



ONS Census Transformation Programme

The 2021 Census

Assessment of initial user
requirements on content for
England and Wales

Genealogy 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’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. There were 606 responses that discussed collection of data about the ‘Genealogy’ topic.

The user consultation generated a request by genealogists to add two new sub-topics (place of birth, and maiden name) to the census in 2021.

Based on the evidence given by users, sub-topics were 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’².

Table 1 Evaluation criteria

1. User requirement <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Purpose• Small geographies or populations• Alternative sources• Multivariate analysis• Comparability beyond England and Wales• Continuity with previous censuses	2. Other consideration <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Data quality• Public acceptability• Respondent burden• Financial concerns• Questionnaire mode
	3. Operational requirement <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

Unlike most other users of census data, genealogists are interested in record level data, currently released to the public 100 years after each census. Respondents requested new topics to be collected, not for their own use, but at record level for the use of genealogists in 100 years time. This information from individual census forms may be manually linked to individual birth, marriage and death certificates. The role of ONS is to produce statistics rather than register individuals or households, but we are aware of the uses genealogists make of census information. The primary purpose of holding a census is to provide information on the characteristics of people and households for a wide variety of uses including national and local policy formulation, planning, and the effective targeting of resources.

Genealogists tend to be most interested in basic demography and household relationships to enable them to confirm identity of individuals and their family relationships. They responded on the range of other census topics, commenting on the benefits of having additional background historical detail which also help to confirm that the correct family member has been identified.

Genealogists are not primarily interested in small geographies, small populations or UK comparability. Comparability over time is important to be able to match up details between censuses and identify changes in family circumstances.

The consultation included ONS plans for the use of administrative data in and beyond the 2021 Census. A concern raised by a number of genealogist respondents was regarding the ongoing availability and suitability of administrative data to meet their needs for family and social history research. ONS has worked with The National Archive, historical researchers and genealogists to discuss the options for provision of a historical record for census using administrative data and surveys. Further research would be required to develop these.

3. Summary of consultation responses

Table 2 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 2 Genealogy - number of respondents by type of respondent

Type of respondent	Total responses	
	N	% total responses
Individual	583	96
Organisation (all sectors)	23	4
Sector		% organisation responses
- Government department/public body	1	4
- Local authority	4	17
- Health organisation	0	0
- Housing	0	0
- Academic / research	2	9
- Charity and voluntary	1	4
- Commercial	0	0
- Genealogist/family historian	13	57
- Other	2	9
Total responses	606	100

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

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

Genealogists gave evidence of the way in which they use existing sub-topics, as detailed in the previous section. However, one of the main themes in the genealogist response was the request for inclusion of place of birth as a new sub-topic for the 2021 Census. Place of birth was last collected in the 1951 Census. There were a large number of requests for place of birth and almost all of which were received on or after 24 August 2015 following the publication of a newsletter on the family history website 'Lost Cousins'. The newsletter article was intended to guide genealogists through the consultation as to which questions they should complete, and summarised what points they should make in order to request place of birth as a new sub-topic. The inclusion of place of birth is requested by genealogists to enable them to more easily identify the correct family member:

Valerie Blease, Genealogist: *"For family historians being able to find the 'right' person is extremely important. Having the birth place assists the researcher in finding the birth certificate, particularly where the surname is common."*

Waltham Abbey Genealogists: *"The data provides the backbone of researching people, people move around and the census gives a platform for tracing individuals and families. It is an important basic tool in to all genealogists and historians."*

College of Arms: *“Statements of place of birth on census returns enable historians and genealogists to understand where people came from. Country of birth is rarely sufficient and it would not be difficult to collect more precise data about town, city or region of birth. These enable the genealogist to trace the origins of individuals and thus continue the family line backwards in time.”*

Birth, marriage and death certificates are frequently given as alternative sources of information for place of birth for people with common names:

Jon Hampton, Genealogist: *“Alternative sources of information are birth, marriage and death certificates. However, they are expensive and the more precise the information available before purchase the more likelihood there is of selecting the right one.”*

Bedfordshire Family History Society: *“We use our topic information to find out where our name interests were born enabling us to narrow down the search field for ancestors and cutting out a lot of expense of buying unwanted certificates.”*

The more information that the person who filled in the census has supplied, the easier our work becomes.”

There were approximately 30 requests received to include maiden and/or former names for the purpose of identifying the correct family member more easily.

Federation of Family History Societies: *“The information requested is essential to positively identify individuals with relatively common names and so enable future generations (after the 100 year “closed” period has elapsed) to explore their origins and heritage. If such details are not collected by the census, it would often be difficult to make a connection between an appearance in the census and in other records.”*

Gloucestershire Family History Society: *“Full name information will help identify individual family members and link them to other families, helping with our research.”*

Lyminge Family History Group: *“Former name (for any reason) would...be useful for the determination of an individual in future family history research.”*

There were also smaller numbers of requests from genealogists for inclusion of new sub-topics such as full name, details of marriages (for example, date, place and number of marriages), details of all children born, and names of parents and their dates of birth. There were also three requests for a free text box or a similar concept to collect additional biographical or genealogical information. However, none of these needs had sufficient evidence against the full range of evaluation criteria to allow an assessment to be undertaken.

4. Evaluation

The following sections show the scores allocated to each sub-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 and Wales: Response to consultation’³ 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 – place of birth

Table 3 User requirement score by criterion – place of birth

Criterion	Score	Evidence
Weighted Overall Score	17	Low user need
Purpose	2	<p>Evidence showed that place of birth would be primarily used for family history research. Place of birth would be used by genealogists to identify the correct birth certificate and therefore obtain further information on the parents of the individual, aiding the development of the family tree. For example,</p> <p>Gwent Family History Society told us:</p> <p><i>“Census records are the single most important source for tracing family history back to the early 19th century. From 1851 each person’s age is recorded and also the parish of birth. This is crucial information as it enables the identification of the individual in the Birth Indices and this enables an order to be placed for the birth certificate. From the birth certificate the name of the mother, and usually the father, can be found. One has then established another generation in the family tree and further researches can be made.”</i></p>

³

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

		<p>Christopher Peter Haines said:</p> <p><i>“For identifying and researching birth information essential for family-history research - especially to find birth certificates, which has become more and more difficult as registration districts have been enlarged and amalgamated over the years. For family history research, the identification of parish, town and county, not just country, is an essential in order to find birth data and establish parental family connections. Limiting this question to birth country only returns us to the near uselessness of these data in the 1841 census until good sense prevailed in 1851 and survived for several decades. There will always be individuals who cannot answer this question fully but it should encourage those who do know their place of birth to provide this information. It also provides for identification of anomalies created by changes in national borders - which are often a serious sticking-point for those affected.”</i></p> <p>Further evidence suggested that place of birth could be used by historians for social history and migration research patterns. For example,</p> <p>the College of Arms told us that:</p> <p><i>“Historians also use this information more generally to seek to understand trends in migration over time and between places.”</i></p> <p>Respondents were not referring to potentially collecting these data for their own use, but requesting that it be collected for the use of genealogists at record level in 100 years time, as a record that allows individual census forms to be manually linked to individual birth, marriage and death certificates.</p>
Small geographies or populations	1	<p>The limited evidence provided showed that place of birth would be used mainly for family history research using historical census records in 100 years' time. For example,</p> <p>an individual told us that:</p> <p><i>“I am interested in households and the people within the household, as they are most likely to be related.”</i></p>
Alternative sources	4	<p>A large number of individual responses from genealogists cited Birth, Marriage, and Death certificates and registers as alternative sources, but it can be difficult or impossible to locate the correct certificate without the place of birth. Other alternative sources mentioned were electoral rolls, directories, newspapers and genealogical website, but these are only partial information used to complement the census.</p>

		<p>The Federation of Family History Societies said:</p> <p><i>“The only other commonly available document that would give this information is the Birth Certificate but it is often impossible to identify the correct Birth Certificate in order to purchase it without knowing the full name. Where people have been born in countries that did not operate comprehensive birth registration when the person concerned was born, such data is unlikely to be available from any other source.”</i></p>
Multivariate analysis	2	<p>Genealogists would use place of birth data with other variables for identification of individuals and to place them in their historical context. Place of birth data would not be used by genealogists for multivariate analysis in the usual sense, however, other variables would be used to help identify individuals so demographic and name data would be used in conjunction with the place of birth. For example,</p> <p>Helen Fisher, a Genealogist, said that:</p> <p><i>“I use the information on place of birth together with the other topics to build a more complete picture of the subject and their life history, to make sure that I have the right person and information.”</i></p> <p>Another individual, Rosemary Haynes, told us that:</p> <p><i>“Place of birth is essential information to family history. Housing and where living and how many people in house etc is additional for social history. Work and Poverty is another area used for family/social history and is very important. Schools & Places of learning is another - it is used as a whole to construct a family history tree to see what my ancestors did and how it affected my upbringing.”</i></p>
Comparability beyond England and Wales	0	No relevant need for UK comparability was given by users as the data would be used by genealogists at individual record level.
Continuity with previous censuses	0	Since information on place of birth has not been collected on the census no comparisons would be possible were a question to be included in the 2021 Census.
Weighted Overall Score	17	Low user need

4.2 Other considerations and operational requirements – place of birth

Questions on this topic were not asked in the 2011 Census, therefore there are no 2011 Census data to assess against the ONS considerations evaluation criteria and no operational requirement to collect this information. If development of questions on this topic were to be taken forward, ONS would integrate consideration of these criteria into the development process.

It is unclear whether place of birth would be asked at the level of settlement, registration district or county, and whether respondents would give their usual residence at that time or the specific place of their birth, for example, hospital or birth centre. With additional complexities around geographies changing over time and the difficulty many respondents may have in accurately remembering their place of birth, measuring this concept accurately presents a substantial challenge. Given the complexities around geographies changing over time, it is predicted that including place of birth would incur a considerable burden on respondents and high operational cost to code responses.

4.3 User requirements – maiden name

Table 4 User requirement score by criterion – maiden name

Criterion	Score	Evidence
Weighted Overall Score	12	Low user need
Purpose	1	<p>Respondents told us that maiden name would be used primarily for family history research, for tracing individuals who may appear under their earlier name in other sources (birth, marriage and death certificates).</p> <p>One individual said:</p> <p><i>“It would help genealogical research greatly if those filling in censuses provided previous names (eg maiden names) by which they had previously been known. At the moment, disparate sources such as birth and marriage certificates, censuses are used to trace derivation of names. Having this in one place would make tracking individuals much simpler.”</i></p> <p>There was evidence suggesting that information would also be of use to historians, sociologists and other academics, but this does not relate to their own use of the data.</p> <p>One individual, Carolyn Jones said:</p> <p><i>“Ensuring the relevant data is collected will also be of value to historians, sociologists and other academics.”</i></p> <p>Respondents were not referring to potentially collecting these data for their own use, but requesting that it be collected for the use of genealogists at record level in 100 years time.</p>

Small geographies or populations	0	Family historians undertake their research using historical census records released 100 years later. A need for data at small geography level was not evidenced.
Alternative sources	4	<p>Some respondents cited birth and marriage certificates as a possible alternative to maiden name. Similar to a response from Gloucestershire Family History Society and other genealogists, Elizabeth Leach, a genealogist said:</p> <p><i>“The only other easily available document that gives this information is a Birth Certificate but it is often impossible to identify the correct Birth Certificate in order to purchase it without knowing the full name. If people have been born in countries that did not operate comprehensive birth registration, such data is unlikely to be available.”</i></p>
Multivariate analysis	2	<p>Maiden name would not be used by genealogists for multivariate analysis in the usual sense. However, other variables would be used to help in the identification of individuals so demographic and name data would be used in conjunction with the maiden name.</p> <p>Anne Ramon, a genealogist, told us that:</p> <p><i>“Any data about an individual's residence, occupation, workplace, family status, birthplace, previous names used, will help the future user identify a specific individual.”</i></p> <p>Federation of Family History Societies:</p> <p><i>“Information on this topic will enable the discovery of the birth record and other historical information and family connections for the individuals concerned. When people of interest have been positively identified in the census record, the answers given to other census questions...would improve our understanding of life at that time.”</i></p> <p>To obtain historical background information genealogists would use data on maiden name with other variables to identify individuals.</p>
Comparability beyond England and Wales	0	No relevant need for UK comparability was given by users as the data would be used by genealogists at individual record level.
Continuity with previous censuses	0	Since information on maiden name has not been collected on the census no comparisons would be possible were a question to be included in the 2021 Census.
Weighted Overall Score	12	Low user need

4.4 Other considerations and operational requirements – maiden name

Questions on this topic were not asked in the 2011 Census, therefore there are no 2011 Census data to assess against the ONS considerations evaluation criteria and no operational requirement to collect this information. 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 tables give the updated views of ONS at the sub-topic level and the justification for these.

Table 5 Updated view

Sub-topic Detail	Initial View	Updated View	Justification
Place of birth	N/A	Do not collect	<p>ONS will not be collecting this information in the 2021 census.</p> <p>With a score of 17, user need for place of birth is well below the threshold at which topics are considered to have a medium user need. This reflects a number of factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose of collecting this information is to be used at the individual record level, when released in 100 years time, rather than to understand or serve the whole population of England and Wales. • The requirement of this group of users differs significantly from those who require published statistics. • The traditional benefits of census such as comparability across the UK and data being available at a small geographical level are not requirements of genealogists. <p>Including place of birth on the census raises concerns around respondent burden and costs relating to collection, response rates and coding of responses.</p> <p>There was limited evidence for resource allocation, service planning and delivery.</p>

Maiden name	N/A	Do not collect	<p>ONS will not be collecting this information in the 2021 census.</p> <p>With a score of 12, user need for maiden name is well below the threshold at which topics are considered to have a medium user need.</p> <p>Genealogists and historical researchers use individual level data from the traditional census released one hundred years after it was captured. This is not the primary purpose of the census.</p> <p>Including maiden name on the census raises concerns around respondent burden and costs relating to collection, response rates and verifying.</p> <p>There was limited evidence for resource allocation, service planning and delivery.</p>
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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 Wales⁴ 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

While being born outside the UK is not in itself a protected characteristic under the Act, those with places of birth outside the UK are more likely to have some of the protected characteristics (e.g. race) than the population as a whole. If place of birth is not included in the census it may be more difficult for genealogists to trace people who were born outside the UK using the same alternative sources that are currently used to trace people born in the UK.

While we acknowledge that lack of information on maiden name may make it more difficult for genealogists to trace people who have married as their current surname may now differ from their surname at birth, this is not on balance something that can be considered as a priority.

The next steps for this topic, discussed below, take into account the identified equality implications.

⁴ *The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 and The Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011.*

7. Next steps

Although ONS will not be collecting this information in the 2021 Census, its value to the family history community is acknowledged.

ONS will continue to engage with genealogists and family historians about the promotion of the 2021 Census.

Annex A: List of organisations that responded, by sector

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

Government department/public body

College of Arms

Local authority

City of Wolverhampton Council

Dorset County Council

Lincolnshire County Council

Warwickshire Observatory

Health organisation

No organisation responses were received for this topic

Housing

No organisation responses were received for this topic

Academic/research

Economic History Society

Gloucestershire House Histories

Charity and voluntary

The Vegan Society

Commercial

No organisation responses were received for this topic

Genealogist/family historian

Bedfordshire Family History Society

Burgum Family History Society

Federation of Family History Societies

Gloucestershire Family History Society

Gwent Family History Society

Gwynedd Family History Society

Lost Cousins

Lyminge Family History Group

Powys Family History Society

Society of Genealogists

Tasmanian Family History Society Inc.

Waltham Abbey Genealogists

Other

Tees Valley Unlimited

