

Scotland's Census 2021 – Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Stakeholder Meeting

Tuesday 24 January, 2017

Scotland's Census 2021 – Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Stakeholder Meeting

Minutes of Meeting 24 January 2017, 14:00-16:00
New Register House, Edinburgh

Attendees:	Gordon Bryden	National Records of Scotland
	Esta Clark	National Records of Scotland
	Sarah Duncan	Scottish Government
	Karen Grieve	Scottish Government
	Tim Hopkins	Equality Network
	Jon Hunter	Scottish Government
	Hugh Kerr	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency(NISRA)
	Brandi Lee Lough Dennell	LGBT Health
	Anneli Lyon	National Records of Scotland
	Cecilia Macintyre	National Records of Scotland
	Michelle Monkman	ONS
	Hannah Pearson	Equality Network
	Liam Rankin	Scottish Government
	Jamie Roberston	Scottish Government
	Catherine Somerville	Stonewall Scotland
	Simon Stockwell	Scottish Government

Purpose

The purpose of the stakeholder event was to provide an opportunity for (potential) sexual orientation and gender identity data users to explore data needs together with National Records of Scotland (NRS) and the Scottish Government (SG).

The event also provided the opportunity for participants to hear about research and testing plans being developed by NRS and the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

Overview of NRS work on sexual orientation and gender identity topics

Celia Macintyre updated the group on the results of the NRS topic consultation which indicated a user need for data on sexual orientation and gender identity. She gave a brief overview of the research and testing plans and how NRS are working collaboratively with ONS and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in the current public acceptability research.

The slides from Celia's presentation can be found on [Scotland's Census website](#)

Update on ONS work

Michelle Monkman from ONS provided an update on how ONS are taking the gender identity work forward.

The slides from Michelle's presentation can be found on [Scotland's Census website](#)

Discussion groups

The attendees split into two groups in order to discuss and provide feedback on sexual orientation and gender identity topics. Below is a summary of the key points raised in both groups in relation to the topics.

Sexual Orientation

User need

Currently available survey data provides an insight into issues for LGBT population but sample sizes are small. The data is needed for equality monitoring whilst significant funding is also provided to various services and equality groups. However, the lack of accurate baseline information was felt to be an issue.

It was thought that census data could potentially provide:

- Baseline figures for statistics and policy development
- Analysis would provide evidence for targeting programmes/ funding
- There may be the ability to perform multivariate analysis at small geographies for which there is a strong user need.

Data quality

There are data quality issues with existing SG survey core questions but the data are still useful. It is believed that there is under reporting, especially in older age groups. It is important to acknowledge these potential issues when results are reported. The 2021 Census could be the first big step to improve data quality.

Public acceptability

Public perception and awareness is changing and quality of responses to sexual orientation questions in surveys is improving. There are continued societal changes, increased awareness and it is thought there is a growing assumption amongst data users that a question on sexual orientation will be included in the census.

Question

If a question is to be asked in the census, it was thought important that it is developed in such a way that it can be asked across other surveys too.

There was a discussion about the age of those who might complete a question. Whilst some people might object if people under 16 were asked to complete the question, it was noted there may well be people under 16 who have a developed a sexual orientation and who may wish to respond.

A voluntary question may be better than a 'prefer not to say option'. However, there was also some discussion about the reliability of data from a voluntary question.

There was some support for a 'write in' box although it was noted that this isn't always meaningful as the numbers can be too small. It was also noted that a 'write in' box shouldn't be compulsory if the 'other' box was ticked.

There was user need identified for data on the asexual population. This shouldn't be a tick box however to avoid confusing respondents.

Guidance

If included, there should be guidance to explain why the question is being asked, as this may improve completion rates. There should also be publicity before the census. There needs to be guidance about who should complete the census form so that individuals have the opportunity to complete the form in private if they wish.

Terminology

There was a brief discussion on the differences in terminology used in England and Scotland. Whilst the term being used in England is Sexual Identity, stakeholders in Scotland prefer the term Sexual Orientation for two key reasons. Sexual Orientation is the protected characteristic (as covered in the Equality Act) and it is felt to be more clearly distinguishable from Gender Identity.

Gender Identity

Issues

There is a need for data on gender identity for equality monitoring and to help evidence where there is a need for service provision. The sex question from the 2011 Census does not allow non-binary people to respond accurately.

Questions

There was support for the question from the 2017 public acceptability research as a replacement for the 2011 Census sex question. It was noted that:

- It allows non binary people to respond
- 'In another way' is better than 'Other'
- Terminology is acceptable. There was discussion of man/woman and male/female and male/female was seen as acceptable but man/woman is preferred.
- It was noted that this question is just an example of what might be asked in 2021

It does not however provide information about the trans population and would need to be followed by a question such as: Have you ever identified as transgender? Y/N

It was accepted by members of the group that it was unrealistic to include four questions such as those developed by Equality and Human Rights Commission in the census.

Question development is important as data from surveys should be comparable with the census.

Various issues were also noted such as whether a gender and/ or trans question should be compulsory and that there would need to be consideration of young people.

Privacy

There are issues around privacy and any question about the stage of transition would be considered intrusive. Some trans people find the 'sex at birth' question offensive.

Protected characteristic

Sex and gender reassignment are both protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010. The Women and Equalities Committee (UK Parliament) have requested that gender identity is the protected characteristic (rather than Gender Reassignment as at present).

Outputs

How would the responses from a gender question be output? This is a technical consideration that NRS and SG statisticians will need to discuss.

Legal

It was noted that the First Minister has stated that there would legal recognition of non-binary people in this parliament. By 2021, people will be recognised as non-binary and intersex and the census should be required to acknowledge this.

Next steps

The next steps are to share the discussion and feedback with attendees. NRS would then identify the key issues to take forward and develop an action plan. Research and testing findings will be shared with stakeholders and NRS will continue working with colleagues across the UK to harmonise where required.