Scotland's Census 2021
Religion Topic Report

Table of Contents

1.   Main Points

- Data on religion is widely used. In 2001, questions on religion were introduced for the first time in Scotland. The 2001 and 2011 question on current religion collected information about religious belonging.

- Strong user need was identified for data on religion.

- In the [Topic Consultation Report](#) (PDF) NRS proposed to continue to collect information on religion in 2021.

- The 2011 current religion question, which asked "what religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?" produces good quality data and fully meets the needs of the majority of users.

- Research and analysis supports taking this question on religion 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.

- Further investigation is on-going for a limited number of requests for additional information to be collected.

2.   Introduction

This topic review sets out the evidence gathered in developing a religion question 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

Religion is a related and complementary concept to ethnic group in the census. Data on religion is widely used for equality monitoring, to identify particular religious groups and to better understand their needs and characteristics, for planning of services and for research and by special interest groups. Religion is a protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. The census provides the only robust source of detailed data on religion at small geographies.
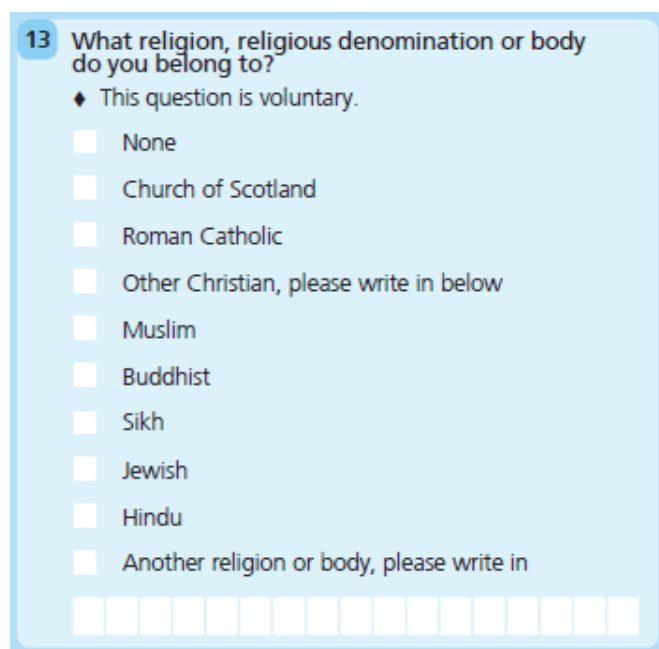
In 2001, questions on religion were introduced for the first time in Scotland. Two questions were included. One question asked "what religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?" and the other question asked "what religion, religious denomination or body were you brought up in?". These are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Scotland's Census 2001 religion questions

The 2011 census retained the religion question about current religion. This question collects information about religious belonging and asks "what religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?". The 2011 Census question is shown in Figure 2.

The question about religion of upbringing was not included in the 2011 Census. Consultation revealed limited user demand for the religion of upbringing question. Stronger requirements were identified for other census topics. Capacity for other questions created by omitting this question allowed NRS to include other questions for which there was greater demand.

Figure 2. Scotland's Census 2011 religion question

The question about current religion was amended for 2011. The row of write-in boxes for 'Other Christian' denominations was removed with respondents specifying 'Other Christian' denominations instructed to write in at the end of the question. The information stating the question was voluntary was added. This question provided data comparable to the question on current religion included in 2001. More information about changes for 2011 can be found online.

3.1 Questions in other UK 2011 censuses

The 2001 Census was the first time religion questions had been asked in Scotland, England or Wales, although the Northern Ireland census has included a religion question since 1861.

While all countries asked at least one question on religion in 2011, different concepts were measured due to country specific user requirements and for consistency with previous censuses. Different response options also reflected country specific requirements and the largest denominations by population in each country.

Northern Ireland asked two questions on religion in 2011 (Figure 3). The question wording for these questions was the same as the questions included in the 2001 Census in Scotland. The question stem of the Northern Ireland question on current religion in 2011 was the same as the wording used in Scotland, although response options varied. Data collected on current religion is comparable across Scotland and Northern Ireland.

Figure 3: 2011 Census religion questions, Northern Ireland (left) and England (right)

One question on religion was asked in the 2011 Census in England and Wales (Figure 3). England and Wales asked a question about religious affiliation which asked "what is your religion?". Response options also varied.

Although the data collected from the question in England and Wales is not considered to be comparable with data collected in Scotland[1], the outputs are considered to be harmonised, such that comparisons can be made across the UK.

3.2 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 about which can be found on the Scottish Government website (Core Survey Questions).

Religion is a core survey question in Scotland. The core survey question asks "what religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?", and provides

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[1] For more information the Office for National Statistics 2011 Census UK Comparability Report is available online at https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census/2011ukcensuses

comparable data to the 2011 Census. This question has mostly the same response options as the 2011 Census question. However, the core question does not collect write-in information about 'Other Christian' denominations and "Pagan" is included as an additional response option. This question is shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Scottish Government Core Survey Questions – Religion

Question:	What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?
Answer:	1. None
	21. Church of Scotland
	22. Roman Catholic
	23. Other Christian
	24. Muslim
	25. Buddhist
	26. Sikh
	27. Jewish
	28. Hindu
	29. Pagan
	30. Another religion, please write in

In addition, some surveys ask about discrimination relating to religion. The SHS asks questions about experience of discrimination and harassment because of religion. The SCJS asks questions about targeting or motivation or crime related to religion.

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) and the Annual Population Survey (APS) ask the 2011 England and Wales religion question "what is your religion?" but retain the response options of the 2011 Census question in Scotland.

4.   Understanding user need

4.1   Topic consultation

NRS invited views on Scotland's Census 2021 in the 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 34 responses received through the topic consultation on the subject of religion. A summary of these responses can be found in the Topic Consultation Report (PDF). In this report, NRS proposed to continue collecting information on religion in 2021.

Stakeholders identified the following reasons for requiring information on religion:

- to plan and deliver services,
- equalities monitoring,
- policy development,
- resource allocation,
- area profiling,
- to identify demand for denominational schools, and for
- research and analysis.

Many stakeholders expressed a need to obtain data at small area level or for multivariate analysis with other census variables, including demographics (for example, age, sex and family size), ethnic group, country of birth, employment, economic activity and general health.

4.2   Further stakeholder engagement

An Ethnicity, National Identity, Language, and Religion Topic Event was held on 20 April 2017. In order to capture the requirements of users who could not attend the event, and to capture further detailed requirements from those who did, a paper (event only) and an online survey ran alongside this event. A summary is available on the Scotland's Census website.

NRS has engaged with a range of stakeholders who have expressed requirements for additional information or made requests for change to the religion question in 2021.

NRS released a draft Scotland's Census 2021 Outputs Strategy (PDF) in February 2018 on Scotland's Census website and invited views on the proposals through a series of Outputs Strategy Events and an online survey. This strategy included a proposal to include large write-in categories in outputs that will be available in 2021 through a flexible table builder. More information is available on the Scotland's Census website.

A 2018 Religion Stakeholder survey aimed to gather additional views on the religion question for 2021 and feedback on the proposals to group some religious denominations for the purposes of creating aggregate output groups. This survey was open from 09 August to 07 September 2018 and gathered 118 responses.

4.3   User need for 2021

The majority of stakeholders indicated that the data collected in 2011 fully met their needs and that asking the same question in 2021 would fully meet their needs for 2021. There are no quality or acceptability concerns about the data this question provided in the 2011 Census[2].

Those for whom the data partially met or did not meet requirements expressed requirements for data on:

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[2] More information about data quality can be found in Scotland's Census 2011 General Report.

- affiliation rather than belonging to allow stronger data comparability across the UK;
- religious practice or attendance;
- belief, including non-religious belief (although it was also noted there are concerns about the type of data captured by a question asking about 'belief'); and
- religion of upbringing.

However, overall user need for data on these aspects of religion or belief was determined to be low.

There were some requests for additional information on Christian denominations. Information on Christian denominations was captured by write-ins in the 2011 Census and is available at national level [3]. The proposals outlined in Scotland's Census 2021 Outputs Strategy (PDF) are considered to mostly meet these needs expressed by users for 2021.

A limited number of requests for additional information to be collected using the 2011 question are being considered. Further information on the development of these requests for additional information is included in Next steps.

5. Question testing

It is recognised a digital first census for 2021 provides opportunities to improve question format online in order to minimise respondent burden and therefore improve data quality. Testing has focused on investigating improvements to question design for an online format. Specifically, the paper format indicates that respondents "write-in below" in the same text field allocated to other response options, which can cause some confusion for respondents.

This section provides evidence from the question testing process carried out by NRS in the question development process for Scotland's Census 2021.

Cognitive testing and quantitative testing processes are used in developing census questions:

- Cognitive testing is a form of in-depth interviewing with a small number of respondents. It aims to provide an insight into the mental processes respondents use when answering questions. This helps us to identify if there are any problems with a question or question design and gain an insight into the source of any difficulty respondents are having.

- Quantitative testing is undertaken primarily to identify data quality concerns. NRS included feedback questions in the quantitative testing in order to gather further information on public acceptability and to identify specific difficulties respondents faced if they were unable to answer a question easily.

In 2017 NRS commissioned ScotCen Social Research to conduct cognitive and quantitative testing of selected questions for potential inclusion in Scotland's Census

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[3] Detailed tables on religion can be access through the Scotland's Census Table Index, available on the Scotland's Census website.

2021. Information about this testing can be found in the 2017 Cognitive and Quantitative Testing Report (PDF).

5.1   Cognitive testing

Two versions of the 2011 Census religion question were included for cognitive testing in 2017 to explore:

- whether the online format improved ability to respond easily compared to the single list approach used on paper,

- whether there are any differences in terms of ease of navigation and respondent preference, and

- potential mode effects between the paper and online question formats.

The paper question included for testing was the 2011 Census question with the order of response options updated to reflect the population size of religious groups in Scotland, in line with the original design elements of the census question.

The online version of this question was split into two stages. Christian denominations were removed from the first stage of the online religion question and replaced with a 'Christian' response option. Respondents selecting this option were routed to the second stage of the question and asked "what Christian denomination do you belong to?".

The questions included for cognitive testing are shown in Figure 6 and Figure 7.

Figure 6: 2017 Cognitive Question Testing religion question – Paper

Figure 7: 2017 Cognitive Question Testing religion question – Online

Stage one

Q7i. What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?

This question is voluntary.

- ○ None
- ○ Christian (including Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic and all other Christian denominations)
- ○ Muslim
- ○ Buddhist
- ○ Sikh
- ○ Jewish
- ○ Hindu
- ○ Another religion or body, please enter:

Stage two

Q7ii. What Christian denomination do you belong to?

- ○ Church of Scotland
- ○ Roman Catholic
- ○ Other Christian, please enter:

Key results

- Cognitive testing found no major differences in terms of ease of navigation between the two step religion question used online compared to the single list approach on paper.
- All respondents were able to locate the correct code in both formats.
- The two-step design caused confusion for some respondents:
  - Some Christian respondents commented that at stage one of the online version it was not clear that there would be a second stage.
  - One respondent discussed that they initially considered writing in their Christian denomination under 'Any other religion of body', before ultimately deciding to code as Christian. On paper, it was immediately clear that they could be specific about their denomination.

Full details of the results of the 2017 Cognitive Testing are available in Annex A.

5.2   Quantitative testing

Following cognitive testing, the question was included for quantitative testing, with the differing online and paper formats. Minor changes to the appearance of the questions were made for the paper and online quantitative testing questionnaires, as seen in Annex B.

In particular, the 'Christian' response option in step one online was changed from "Christian (including Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic and all other Christian denominations)" to "Christian", in an attempt to reduce confusion for respondents.

The main aim of quantitative testing was to examine whether a two-stage question online would impact on data quality by analysing:

- the distribution of responses, including similarities and differences in distribution by mode;

- invalid responses, inclusive of routing errors and invalid combinations, as a measure of data quality; and

- the percentage of potentially backcodable responses as a measure of data quality.

Full details of the results of the 2017 Quantitative Testing are available in Annex B.

Key results: distribution of responses

- The proportion of respondents stating that they had no religion (48%) was ten percentage points higher in testing than in the 2011 Census (37%).

- This increase was coupled with smaller proportions identifying as Church of Scotland and Roman Catholic than was the case in the 2011 Census.

- Proportions identifying with other response options were found to be similar to those in the 2011 Census.

- These findings are roughly in line with changes in religion data collected through the SHS, and are unlikely to indicate data quality issues.

- In 2015, the SHS reported that the proportion of people indicating they had no religion was around 50%.

- Decreases in the number of people identifying as Church of Scotland and to a lesser degree Roman Catholic have been observed in annual SHS data since 2011.

Key results: distribution of responses by mode

- There were some identifiable variations in responses by mode.

- Of those who identified as Christian or Roman Catholic, slightly larger proportions completed the questionnaire on paper than online.

- A small majority of those who stated they had no religion completed the questionnaire online.

- Among those who chose not to answer the question almost two-thirds responded on paper. In addition, around 72% of all respondents aged 65 or over responded on paper.

- However, correlations of religion with age, and mode with age were also observed. Association between religion and mode has not been tested for significance.

- In line with findings from the 2011 Census, the number of people who stated they had no religion declined with age.

- Of those who identified as 'Christian' in the 2017 test, around a third were aged 35-54 and a further third aged 65 and over. Christianity rates were lowest amongst the youngest age group.

Key results: invalid responses

- Invalid responses accounted for less than 1% of total responses.

- As the religion question was voluntary, item non-response is deemed a valid response.

- A comparison of the 'religion not stated' rate in 2017 testing and previous census results shows that item non-response was similar. This suggests that a two-step online question has limited impact on respondents not stating their religion.

Key results: backcodable write-in responses

- In the two-stage question tested online, respondents selecting "Christian" were asked to specify their denomination at the second stage of the question.

- Whilst the number of respondents selecting 'Another religion or body' was very small, of these, almost half (6 out of 12 cases, unweighted) of those who ticked and wrote in a response to 'Another religion or body' should have been coded as 'Christian: Other'.

- This suggests that there was some confusion about how to specify Christian denominations with this two-stage approach.

6.   Next steps

Research and analysis supports taking this question on religion 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.

A limited number of requests for change to the 2011 question are being taken forward for further testing and are detailed below:

- Pagan

The Pagan Federation requested that a 'Pagan' tick-box response option be added to the religion question for 2021. This request was supported by a number of other stakeholders.

A requirement for this information to study the changing patterns of religious identity, the revival of Pagan religion, provide appropriate services and for equality monitoring was expressed.

Information about the Pagan communities of Scotland was available at national level from religion write-in information from the 2011 Census. A requirement for census data at local authority level and for multivariate analysis in order to understand health outcomes, educational attainment, labour force participation and socio-economic classification for this group was expressed. There is evidence that this group experiences some disadvantage.

Although some alternative sources of information are available, stakeholders indicated that these did not provide accurate, timely or enough detailed information about this population.

- Muslim

A number of stakeholders, including the Scottish Government, expressed user need for more detail on branches/schools of Islam. The large size and diversity of this population were noted.

Requirements were expressed for more detailed information to understand the presence, relative size and needs of different Muslim communities, better target interfaith work, and identify vulnerability to crime or discrimination. There is evidence that this group experiences significant disadvantage.

While questions for inclusion have been developed, 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.

The final decision on the content of the questionnaire for Scotland's Census 2021 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.

Annex A: 2017 Cognitive Testing

In 2017 NRS commissioned ScotCen Social Research to conduct cognitive and quantitative testing of selected questions for potential inclusion in Scotland's Census 2021. Information about this testing can be found in the 2017 Cognitive and Quantitative Testing Report (PDF).

1. Questions tested and measurement aims

One religion question was included for cognitive interviewing. To ensure the target populations were reached, several recruitment strategies were adopted. The table below shows the sample achieved for cognitive testing.

Table A1: Sample composition achieved

Characteristics	Number
Sex	
Male	17
Female	15
Age	
18-34	5
35-64	22
65+	5
Highest qualification	
Further or higher education (degree, masters, PhD, professional quals, SVQ level 5)	21
Upper secondary school qualification (e.g. Highers, A-Levels)	6
Lower secondary school qualification (e.g. Standard Grade, Intermediate 2s, O grades, GSCE, National 4/5) or below/none	5
Religion	
None	14
Church of Scotland	6
Roman Catholic	1
Other Christian	4
Muslim	1
Buddhist	1
Sikh	2
Hindu	1
Other	2

Table A1 continued: Sample composition achieved

Characteristics	Number
Ethnic Group	
White	25
Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British	5
African	1
Other ethnic group	1
Passports held	
United Kingdom	24
Ireland	1
Other	5
None	2
Use language other than English at home	
No, English only	26
Yes, British sign language	-
Other	6
Computer Skills	
Has difficulty managing basic computer tasks/cannot manage basic computer tasks	-
Can manage basic computer tasks such as browsing the internet and word processing	10
Can manage more complex computer tasks	22
Tenure	
Owns with a mortgage or loan	11
Own outright	7
Own with shared equity	
Rent (with or without housing benefit)	12
Part own and part rent (shared ownership)	1
Live here rent free	1

Two different formats of the religion question were tested:

- An online version was tested where the question was split over two screens, the first screen showing religion, and the second screen showing different Christian denominations if 'Christian' had been selected.

- A paper version of the question was also tested in which all religions were shown in a single list (including different denominations of Christian). The questions tested are shown in Table A2.

Table A2: Questions tested on Religion

Online version- Two step question

Q7i. What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?

This question is voluntary.

- ○ None
- ○ Christian (including Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic and all other Christian denominations)
- ○ Muslim
- ○ Buddhist
- ○ Sikh
- ○ Jewish
- ○ Hindu
- ○ Another religion or body, please enter:

Q7ii. What Christian denomination do you belong to?

- ○ Church of Scotland
- ○ Roman Catholic
- ○ Other Christian, please enter:

Paper version

Religion question paper version

7 What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?
  - ◆ This question is voluntary
  - ☐ None
  - ☐ Church of Scotland
  - ☐ Roman Catholic
  - ☐ Other Christian, please write in below
  - ☐ Muslim
  - ☐ Buddhist
  - ☐ Sikh
  - ☐ Jewish
  - ☐ Hindu
  - ☐ Another religion or body, please write in

The aims of testing these questions were to:

- Explore whether the online format improved ability to respond easily compared to the single list approach used on paper and whether there are any differences in terms of ease of navigation and respondent preference.

- Explore potential mode effects between the paper and online question formats.

In addition to these two aims some additional issues were mentioned spontaneously by respondents. These related to the number of 'Christian' response options available compared to other religions, the 'none' category and the connotations of the word 'belong.' Findings on all these areas are discussed below.

2.   Comparing the online and the paper approach

All respondents were able to locate the correct code with the online and paper formats, and there were no instances where respondents selected a different response between paper and online. However, respondents varied regarding which question format they thought was the best. Some preferred the single list approach on paper where all codes were visible, while others preferred the two-step 'unfolding' question used online. Others had no preference between the two versions.

For those who preferred the paper format, for many this was simply because they find it easier to understand and retain information that has been printed on paper. For example, one respondent discussed how they are more prone to skipping information when reading from a screen, whereas on paper they take time to ensure they have read everything carefully. Indeed, this respondent did not notice that the religion question was voluntary at the online version, but noticed that this was the case on paper.

However, specific advantages to the paper format of the religion question were also mentioned. Some respondents felt that the paper format was quicker and simpler than online, as all of the information could be viewed on one page and they were not required to navigate through two separate questions.

Additionally, some Christian respondents commented that at the online version, it is not clear that there is going to be a second stage. For example, one Christian respondent belongs to the Church of Iceland rather than any of the Christian denominations specified. This respondent discussed how when they saw the first part of the religion question online, it was not obvious that they were going to get a chance to indicate the denomination of Christianity they follow in greater detail. As a result, they initially considered writing 'Church of Iceland' in the 'Any other religion or body' open text box, before ultimately deciding to code as Christian. Conversely, on paper, it was clear that they could be specific about the denomination of Christianity they follow.

Other respondents preferred the online format of the religion question. Respondents commented that there was less information and text on the online format of the religion question, which made it easier to read and simpler to understand. For some, this was because they have an overall preference for completing questionnaires on a

computer or device rather than on paper. For example, respondents discussed how it is more difficult to correct mistakes made on paper than it is online.

Additionally, some Christian respondents who do not identify as belonging to the Church of Scotland or Roman Catholic found the layout of the paper format unclear. On paper, those who code as 'Other Christian' are instructed to write the denomination of Christianity they belong to 'below'. However, the space for them to write in is the same space given to those who code as 'Another religion or body'. This confused these respondents, who were unsure as to whether this was the space that they were to write the type of Christianity they follow. They suggested that the 'Other Christian' category should be next to the other religion category, so it is obvious that this is the space for them to write in. Alternatively, they proposed that there could be an additional open text box specifically for those who identify as 'Other Christian' to prevent confusion. The two-step religion question online overcame this issue, as the open text box for those who identify as 'Other Christian' is directly below the answer category.

Although some minor issues were raised with both the online and paper formats of the religion question, no major issues were found in relation to data quality. All respondents were generally able to understand the question and give an appropriate response using both versions tested. The advantages and disadvantages of both formats are summarised in Table A3.

Table A3: Advantages and disadvantages of the different formats of religion questions

	Paper version	Online version
Advantages	Quicker – all information can be viewed on one page Clear that Christians can be specific about denomination	Quicker – less information to read at first stage (non-Christians only) Less information to read – easier to understand
Disadvantages	Too much information on one page Less clear where 'Other Christians' are to write in their denomination	Unclear that there is going to be a second stage (Christians only)

3. Findings on acceptability

During the cognitive testing, respondents were also asked about the acceptability of having a question on religion in Scotland's Census 2021. In general, respondents were comfortable answering the religion question, with many commenting that it is a standard question that they would expect to see in the census. Respondents acknowledged that although some people may be uncomfortable disclosing their religion in Scotland's Census 2021, the fact that the question is voluntary largely resolves this issue, as those who do not wish to state their religion are not required to. However, respondents did comment that it is easier to notice that the religion question is voluntary on the paper format than online due to the fact that on paper, the text is a different colour.

4. Number of 'Christian' response options

Some issues were raised with the acceptability of the question in its current format. At the paper version of the religion question, respondents queried why Christianity was broken down into different denominations, but other religions were not. For example, one respondent commented that there are a range of different branches within Islam which are not covered by the answer categories, and commented that it was unfair to do so for Christianity but not other religions. Respondents generally felt that if Christianity is to be broken down by denomination, then all religions should be split into different sects, with a two-step 'unfolding' process for each religion online.

However, it is worth nothing that this was raised by non-religious and Christian respondents as opposed to those identifying with a minority religion group. Those who identified with a minority religion group did not express any concerns that they were unable to specify the branch of their religion that they identify with.

5. Views on the 'none' response option

When testing the religion question during the cognitive interviews, respondents felt that it was unusual for the 'None' answer category to be at the top of the list, and that it would be better placed at the bottom. Respondents also commented that the word 'None' was a rather harsh term to use for those who do not identify with any particular religion. It was suggested that the word 'None' was reflective of Agnosticism - a belief that nothing is known or can be known of the existence or nature of God. For example, one respondent discussed how they have beliefs, but does not feel that they belong to any particular religion, religious denomination or body. They did not feel that the 'None' option accurately captured this view, but neither did any of the other answer categories. It was suggested that 'No religion' would be a softer term to use which those who do not identify with any particular religion would be more comfortable selecting.

Respondents who identified as Atheist also felt that Atheism should be a distinct answer category at the religion question. For example, one Atheist respondent felt obliged to select 'None' at this question. However, this respondent commented that this does not accurately reflect their views, as Atheism is a distinct disbelief or lack of belief in the existence of God which the term 'None' does not adequately capture.

6. Use of the word 'belong'

Respondents also raised concerns with the word 'belong' in the religion question. It was suggested that the word 'belong' connotes being an official member of a particular religion, as opposed to merely identifying with the beliefs of that religion. For example, one respondent discussed how although they associate with the Church of Scotland they do not feel that they 'belong' to this particular denomination of Christianity. To this respondent, to 'belong' to a religion means that you regularly go to Church and pay a subscription fee. It was suggested that to rectify this issue, the question could be reworded to ask 'What religion are you?', 'What religion do you consider yourself to be?', or 'What religion do you associate with?'.

7. Non-religious beliefs

Some respondents suggested that to ensure the religion question in Scotland's Census 2021 is inclusive, non-religious beliefs should be incorporated into the question, such as atheism. However, previous research has discussed how the inclusion of these belief-related concepts changes what the question is measuring[4].

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[4]

https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011census/howourcensusworks/howweplannedthe2011census/questionnairedevelopment/finalisingthe2011questionnaire

Annex B: 2017 Quantitative Testing[5]

In 2017 NRS commissioned ScotCen Social Research to conduct cognitive and quantitative testing of selected questions for potential inclusion in Scotland's Census 2021. Information about this testing can be found in the 2017 Cognitive and Quantitative Testing Report (PDF).

Question tested and aims of testing

A question on religion was included in the individual section of the questionnaire for quantitative testing. The question asked respondents to select "what religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?".

The online question involved a two-stage process. The main aim of quantitative testing was to examine whether a two-stage question online would impact on data quality by analysing:

- the distribution of responses, including similarities and differences in distribution by mode;

- invalid responses, inclusive of routing errors and invalid combinations, as a measure of data quality; and

- the percentage of potentially backcodable responses as a measure of data quality.

2017 test - Two step religion question online

Q24. **What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?**

- This question is voluntary

○ None
○ Christian
○ Muslim
○ Hindu
○ Buddhist
○ Sikh
○ Jewish
○ Another religion or body, please enter:

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[5] All figures in this report have been rounded to nearest whole number.

Q24b. **What Christian denomination do you belong to?**

- ○ Church of Scotland
- ○ Roman Catholic
- ○ Other Christian, please enter:

2017 test– one step paper question

24 What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?

♦ This question is voluntary

- ☐ None
- ☐ Church of Scotland
- ☐ Roman Catholic
- ☐ Other Christian, please write in below
- ☐ Muslim
- ☐ Hindu
- ☐ Buddhist
- ☐ Sikh
- ☐ Jewish
- ☐ Another religion or body, please write in

1. Religion distribution

In testing, approximately half of the valid sample[6] (48%) stated that they had no religion. A similar proportion identified as being Christian (45%), as shown in Tbale . Of the valid sample, around a quarter (26%) selected that they were Church of Scotland, 13% selected Roman Catholic and 6% chose "Other Christian".

Few in the sample identified as Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or Sikh (1% or less) while 2% chose 'Another religion or body'. There were no respondents who identified as Jewish. Most respondents who selected 'Another religion or body' also wrote in a response (2% of total valid responses, compared with around 0.1% of respondents who selected another religion or body but did not provide a write-in response, and less than 1% who provided a written response but did not select an option at the religion question).

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[6] Valid sample refers to those who provided a valid response to the religion question and had fully completed the questionnaire. All figures in this report exclude the 59 cases that partially completed the questionnaire.

The layout and wording of the religion question in 2011 was similar to the paper version of the question tested in 2017. The proportion of respondents stating that they had no religion (48%) was ten percentage points higher in testing than in the 2011 Census (37%). This increase was coupled with smaller proportions identifying as Church of Scotland and Roman Catholic than was the case in the 2011 Census. The proportion electing not to answer the question was roughly the same in testing as it was in the 2011 Census (6% and 7% respectively), as were those selecting other religions (0 to 1%) and 'Another religion or body' (2% and <1% respectively).

Table B1: Religion, total valid responses from 2017 test (weighted responses from full completions only) and Scotland's Census 2011

	2017 test (weighted responses from full completions of ages 16 and over)[1]		2011 Census (total population)	
	Total	**%**	Total	%
Christian	**636**	**45**	**2,850,199**	**54**
Church of Scotland	373	26	1,717,871	32
Roman Catholic	181	13	841,053	16
Other Christian	82	6	291,275	6
Christian not specified	0	0	-	-
Muslim	**9**	**1**	**76,737**	**1**
Hindu	**1**	**<1**	**16,379**	**<1**
Buddhist	**11**	**1**	**12,795**	**<1**
Sikh	**4**	**<1**	**9,055**	**<1**
Jewish	**0**	**0**	**5,887**	**<1**
Another religion or body	**31**	**2**	**15,196**	**<1**
No religion	**679**	**48**	**1,941,116**	**37**
Religion not stated	**46**	**3**	**368,039**	**7**
Total valid responses	**1417**	**100**	**5,295,403**	**100%**

2. Religion by mode

There were some identifiable variations in responses by mode. Of those who identified as Christian, a slightly larger proportion completed the questionnaire on paper (57%, compared with 43% who completed it on online), as shown in Table B2. This was true for both those who identified as Church of Scotland (60% on paper and 40% online) and those who chose Roman Catholic (55% on paper and 45% online).

A small majority of those who stated they had no religion completed the questionnaire online (57% compared with 43% on paper). Among those who chose not to answer the question 'Religion not stated' almost two-thirds responded on paper (it should be noted this group was relatively small).

However, correlations of religion with age, and mode with age were also observed. Association between religion and mode has not been tested for significance.

Table B2 Religion by mode

		Mode		
		Responses - Online	Responses - Paper	Total
Religion	**Christian: Total**	43%	57%	100%
	Church of Scotland	40%	60%	100%
	Roman Catholic	45%	55%	100%
	Other Christian	56%	44%	100%
	Christian: not specified	0%	0%	100%
	Muslim	0%	100%	100%
	Hindu	100%	0%	100%
	Buddhist	52%	48%	100%
	Sikh	50%	50%	100%
	Jewish	0%	0%	0%
	Another religion or body	75%	25%	100%
	No religion	57%	43%	100%
	Religion not stated	33%	67%	100%
	Total valid responses	50%	50%	100%

3. Religion by age

In line with findings from the 2011 Census, the number of people who stated they had no religion declined with age.

In the 2017 test, four in ten (43%) of those with no religion were aged 16-34 and one in ten (11%) were aged 65 and above, as shown in Table B3. Of those who identified as 'Christian', around a third (34%) were aged 35-54 and a further third aged 65 and over (35%). Christianity rates were lowest amongst the youngest age group (around 12% of those aged 16-34). Too few respondents identified with other religions to draw any robust associations by age.

Too few respondents chose not to answer the religion question ('religion not stated') to draw any robust associations by age for this group.

Table B3 Religion by age (weighted responses)[7]

		All people				
		16-34	35-54	55-64	65+	Total valid responses
Religion	**Christian: Total**	12%	34%	19%	35%	100%
	Church of Scotland	9%	30%	21%	40%	100%
	Roman Catholic	15%	42%	16%	27%	100%
	Other Christian	17%	34%	19%	29%	100%
	Christian: not specified	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
	Muslim	77%	23%	0%	0%	100%
	Hindu	0%	0%	100%	0%	100%.
	Buddhist	63%	28%	5%	4%	100%
	Sikh	50%	50%	0%	0%	100%
	Jewish	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%
	Another religion or body	66%	14%	5%	14%	100%
	No religion	43%	33%	13%	11%	100%
	Religion not stated	40%	27%	13%	21%	100%
	Total valid responses	30%	33%	15%	22%	100%

4. Religion not stated / item non-response

As the religion question is voluntary, item non-response is a valid response.

Of fully completed questionnaires, 3% chose not to respond to the question on religion.

A comparison of the 'religion not stated' rate in 2017 testing and previous census results shows that item non-response was similar to the 2011 (7%) and 2001 (5%) Census results. This suggests that the introduction of a two-step process for the online version of the questionnaire potentially has limited impact on this specific measure of data quality.

5. Invalid responses to religion

Since item non-response was treated as a valid response at this question, invalid responses to religion were only possible either by multi-ticking or choosing invalid combinations, that is, where a respondent chose both 'None' and a valid religion.

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[7] Please note that figures are rounded independently and so may not add up exactly to totals or figures quoted elsewhere in the text

Both types of invalid response were only possible on the paper mode, as the online survey would not permit these to happen, so it was not possible to examine invalid responses to religion by mode.

There was one instance of an invalid combination of responses to the religion question, and one instance of someone ticking more than one option[8]. This suggests that the current question works well at eliminating these types of errors. With so few invalid responses obtained, it is not possible to comment how invalid response varied by age.

6. Backcoding

Two per cent of respondents who provided a response to the religion question reported that they belonged to 'Another religion or body', as shown in Table B4. Almost all of those who selected this option both ticked the option and provided the religion, religious denomination or body they belonged to.

The remainder were split between those who wrote in their religion or body without ticking 'Another religion or body' and those who ticked the 'Another religion or body' without providing a text write in.

Half (6 cases, out of a total of 12 cases) of those who ticked and wrote in a response to "Another religion or body" online could have been backcoded to "Christian: Other". There were no instances of write ins being backcodable into any other religion.

This could be an artefact of people feeling unable to correctly identify themselves at the first step of the religion question online- however, due to small numbers selecting 'Another religion or body' and providing a write in response (12 cases, unweighted), it is not possible to come to any firm conclusions about the impact this may have on a wider scale. No 'Another religion or body' write-ins from the paper mode were backcodable.

In total, 55 respondents who answered 'Christian' to the first step of the religion question online selected 'other Christian' and wrote in a response. However, none of these responses could be backcoded either into a Christian category or any other religion.

Of those who selected 'Other Christian' on paper, 2 cases could be backcoded into 'Roman Catholic'.

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[8] Both figures are unweighted counts

Table B4: Backcoding religion by mode (unweighted counts)

		Number of responses - Online	Number of responses - Paper	**Total**
Christian: Total (Roman Catholic, Church of Scotland and Other Christian)		301	473	774
Christian: Other Christian	Total Other Christian	55	44	99
	Total text responses	54	42	96
	Recodable	0	0	**0**
	Recodable as other than Christian	0	0	**0**
Another religion or body		12	4	16
Another religion or body, please write in:	Total text responses	12	4	16
	Recodable	6	0	**6**
	Recodable as Christian (including Roman Catholic, Church of Scotland and other Christian)	6	0	**6**
	Recodable as other than Christian	0	0	0

7. Feedback

The questionnaire was split into four sections online, where at the end of each of the four sections; respondents were asked to state if they found any questions within the section difficult to answer and to provide verbatim feedback on why this was the case in an open text box. For the paper questionnaire, feedback questions were included at the end of the questionnaire. In total, 2% of respondents stated that they found the question on religion difficult to answer.