



House of Commons  
Public Administration Select  
Committee

---

# Official Statistics: 2011 Census Questions

---

## Written Evidence

*This is a volume of submissions, relevant to the inquiry into Official Statistics: 2011 Census Questions, which have been reported to the House but not yet approved for publication in final form. Any public use of, or reference to, the contents should make clear that it is not yet an approved final record of the written evidence received by the Committee.*

# List of written evidence

---

	<i>Page</i>
1 Professor Philip Rees (OSCQ 01)	3
2 Demographics User Group (OSCQ 02)	7
3 Equality and Human Rights Commission (OSCQ 03)	10
4 Market Research Society (OSCQ 04)	15

## **Memorandum from Professor Philip Rees (OSCQ 01)**

Interests: Member of the UK Census Design and Methodology Advisory Committee, Member of the ONS Census Advisory Groups, Member of the Department of Health Advisory Committee on Resource Allocation

### **The Value of the Census**

The decennial census is an absolutely necessary taking of stock of the nation's population, its demographic, social, employment, health, disability statuses and many more at the finest geographical level. No other statistical instrument aims to include all of the UK resident population in this kind of detail. Until such time as an *Integrated Population Statistics System*, approved by Parliament, has been successfully created, the census is essential.

The census form with four pages of household and four pages of individual questions is entirely appropriate for gathering together the information required by central government, local government, businesses, charities and research organisations to report on the "state of the nation".

The Office for National Statistics has worked effectively and responsibly to consult about the nature of the questions to be included. The greatest weight has been given, rightly, to the views of central government and lesser weight to lobby groups including academics like myself. Below I do ask for some reconsideration of the mix of questions, basically inclusion of a question on income using space made available by dropping one or more of the additional questions introduced in the 2011 proposals. I also comment on the good design of the identity/ethnicity questions, for which a census is essential as all survey instruments struggle to achieve adequate samples of the smaller ethnic groups.

The census has one vital quality: through dissemination via the web, via Neighbourhood Statistics and via Statbase (ONS interfaces with equivalents provided by GROS and NISRA) any person can access statistics about their own neighbourhood or any other comparison area. The people provide the data and can use the data provided.

### **Privacy Issues**

Commentators raise issues about privacy of the information collected. That privacy is absolutely guaranteed under successive Census Acts (1920 and 1990). To my knowledge there has been no disclosure of household or individual information from a census by any of the responsible offices (UKSA, ONS, its predecessor OPCS, GROS, NISRA, NAW). The security procedures and statistical disclosure controls adopted by the census offices are a model for other central and local government departments.

### **Cost Issues**

The census does cost a large sum of public money. The census offices undertake extensive, properly conducted tendering to out-source parts of the administration to obtain best value

for money. The major innovation for the 2011 census is the adoption (in England and Wales) of post-out as well as post-back, saving on enumerator labour and at the same time providing the postal firm(s) that may win the contract with valuable additional revenue. This has in turn driven the development, for purposes of the census, of a comprehensive and quality assured national address register. This has the potential for development into a National Address Register for widespread use by government and commerce. A second important innovation is the introduction of web forms that the householder can complete over the internet. My informed guess that at least a quarter of households will use this facility and probably one third by 2011 (this is based on experience in the 2009 Census Rehearsal in Scotland). This will generate many benefits: householders (us) will save the census offices data capture costs; the quality of answers will be improved through edit and consistency checks and routing instructions. People will be thoroughly familiar with such forms which are in common use in government and business. It is also likely that the quality of entries will rise, again based on Scottish census experience.

The long run solution to the cost issue is to follow the excellent pioneering work of our Nordic neighbours (Sweden and Finland in particular) and create a linked, secure, confidential data base of all residents based on administrative registers (e.g. NHS, NINo, e-Borders, HMRC tax and DWP benefit registers). The benefits of so doing would be enormous: at a cost perhaps only 10% of a decennial census, the UKSA would be able to ask the statistical offices to produce a census each year. That census would just be a set of statistical counts equivalent to current census outputs, available electronically to all organizations and individuals who needed to know about the UK population.

### **The Income Question**

This question is absent from yet another census. There were strong representations made by social scientists and business researchers for inclusion of a household income question in the census in 1991 and 2001. We were led to believe that a question on income was a strong runner for inclusion until very shortly before finalisation of the White Paper, cm 7513.

The *arguments for a question on income* are (1) it is the best socio-economic indicator for establishing the level of poverty in households and (2) we need to know about people's incomes by region, local authority and neighbourhood in order to deliver services effectively. Measured income is much more discriminatory than the proxy variables used to construct indexes of deprivation, such as occupation or education (Rees 1979). The alternatives which are used as proxies in indexes of deprivation (census based or administrative data based) dampen down the extent of variation in poverty/affluence across the UK population.

The *arguments against an income question* put by National Statistics are: (1) it would prejudice the completion rates in the census, (2) small area incomes can be estimated from other variables and (3) there is survey information available on income (Labour Force Survey, Annual Population Survey, Integrated Household Survey).

There are *counter-arguments* to each of these points: (1) in the census tests and rehearsals

including an income question in the census form depressed responses by a very small amount (1-2%) and the bands of income are set so broadly that no precise incomes need be disclosed even within the households completing the census, (2) existing estimations based on census proxy variables fail to capture the true variation in income and fail to deliver the income distributions for small areas necessary for policy analysis and (3) the national surveys cannot deliver reliable local or small area estimates because of small sample size and because of new rules restricting publication and use.

People have the right to know the distribution of income in their neighbourhoods and in other parts of the kingdom.

### **The Migration Questions**

The proposed 2011 Census will include more questions on migration than hitherto, focussed on understanding the nature of international immigration to the United Kingdom. These questions were introduced as a response in part to the pressures on National Statistics to improve migration statistics (UKSA 2009). A question on country of birth (Q7 in the England and Wales 2009 Census Rehearsal) has been asked in censuses since 1851; a question on place (Q21 in the England and Wales 2009 Census Rehearsal) has been asked since 1961. To these the proposal is to add Q8, Month and Year of arrival in UK, Q10 intention to stay in the UK and Q11 passports held.

There are strong *arguments against the additional migration questions*: (1) Qs8, 10 and 11 may well cause anxiety for immigrant householders (a fear about being removed) and depress response, (2) Q10 introduces the notion of intention, which departs from usual census practice of asking about current or past status which are “facts” and (3) they will not achieve the objective of improving UK international migration statistics which are needed every year in a decade not just in census year. The aim of understanding the links between date of entry, intention, passport and migration history would have been better explored in a survey rather a census.

My colleagues and I have argued that the additional investment in migration statistics should have been targeted at using administrative statistics, which are already being collected (e.g. Landing Cards, International Passenger Survey) or which are in the pipeline (e.g. e-Borders) (UKSA 2009, Part 2).

### **The Identity Questions**

These questions are well constructed and represent good evolutions of questions introduced in the 1991 and 2001 censuses. Q16 on ethnicity puts right some conceptual inconsistencies in the 2001 question, identifies some new groups usefully but enables useful comparisons to be made with 2001 Census results. Q15 on national identity will, I hope, put to rest concerns expressed by non-English groups that their identities were suppressed. Q18 on language will be helpful in identifying where English language training is needed to give non-speakers better access to the labour market.

## References

Rees, P. (1979) *Residential Patterns in American Cities: 1960*. University of Chicago, Department of Geography, Research Paper No.189, Chapter VI, pp.210-229.

UKSA (2009) *Migration Statistics: the Way Ahead*, Report 4. UK Statistics Authority, London. ISBN: 978-1-85774-904-5.

## Glossary

DWP	Department of Work and Pensions
GROS	General Register Office Scotland (Edinburgh)
HMRC	Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
ONS	Office for National Statistics (London, Titchfield, Newport, Southport)
OPCS	Office for Population Censuses and Surveys (predecessor to ONS)
NAW	National Assembly of Wales (Cardiff/Caerdydd)
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (Belfast)
UKSA	United Kingdom Statistics Authority (London)

November 2009

## **Memorandum from the Demographics User Group (OSCQ 02)**

### **The value of the Census and its questions to commercial companies**

1. The Demographics User Group (DUG)<sup>1</sup> represents the views on matters relating to official statistics, of major commercial companies – Barclays, Boots, Co-operative Group, E.ON, John Lewis, Marks & Spencer, Sainsbury's, Tesco, The Children's Mutual, and Whitbread – which make extensive use of the Census.

2. These and many thousands of other companies turn to the Census to provide information when making vital business decisions, such as:

- Where are the best places for our new outlets?
- Which branches should we close?
- What products and services should we be offering in each of our existing stores?
- Where should we advertise?
- Who are our best customers, and our best prospects?
- Which areas and people should we survey?

These issues are typical for the commercial world, but there are also close parallels amongst public services. (Further illustrations are given in a paper "Meeting the needs of Census users in the UK's private sector").<sup>2</sup> These are of course commercial decisions, but ensuring that evidence exists, and is freely available, promotes business efficiency, and in some cases, the UK's position as a worldwide leader.

3. The Census underpins many decisions involving investments of billions of pounds by businesses every year. Very few large companies still rely solely on "gut feel" when reviewing their branch network or which prospects to target. Making the right investment decisions is vital to business success. The sums of money involved are considerable. For example, the refurbishment of just one pub or restaurant often costs many hundreds of thousands of pounds, whilst the development of a single new superstore can exceed £20 million. Large companies with national chains of stores, branches or restaurants each make decisions about the investment of hundreds of millions of pounds a year: Sainsbury's, for example, have stressed the importance of Census information in developing their "Sainsbury's Local" convenience stores.<sup>3</sup> Further down the scale, a new start-up company might sink or swim depending on whether its first outlet is in the best location. Faced with the worst recession for 50 years, businesses need the best possible information.

### **Why the Census is still better than alternative sources of information**

4. In order to understand their markets, companies seek statistics for small neighbourhoods, across the whole of United Kingdom, for a wide range of question topics. Only the Census can currently provide this. Sample surveys only produce estimates for large areas. Administrative sources, as discussed in the Treasury Sub Committee's report "Counting the

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.demographic.co.uk/dug.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unece.org/stats/documents/2009.10.census.htm>

<sup>3</sup> "The 2001 Census and its significance for the commercial world". Alison Green, Strategic Development Manager, Sainsbury's. British Retail Consortium Solutions, March 2004.

Population”<sup>4</sup> are not yet sufficiently integrated to classify people and areas by several topics at once.

### **The importance of a wide range of questions**

5. Since starting to use the Census 1981, commercial companies have valued many of the established topics that were also asked again in 1991 and 2001. Sometimes the interest is in just one aspect (e.g. the population aged 25-29), but there is often increased value in segmenting the population further (e.g. the potential market of males, in professional occupations, aged 50-64). Commercial companies are also heavy users of geodemographic classifications, which classify every small area throughout the UK by neighbourhood type, and typically are built using at least 40 diverse Census variables. The commercial classifications Acorn and Mosaic, and the ONS’s OAC, are used extensively to profile local areas and also customer files.

### **Census consultation on questions – users’ varied needs**

6. Members of the Demographics User Group appreciate that the choice of questions for the Census form is never easy, and has to cope with conflicting demands for limited space. In our opinion, the Census Offices have done a good job in seeking to assess users’ needs, and making recommendations for parliamentary approval.

7. Extensive consultation was held in 2005 which ranged across users in central and local government, business, and academia. Many questions were supported by all users. Others, such as a question on “Carers”, are of great interest to particular users.

8. Following the publication of a detailed report in March 2006, there were doubts that the following established topics could be included: Qualifications; Industry; Hours Worked; Number of Employees. This would have severely damaged existing classifications, and members of DUG were pleased that funding for a 4th page was secured. Turning to the new questions proposed for 2011, commercial users are pleased to see Second Residence (making sure that every household is recorded at one of its addresses); and Language (for local marketing). Other users, primarily in central government, have made the case for new questions on national identity and citizenship; month & year of entry, and intention to stay; and number of bedrooms.

9. Our one major regret is that there are no plans to include a question on Income, due to fears about the possible effect on response. This topic is important to users in all sectors. Income is regularly asked in censuses held in Australia, New Zealand and the USA, and it is planned to be asked in Scotland in 2011 for the first time.

### **Scope, cost, and maximising value**

10. The Census is a unique opportunity to collect detailed information which is of immense value to decision makers in both businesses and government. The Test Census showed that the inclusion of a 4<sup>th</sup> page had no significant effect on response rates. Also, completion of the

---

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmtreasy/183/183.pdf>

form on the internet will be easier for many users. The cost, when weighed against the scale of decisions to be taken by government and business over the decade 2013 – 2023, is small. The deletion of even a full page of questions would make little difference to the cost, but result in many ill-informed decisions. Our particular fear is that, in seeking to cut costs, the ultimate outputs would suffer for very little saving. For the 2001 Census, only 3% of the budget was spent on creating the final statistics, which are of course the sole purpose of the project. There is a real danger that, having carried out a much-needed Census data collection, the Government will fail in the last hundred yards to maximise the valuable statistical information that should be produced.

November 2009

## Memorandum from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (OSCQ 03)

### *Who we are and what we do*

1. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) was established on 1 October 2007 and is working to eliminate discrimination and hatred, prejudice and hostility against different groups, reduce inequality, protect human rights and to build good relations, ensuring that everyone has a fair chance to participate in society.
2. The Commission is a non-departmental public body (NDPB) established under the Equality Act 2006 and is accountable for its public funds, but independent of government.

### **Summary**

3. This submission is in relation to the content of the census questions . It develops some of the points made in our earlier submission and additionally raises the issue of an income question on the census. The key points are:
  - The inclusion of a **sexual orientation question** is important in making the census relevant and useful in relation to equalities legislation and it is possible for the data to be sufficiently reliable.
  - A **second disability question** in line with the Scottish census is necessary for this information to be reliable and useful.
  - It is vital for an **income question** – at the very least a household income question – to be included in the census if policy and service delivery is to take proper account of socio-economic inequality. The experiences and needs of the other identity groups covered in the census are very different at different levels of income and without an income question the value of many other aspects of the census data is much reduced. It is important to begin to get more accurate population estimates of equality groups at different levels of income.
  - In prioritising the identification of the minority ethnic groups Jews and Sikhs via the religion question, the question has been made less effective for identifying those with non-religious beliefs and those without beliefs. A non-leading question needs to be developed which would collect the identity of a wider range of groups covered by the equality legislation.
4. We recognise that there are difficult decisions to be made in terms of the questions that are included in the space available. Our priority order for additional questions are

- Sexual identity (because of the high user demand and belief that the data that would be derived would be sufficiently reliable in its own terms)
  - Second disability question (because of the evidence that shows the unreliability of the single question on its own and the high user demand for as accurate as possible disability data)
  - Household income (because of the increasing importance of issues around socio-economic equality and the need to have this as a classifying variable to usefully analyse other questions in the census)
5. The judgement that we would make is that the reliability from these questions is sufficient given the importance of their inclusion and that other data developments in other surveys do not reduce the need for these within the census.
  6. It is obviously right that Parliament should weigh up the priorities in terms of what changes/omissions would need to be made to other parts of the census in order to allow these questions to be included. But if the Committee is interested in our views on some candidates for such changes, we would be happy to discuss at the oral session.

### **Sexual Orientation**

7. The following points need to be re-iterated in terms of the need for a sexual identity question to be included
  - a. New legislation is increasing the demand for data on sexual orientation to meet information needs of public sector duties and equality monitoring generally. The Equality Bill currently going through Parliament is expected to increase demand substantially for baseline data on the Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual (LGB) population in order to support the information needs of public bodies who will have to comply with much broader public sector duties to promote equality. This includes bodies operating at a local level, where the census would be the only source of sufficient information, even if sexual orientation data is collected on large national surveys in the future.
  - b. **Inclusion of a sexual orientation question is important for the census to meet user need.** In the consultations undertaken by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on the content of the 2011 census, high user demand from stakeholders placed sexual orientation in the highest category of need. The census outputs will serve public policy needs until the early 2020s and the data from the census and Integrated Household Survey combined would allow the urgent need to establish population estimates of the LGB population to be met. LGB individuals should have the opportunity to identify themselves in the census to the same extent as other groups covered by equalities legislation. For the census to be fully relevant it needs to give equal treatment to this equality

strand as to the others, all of which are covered in the census. Inclusion on the census would also help establish the general acceptability of collecting data on this topic. Not including a sexual orientation question is widely perceived to marginalise and exclude the LGB population.

- c. An on-line survey<sup>5</sup> of nearly 3,000 people with minority sexual orientations suggests that high proportions of these respondents segregate themselves into particular areas or occupations because of fears that their sexual orientation will not be accepted in some places. This is potentially damaging for individuals and the economy and these patterns need to be better understood to help guide local services and interventions. Only the census will deliver this.
- d. **Inclusion of a sexual orientation question will yield sufficiently reliable data.** The Commission has been arguing for the inclusion of a question on this topic for over a year and still believes that it is appropriate and possible to include one on a voluntary basis in the same way as the question on religion is included. The Sexual Identity Project carried out by ONS has demonstrated that it is possible to collect data on this topic and has in the process developed a question that could be used.
- e. In the above mentioned on-line survey of nearly 3000 people with minority sexual orientations and 2000 heterosexual orientations, nearly 80% of heterosexual respondents and nearly 85% of those with minority sexual orientations supported or did not mind the inclusion of a sexual identity question in the census.<sup>6</sup>
- f. Although a minority of people may identify differently in the census process than they might in surveys where responses are more private, research suggests this is a relatively small minority and the data on those identifying with minority sexual orientations within the household that the census would deliver would be valuable in its own right. *It should be noted that similar issues of accuracy or privacy could equally apply to other questions such as the disability or religious ones, but are not seen as a barrier to their inclusion in the census.*

## Disability

- 8. **The Commission sees a strong need for a second question on disability, in line with the two questions proposed in Scotland.** The proposal for Scotland involves asking a question about specific health conditions, such as mental health and specific impairments such as being deaf and then asking the general question proposed in the England and Wales census on whether the respondent has a limiting health condition

---

<sup>5</sup> The report from this survey with details of the sampling and some key findings is published on the EHRC website. The sample was taken from a self-selected panel who have signed up to take part in online surveys.

<sup>6</sup> These figures are weighted to be broadly representative of the population in terms of age, gender, employment status, industry sector, SEG and education level as detailed in the published report, but due to the nature of the sample need to be treated with caution as we do not know how representative self-selected panel members are of the population, hence the rounding of the figures.

or disability. Inclusion of the prior question as proposed for Scotland is necessary for both reasons of reliability and relevance/usefulness.

9. In respect of reliability, research suggests that some areas, such as mental health, are under-reported in general questions on disability/health conditions (particularly as the proposed question does not explicitly indicate that it covers both physical and mental health conditions and disabilities). In terms of relevance and usefulness it is clear that the issues and support requirements of, say, deaf people, are substantially different from, say, people with mental health conditions. Failure to distinguish different disabilities at this level make the relevance of the census data very poor for local service provision or for helping local authorities to prioritise activities within the duties laid on them by equalities legislation.

### **Income**

10. There is strong user demand for this question to be included. The issues around poverty and around socio-economic equality remain highly important. In understanding properly the experiences and consequent service planning needs of different equality groups, it is necessary to understand their income distribution at local, regional and national level. The full value of the other questions in the census cannot be derived without this. The arguments for and against the income question have been summarised in the submission to the committee by Professor Philip Rees and we will not repeat them.
11. Although there may be initial negative reactions to the inclusion of an income question, this was also the case when the ethnic minority question was added, but this has not persisted, rather the debate has moved on to what question best captures ethnicity rather than whether it should be captured at all. This is likely to be the case with the household income question – and indeed a sexual identity question – and there needs to be some leadership in these areas, as there was in the case of ethnicity.
12. Although there are issues about gender in relation to the collection of household income data rather than individual income data, we believe that at the very minimum the Scottish decision to include a household income variable within the household part of the census should be followed in England and Wales.

### **Religion**

13. The Commission previously raised an issue concerning the religion question in our submission to the PASC in June, i.e. that the religion question must not be a leading question in terms of assuming a religion and must cover belief as well as religion in line with equalities legislation in order to make the information reliable and useful.

14. The reference to the leading nature of the question refers to the wording of the question stem which is “What is your religion?” Stakeholders have raised concerns that this biases the question towards specific religions and away from the 'no religion' response. In fact different question wording has been shown to result in a much higher percentage with no religion.
15. Equalities legislation covers both religious and 'similar' non-religious beliefs as well as those without such beliefs. The current question only covers religion both in the question stem and in the answers, e.g. 'no religion' and 'any other religion'. We would like to see further work carried out by ONS to extend religion questions to cover other relevant concepts and provide data on other belief groups.
16. The issue of ensuring the question is not leading is clearly important in a question designed to measure broad affiliation, which is the stated aim of the currently proposed census question.

November 2009

## **Memorandum from the Market Research Society (MRS) (OSCQ 04)**

### **Introduction**

The Market Research Society (MRS) is the world's largest association representing providers and users of market, social, and opinion research. The latest MRS annual survey of the UK market research industry showed that total industry revenue increased by 6.2% during 2008 reaching an estimated value of £2.16bn. The UK is the second largest market and social research market in the world.

Full details on MRS and its activities are available via: <http://www.mrs.org.uk>

The Census provides the information bedrock which underpins quantitative survey research in the UK. It delivers the primary source that drives geodemographics, and is used by the private and public sector to support countless investment and social marketing decisions every year.

Census data is a vital data source for research and MRS, its members and Company Partners, are concerned that the Census continues to give high quality statistics on the population, households and labour market.

### **Breadth of Census Questions**

Market and social researchers appreciate that changes in society have resulted in increasing difficulties to conduct the Census in the traditional way. MRS therefore supports the decision by the Census Offices to include new questions on topics such as month and year of entry, second residences and intention to stay, in order to strengthen the definition of the population base used in the Census.

Other new questions have been added on topics such as national identity and citizenship, largely at the request of central government.

The decision to include all of the above topics raised a concern amongst our users that there would be insufficient space in the Census form for established questions on the labour market, such as occupation, industry, qualifications and hours worked. These are the essential ingredients for creating social classifications, which are another important application of the Census. The labour market questions also provide the closest proxy to asking a question on income, which had been requested by many users but was dropped due to ONS fears about possible effects on response rates.

The Census Offices responded well to the concern about space on the form - after consultation and testing, funding was obtained for a 4<sup>th</sup> page of individual questions, enabling the new topics to be included without loss of valuable established labour market questions. MRS welcomed this decision - it should enable the 2011 Census to provide a reliable and rich

information resource for the next decade.

If government now decides to cut back on the census questionnaire, the cost saving would be marginal however the information loss for research purposes would be many times greater. Having less robust census data to draw from would be to the detriment of all aspects of society including government, commerce and the general public.

### **Delivery of Census Outputs**

MRS understands that the 2011 Census does not have central funding for producing outputs from 2012/13 onwards, yet output processing must surely be a relatively small cost compared with the budget that has been approved up to 2012.

MRS is therefore extremely concerned that the benefits of the 2011 data collection will fail to be delivered to users, which will be a great waste of the investment of time and money that will have been made in the 2011 Census so far.

MRS welcomes the efforts of the Census Offices in starting to explore partnership working to exploit the 2011 Census outputs. However this cannot be allowed to replace the central creation and delivery of a set of high quality statistics that meet user needs and are freely accessible for all.

For more detailed views on 2011 Census, the Census questions and process, please see the submission from MRS to the Public Administration Select Committee which was sent in June 2009.<sup>7</sup>

November 2009

---

<sup>7</sup> Public Administration Select Committee, Oral and Written Evidence, Official Statistics: 2011 Census, Session 2008-09, HC 742-i, Ev 41