



ONS Census Transformation Programme

The 2021 Census

Assessment of initial user
requirements on content for
England and Wales

Armed forces community
topic report

May 2016

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1. Introduction

In June 2015 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published the public consultation document ‘[The 2021 Census initial view on content for England and Wales](https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/consultations/the2021censusinitialviewoncontentforenglandandwales)’¹. This discussed the initial views of ONS regarding the potential inclusion of current (2011) and additional topics in the 2021 Census. The public consultation was open from 4 June 2015 to 27 August 2015 and aimed to promote discussion and encourage the development of strong cases for topics users wanted to be included in the 2021 Census. The focus was on information required from the 2021 Census, not the detailed questions that could be asked on the questionnaire.

ONS received 1,095 responses to the consultation; 279 of these were from organisations and 816 were from individuals. Although the armed forces community was not specifically consulted on, 10 respondents discussed the collection of armed forces community data within their response.

‘Armed forces community’ is a new topic proposed by users in response to the topic consultation. There are no sub-topics within this topic.

Based on the evidence given by users, the topic was evaluated using the criteria detailed in the consultation document using a standardised method. The criteria are listed in table 1 below. The criteria largely reflect those used in the 2011 Census topic consultation and have undergone expert review within ONS and via the Census Advisory Groups for use in the 2021 Census topic consultation. More detail on the scoring methodology is available in section 2 of the document ‘[The 2021 Census - Assessment of initial user requirements on content for England & Wales: Response to consultation](https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/consultations/2021censustopicconsultation/assessmentofinitialuserrequirementscontentforenglandandwalesresponsetoconsultation)’².

Table 1 Evaluation criteria

<p>1. User requirement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose • Small geographies or populations • Alternative sources • Multivariate analysis • Comparability beyond England and Wales • Continuity with previous censuses 	<p>2. Other consideration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data quality • Public acceptability • Respondent burden • Financial concerns • Questionnaire mode
	<p>3. Operational requirement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maximising coverage or population bases • Coding of derived variables and adjustment for non-response • Routing and validation

This report provides ONS’s updated view based on our evaluation of user responses against these evaluation criteria.

¹ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/consultations/the2021censusinitialviewoncontentforenglandandwales>

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/census/censustransformationprogramme/consultations/2021censustopicconsultation/assessmentofinitialuserrequirementscontentforenglandandwalesresponsetoconsultation.pdf>

2. Background

The armed forces community includes both current and ex-service personnel (both regulars and reservists) as well as their dependants: including spouses, civil partners, children and widows/widowers.

The Armed Forces Act 2011 states that the Secretary of State (for Defence) must prepare an armed forces covenant report each year to record the effects of membership, or former membership, of the armed forces on service people in different fields, including healthcare, education and housing. The report must state whether armed forces personnel are at a disadvantage when compared with other persons and should comment on whether the making of special provision for the affected people would be justified.

In response to this, different government departments have taken steps to support the armed forces covenant. For example, the Department for Education (DfE) introduced the Service Pupil Premium in 2011, for maintained sector schools in England. This provides extra funding to schools to support children of service families.

The increased public policy interest in the service community appears to have led to an increased demand for information on this topic. The Welsh Government, the Department of Health (DH), Ministry of Defence (MOD) - Defence Statistics, and the Local Government Association were amongst respondents requesting an additional census topic in relation to the armed forces. Requests varied amongst respondents, with some requesting data specifically on veterans and others stating a wider interest in current service personnel and their families.

Although armed forces information was not collected as a dedicated topic in the 2011 Census, some information was included in census outputs, derived from occupation. For example, published tables included current members of the armed forces by residence type, sex and age down to local authority level as well as data on associated persons in households containing members of the armed forces. The Ministry of Defence publish monthly service personnel statistics and some information on veterans, and the Royal British Legion has collected data on veterans through a household survey. However, in their responses to this consultation, data users discussed drawbacks with the currently available sources of information.

Following a [review of the Integrated Household Survey questionnaire in 2014](#)³, questions on veterans sponsored by the Ministry of Defence, have been added to the ONS Annual Population Survey. However, although the Annual Population Survey data may provide an additional source in the future, outputs are yet to be published.

Table 2 Initial view of ONS

Topic detail	Initial view	Collected in 2011?
Armed forces community	New topic proposed by users in response to the consultation – no initial view presented	No

³ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/get-involved/consultations-and-user-surveys/consultations/integrated-household-survey-questionnaire-content-review---2014/index.html>

3. Summary of consultation responses

Table 3 presents the number of responses by type of respondent and organisational sector. The organisations that responded to this topic are listed by sector in Annex A.

Table 3 Armed forces topic - number of responses by type of respondent

Type of respondent	Total responses	
	N	% total responses
Individual	0	0
Organisation (all sectors)	10	100
Sector		% organisation responses
- Government department/public body	3	30
- Local authority	4	40
- Health organisation	0	0
- Housing	1	10
- Academic / research	0	0
- Charity and voluntary	2	20
- Commercial	0	0
- Genealogist/family historian	0	0
- Other	0	0
Total responses	10	100

Note: Percentages might not add to 100% due to rounding.

Note: An organisation may have submitted more than one response.

The quotes below reflect the views of a range of consultation respondents on how data about the armed forces community are, or could be, used.

Users, including central and local government and charities, commented on using the data to target support for veterans where it is most needed. Respondents also said that the data would be used to help fulfil the armed forces covenant and to support local and health authorities with resource allocation and service provision.

Ministry of Defence (MOD) - Defence Statistics: *“The information would aid the Government (both national and local), NHS, companies and charities with the allocation of resource, delivery of services, developing of policies and monitoring in support of the armed forces covenant. As part of the Armed Forces Act 2011 the Defence Secretary is obliged to report annually on the progress made by the Government in honouring the covenant. The MOD is currently working with OGD to develop metrics which will highlight where, if anywhere, the armed forces community is disadvantaged. Information on the total number of veterans and dependants and their location would enable numbers being collected by OGD to be put into context.”*

Local Government Association: *“Current data sources are not robust enough to allow councils to adequately plan local services for veterans. As such, this group has difficulties when trying to access health, social care and housing options. Councils are also experiencing criticisms for not fulfilling their obligations under the community covenant.”*

City of Wolverhampton Council: *“It would be invaluable if we could collect data on people with a military connection as there is currently no data available in this area. The areas of specific interest relate to finding out if people are serving members of the armed forces; if they are veterans or reservists; and if they are dependents of serving personnel. This would go a long way to helping to establish a military footprint in the area which, in turn, would help establish their needs and plan services more appropriately.”*

The Royal British Legion discussed how they would use the data to position their services where they are most needed:

The Royal British Legion: *“For the Legion to continue to spend donated charitable funds in a way that maximises the support that we provide, it’s vital that we are able to position our services in geographic areas where they are most needed. As those in the ex-service community of working age are more likely than their general population contemporaries to have a long term health condition, the need for charities such as the Legion to be geographically relevant is further increased. Being able to derive population statistics for the ex-service community by local authority level will enable local authorities to assess strategic need accurately, commission services effectively and therefore honour their obligations under the community covenants.”*

However, several local authority respondents suggested that data on military veterans would be better captured through non-census sources. For example:

Salford City Council: *“ONS is engaged in an extensive research programme to better understand, improve and obtain access to live administrative and other data sets many of which have the potential to provide better and more timely/frequent data than the decennial census. The council believes that access to data relating to military veterans would be better provided in this way.”*

4. Evaluation

The following sections show the scores allocated to the topic by individual criterion based on the evidence given by users. The criteria largely reflect those used in 2011, but have undergone expert review within ONS and via the Census Advisory Groups. The document '[The 2021 Census - Assessment of initial user requirements on content for England & Wales: Response to consultation](#)'⁴ gives details on the scoring methodology including:

- 'user requirements criteria', including a description of relative weights, are described in section 2.1 of the document. Note that, in the following tables, the overall score is weighted and is not the sum of the scores for individual criteria
- 'other considerations' are described in section 2.2 of the document. These will predominately be used in conjunction with the user requirement score to steer the development of the census questionnaire and the production of administrative data research outputs
- 'operational requirements' are described in section 2.3, of the document. ONS has operational uses for some of the data collected in the census, of which the most important is maximising coverage of the 2021 Census. Each sub-topic is categorised as being of maximum, moderate or minimum importance in relation to operational requirements.

4.1 User requirements - armed forces community

Table 4 User requirement score by criterion

Criterion	Score	Evidence
Weighted Overall Score	62	Low user need
Purpose	8	<p>Central and local government and charity sector respondents indicated that information on veterans and currently serving armed forces would be used to influence resource allocation and service delivery, particularly in relation to meeting the recommendations in the armed forces covenant which exists to redress the disadvantages that the armed forces community may face in comparison to other citizens.</p> <p>The Local Government Association requested an additional census topic on 'Armed Forces Veterans' and stated that:</p> <p><i>"Information is used to allocate resources on health, social care, housing, and leisure. Local authorities need to determine the needs of their local population in terms of health, social care and housing requirements. Armed forces veterans are a specific group who require specific support. Information is also required to allow councils to fulfil their obligations under the National Armed Forces Covenant and local Armed Forces Community Covenant...A more accurate indication of the location and number of veterans would</i></p>

⁴ <https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/census/censustransformationprogramme/consultations/2021censustopicconsultation/assessmentofinitialuserrequirementscontentforenglandandwalesresponsetoconsultation.pdf>

Criterion	Score	Evidence
		<p><i>allow councils to include the data in JSNAs and hence commission more effective provision in health and social care services. Mental health services have been particularly highlighted as not meeting the needs of veterans. The data would also be used to allow consideration within housing allocations. Finally, councils have agreed, under the AFCC, to take into account the specific needs of armed service personnel, their families and veterans in the delivery of their local services, and they are unable to adequately undertake this without robust local data."</i></p> <p>The Welsh Government requested that further information on the armed forces community be collected in the census and said that:</p> <p><i>"Having reliable information on the armed forces community in Wales will support the delivery of community covenants, future policy development, and target services to where they are needed."</i></p> <p>The Royal British Legion requested an additional topic on 'The (ex-) armed forces community' and wrote that:</p> <p><i>"In order to ensure that our welfare work, our care services and our work with those who have made the largest sacrifice, such as the injured and bereaved, reaches those who need it the most, reliable and comprehensive data is essential. As a responsive organisation that delivers much needed support to the ex-service community in England and Wales, it is critical that we are able to access the hardest to reach communities and catch those who are currently falling through the net of state support."</i></p> <p>Ministry of Defence (MOD) - Defence Statistics highlighted that specific funding has been allocated to up-holding the armed forces covenant:</p> <p><i>"The importance of the armed forces covenant is demonstrated by chancellor's decision to make funding for the covenant permanent."</i></p>
Small geographies or populations	7	<p>The main use of the data outlined by respondents was to identify areas of need at local authority level. For example, Ministry of Defence (MOD) - Defence Statistics said that:</p> <p><i>"The MOD is frequently being asked for the number of veterans and dependants by local authority and CCG etc. Having the information by small geographies would aid local authorities and CCG's etc. to allocate resource, deliver services and develop policies in support of the armed forces covenant. It would aid the MOD in monitoring of the armed forces covenant and identify the areas where, if any, the armed forces community is disadvantaged."</i></p> <p>The Royal British Legion substantiated the request for local authority level data by stating that:</p> <p><i>"Data that can be aggregated to national, regional and local authority level and provides comparable statistics between the ex-service community and the general population is therefore not only helpful, but paramount if the Government are to monitor and address disadvantage."</i></p>

Criterion	Score	Evidence
		<p>However, there was also some evidence of a need at lower levels of geography, for example the Department of Health (DH) stated that:</p> <p><i>“Such information is needed on a consistent basis at a local level (LA, CCG and below). CCGs and LAs need information about where veterans reside and their health and care needs to assist in prioritisation, needs assessments and commissioning processes. There is also a requirement for information on veteran demographics to support higher-level policy decisions. In addition, the information would be of significant value for research by academic organisations and service charities.”</i></p>
Alternative sources	5	<p>Respondents discussed several alternative sources including Ministry of Defence official statistics as well as surveys such as The Royal British Legion Household Survey. However, the disadvantages of such sources were noted. For example, the Royal British Legion, commenting on their own survey, said that:</p> <p><i>“...even with significant investment, the survey relied on an eligible survey sample of 2,203 participants, meaning that further analysis of regional trends proves statistically insecure due to ever decreasing sample sizes for comparison to objective national datasets. The cost of increasing the sample size would surpass feasible charitable funding...”</i></p> <p>Ministry of Defence (MOD) - Defence Statistics said that:</p> <p><i>“The MOD publishes an Official Statistic on the numbers of currently serving personnel however to date there is no complete definitive source on the numbers of veterans and dependants. Current data sources only cover part of the armed forces community or provide estimates. The MOD publishes an official statistic on the location of armed Forces pension and compensation recipients. However this only includes members of the armed forces community who currently receive a pension or who have claimed compensation under the War Pension Scheme or the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme for service attributable injuries or illnesses.”</i></p> <p>Respondents also commented on limitations of existing census outputs in relation to the Armed Forces. The Welsh Government stated that:</p> <p><i>“The current dataset classifies usual residents in England and Wales who are members of the armed forces community by residence type (household or communal resident) but this should be expanded to include length of service and in which branch of the armed forces. This data would greatly help develop service provision in the future, and could be used to inform services which target transition into civilian life.”</i></p>
Multivariate analysis	7	<p>Owing to commitments under the armed forces covenant, respondents told us about how they would use the data with a range of other census topics.</p>

Criterion	Score	Evidence
		<p>Ministry of Defence (MOD) - Defence Statistics stated that:</p> <p><i>“Currently the armed forces covenant report is focusing on ensuring the armed forces community is not disadvantaged in relation to health, housing and education however the covenant covers all public services. The sub-group of the armed forces community will be compared to the UK general population. Identifying if there are any specific differences between the armed forces community and the UK general population will help focus policy direction.”</i></p> <p>The Royal British Legion commented that:</p> <p><i>“...many ex-service individuals have a long term illness or disability that may or may not be as a result of their armed forces career, many others from commonwealth nations or through careers with the Gurkhas may have taken up permanent residence in the UK after leaving Service, and veterans and their dependents permeate all socio-economic groups within the UK. However, a comprehensive picture of how these various demographics correlate with each other is currently missing. The inclusion of our proposed topic in the census would be highly beneficial in establishing the demographic and geographic diversity through cross analysis with other census topics, again highlighting where there are areas of significant need or disadvantage.”</i></p> <p>These comments highlight that the analysis of the armed forces community by a range of socio-economic variables would be a key advantage of collecting data on this topic in the census.</p>
<p>Comparability beyond England and Wales</p>	<p>6</p>	<p>Data users commented on the requirement to make comparisons between local and UK average data to meet the recommendations in the armed forces covenant. Ministry of Defence (MOD) - Defence Statistics said that:</p> <p><i>“The armed forces covenant is a UK wide policy however it is known that the armed forces community has a greater presence in certain locations. In order to ensure the armed forces community is not disadvantaged local information will be compared to UK average.”</i></p> <p>One charity also commented on their requirement for UK comparable data:</p> <p><i>“The Royal British Legion, and its sister charity Poppy Scotland, provide welfare, support and assistance to veterans and their dependents anywhere in the UK. We also provide support to beneficiaries who are based overseas as required. This UK wide remit requires us to have an accurate estimation and distribution of the (ex-)service population in all four devolved administrations.”</i></p> <p>A consolidated response from The Royal British Legion, ABF The Soldiers’ Charity, Blesma - The Limbless Veterans, Forces in Mind Trust, Help for Heroes, RAF Benevolent Fund and SSAFA stated that:</p> <p><i>“The commitments of the armed forces covenant have been further enshrined into local authorities through community covenants. We are delighted that every council in England and Wales has</i></p>

Criterion	Score	Evidence
		<p><i>now signed up to a community covenant and that, on paper, the principles of the covenant are being brought into local service provision and decision making.”</i></p> <p>This shows that although only a small number of local authorities responded to the consultation on this topic, the data, if collected, could be used across the whole of England and Wales</p>
Continuity with previous censuses	0	Since information on the armed forces community has not been collected in the census no comparisons with previous censuses would be possible if a question was to be included in the 2021 Census.
Weighted Overall Score	62	Low user need

4.2 Other considerations and operational requirements - armed forces community

As a question on this topic was not asked in the 2011 Census there is no evidence available to assess the ‘Other considerations’ evaluation criteria. Additionally, there is no operational requirement to collect this data. If development of questions on this topic were to be taken forward, ONS would integrate consideration of these criteria into the development process.

5. Updated view

The following table gives the updated view of ONS at the topic level and the justification for this.

Table 5 Updated view

Topic detail	Initial view	Updated view	Justification
Armed forces community	n/a	Do not collect Explore admin data potential	<p>Data users showed a clear requirement for information on the whole of the armed forces community, including veterans and dependents, particularly in relation to making decisions about service planning and delivery and the allocation of resources to meet the recommendations of the armed forces covenant.</p> <p>However, currently available sources partially meet user needs. Additionally, the Annual Population Survey has recently included questions to collect information on veterans and we expect that additional information from this source will be available in the future. Several local authorities raised concern over collecting data related to the armed forces in the census and suggested that alternative sources would be more suitable.</p> <p>The user need for this topic is not strong enough to include this additional topic ahead of other topics in the census.</p> <p>We will investigate the linkage of admin sources on armed forces veterans to the 2021 Census data to produce outputs required by users.</p>

6. Equality implications of ONS's updated view

The Equality Act 2010 and associated public sector equality duty require public bodies to work towards eliminating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity with regard to nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. These requirements are reinforced by secondary legislation in both England and Wales⁵ as well as by the Equality Objectives published recently by the Welsh Government which seek to address the key equality challenges faced in Wales and to support progress towards the well-being goals in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The proposals made for the 2021 Census content will consider identified 'User requirements' for data alongside other factors such as 'Other considerations' and 'Operational requirements' specified in our evaluation criteria. In addition, it will be important to take account of the impact of any decisions that we may make on equality. Impacts can be:

- positive - actively promote equality of opportunity for one or more groups, or improve equal opportunities/relations between groups
- adverse or negative - cause disadvantage or exclusion (any such impact must be justified, eliminated, minimised or counter-balanced by other measures)
- neutral - have no notable consequences for any group

Membership of the armed forces community is not a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. However, the government supports the armed forces covenant. The two core principles of the covenant are that members of the armed forces community, including veterans and dependents, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services and that special consideration is appropriate in some cases, especially in relation to the injured and bereaved.

The covenant's core principles have been enshrined in law in the Armed Forces Act 2011. Hence, collection of data on this topic could:

- increase visibility of the armed forces community
- support organisations in enacting the principles of the armed forces covenant
- provide the basis to investigate, for the armed forces community, characteristics that are protected under the Equality Act such as disability and race
- assist government policy development and monitoring, resource allocation, and service planning for the armed forces community

However, the overall user need for data on this topic has scored lower than that for other topics. Therefore ONS does not intend to include an additional topic on the armed forces community in the 2021 Census.

⁵ *The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 and The Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011.*

The potential negative impacts of not collecting this information are mitigated by there being existing sources on various components of this population, including some [2011 Census information](#)⁶. There are also potential new outputs on veterans from the Annual Population Survey. Further outputs on current service personnel derived from the data to be collected on occupation in the 2021 Census will be available as 2021 outputs.

The next steps for this topic, discussed below, take into account the identified equality implications. As research and stakeholder engagement continues, if further equality implications emerge, these will be considered and mitigated where necessary.

⁶ <http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/populationestimates/datasets/2011censusarmedforcesstatisticsforlocalauthoritiesinenglandandwales>

7. Next steps

Although there is a clear need for information on the armed forces community, the user need for this topic is not strong enough to include this additional topic in the 2021 Census. As a result, there are no plans to undertake further work for a census question on this topic. However, the ONS Annual Population Survey has recently included questions to collect information on veterans. We expect that additional information from this source will be available in future. In addition, we will investigate the feasibility of linking administrative sources, on armed forces veterans, to data from the 2021 Census to produce the outputs required by users.

Annex A: List of organisations that responded, by sector

This list includes organisations that discussed collection of data on the 'Armed Forces' topic. If multiple responses were received from an organisation the name only appears once.

Government department/public body

Department of Health (**DH**)

Ministry of Defence (**MOD**) - Defence Statistics

Welsh Government

Local authority

City of Wolverhampton Council

Local Government Association

Salford City Council

Suffolk County Council

Health organisation

None received for this topic

Housing

Yarlington Housing Group

Academic/research

None received for this topic

Charity and voluntary

Consolidated response: The Royal British Legion, ABF The Soldiers' Charity, Blesma The Limbless Veterans, Forces in Mind Trust, Help for Heroes, RAF Benevolent Fund, and SSAFA

The Royal British Legion

Commercial

None received for this topic

Genealogist/family historian

None received for this topic

Other

None received for this topic

