPANT ASKS TO CLICK 'CHOOSE ANOTHER SECTION' link:**
 - a. RECORD if asked - and probe later
 - b. CHOOSES GENDER IDENTITY section: go to the gender identity question.
 - c. CHOOSES OTHER SECTION: explain that we don't have access to those questions today and ask them if they want to go back to the sex question or if they want to go to a gender identity question.
 - d. Go back to sex question, or move on to gender identity question.
4. **SHARE GENDER IDENTITY question** and ask them to think aloud and what they would do on this page. If they answer it go to step 9.
5. **PARTICIPANT ASKS TO CLICK HELP BUTTON** Show them the guidance for the gender question and take note of any comments made.
6. **PARTICIPANT ASKS TO CLICK 'CHOOSE ANOTHER SECTION' link:**
 - a. RECORD if asked - and probe later
 - b. CHOOSES SEX QUESTION – share the sex question on your screen and ask them what they want to do.
 - c. CHOOSES OTHER SECTION: explain that we don't have access to those questions today and ask them if they want to go back to the gender identity question.
 - d. Go back to gender identity question and ask them what they want to do.
7. **IF NOT COMPLETED SEX Q** ask them if they want to go back to the sex question, if not consider it a refusal to answer the sex question and ask relevant questions in the topic guide.
8. **IF NOT COMPLETED GENDER Q** consider it a refusal to answer the gender question and ask relevant questions in the topic guide.
9. Thank you for going through that with me. We'll now move onto the part where I will ask you some questions to check how the instructions are working.
10. **GO TO PROBES**

2. Sex question

Interviewer: go to the sex question slide and share it with the participant on your screen. I'm now going to ask you some questions about this question.

- What did you understand the question to be asking you?
- In your own words, please describe how you interpret the term 'sex'?

If the participant answered the question: -

- How easy or difficult was it to answer this question?
- You gave the answer X. How did you decide on your answer to this question?
- Is this how you would usually answer this question?
- - If not, why not
- *[If guidance was not used]* If you weren't sure how to answer what would you do?
 - Would you have needed guidance/ extra information for this question?

If the participant selected the link to 'choose another section and return to this later'

Interviewer: present the choose another section slide on your screen

- Why did you click this link?

If the participant refused to answer the question: -

- I note that you refused to answer this question, can you please talk me through why you decided not to?

Ask all participants: -

- How acceptable or unacceptable is this question? Why?
- Did you notice the information under the question? *Prompt if required: - a question on gender identity will follow*
 - What did you understand this information to mean?
 - In your own words, please describe how you interpret the term 'gender identity'?
 - What were your thoughts on this information?
 - How clear or unclear did you find this information?
 - How useful or not useful was this information for you?
 - Did this information influence how you answered this question?

3. Gender identity question

Interviewer: display the gender question and share your screen with the participant. I'm now going to ask you some questions about this question.

- What did you understand the question to be asking you?
- In your own words, please describe how you interpret the term 'gender you identify with'?

If the participant answered the question: -

- How easy or difficult was it to answer this question?
- You gave the answer X. How did you decide on your answer to this question?

If the participant selected the link to 'choose another section and return to this later'

Interviewer: present the choose another section slide on your screen

- Why did you click the link?

If participant refused to answer the question: -

- I note that you refused to answer this question, can you please talk me through why you decided not to?

Ask all participants: -

- ***[If guidance was not used]*** If you weren't sure how to answer what would you do?
 - Would you have liked/needed guidance/ extra information for this question?
- **Did you notice the instruction under the no response option [please enter gender identity]?**
 - What did you understand that instruction to mean?
 - What were your thoughts on this instruction?
 - How clear or unclear did you find the instruction?
 - How useful or not useful was this instruction for you?
- **How acceptable or unacceptable is this question? Why?**
- **Did you notice the information under the question? *Prompt if required* - this question is voluntary.**
 - What did you understand that information to mean?
 - What were your thoughts on this information?
 - How clear or unclear did you find this information?
 - How useful or not useful was this information for you?

4. Guidance A

(No explicit instruction)

Interviewer: If the participant asked you to click on the guidance link: Go to the sex question, remind the participant that they asked you to click on the 'Help' button and that you're now going to discuss the guidance they read at the time with them. Explain that you're going to show them three versions of instructions for the sex question that ONS is considering using, starting with the one they saw at the time of answering the question. Then go to Guidance A slide.

Interviewer: If the participant did not ask you to click on the guidance link: Go to the sex question and ask them if they noticed the help button. Tell them that if they clicked on this, they would be taken to some guidance on how to answer the sex question. Explain that you're going to show them three versions of instructions for the sex question that ONS is considering using, starting with this one. Then go to the Guidance A slide.

[if not used] Did you notice the help button?

- **What are your overall thoughts on this guidance?**
- **Was there any part of it that stood out to you? Which part? Why?**
- **What did you understand the guidance to be telling you? Was there any part you do not understand?**
- **How clear or unclear was this guidance? In what way?**
- **How helpful or unhelpful did you find the guidance in helping you decide how to answer? In what way?**

- **Having read the guidance: -**
 - Would you change your answer to the sex question or not change it?
 - How acceptable or unacceptable did you find the wording? Why?
 - Have your feelings towards answering the sex question changed? How?
 - Have your feelings towards completing the 2021 Census changed to be more or less positive? Why?

Interviewer: try to ascertain if there is a risk that the participant would stop completing the Census as a whole and/or try and skip the sex question.

If the participant selected the link to 'why we ask this question link'

I noticed you clicked on the link 'why we ask this question'

Interviewer: present the why we ask this question slide on your screen

- **Why did you click the link?**
- **What do you understand the link to be telling you?**
- **What do you think of the wording?**

- Is the wording acceptable or unacceptable?
- **Is the link helpful or unhelpful?**

If the participant did not select the link to 'why we ask this question link'

- **Did you notice this link at the time of answering?**

Interviewer: present the why we ask this question slide on your screen

- **What do you understand the link to be telling you?**
- **What do you think of the wording?**
 - Is the wording acceptable or unacceptable?
- **Is the link helpful or unhelpful?**

Ask all participants

[for the overall page] Are there any improvements that you think should be made?

5. Guidance C

(Guidance states - It's up to you how you answer this question. If you're not sure how to answer you could, for example, use the sex registered on any of your official documents.)

Interviewer: Share Guidance C slide with the participant and invite them to read it. Explain this is another version of instructions for the sex question that ONS is considering using.

Present the participant with the guidance C showcard and invite them to read it

- **What are your overall thoughts on this guidance?**
- **Was there any part of it that stood out to you? Which part? Why?**
- **What did you understand the guidance to be telling you? Is there anything parts you do not understand?**
- **How clear or unclear was this guidance? In what way?**
- **How helpful or unhelpful did you find the guidance in helping you decide how to answer? In what way?**

- **Having read the guidance: -**
 - Would you change your answer to the sex question or not change it?
 - How acceptable or unacceptable did you find the wording? Why?
 - Have your feelings towards answering the sex question changed? How?
 - Have your feelings towards completing the 2021 Census changed to be more or less positive? Why?

Interviewer: try to ascertain if there is a risk that the participant would stop completing the Census as a whole and/or try and skip the sex question

[If not covered previously] If the participant selected the link to ‘why we ask this question link’

I noticed you clicked on the link ‘why we ask this question’

Interviewer: present the why we ask this question slide on your screen

- **Why did you click the link?**
- **What do you understand the link to be telling you?**
- **What do you think of the wording?**
 - Is the wording acceptable or unacceptable?
- **Is the link helpful or unhelpful?**

[If not covered previously] If the participant did not select the link to ‘why we ask this question link’

- **Did you notice this link at the time of answering?**

Interviewer: present the why we ask this question slide on your screen

- **What do you understand the link to be telling you?**
- **What do you think of the wording?**
 - Is the wording acceptable or unacceptable?
- **Is the link helpful or unhelpful?**

Ask all participants

- **What do you understand by the phrase “It's up to you how you answer this question”?**
 - How acceptable or unacceptable is this phrase?
 - How clear or unclear was this phrase?
 - How helpful or unhelpful is this phrase to you?

- **What do you understand by the phrase “use the sex registered on any of your official documents”?**
 - How acceptable or unacceptable is this phrase?
 - How clear or unclear was this phrase?
 - How helpful or unhelpful is this phrase to you?

- **Are there any improvements to this guidance that you think should be made?**

6. Guidance B

(Guidance states: If you're not sure how to answer, use the sex registered on your birth certificate.)

Interviewer: Share Guidance B slide with the participant and invite them to read it. Explain this is another version of instructions for the sex question that ONS is considering using.

What are your overall thoughts on this guidance?

- **Was there any part of it that stood out to you? Which part? Why?**
- **What did you understand the guidance to be telling you? Is there anything parts you do not understand?**
- **How clear or unclear was this guidance? In what way?**
- **How helpful or unhelpful did you find the guidance in helping you decide how to answer? In what way?**

- **Having read the guidance: -**
 - Would you change or not change your answer to the sex question?
 - How acceptable or unacceptable did you find the wording? Why?
 - Have your feelings towards answering the sex question changed to be more or less positive? Why?
 - Have your feelings towards completing the 2021 Census changed to be more or less positive? Why?

Interviewer: try to ascertain if there is a risk that the participant would stop completing the Census as a whole and/or try and skip the sex question.

[If not covered previously] If the participant selected the link to ‘why we ask this question link’

I noticed you clicked on the link ‘why we ask this question’

Interviewer: present the why we ask this question slide on your screen

- **Why did you click the link?**

- **What do you understand the link to be telling you?**
- **What do you think of the wording?**
 - Is the wording acceptable or unacceptable?
- **Is the link helpful or unhelpful?**

[If not covered previously] If the participant did not select the link to ‘why we ask this question link’

- **Did you notice this link at the time of answering?**

Interviewer: present the why we ask this question slide on your screen

- **What do you understand the link to be telling you?**
- **What do you think of the wording?**
 - Is the wording acceptable or unacceptable?
- **Is the link helpful or unhelpful?**

Ask all participants

- **What do you understand by the phrase “sex registered on your birth certificate”?**
 - How acceptable or unaccepted is this phrase?
 - How clear or unclear was this phrase?
 - How helpful or unhelpful is this phrase to you?
- **Are there any improvements to this guidance that you think should be made?**
 - **What changes would you suggest?**

7. Guidance D

*(Guidance states - If you’re not sure how to answer, use the sex registered on your birth certificate **when you were born.**)*

What are your overall thoughts on this guidance?

- **Was there any part of it that stood out to you? Which part? Why?**
- **What did you understand the guidance to be telling you? Is there anything parts you do not understand?**
- **How clear or unclear was this guidance? In what way?**

- **How helpful or unhelpful did you find the guidance in helping you decide how to answer? In what way?**
- **Having read the guidance: -**
 - Would you change or not change your answer to the sex question?
 - How acceptable or unacceptable did you find the wording? Why?
 - Have your feelings towards answering the sex question changed to be more or less positive? Why?
 - Have your feelings towards completing the 2021 Census changed to be more or less positive? Why?

Interviewer: try to ascertain if there is a risk that the participant would stop completing the Census as a whole and/or try and skip the sex question.

[If not covered previously] If the participant selected the link to ‘why we ask this question link’

I noticed you clicked on the link ‘why we ask this question’

Interviewer: present the why we ask this question slide on your screen

- **Why did you click the link?**
- **What do you understand the link to be telling you?**
- **What do you think of the wording?**
 - Is the wording acceptable or unacceptable?
- **Is the link helpful or unhelpful?**

[If not covered previously] If the participant did not select the link to ‘why we ask this question link’

- **Did you notice this link at the time of answering?**

Interviewer: present the why we ask this question slide on your screen

- **What do you understand the link to be telling you?**
- **What do you think of the wording?**
 - Is the wording acceptable or unacceptable?
- **Is the link helpful or unhelpful?**

Ask all participants

- **What do you understand by the phrase “sex registered on your birth certificate when you were born”?**
 - How acceptable or unaccepted is this phrase?
 - How clear or unclear was this phrase?

- How helpful or unhelpful is this phrase to you?
- **Are there any improvements to this guidance that you think should be made?**
 - **What changes would you suggest**

8. Comparison of all guidance

- **Which version did you find the most informative/helpful?**
- **Which version do you feel most enables you to answer the question accurately? Why?**
- **Which version did you find the easiest to read? Why?**
- **Which version did you prefer? Why?**
- **Which version did you least prefer? Why?**
- **Which guidance is the most acceptable to you? Why?**

9. Social engagement and the Census sex question

Interviewer: Take a conversational approach to this. If participant isn't engaging in this topic or becomes defensive, bring the discussion to a natural end and move to the Conclusion.

So, having talked about all that ...

- **Have you discussed answering questions about your sex with other people or organisations in the past?**
 - How?
 - Who was that with?
- **Would you seek advice or support from your peers or networks about answering the Census sex question that you've seen today?**
 - Who would you engage with?
 - What methods of communication would you use?
 - What would you like to discuss?

- What advice, if any, would you give others about answering the census?
- What advice, if any, would you give others about answering the sex question you have seen today?

Interviewer: Ask only if participant has discussed answering questions about their sex with others.

- Have you previously tried to influence or change the way that sex questions are asked on official forms like the census?
 - How?

Ask only if the participant has objections to the Census question or any of the guidance and has indicated that they would interact with social media about it:-

- Having seen the Census question, would you try to influence how others respond to the questions or the census as a whole?
How?

10.Conclusion

That brings us to the end of the questions. I know there was a lot in there as we covered two very different topics and I really appreciate your time and your thoughts.

- Was there anything else you want to mention?
- Any questions?

Thanks again for your valuable help