

**Scotland's Census 2021
Voluntary and Unpaid Work Topic Report**

Table of Contents

1. Main Points.....	3
2. Introduction.....	4
3. Understanding user need	5
3.1 Alternative sources	5
3.2 Topic Consultation	5
4. Next steps.....	6

1. Main Points

- Some support for a question on voluntary and unpaid work was identified, to help understand and deliver support to third sector service delivery.
- In the [Topic Consultation Report](#) (PDF) published in August 2016, NRS concluded further consideration was required. This included work to understand whether the Census was the most appropriate way of collecting the information.
- There are alternative data sources currently available which collect data on volunteering.
- Gathering data on voluntary and unpaid work is complex, and stakeholders noted issues around clear definitions and the number of questions required to gather good quality data.
- Research and analysis does not support taking a question on this subject further at this stage.

2. Introduction

This topic review sets out the evidence gathered in developing a question on volunteering 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 at the links in this document.

The 2021 Census will be digital first. The Census 2021 questionnaire must gather high quality data that meets user needs. The following link provides more information about [key elements of the design](#) for 2021.

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.

Information about volunteering was not collected in Scotland's Census 2011. ONS did not include a question on voluntary work in the 2011 Census. NISRA included a question on voluntary work in the 2011 Census.

3. Understanding user need

3.1 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](#)) and 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 about this can be found on the Scottish Government website.

The main source of data on volunteering is the Scottish Household Survey ([SHS](#)) which asks three questions: one on the frequency of volunteering, one on the number of hours spent carrying out voluntary work and one on the type of voluntary work involved in.

3.2 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.

There were 20 responses received through the topic consultation on the subject of volunteering. A summary of these responses can be found in the [Topic Consultation Report](#) (PDF).

The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act aims to give community bodies rights and public sector authorities duties to boost community empowerment and engagement. Some consultation respondents noted an interest in monitoring this.

It was also noted information on voluntary and unpaid work could be useful as a supplement to information on the labour market.

However, developing a satisfactory question which would cover the wide variety of voluntary work which people might undertake is complex from a single question. There was concern from some consultation respondents that it would not be possible to ask a satisfactory question on voluntary work. Concern was raised about potential unwillingness to report voluntary and unpaid work given implications for benefits. While there was some need identified for small geographies, this was not a universal need.

Given the demand for questions in the census, user need was not identified as strong enough to include more than a single question on voluntary and unpaid work in the census.

4. Next steps

Research and analysis does not support taking a question on this subject further at this stage.

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

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](#).