



ONS Census Transformation Programme

The 2021 Census

Gender identity research
and testing plan

May 2016

Research Plan for Gender Identity

Gender identity is a personal internal perception of oneself and as such the gender category with which a person identifies may not match the sex they were assigned at birth. In contrast, sex is biologically determined.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) [2021 Census topic consultation](#) identified a clear need among data users for data about gender identity, particularly in relation to planning services for, and allocating resources to interventions to support this community in England and Wales. The user requirement for data on those with the protected characteristic of gender reassignment is strengthened by the Equality Act 2010. Therefore, ONS plans to take forward work on gender identity.

[National Records of Scotland \(NRS\)](#) and the [Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(NISRA\)](#) are currently analysing the responses to their consultations on the topics to be included in their respective censuses. If similar user need is identified in Scotland and Northern Ireland, the three offices will work together to develop a joint research plan and to gather appropriate evidence to decide whether the census is the appropriate vehicle to collect this information.

This work may lead to a question being recommended for inclusion on the 2021 Census. If a question is recommended, significant question development will be required to enable this. Although the EHRC has developed a recommended suite of questions to collect data on gender identity there is no national harmonised standard question on gender identity, and in the 'Trans Data Position Paper' published in 2009, ONS concluded that household surveys were not an appropriate approach to collecting information about gender identity.

ONS plan to identify options for meeting the user requirement for data and make a recommendation on how to take forward work on gender identity across ONS. However, there are public acceptability issues related to asking a question on this topic. Privacy concerns are especially relevant in the context of gender identity because those who have legally changed their sex from that assigned at birth are not obliged to reveal their gender history. ONS will consider with stakeholders the impact of this on the quality of any data that could be collected and whether the positive impacts of collecting data would be greater than the negative impacts.

Any consideration of inclusion of this topic in the 2021 Census will be completed by the end of 2017. This decision will form part of the recommendation to government and Parliament on topics for the 2021 Census.

Any change to the Census Act 1920 to enable a question on gender identity would likely have to be made through primary legislation, as was the case when a religion question was added in the 2001 Census. Such primary legislation had to be passed by both the House of Commons and the House of Lords. Members of the House of Lords were concerned that the religion question could be seen as an infringement of respondents' civil liberties so it was decided that the question would be voluntary; this might also be necessary for any question on gender identity.

ONS will engage with relevant stakeholders, including representatives of the trans community, throughout the testing and development work. The results of this research will be published in due course.

Proposed work

Task	Description	Target completion date
Identify and plan work to produce gender identity estimates	Establish a working group to work with stakeholders and identify user needs for gender identity estimates. The group will commence in May 2016. Its initial aim will be to produce a detailed plan for research and, if appropriate, output production on gender identity.	September 2016
Review the 'Trans Data Position Paper'	<p>Since the publication of this paper in 2009 there have been changes in UK legislation, such as the Equality Act 2010, that relate to gender identity.</p> <p>Additionally there have been developments in how data in household surveys are collected, for example the 2021 Census will, as per the National Statisticians recommendation that there be an "online census of all households and communal establishments in England and Wales in 2021, as a modern successor to the traditional, paper-based decennial census."</p> <p>This review will consider if the evidence that led to ONSs published position still remains valid. It will also consider if there is additional evidence that should be taken into account or research that should be undertaken.</p> <p>If necessary, ONS will produce an updated position paper.</p>	December 2016
Seek to learn from other National Statistics Agencies.	<p>Whilst data on gender identity are currently limited, data collection methodology for this topic is developing in many areas of the world. In 2011, three countries are known to have collected data on gender identity via their question on sex; Australia, India and Nepal.</p> <p>This work will involve collaboration with these, and any other countries identified as taking forward work on gender identity to learn from their experiences.</p> <p>The experiences of Australia will be especially relevant as they conduct censuses every 5 years and their next census is planned for August 2016.</p>	December 2016

<p>Engage with relevant stakeholders, including members of the trans community, to clarify data requirements</p>	<p>The 2021 Census topic consultation identified a clear user need for data about gender identity, including those with the protected characteristic of gender reassignment under the Equality Act 2010. However, the exact output categories need to be clarified.</p> <p>This work aims to identify:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the concepts to be measured, and • output categories required. 	<p>December 2016</p>
<p>Identify alternative options for meeting the user requirement for data</p>	<p>The 2021 Census is not the only potential method of collection of data for this topic. For example there may be potential to investigate administrative data.</p>	<p>July 2017</p>
<p>Development and implementation of options evaluation criteria</p>	<p>Evaluation criteria will be developed in order to enable a decision on which, if any, of the identified options for taking forward work on gender identity are appropriate for ONS to take forward. These criteria will, for example, consider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • coverage of population • quality of data collected • public acceptability 	<p>July 2017</p>

