

About you

Are you answering this questionnaire on behalf of an organisation or as an individual?

- (Required) Organisation
- Individual

Please tell us a bit about you.

Name of your organisation (if applicable)

Name (Required)

Email address (Required)

Telephone number

What sector do you work in? This will assist us in monitoring the range of users the consultation has reached.

- (Required) Government department / public body
- Local authority
- Health organisation
- Housing
- Academic / research
- Charity and voluntary
- Commercial
- Utility
- Journalists / media
- International organisation
- Genealogist/family historian
- Other (please specify – text box)

May we contact you to discuss your response to this consultation? This may be to follow up any specific points that we need to clarify.

- (Required) Yes
- No

May we contact you in future about the Census Transformation Programme and the 2021 Census? This may be to inform you of further consultations, to provide updated information about the Census Transformation Programme, or to provide a link to the results of this consultation.

- (Required) Yes
- No

To support transparency in our decision making process, responses to this consultation will be made public. This will include the name of the responding organisation or individual. Please confirm that you are content for your name to be published. We will not publish personal contact details. Please be aware that any information provided in response to this consultation could be made publicly available if requested under a Freedom of Information request.

(Required) Yes, I consent to my name being published with my response

No, please remove my name before publishing my response

Introduction and 2021 Census design context

1. Introduction

ONS is responsible for the census in England and Wales. For the 2021 Census we want to build on the success of the 2011 Census. We aim to maintain or improve the quality of the data for those topics collected, provide comparability where customers tell us it is important and deliver information that is relevant to the needs of users in 2021. We want you to use census data because we believe that better data helps you make better decisions.

The census is just one part of a much wider statistical system. Collecting information through a census represents a significant investment and imposes a burden on all families in England and Wales. It will only be appropriate when it is the most effective way to collect information to meet a strong user requirement, and the associated benefit outweighs the cost of collection.

This consultation is our first step towards understanding what you need from the census and your response to this consultation will be important. In some instances there will be other more appropriate vehicles to collect information and your responses will help us assess how best to meet your information need.

This paper provides the initial view of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on the content of the 2021 Census questionnaire for England and Wales. It forms the starting point of consultation on the topics and sub-topics to be included. Our initial view is informed by evaluation of the success of the 2011 topics and questions, as well as evidence about user requirements from recent consultations for Beyond 2011. It is also informed by our current understanding of affordability and by our aspirations for using administrative data.

The views expressed in this paper are preliminary. The aim is to promote discussion and encourage the development of strong cases for topics to be included in the 2021 Census. The focus of this paper is on information required from the 2021 Census, not the detailed questions that should be asked on the questionnaire. The exact content of the questionnaires for the 2021 Census will only be finalised after further research, testing and consultation.

Most of the 2011 questions worked successfully and our expectation is generally for stability in the questions for 2021. For further information on 2011 Census quality see Annex A - available at the base of this section.

Given the wide ranging changes introduced in the 2011 Census – 8 new individual questions and 1 new household question – we think that the overall length of about 43 questions per person is at the limit of acceptable burden to the public. We are therefore not expecting to expand the total respondent burden. The introduction of any new topics may mean the removal of existing topics. Changes will be considered to address:

- Where questions didn't work well in 2011, particularly where they didn't support users' requirements for outputs.
- New or emerging policy requirements that cannot be addressed through the use of survey or administrative data.
- To meet changes in international guidelines (eg around the labour market topic) and in legislation.

Consultation on the content of previous censuses resulted in a demand for more census topics than was possible to accommodate. For transparency, the criteria against which cases for topics will be assessed are listed within section 4 Evaluation criteria. This will allow respondents to have a clear view of the constraints and trade-offs from the start of the consultation process.

As in previous censuses, there will be separate censuses in Scotland and Northern Ireland and the three census offices will work together to develop a set of questions that, wherever possible, deliver harmonised outputs across the UK.

2. 2021 Census design context

In March 2014, the National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority made [a joint recommendation on the census and the future provision of population statistics in England and Wales](#). It recommended:

- 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, but recognising that special care would need to be taken to support those who are unable to complete the census online, and
- increased use of administrative data and surveys in order to enhance the statistics from the 2021 Census and improve annual statistics between censuses.

The Government responded to the consultation in July 2014 welcoming the recommendation for a predominantly online census in 2021 supplemented by further use of administrative and survey data:

- "Government recognises the value of the census and its history as a bedrock of statistical infrastructure. The census provides information on the population that is of fundamental importance to society...
- Modernising the approach could significantly improve the speed of analysis and outputs. In addition, we are not making the best use of the considerable data that government already collects.
- ... our support for the dual running of an online (decennial) census with increased use of administrative data is only relevant to 2021 and not for future censuses...
- Our ambition is that censuses after 2021 will be conducted using other sources of data and providing more timely statistical information."

2021 Census design

The high level 2021 Census design will build on the highly successful 2011 Census design, utilising many of the design aspects from 2011. However, the most significant change will be that the majority of respondents are expected to complete their census questionnaire online. The design implications of an online census will be further explored in the 2021 Census design overview.

The design will also be influenced by the availability and scope of administrative data and big data. The move to an online-first census may provide an opportunity to redesign questions (for example self-completion of address questions). Decisions on the detailed content of questions will be based on the result of research and the assessment of user need.

Use of alternative sources

ONS is exploring methods to use administrative data to derive and evaluate trial outputs covering both estimates of the population and socio-economic characteristics, including household attributes. The first set of trial outputs will be available in the autumn of 2015.

Such information may help in running the census, for example in developing the address register and informing the field operation. More information on these strands of work is available at Annex B - available at the base of this section.

Dissemination and disclosure control

The 2011 Census provided more data than ever before, including data for new geographies and alternative populations. This consultation is seeking views on information requirements from the 2021 Census, and is not specifically consulting on the formats in which the data will be available, or the ways in which the data will be accessed. As stated in the [2011 Census General Report](#), for the 2021 Census we will be giving consideration to moving from the traditional approach of producing a large number of small datasets, to producing a smaller number of larger datasets providing greater flexibility. If that option is adopted, it would have the potential to allow users to self-serve to get the combinations of variables at the detail required for their chosen geographic areas, subject to disclosure control constraints.

Geography

A key element of the information requirement is the level of geography that is needed for the topics. Our initial view is that output areas (OAs) and super output areas (SOAs) will be the standard output geography, as for 2011 and 2001. We expect a small percentage (less than 5 per cent) will need to be split or amalgamated because of on the ground changes. The 2011 Workplace Zones will be maintained in 2021 on a similar basis to their creation from 2011 Census data, as splits or merges of the 2021 set of OAs. These initial views will be reviewed over the coming years.

Please confirm you have read and understood this important background information.

(Required)  Yes, I have read and understood the information on this page.

Topic: Religion

The table shows ONS's initial view about collecting data on Religion in the 2021 Census. Please tell us your views on the initial view, and about your use of information by completing the questions further down this page.

Sub-topic	Initial view	Collected in 2011? Yes/No	Comment
Religion	Collect	Yes	Measuring religion is especially sensitive to the precise wording and format of the question; ONS intends to measure religious affiliation in order to provide data comparable with the 2001 and 2011 Censuses.

The census first included the religion topic in 2001. Its inclusion was allowed on the condition that the question was voluntary, and in 2011 it remained the only voluntary question.

[Consultation prior to the 2011 Census](#) showed that many public bodies were using religion data alongside ethnicity to assist in monitoring discrimination. Other common uses included establishing differences in take-up of services and monitoring social exclusion, particularly of minority groups. The [Beyond 2011 Public Consultation](#) highlighted the increasing importance of this topic to users.

It is common practice when measuring the religion of a population to distinguish the concepts of religious affiliation, belief or practice. The report '[Final Recommended Questions 2011 – Religion](#)' stated that the majority of stakeholders who expressed views prior to the 2011 Census were supportive of ONS's decision to collect information on affiliation. However, the 2006/07 [Ethnic Group, National Identity, Religion and Language consultation](#) also identified a demand for a number of alternative concepts.

Cognitive testing and testing on the Opinions Survey showed that alternative questions on religion failed to just measure religious affiliation, instead tapping into practice, belief, or belonging. ONS understands that comparability with the 2011 and 2001 Censuses, which asked the same question, is very important to users. Any change to the question that would affect the comparability of data on this topic would have to meet a clearly identified and strong user need.

ONS intends to continue to collect religion on a voluntary basis in the 2021 Census.

[Manylion pwnc - crefydd - Welsh language](#)

Related questions from the 2011 Census

Religion

<p>20 What is your religion?</p> <p>➤ This question is voluntary</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No religion</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Buddhist</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Hindu</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Jewish</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Muslim</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Sikh</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Any other religion, write in</p> <p><input type="text"/></p>	<p>20 Beth yw eich crefydd?</p> <p>➤ Mae'r cwestiwn hwn yn wirfoddol</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Dim crefydd</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Cristnogaeth (pob enwad)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Bwdhaeth</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Hindŵaeth</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Iddewiaeth</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Islam</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Siciaeth</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Unrhyw grefydd arall, nodwch</p> <p><input type="text"/></p>
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1a Do you currently use 2011 Census information about Religion?

- Yes
- No (Go to question 2)

1b If yes, what do you currently use information about Religion for? Select all that apply.

- Resource allocation – Central government
- Resource allocation – Local government
- Service planning and delivery
- Policy development and monitoring
- Research requirement
- Other purposes (please specify in the box below)

1c How do you currently use information about Religion? For example:

- If you indicated that you use information for resource allocation please describe how and the value of resource being allocated.
- Please describe the specific uses of the data. For example what information sources you use, what specific use you make of census information.
- What additional information do you need on this topic? How would it be used?
- What has been the impact on policy development/monitoring of using census data?
- Please describe the types of research you use the information to support and why the information is important for that.

The British Humanist Association is the national charity working on behalf of non-religious people who seek to live ethical and fulfilling lives on the basis of reason and humanity. We promote a secular state and equal treatment in law and policy of everyone, regardless of religion or belief.

As such we regularly use questions related to religion or belief demographics when developing or advocating for certain policies, in particular in relation to resource allocation for the provision of public services.

The Census is particularly useful in its high statistical significance and in being able to look at small local areas. However it is less helpful than some other surveys (for instance the British Social Attitudes Survey or other opinion polls) in that, in part as a result of the leading character of the question, it records only very weak cultural affiliation, which means that the information captured is not helpful – indeed, misleading – in many contexts (e.g. almost any that relate to allocation of resources to 'faith groups') where measuring religious belonging or practice would be more useful.

Associated evaluation criteria

Strength of user need

User need could be justified in terms of, for example: significant resource allocation, improved service provision, major policy development or policy monitoring.

Additionally, requirements arising from legislation strengthen the case for inclusion. For example, requirements of the UK legislation, UN, UN Economic Commission for Europe and Eurostat will be taken into account.

2a To what extent do you agree with ONS's initial view on whether the following Religion sub-topics are collected in the 2021 Census?

Agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Disagree

Religion



Reminder of ONS's initial view

Sub-topic	Initial view	Collected in 2011? Yes/No	Comment
Religion	Collect	Yes	Measuring religion is especially sensitive to the precise wording and format of the question; ONS intends to measure religious affiliation in order to provide data comparable with the 2001 and 2011 Censuses.

2b Please indicate the impact on you/your work if ONS did not collect information about Religion in the 2021 Census.

High

Medium

Low

Do not use

Religion



2c If you indicated high or medium impact please describe the impact on you/your work if ONS did not collect information about Religion in the 2021 Census. It's really important that you tell us about the impact as this will form an important part of our evaluation. For example:

- What would be the best alternative source of information?
- What would be the impact of using this alternative source?
- What mandatory activities would you no longer be able to carry out?
- What other activities would you no longer be able to carry out?
- What additional costs would you or others incur?

Please write your answer below

Why not ask about the impact on our work if the census DID continue to collect the information about religion?

As already mentioned, the current question is of a leading character and thus records a higher religious response than any other prominent public survey on the topic, embracing (as the ONS itself has admitted) even people whose only connection with religion is that they were once baptised or that they got married in a church. Before the 2011 Census we received strong assurances from the ONS (reflected in <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/census/2011/the-2011-census/2011-census-questionnaire-content/final-recommended-questions-2011---religion.pdf>) that the ONS would do its utmost to make this fact clear.

But this is not at all clear from e.g. <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/detailed-characteristics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/sty-religion.html> and <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/census/2011-census/detailed-characteristics-for-local-authorities-in-england-and-wales/rpt---religion.html>. The closest the latter comes to it is that if you download the PDF it offers it says 'The question ('What is your religion?') asks about religious affiliation, that is how we connect or identify with a religion, irrespective of actual practise or belief. Religion is a many sided concept and there are other aspects of religion such as religious belief, religious practice or belonging which are not covered in this analysis.' But we had expected that the headline presentation would be qualified in stronger terms than this – instead it makes no qualifications and even here no 'innocent reader' would expect that 'affiliation' could mean as little as being baptised in infancy or married in a church. Therefore the current results are misleading.

Equalities legislation requires religious and non-religious beliefs to be treated equally, and it is clear that both religious and non-religious beliefs have relevance to service provision and planning. So while we understand the desire of the ONS to maintain continuity with the previous two censuses, we continue to hold that such weak affiliation is not a proper factor in public policy planning. If the ONS insists on the priority of continuity over relevance then there is a pressing need to disambiguate the

extent to which that affiliation leads to belief, belonging and/or practice, in order to enable the ONS to properly identify the genuinely religious population and the full size of the effectively non-religious population.

Our preference would be for two changes to be made. The first is for the question to be changed from 'What is your religion?' to 'What is your religion, if any?' This is slightly less leading and should be something for which there is definitely adequate space.

The second is for the addition of a second question on religious practice. This could be 'Do you consider that you are actively practising your religion? - Yes – No', in line with the harmonised National Statistics religion question, or it could be something that further disambiguates the extent of practice. If this question were also asked it would allow the ONS to fully identify those who belong to ethno-religious groups such as the Sikhs and Jews, while also allowing the (distinctly smaller) extent to which this translates into religious practice to be measured.

These changes would enable continuity while going some way to ensuring that the results are not misinterpreted at a national political level in the way they have been in the past. It would also mean that the Census presents a more complete and accurate reflection of what religion and belief in England and Wales actually is today.

To answer more directly the question that was asked, if the information was not collected it would in some ways be helpful to us as it would stop politicians and others from mistakenly claiming the population is more religious than it is and justifying dubious public policy decisions on that basis. However, it would also be unhelpful as it would stop us from having the local data which sometimes can be useful.

3a At what geographical level do you currently use information about Religion? Select all that apply.

- Output area
- Super output area
- Ward
- Local authority
- Regional
- National
- Other

3b If you need information about Religion for small geographies please describe how you use it. For example:

- Are you using it to identify specific areas to target for intervention?
- Does it provide input to resource allocation?

The data is sometimes useful when working with local stakeholders. Highly local data is useful to us in particular in looking at the population of catchment areas of schools and at client groups for other local services in order to compare provision with maximum potential demand.

Associated evaluation criteria

Need for information for small geographies or populations

There must be a need for information for small population groups and/or at detailed geographical levels. Information that is only required for broad geographic areas or large population groups might be better obtained from other statistical sources.

All small geography data must easily be aggregated to higher levels of geography, enabling outputs to be consistent and comparable regionally and nationally.

4If you need information about Religion for small population groups please describe how you use it and the impact on you/your organisation if it were not available.

It is helpful to compare religion to ethnicity and age. This can be done whilst maintaining reliability in a way not possible with other surveys.

Associated evaluation criteria

Need for information for small geographies or populations

There must be a need for information for small population groups and/or at detailed geographical levels. Information that is only required for broad geographic areas or large population groups might be better obtained from other statistical sources.

All small geography data must easily be aggregated to higher levels of geography, enabling outputs to be consistent and comparable regionally and nationally.

5aHow important is UK comparability for information about Religion?

- Very important
- Important
- Quite important
- Not important

5bPlease describe how your use of information about Religion requires UK comparability. For example:

- Do you need to make comparisons across the UK for resource allocation purposes?
- Do you need to make comparisons between areas of different sizes, for example comparing data for a local authority with the UK average?
- Are you involved in developing UK wide policy?

- Is your organisational remit UK wide and requires you to provide information to support this?

It is helpful when developing or advocating around UK-wide policy to have comparable data cross the UK. However, we appreciate that some of the decisions involved in question wording in, to a great extent Northern Ireland, and to a lesser extent Scotland, would not be suitable for England and Wales, so this is not solely a question for the ONS, and some of the relevant policy areas are devolved.

Associated evaluation criteria

Assessment of need for UK comparability

Data collected from the census should be required on a comparable basis across a large geographical area. Where possible, if there is a user need, the three UK Census Offices will release census outputs that are consistent across the UK.

Which England and Wales censuses have you compared the 2011 Census Religion data with?

- 2001
- 1991
- 1981
- Earlier censuses
- None

6b Please describe how you have used comparisons from previous censuses for Religion. For example:

- Evaluating change over time in order to make decisions about funding.
- Evaluating change over time in order to make decisions about policy.
- Evaluating benchmarks used for monitoring the success of area based intervention.
- Producing projections.
- Service planning and delivery.

The growth of the 'No religion' category and decline of the 'Christianity' category has been important in debates around the provision of public services, the place of the bishops in the House of Lords, and so on.

Associated evaluation criteria

Continuity with previous censuses

Comparison with previous censuses is an important aspect of census analysis and, wherever appropriate, the 2021 Census questionnaire will collect the same information as the 2011 Census questionnaire.

However, other aspects of user needs may override the need for comparability.

7a To what extent do you need to use information about Religion with information about other census topics?

- Frequently with a wide range of other topics
- Frequently with a limited range of other topics
- Occasionally with a wide range of other topics
- Occasionally with a limited range of other topics
- Not at all

7b Please describe how you use information about Religion with information about other census topics.

Comparing religion with age and ethnicity is particularly interesting. The former has some bearing on debates around the place of religious and non-religious worldviews in the school curriculum (for instance).

Associated evaluation criteria

Requirement for multivariate analysis

A key benefit of census data is the ability to analyse particular variables against one another. A requirement to undertake multivariate analysis will affect whether suitable alternative sources for the information exist and may strengthen the case for inclusion in the census.

7c Please list the other topics that you need to use information about Religion with.

Age, ethnic group, national identity, sexual identity.

Reminder of topics and sub-topics

Topic	Sub-topic
Basic demographics and household composition	Age Sex Marital Status Household and family relationships
Housing	Type of accommodation and Self-containment Tenure and landlord (if renting)

	<p>Number of bedrooms</p> <p>Number of rooms</p> <p>Type of central heating</p> <p>Number of cars or vans</p>
Ethnicity and national identity	<p>Ethnic group</p> <p>National identity</p>
Language	<p>Welsh</p> <p>Main languages used</p> <p>English language proficiency</p>
Religion	Religion
Migration and citizenship	<p>Long term international migration (year of arrival and citizenship)</p> <p>Short term international migration (intention to stay)</p> <p>Internal migration (address one year ago)</p>
Education	Qualifications held
Health	<p>General health</p> <p>Long-term health problem or disability</p>
Carers	Amount of unpaid care provided
Labour market and socio-economic classifications	<p>Economic activity and hours worked</p> <p>Occupation</p> <p>National Statistics socio-economic classification (NS-SeC)</p> <p>Industry</p> <p>Supervisory status and Year last worked</p> <p>Volunteering and unpaid work</p>
Travel	<p>Method of transport to place of work</p> <p>Address of place of work</p>

	Address of place of study
Income	Income
Sexual identity	Sexual identity

8a Do alternative (non-census) sources of information about Religion meet your current requirements?

- Yes fully
 Yes partially
 No
 Don't know

8b Please tell us about the alternative sources of information about Religion that you use. For example:

- Do you use these sources in combination with the census? How?
- What would be the next best alternative source of information?
- What would be the impact of using this alternative source?

We also look at the British Social Attitudes Survey (which measures belonging, or strong affiliation) and other opinion polls (which measure the same, and also religious practice).

We prefer BSAS to the Census as the question it asks is less leading and strong affiliation is more useful in most contexts, with respect to no religion/Christianity in particular. However the Census is the only source available when looking at very local areas.

Associated evaluation criteria

Suitability of alternative sources

The 2021 Census will only seek to collect information that there is no other means of obtaining. Consideration should be given to whether or not suitable information is available from other sources; for example administrative records or sample surveys.

In addition, the census should only collect information that will remain relevant for a significant time after collection.

Additional information

1 Do you have any further comments relevant to this consultation?

The questions in the religion section ask about agreement with the ONS's current view on the topic but it doesn't give any space to write down what you think about their current view, only space to write about the impact on you if ONS didn't include the topic any more, and whether you can get the information elsewhere.

This doesn't allow for the user to advocate for the topic to be modified. This was confusing and unhelpful.

User satisfaction

In order to improve how we run online consultations, we'd really appreciate your feedback about how easy you found our online consultation to use. Please take a moment to complete the following questions. Thanks.

Overall, how satisfied were you with the ONS's online consultation service today?

- Very satisfied
- Satisfied
- Neither satisfied or dissatisfied
- Dissatisfied
- Very dissatisfied

Please tell us if there are any specific areas for improvement, or if you have any other comments.

The questions in the religion section ask about agreement with the ONS's current view on the topic but it doesn't give any space to write down what you think about their current view, only space to write about the impact on you if ONS didn't include the topic any more, and whether you can get the information elsewhere.

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