

Scotland's Census 2021
Rooms and Bedrooms Topic Report

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1. Main Points

- Number of rooms information has been collected by Scotland's Census since 1951.
- A bedrooms question has not been included in Scotland's Census before, but was included in the 2011 censuses in England and Wales, and Northern Ireland.
- Strong user need was identified for data to enable calculations of overcrowding/under-occupancy; estimating property size, and informing housing property and strategy.
- Given the high demands for questions to be included in the Census, it would be disproportionate to ask two questions to meet one data need. Stakeholder engagement identified that data on number of bedrooms would best meet user needs.
- Census 2021 testing did not include a bedrooms question as this is an existing question. The question has been used in the Scottish Household Survey, and performed well in the England and Wales census in 2011.
- Research and analysis does support taking a question on bedrooms further at this stage.
- The digital first approach for 2021 requires further development and user testing to fully understand the best way to present the questions online to maximise response, minimise respondent burden and ensure good quality data which meets user needs. An on-going programme of question development, focusing on sensitive or complex questions will further inform the specific question wording.

2. Introduction

This topic review sets out the evidence gathered in developing a rooms and bedrooms question set for Scotland's Census 2021.

Question development for the 2021 Census began in 2015. An iterative and comprehensive process of user consultation, evaluation and prioritisation of user requirements, and qualitative and quantitative question testing has been carried out to inform decisions on the questions to be recommended for inclusion in the 2021 Census. More information about [research and preparation](#) and [question development](#) for Scotland's Census 2021 can be found online.

The 2021 Census will be digital first. The Census 2021 questionnaire must gather high quality data that meets user needs. More information about [key elements of the design](#) for 2021 can be found online.

Two frameworks have been published by National Records of Scotland (NRS) to evaluate the effectiveness of [question design for existing, alternative and new questions](#) (PDF) and to evaluate the effectiveness of [question design of tick box response options](#) (PDF).

Questions and their response options are evaluated against five main themes:

Strength of user need

- ✓ Data collected by the census must meet a user need for equality monitoring, policy development, resource allocation and/or service planning and delivery.

Suitability of alternative sources

- ✓ Data collected by the census must meet a user need that cannot be met elsewhere.

Acceptability, clarity and data quality

- ✓ Questions asked in the census must be acceptable to the majority of the public, clear and be designed with minimal respondent burden in order to obtain good data quality that meets user needs.

Comparability

- ✓ Data collected by the census should be comparable over time where possible, and harmonised across the UK where reasonable.

Operational considerations

- ✓ Census questions must be considered as part of the census as a whole, where effective digital and paper design, space and financial constraints must be considered. Additionally, some questions may be required for operational purposes in the process of conducting the census.

The final decision on the content of Scotland's Census 2021 questionnaire will ultimately be made by the Scottish Parliament.

As in previous years, there will be separate censuses conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in England and Wales, and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in Northern Ireland. The three census offices work together to develop a set of questions that, wherever possible and necessary, will deliver harmonised outputs across the UK.

3. Background

Data on the number of rooms available for use by a household have been used to:

- calculate overcrowding/under-occupancy;
- estimate property size; and
- inform housing policy and strategy

3.1 Previous Scotland's Census rooms questions

Figure 1. Scotland's Census 2001 Rooms Question

H3 How many rooms do you have for use only by your household?

- ◆ Do not count bathrooms, toilets, halls or landings, or rooms that can only be used for storage such as cupboards.
- ◆ Do count all other rooms, for example kitchens, living rooms, bedrooms, utility rooms and studies.
- ◆ If two rooms have been converted into one, count them as one room.

Number of rooms

Figure 2. Scotland's Census 2011 Rooms Question

H8 How many rooms are available for use only by this household?

- ◆ Do NOT count:
 - bathrooms
 - toilets
 - halls or landings
 - rooms that can only be used for storage such as cupboards.
- ◆ Count all other rooms, for example:
 - kitchens
 - living rooms
 - utility rooms
 - bedrooms
 - studies
 - conservatories.
- ◆ If two rooms have been converted into one, count them as one room.

Number of rooms

Minor updates were made to the rooms question between 2001 and 2011. The main change was to the layout of the question. Other changes included a minor wording change to the question stem and the addition of an instruction to count conservatories.

The Census Quality Survey (CQS)¹ agreement rates can be found in Chapter 9 of the [2011 General Report](#) (PDF). The rate for rooms was 86.6%. This was the lowest agreement rate of all the questions in the Housing and Accommodation section of the census questionnaire, with all the rest having rates of 94.8% or higher.

¹ The CQS was a voluntary survey carried out after the census to measure the accuracy of responses in the census. The survey asked a sample of the population the same questions as were asked in the census. Answers between the census and the CQS were compared and where responses differed, follow-up questions were asked of the respondents to determine why this was. Agreement rates were calculated for each question: the percentage of CQS respondents that gave the same response to the census and the CQS question. The Census Quality Survey (CQS) agreement rates are an indicator of quality for the Scotland's Census 2011 questions.

3.2 Rooms and bedrooms questions in other UK 2011 censuses

The rooms and bedrooms questions asked by ONS and NISRA are shown below in Figures 3 and 4, respectively.

Figure 2. ONS 2011 Rooms and Bedrooms Questions

H9 How many rooms are available for use only by this household?

➔ Do NOT count:

- bathrooms
- toilets
- halls or landings
- rooms that can only be used for storage such as cupboards

➔ Count all other rooms, for example:

- kitchens
- living rooms
- utility rooms
- bedrooms
- studies
- conservatories

➔ If two rooms have been converted into one, count them as one room

Number of rooms

H10 How many of these rooms are bedrooms?

➔ Include all rooms built or converted for use as bedrooms, even if they are not currently used as bedrooms

Number of bedrooms

Figure 1. NISRA 2011 Rooms and Bedrooms Questions

H9 How many rooms are available for use only by this household?

➔ Do not count bathrooms, toilets, halls or landings, or rooms that can only be used for storage such as cupboards.

➔ Count all other rooms (for example, kitchens, living rooms, utility rooms, bedrooms, studies and conservatories).

➔ If two rooms have been converted into one, count them as one room.

Number of rooms

While the rooms question asked by NISRA has a slightly different layout to the question asked by NRS and ONS (which are identical), it does collect the same information.

ONS introduced a question on bedrooms in 2011. No question on bedrooms was asked by NISRA.

As data on number of bedrooms was not collected in Scotland in 2011 there is no Scottish CQS agreement rate for this. However, ONS ran a CQS in England and Wales and their agreement rate for number of bedrooms was 91.4%.

For comparison, their CQS agreement rate for number of rooms was 66.5% with all other questions in the Housing and Accommodation section of the questionnaire having agreement rates of over 88%.

These results indicate that respondents found the bedrooms Question easier to answer than the rooms Question. This suggests that a bedrooms Question would provide higher quality data.

3.3 Alternative sources

Since 2012, a set of core questions has been used to provide information on the composition, characteristics and attitudes of Scottish households and adults across a number of topic areas through the three largest surveys in Scotland:

- the [Scottish Household Survey](#) (SHS)
- the [Scottish Health Survey](#) (SHeS)
- the [Scottish Crime and Justice Survey](#) (SCJS)

A set of core and harmonised questions is recommended in order to provide comparable estimates across Scotland. More information can be found on the Scottish Government website ([Core Survey Questions](#)).

Number of rooms and number of bedrooms are both harmonised survey questions.

The SHS collects the number of bedrooms but not the number of rooms. The other social surveys listed above do not collect information on either rooms or bedrooms.

4. Understanding user need

4.1 Topic consultation

NRS invited views on [Scotland's Census 2021 – Topic Consultation](#) (PDF) between 8 October 2015 and 15 January 2016. The consultation was a key step towards understanding what information users will need from the census in 2021, and helped to build strong cases to justify the inclusion of topics. The focus of the consultation was on information required at topic-level, not the detail of the questions that should be asked on the questionnaire.

Following the consultation, NRS worked closely with stakeholders through follow-up events, meetings, focus groups and online surveys to gather more detailed information about data requirements to ensure user needs were understood. Information about these events can be found on our [Get Involved pages](#) online.

There were 46 responses received through the topic consultation on the subject of Housing and Accommodation, around half of which commented on rooms and bedrooms. A summary of these responses can be found in the [Topic Consultation Report](#) (PDF).

Through the consultation, stakeholders indicated that data on number of rooms and number of bedrooms are generally required to meet the same key user needs:

- Calculating overcrowding/under-occupancy
- Estimating property size
- Informing housing policy and strategy

NRS proposed to continue to collect data on number of rooms and to give further consideration to whether information on number of bedrooms should be collected in 2021. NRS noted in the Topic Consultation Report that in the interest of minimising respondent burden, trade-offs may be required.

4.2 Further stakeholder engagement

As part of follow-up work to the Topic Consultation, NRS investigated which data, number of rooms or number of bedrooms, would best meet user needs. Part of this analysis was a survey which was available from 30 May 2017 to 30 June 2017.

There were 15 responses to the survey: six from individuals and nine on behalf of organisations or groups. The respondents included the Scottish Government and six local authorities.

The majority of respondents indicated that data on number of bedrooms would meet their needs sufficiently. Respondents indicated that the bedrooms question shown in the survey would meet these needs.

Those who indicated that data on number of bedrooms would not meet their needs, cited uses of the data for which data on number of bedrooms has been deemed to be sufficient.

More information about this survey and the results can be found in the [Survey Summary](#) on the Scotland's Census website.

5. Question testing

NRS testing did not include a bedrooms question as this is an existing question.

The existing question has been used in the Scottish Household Survey. It also performed sufficiently well in the England and Wales census in 2011.

6. Other Considerations

During user consultation, some respondents highlighted information requirements for continuity between 2011 and 2021.

NRS has looked into whether there is scope to support this need through administrative data. If sufficient demand arose in the future, this could be taken forward as a data linkage project. However, research to date suggests the quality of the Scottish Assessors Association (SAA) data does not allow users replication of the previous Census question.

7. Next Steps

Research and analysis support taking a question on bedrooms further at this stage.

NRS is continuing question development of a full question set for the 2021 Census and will be considering questionnaire design and respondent burden. The final decision on the content of Scotland's Census 2021 questionnaire will ultimately be made by the Scottish Parliament.

The digital first approach for 2021 requires further development and user testing to fully understand the best way to present the questions online to maximise response, minimise respondent burden and ensure good quality data which meets user needs. An on-going programme of question development, focusing on sensitive or complex questions will further inform the specific question wording.

More information about preparation for Scotland's Census 2021 and details about upcoming events can be found on the [Scotland's Census website](#), by subscribing to the [Scotland's Census newsletter](#) and following us on Twitter [@NatRecordsScot](#).