

Census Advisory Group for Wales

Ethnicity Testing in Wales by the Welsh Assembly Government CAGW(07) 02

Introduction

The Office of the Chief Social Research Officer (OCSRO) was asked by the Statistics Directorate within the Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) to assist the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and WAG with its development of the 2011 Census. Specifically, OCSRO was asked to examine the proposed 2011 Census form – and explore (using cognitive interviews) how Somalis living in Wales interpret, understand and answer the Census questions that relate to ethnicity, national identity, language and religion. Cognitive interviews are an internationally recognised method for testing questions and questionnaires. Cognitive interviews focus on how respondents understand each question; how they remember (and / or recall) information; how they select a response; and how they react to sensitive questions.

In addition to carrying out interviews with Somalis, OCSRO will also be carrying out focus groups with individuals living in Wales who would describe themselves as white Welsh / British in order to explore the acceptability of terms used in the ethnicity and national identity questions. The focus groups will also explore whether there are any sensitivities associated with the ethnicity and national identity questions that need to be considered and addressed by the Welsh Assembly Government.

The following document provides a summary of key findings from the cognitive interviews conducted with Somalis in Cardiff. It also provides an update of OCSRO's plans to conduct focus groups.

Cognitive interviews with Somalis – key findings

The fourteen cognitive interviews conducted with Somali respondents in Cardiff have raised a number of issues in relation to the proposed 2011 Census. These issues relate not only to specific census questions (and the interpretation of specific words and the meaning of these questions), but also to the layout of the Census and the instructions for those completing the form.

- *National identity question:* For those respondents who were born in Wales, they either ticked “Welsh” or “British”. Other respondents wrote in their national identity (e.g. Somali) although they tended not to tick the OTHER box. A number of respondents commented that they had not noticed that this was a “multi-tick” question – and that they would have ticked more than one box if they had seen this instruction. This has implications for respondents born in Wales – who may just tick “Welsh” rather than

“Welsh” and “British”, which respondents commented that they would have done – had they realised it was a multi-tick question.

- *Defining national identity:* Respondents found it difficult to define national identity and individual interpretations of the term national identity differed from person to person. Nonetheless, three common themes emerged. The first was that national identity was about the perceptions of others. In particular, respondents commented that while they might “feel” British or Welsh, others would not see them as British or Welsh – and as a result, they felt that they could not tick the British or Welsh box. Secondly, respondents commented that national identity was about “how you see yourself” – and what nationality you “feel” you belong to. Finally, national identity was about whether you were “entitled” to call yourself a particular nationality. This was usually based on the claim that you belonged to a particular nationality if you held the citizenship of that particular country. In general, respondents commented that national identity was something that could change (depending on which country you were living in and for how long) – whereas ethnicity was about background and origin.
- *Ethnicity question:* There was no “standard way” for Somalis to answer this question. Some ticked the “African” response in the British or Black British section. Others wrote in “Somali” in the “Any other black background, write in” section. Others ticked more than one box.
- *Defining ethnicity:* When asked about the terms ethnicity – all respondents commented that they were Somali (but did not necessarily write this in the “OTHER” tick box). Ethnicity was defined by respondents as being about an individual’s background – including where their parents had come from, where they were from “originally” and where their “origins” were.
- *Passport Question:* Some respondents interpreted this question as being “the passport that they currently held” – as opposed to the passport(s) that they could hold. A number of respondents commented that they could have held a Somali passport but chose not to write this down, primarily because a Somali passport is not recognised by the international community. A small number of respondents stated that they did not have a passport (but held “travel documents” instead). Instead of writing which passport they were entitled to hold – these individuals tended to write “travel documents” in the “OTHER” section of the question.
- *Language question:* Almost all respondents wrote an additional language in the “Other language. Write in” section of the Census form – with the majority of respondents writing in “Somali”. It was noticeable, however, that the majority of respondents were also fluent in other languages – and almost all noted that there was not enough space for them to write down these additional languages. Where respondents had written Somali – several respondents did not see the associated tick boxes (on whether they “understood spoken” or could speak, read and/or write that particular language). A high number of respondents did not tick the “Understand Spoken” box for English – despite then ticking “speak”, “read” and “write”.

When asked about this, some respondents stated that they thought this response was for people who could only understand spoken English (and could not speak English themselves).

- *Routing of questions:* The routing of question (and associated routing instructions) were sometimes difficult for respondents to understand and follow. Respondents commented that they would be particularly difficult for those who were not used to completing official forms. A number of respondents stated that they were “used to” filling in job applications and as such were “used to” and able to follow the routing.
- *Other write in box:* Another common issue was not ticking the “OTHER WRITE IN” box – despite writing something in this particular section (e.g. the ethnicity and national identity question). This has implications for data entry at a later date.

Focus groups with “white Welsh / British” in Wales

OCSRO is currently planning to conduct six focus groups with individuals who define themselves as white Welsh / British. The aim of these focus groups is to examine:

- How respondents in Wales think about (and answer) the question “What is your national identity?”
- How respondents in Wales think about (and answer) the question “What is your ethnic group?”
- What respondents in Wales think about the new tick box category for the ethnicity question: “White: Welsh, English, Scottish, Northern Irish or British”.

The overall aim of the focus groups is to make an informed judgement about whether there could be confusion or objections to the ethnicity question from the point of view of respondents who define themselves as “white” and “Welsh / British”. Specifically, the focus group discussions will explore the following:

- The concept of “ethnicity” – what does this mean to people / what comes to mind / how would they describe their ethnic group?
- The different ways in which “ethnic group” could be captured in the census. This would be explored by presenting different options to participants and ascertaining how people would answer these questions.
- Issues around the different options: Was there any confusion in relation to the description, the layout, and the terminology used for the national identity and ethnicity questions?
- The rationale behind the current version of the national identity and ethnicity questions: What do they think? How do they feel about the questions in their current format? What alternatives are there? What would they prefer to see? Why?

- What information / guidance could be provided around these questions? What is needed to address confusion / concerns? Would additional information / guidance help to address any confusion and concerns?

The focus groups will take place in Cardiff, Carmarthen and Wrexham at the end of November, with the view to providing key findings to the Statistics Directorate at the beginning of December. Three of the focus groups will be moderated in Welsh.