

Review of Census Ethnicity Classifications Consultation Response of the Scottish Council of Jewish Communities

Note

We note that the Scottish Executive and GROS have proposed slightly different questions and question formats in their parallel consultations and we have referred to both versions in this response.

Q1: Should several different questions be used to capture information on ethnic identity instead of one question?

Ethnicity is a complex area, and we are in complete agreement with the statement (Scottish Executive Consultation Document p13) that *'it is extremely difficult to capture all of these complexities within a single classification system.'* and with the view that the attempt to do so in the 2001 census resulted in classifications that were *'confusing, inconsistent and inaccurate'* ('Ethnic Identity and the Census', Scottish Executive, 2005) both as regards the question itself and the range and structure of the possible responses.

We appreciate that there are cost implications to including additional questions in the census, but there is no point in collecting useless data, so if the data collected is to provide full and useable information then we believe those costs will have to be met – and that it will be worth meeting them.

There is no single factor identifiable as 'ethnicity' - which is precisely what the failings of the 2001 question demonstrated. Instead there are a variety of factors that contribute to an individual's sense of 'identity', including the respondent's nationality, descent, race, religion, culture, and language, among others, and all of these must be taken into consideration if the census is to provide useful information in this complex and often sensitive area. It is for the Executive first to determine the point of asking for this information and then to devise a question that elicits unambiguous responses.

Q2: If you think the information on ethnicity could be captured using one question can you suggest categories to be used in this question?

We do not believe this is possible for the reasons stated.

Q3: Should there be a separate question asking about national identity?

We believe that the question is unclear in its current format and that respondents would be uncertain as to how they should respond. It is not clear to us whether this question would replace *'What is your country of birth'* which has been asked in previous censuses and which still appears in 'New and Modified Scottish Census Questions' (GROS, July 2005). Some respondents might interpret the question as asking about their actual nationality, others about their country of birth, and others about familial or emotional attachment to a nationality that might or might not be their own.

If the census is to include questions relating to country of birth, family descent and identification with any community or culture not covered by the other questions, then we do not believe there is a need for a separate question about national identity. If on the other

hand there is such a question it should be entirely unambiguous about which of the above information it is seeking.

Q4: Can you think of another term that captures the information described as area of family descent/origin?

This is another ambiguous expression. All questions asked must be entirely clear both about the meaning of abstract terms such as 'descent' or 'origin' **and** about whether the response is intended to be objective or subjective (e.g. "what part of the world did your family come from?" as against "what part of the world do you feel a familial or emotional attachment to?")

Q5: Are the world areas listed on page 22 of the consultation document the most helpful or would you recommend a different split?

In our view the format of this question is much more acceptable and more likely to provide reliable data than that used in the 2001 census.

The short introduction to the question is extremely helpful in explaining the rationale behind the question in a way that makes it more likely that respondents will feel comfortable enough to answer the question fully and accurately.

However, GROS has suggested a category of Arab or Middle East descent in 'New and Modified Scottish Census Questions' (GROS, July 2005). We do not support this because it would perpetuate the elision of ethnicity and geography in the 2001 categories. Instead we support the suggested inclusion of 'Arab' as one of the examples for Q4 on p22 of the Scottish Executive Consultation Document, and 'Middle East' as an additional area to those listed on p.22.

Q6: What do you think would be the best way to capture information on mixed descent?

We strongly support the replacement of 'Mixed' and 'Other' categories with the instruction to *'tick as many boxes as relevant'* as proposed in the Scottish Executive Consultation Document.

However, we note that the 'Mixed' and 'Other' categories still appear in 'New and Modified Scottish Census Questions' (GROS, July 2005) and would therefore reiterate that their use (and also the location of "mixed" between "white" and the other substantive categories) in the 2001 census resulted in many people feeling alienated and excluded. We strongly urge that they should not appear in the 2011 census.

Q7: What would be the most acceptable and useful way to ask individuals about their colour or whether they are visibly from a minority ethnic group?

The use of colour as an indicator of belonging to an ethnic minority is particularly problematic. The 2001 census category of 'white other' has been the object of widespread criticism for concealing the presence of many non-visible minorities and for providing little in the way of useful information. For example, 'Ethnicity Monitoring: Involvement Guidance for Partnerships on Monitoring Involvement' (Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, August 2004) concluded that 'it may be necessary to undertake further data gathering where sizeable

'White Other' populations are concerned' because 'the category 'White Other' was used to cover a wide range of ethnic groups....[and] does not, for instance, distinguish between people of Turkish or Cypriot origin.'

The use of 'black' as an identifying category has been widely censured on a number of grounds. 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, Gypsy Traveller), and there are also many Asians, particularly Chinese, who do not identify with this term at all, or who use it only as convenient political shorthand.

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.

We do not see what purpose is served by the inclusion of a question that asks respondents to describe their colour, such as Q3 on p22 of the Scottish Executive Consultation Document, particularly since some people regard being described by colour as offensive and others regard only one colour term ('black') as having political significance. Various recent publications have used the term 'black' to refer to

- i) all minority communities regardless of skin colour
- ii) all visible minority communities (based solely on skin colour)
- iii) minority communities that are neither 'white' nor 'brown'
- iv) minority communities that are neither 'white', 'Asian' nor 'Hispanic'.

That is sufficient to vitiate the question, since if the terms used in the question are not entirely unambiguous, the responses cannot be relied on in any respect whatever.

We would, however, support a question such as Q4 on p22 of the Scottish Executive Consultation Document which asks whether respondents believe themselves to be part of a visible minority ethnic group. The Scottish Executive Consultation Document suggests (p17) that '*This might extend beyond skin colour, for example an individual's clothing/dress may make it apparent that they belong to or are affiliated with a minority ethnic group*'. We strongly support this view and suggest that the rubric should include this explanation.

We also support the inclusion of a question relating to experiences of discrimination such as that proposed in Q16 of 'New and Modified Scottish Census Questions' (GROS, July 2005) and believe that it would be appropriate to include 'colour' as one of the categories in this question.

Q8: Do you think that the Census language question (as shown on page 21 of the consultation document) should be extended to include community languages?

A large number of languages are spoken in Scotland today, and we support the extension of the language question in the format suggested in Q9 of 'New and Modified Scottish Census Questions' (GROS, July 2005). We would, however, point out that the term 'community languages' is unhelpful since all languages are spoken by communities. This is analogous to the use of 'ethnic' to describe minority ethnicities but not the majority ethnicity. The term 'minority languages' would be preferable.

Language is an important means by which people identify themselves but it can also be a barrier to understanding and communication and the inclusion of this question would both

enlarge understanding of respondents' ethnicity and directly enable service providers to plan translating and interpreting services more effectively.

Q9: Should a question be included on identification with a community or culture not covered by the other questions? Should this be an open question (such as the example shown on page 22 of the consultation document)?

We believe that Q4 on p22 of the Scottish Executive Consultation Document would provide extremely valuable information that would enable the census to gather a much fuller picture than it otherwise could.

For example, 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 since many people consider themselves ethnically Jewish despite the fact that they do not affiliate to a synagogue. This view of Judaism is supported by the fact that Jewish people benefit from the protection of the Race Relations Act.

There is also empirical evidence for the importance of this from the last Canadian census, in which respondents were able to identify themselves as 'Jewish' in response to both the religion and the ethnicity questions. The data showed that the number identifying in **either** of these ways 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.

In our view the proposed write-in question together with the suggested examples (including 'Jewish') will result in the intended information being collected.

Q10: What implications would there be for you/your organisation if direct comparability with previous Census data is not possible?

We agree with the findings reported in 'Ethnic Identity and the Census' (Scottish Executive, 2005) that the 2001 ethnicity categories were '*confusing, inconsistent and inaccurate*', that '*they were considered to hide the real diversities within Scotland*' and that '*minority ethnic groups were effectively marginalized [by them]*'. It is therefore inevitable that '*for ethnic, national and religious identity to be meaningful there may [indeed **must!**] be some loss in terms of direct compatibility*' (ONS census consultation paper, section 3.5), since that is clearly preferable to comparable but '*confusing, inconsistent and inaccurate*' data.

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 than they might otherwise have been in providing information about the ethnic descent of the Scottish 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. 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 in Q2 on p22 of the Scottish Executive Consultation Document.

Q11: What implications would there be for you/your organisation if the Census was changed to include a range of questions to capture ethnic identity?

Individual faith and ethnic communities 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 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.

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 cannot reflect changing patterns of demand without independent objective comparators. In particular it 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.

Although it is known that the majority of the Scottish Jewish community lives in East Renfrewshire there are smaller communities (such as Aberdeen and Dundee) as well as isolated groups and individuals throughout Scotland from the Borders to the Shetlands. Small populations may easily be overlooked in other surveys that have a smaller scope than does the census. Many Jewish people in Scotland live in small and often rural communities of barely 100 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.

Information gained from the census enables the community to plan more effectively and to target specific provisions more accurately. This is important because many people, who identify themselves as ethnically Jewish prefer to use social and educational services that cater for people of a similar background rather than those provided in the wider community.

As we have already mentioned in our response to question 9 above, we therefore believe strongly that 'Jewish' should be included as options in both the religion and ethnicity questions of the census. As the Jewish community becomes less cohesive, it is important to ensure that different types of identification are captured, and this Canadian model provides a way of doing so and providing a much more accurate picture of the numbers and geographic distribution of the population.

Further comments

We welcome the intention of the Scottish Registrar to collect information relating to distinct aspects of ethnicity and suggest that the information is no less important to data users in England and Wales than in Scotland. Most minority communities live throughout the UK so if information is collected for only one part of the country 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. In our view harmonisation of information

collected across the UK should be achieved by a levelling up rather than down, and we have responded in similar terms to the recent ONS consultation, strongly recommending that the census in England and Wales should include separate questions about religion and ethnicity in a form that reflects the results of the extensive consultation that has been carried out by GROS.

We also believe that it would be valuable to extend to the rest of the UK 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 interpret ‘belonging’ as requiring an active commitment, such as for example, paying formal membership dues. In this respect the 2001 England and Wales question “What is your religion or faith?” is to be preferred.

Summary

We strongly support the inclusion of additional questions about ethnicity into the 2011 census. We believe that some of the questions/question formats proposed in the Scottish Executive Consultation Document should be incorporated into the 2006 census test and the 2011 census in place of some of those proposed in ‘New and Modified Scottish Census Questions’ (GROS, July 2005).

Note: The Scottish Council of Jewish Communities is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland comprising Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee as well as the more loosely linked groups of the Jewish Network of Argyll and the Highlands, and of students studying in Scottish Universities and Colleges.

We have consulted widely among members of these communities in the course of preparing this response.