

Response to consultation on possible content of 2011 Census

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Topic or classification

Ethnicity and Religion

If responding about a classification, which topics are required to derive it?

1. Why is the information required?

Please indicate if the information is used for resource allocation purposes.

Britain is not a homogenous society and service providers such as the NHS, Local Councils and Education Authorities are obliged by law to make adequate provision for the needs of everyone, whatever their religion or ethnic descent. To do this effectively they need to know the size and geographic distribution of communities in order to allocate resources appropriately.

Individual faith and ethnic communities also provide services for their members and the Jewish community is particularly active in this regard. In addition to providing for people's religious and spiritual needs, the UK Jewish community provides care services for children, for the elderly and for those with a disability; educational services for people of all ages; sporting and social activities and a range of other provisions.

Although the majority of the UK Jewish community lives in a small number of known geographic centres (such as London and Manchester) there are smaller communities (such as Birmingham and Bristol) as well as isolated groups and individuals throughout the UK from the Isle of Wight to the Shetlands. Information gained from the census enables the community to plan more effectively and to target specific provisions more accurately. In a climate where funding is tight this is essential in order not to waste valuable and scarce resources.

It is evident from the 2001 census that more people regard themselves as being of any particular religion than attend a place of worship. This is particularly true of the Jewish religion due to the fact that many people consider themselves ethnically Jewish even though they do not subscribe to Judaism as a religion. This view of Judaism is supported by the fact that Jewish people benefit from the protection of the Race Relations Act.

In addition, in the Canadian census, in which respondents were able to identify themselves as 'Jewish' both by religion and by ethnicity, shows that the number identifying in **either** way was 27.6% more than those identifying themselves Jewish by religion alone. As these individuals continue to call on communal welfare and social facilities, full and accurate statistics are required to enable effective planning of service provision and these will not be available unless all respondents are given the option of identifying themselves as Jewish by either religion or ethnicity.

We would therefore urge ONS to include the category 'Jewish' not only in the religion question but also in a question about ethnic descent (or alternatively in a supplementary question (such as that proposed by GROS in the Scottish Executive consultation paper on this subject: '*Do you identify with any community or culture not covered by the other questions for example, Arab, Gypsy, Jewish, Kurdish, Romany, Traveller, etc.?*').

We also believe that it would be valuable to extend UK-wide the question asked in Scotland in 2001 regarding the religion in which people were brought up. It should also be noted that a question asking about "membership" such as "What religion or faith do you belong to?" depresses numbers, as many people do not recognise affiliation without, for example, paying formal membership dues.

In our view these changes would provide a much more accurate picture of the numbers and geographic distribution of the Jewish population of the UK. This is important for service provision because many people, who identify themselves as ethnically Jewish prefer to use social and educational services which cater for people of a similar background rather than those provided in the wider community. The 2001 census identified the fact that the Jewish community is aging and now includes a disproportionate number of elderly people. Many of these arrived in the UK as refugees and in old age tend to revert to their childhood language making it essential for them to have access to social activities within their own community if they are not to become isolated.

2. Why is this information required for small population groups and/or small geographies?

Small populations may easily be overlooked in surveys which have a smaller scope than does the census. Many Jewish people in the UK live in small and often rural communities of well under 500 people, whilst others live outwith any geographically distinct Jewish community. Service providers in these areas need particular support in providing appropriate services, and the first step is for them to be aware that a need exists. The universal nature of the census enables it to provide a comprehensive and finely-drawn picture of the distribution of minority communities.

3. What assessment of alternative source of information has been carried out? What would be the impact of using the next best alternative?

The only means by which the Jewish community can gather information itself is through synagogue membership figures or by extrapolation from level of demand for other communal services such as burial. It is self-evident that this will not include people who are less religiously committed or who do not have a synagogue nearby, perhaps because they live in a rural area, and that figures collected in this way cannot provide information necessary for effective planning of service provision.

As the Community becomes less cohesive, it is therefore more important to ensure that such looser identification is captured, and the Canadian model provides a way of doing so.

4. Which other topics, if any, are required for multivariate analyses together with this topic?

None in particular, but it should be noted that any sacrifice of accuracy when numbers are small will vitiate statistical techniques like multivariate analysis.

5. Why is it important that this information is available for the UK as a whole?

Jewish people, in common with the members of many other minority communities, live throughout the UK. If information is collected for only one part of the country then it will not be possible to gain an accurate picture of those populations, and it will also prevent direct comparisons between census figures from different parts of the UK.

We welcome the intention of the Scottish Registrar to collect this information and suggest that the information is no less important to data users in England and Wales than in Scotland. **In our view harmonisation of information collected across the UK should be achieved by a levelling up rather than down, and we strongly recommend the inclusion of separate questions about religion and ethnicity in a form that reflects the results of the extensive consultation which has been carried out by GROS.**

6. Will this information ensure continuity with previous Censuses?

We agree with the statement made in the ONS consultation paper (section 3.5) that *'It is recognised that for ethnic, national and religious identity to be meaningful and dynamic there may be some loss in terms of direct compatibility over time.'* The Scottish Executive has carried out research into the way in which the 2001 census collected information about ethnicity and has reported that the classifications were described as 'confusing, inconsistent and inaccurate', that 'they were considered to hide the real diversities within Scotland' and that 'minority ethnic groups were effectively marginalised'. (Ethnic Identity and the Census <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/54357/0013572.pdf>)

The format and wording of the ethnicity question in the 2001 census has proved unpopular with a wide range of people and has made many in minority communities feel alienated and excluded. The mix of colour and nationality in the categories has resulted in the responses being less useful as they might otherwise have been in providing information about the ethnic descent of the UK population – and we are in agreement with senior staff at GROS whom we have heard describe the 2001 categories as 'irrational'.

In the light of this situation we believe there is more to be lost than gained in seeking to ensure direct compatibility with the 2001 census, and we strongly recommend that the question should be reworded. Our favoured option would be that this should be a completely open 'write-in' question along the lines of *'what is your ethnic descent?'* We appreciate that this would cause some difficulties in terms of collating and presenting responses, though we do not believe these to be insurmountable. If the format is to remain a combination of 'tick-box' and 'write-in' (as it was in the 2001 census) then we support the format and wording proposed by GROS in the current Scottish Executive consultation paper ('A Review of Census Ethnicity Classifications Consultation p22).

7. Do you have any other comments relevant to this consultation?

We strongly urge that the wording of the 2001 ethnicity question should not be repeated in the 2011 census. As well as impacting on the accuracy and usefulness of information about minority communities across the UK, this wording is likely to result in communities feeling more excluded and alienated from society as a whole.

The use of colour as an indicator of belonging to an ethnic minority is particularly problematic. Not only do Africans object strongly to having to identify themselves by colour, when Asians, for example do not, but there are a great number of non-'black' minority communities in the UK (eg. Polish, Kurdish, Italian, Chinese, Gypsy Traveller). **When 'black' is used as if it were synonymous with 'minority community' all of these are excluded because they are not in any sense black. When 'white' is used as if it were synonymous with 'the majority community' these same communities are excluded once again because they are not part of the majority community. This double exclusion is particularly divisive and alienating.**

During the last year GROS has been consulting on an ongoing basis about the form and wording of questions designed to elicit information about ethnicity and religion, as a result of which it is now considering the inclusion of a larger number of questions than currently proposed by ONS. We believe that these questions, which include country of birth, nationality, current religion and religion in which the respondent was brought up, ethnic descent, languages spoken and understood, and whether the respondent has ever experienced discrimination, would provide a much more accurate and useful picture of the numbers, geographic spread, and experience of all minority communities in the UK, and strongly recommend that this should be adopted UK-wide.

Please return to: Censustopics@ons.gsi.gov.uk

Responses may be made public and may be attributed to respondents