# Scotland’s Census 2031

# Topic consultation

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# Introduction

The National Records of Scotland (NRS), on behalf of the Registrar General for Scotland, is responsible for conducting Scotland’s census. These statistics are of national strategic importance and bring a wide range of benefits to Scotland.

Census statistics provide an accurate picture of Scotland’s population including its size, distribution, and demographics, including age, sex, ethnicity, and household composition. Our statistics inform policy making, enabling government agencies to make evidence-based decisions based on evidence regarding funding allocation for services like healthcare, education, and transport based on local needs. They help local authorities plan for infrastructure development, housing, and community services based on trends within their area. Census statistics support economic development strategies by providing insights into the workforce, employment patterns, and economic activity within different regions. They support research on social issues, including poverty, health disparities, and migration. They assist with equality monitoring by identifying inequalities across different demographics, promoting social inclusion. Census statistics help communities understand their own needs and to participate in decision-making. Finally, our statistics are used to help determine the budget allocation from the UK Government to the Scottish Government.

Counting the entire population at one point in time is a large, expensive and complex undertaking. The planning is extensive, and it takes time to process and publish the information. We have started to plan for the next census by building on the success of Scotland’s Census 2022. It is right that we design and manage a census that will best meet users’ needs. The purpose of this consultation is to inform our work on the topics to be included in the 2031 Census. We are seeking your views on:

* How you currently use the 2022 Census outputs, the benefits of the census data and how far these meet your needs.
* Your future requirements for statistics about Scotland’s housing, its people and their characteristics.

We will use this information to inform the content of the 2031 Census and the topics it will cover. This consultation is the beginning of a wider programme of engagement. We will work with stakeholders to ascertain their views on the topics to be gathered in 2031.

This paper is divided into seven sections. Section 2 sets out the context for this consultation, noting the importance of the census and situating it in a UK setting. Section 3 specifies the criteria that we will use to evaluate the topics to be included in the census. The main part of the paper, section 4, focuses on the topics that we are considering for inclusion. It documents the topics included in 2022, topics that we considered previously but did not include and topics that were included in censuses elsewhere in the UK. This section explores the availability of data from other sources: a key consideration for inclusion. Section 5 asks how you are using the 2022 outputs and what outputs you want included in 2031. Section 6 then explains how to respond to this consultation before section 7 outlines our next steps.

# Context

The census is the flagship of NRS’s population statistics. We have finished publishing the main outputs from the 2022 Census and are starting to plan for 2031. At the start of each census cycle, we seek to understand users’ changing requirements. These views inform the design of the census, the topics it covers and the methods we use to collect the information.

NRS collaborate with partners across the UK, including the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) and the Welsh Government. The [UK Concordat on Statistics](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-concordat-on-statistics/uk-concordat-on-statistics) sets out how the UK and Devolved Governments cooperate in relation to the production of statistics, statistical standards and the statistics profession.

As in the past, there will be separate censuses in England & Wales and Northern Ireland. Where efficient and effective to do so, NRS will work with ONS and NISRA to design and build a census for 2031. The census will, where possible and necessary, support the harmonisation of outputs across the UK. At the same time, Scotland’s Census must meet the needs of our unique characteristics and geography. The ONS launched a [consultation](https://consultations.ons.gov.uk/ons/futureofpopulationandmigrationstatistics/) in 2023 on the Future of Population and Migration Statistics in England and Wales. On 17 June 2025, the three census offices each recommended to their respective Governments that they should commission and resource full censuses of population and housing across the UK in 2031. It is our shared ambition that these censuses will provide coherent UK outputs and, where possible, maximise the use of administrative data.

The census is one part of a wider statistical system. Collecting information through a census is a significant investment and places a legal obligation on households and individuals in Scotland to provide personal information. We therefore must make sure that:

* the census is the most effective way to collect the information
* there is strong user requirement for the information
* the benefit of collecting the information outweighs the costs of collection.

This paper and associated engagement is our first step in understanding what you need from the census. It is the beginning, not the end, of our consultation processes. After analysing the results from this consultation, we will engage with stakeholders and topic experts to further understand users’ needs. These insights will guide our question development and testing.

Your response to this consultation will help us understand the best way to meet your future needs. As well as census data, other sources of information may help. For example, some information may already be held by a public body. Rather than adding questions to the census, it may be better for NRS to access this administrative data. We may collect data using surveys where granular data is not so important. Alternatively, combining census, administrative and survey data may offer the best solution. We must be assured that we can consistently produce reliable, quality statistics from these sources. We want to give you the statistics that you need to make informed decisions for the people of Scotland.

This paper provides NRS’s initial views on the type of topics that could be collected in the census in 2031. Our view is informed by the 2022 topics and questions. This paper focuses on topics, not the detailed questions that will be asked on the questionnaire. We will propose questions only after comprehensive research, testing and further discussions with users. The Scottish Parliament will approve the questions to be used in 2031.

Before the 2022 Census, we comprehensively reviewed the topics and tested questions to make sure they were fit-for-purpose. As a result, we asked new questions about:

* UK armed forces veterans
* sexual orientation
* trans status or history
* passports held
* British Sign Language

Details of the 2022 Census topic consultation and question testing are published on the Scotland’s Census [website](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/scotlands-census-2022-topic-consultation-report/). This topic consultation seeks further information on how results from these questions were used. This will help us determine whether the questions met users’ needs and whether we should collect them again in 2031.

Overall, the 2022 topics and questions met users’ needs, but we may include new ones if they meet our criteria.[[1]](#footnote-2) If we add new questions, we may have to remove questions that we asked in 2022. Space on our paper questionnaire is limited, and respondents will not complete the census if it is too long. Changes to the questionnaire will address:

* questions in 2022 where there were issues with data quality, or they no longer support user needs
* emerging policy requirements that cannot be found from alternative sources
* changes in international guidelines (e.g. around the labour market topic) and in legislation

Previous consultations resulted in demand for more topics than it was possible to accommodate. The next section sets out our criteria for choosing which topics to include in the census.

# Evaluation criteria

Our evaluation criteria are similar to those we used for our previous census topic consultation. The tables below set out these criteria under three categories. The first category ‘user requirements’ ensures that topics have a strong and clearly defined user need. The second category covers other considerations. The third category ‘operational requirements’ relates to the viability of including the topic. We must consider the length of our paper questionnaire, the ease by which the answers can be captured and coded, and the impact on coverage.

Table 1: User requirements

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **User requirements**   |   |
| Strength of user need   | Data collected by the census must meet a user need for equality monitoring, policy development, resource allocation or service planning and delivery.  |
| Need for information for small geographies or populations   | Data collected by the census meets a user need for small area data or data on small populations.  |
| Suitability of alternative sources   | Data collected by the census must meet a user need that cannot be met elsewhere.  |
| Need for multivariate analysis   | Data collected by the census must meet a user need to analyse a particular variable against others, providing new information.  |
| Need for UK comparability   | Data collected by the census should be harmonised across the UK where reasonable.  |
| Need for continuity with previous censuses   | Data collected by the census should be comparable over time where possible.  |

Table 2: Other considerations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Other considerations**   |   |
| Data quality   | Questions asked in the census must be easily interpreted by respondents, so that a high and consistent response is obtained and good quality data for distinct populations and across the population can be collected.  |
| Public acceptability | Questions asked in the census must be acceptable to most of the public. We cannot include a question if large sections of the public do not find it acceptable.  |
| Respondent burden  | Questions asked in the census must be designed to incur minimal respondent burden to obtain good quality data that meets user needs. Respondent burden cannot be too high as this would deter people from completing the questionnaire.  |
| Financial concerns   | Questions asked in the census must not present major coding problems, require extensive processing, or significantly add to the cost of the census. Questions asked in the census may be used by other organisations. The cost to organisations changing their systems to collect new questions must not be significant.  |
| Questionnaire design   | Questions asked in the census should have no negative mode effects between capturing data online or on paper.  |
| Improvements to linkage rates with administrative data   | Questions asked in the census should have no negative impact on future work linking to administrative data sources.  |

Table 3: Operational requirements

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Operational requirements**   |   |
| Improving coverage   | Use of data collected operationally in the process of conducting the census. Of most importance is maximising coverage, as the primary aim of the census is to provide a robust estimate of the usually resident population.  |
| Coding of derived variables[[2]](#footnote-3)   | Questions asked in the census must not present major coding problems or require extensive processing.  |
|  Length of paper questionnaire  | Individual questions must be considered in the context of the census, where effective digital and paper design must be considered.  |

# Topics under consideration for Census 2031

This section sets out the topics that we are thinking about collecting in 2031. Schedule 1 of the Census Act 1920 (“the Act”) lists the matters in respect of which particulars may be required in a census return. The matters are the topics to be covered in the census, not the questionsto be asked. The Act does not oblige the Registrar General to seek particulars in respect of all matters in the Schedule, but it limits the census to those matters. Matters in respect of which particulars may be required are:

1. Name, sex, age

2. Occupation, profession, trade or employment

3. Nationality, birthplace, race, language

4. Place of abode and character of dwelling

5. Condition as to marriage or civil partnership, relation to head of family, issue born in marriage

5A. Religion (voluntary)

5B. Transgender status and history (voluntary)

5C. Sexual orientation (voluntary)

6. Any other matters with respect to which it is desirable to obtain statistical information with a view to ascertaining the social or civil condition of the population.

The 2022 Census provided data across seven broad topics, and we recognise the value of comparability over time:

* ethnic group, national identity, language and religion
* UK armed forces veterans
* sexual orientation and trans status or history
* demography and migration
* housing
* education, labour market and travel to work
* health, disability and unpaid care

Information on how you use this data will inform which topics we include in the next census. For this reason, we are asking you to tell us about your use of 2022 Census data as part of this consultation. More information on the [data released from the 2022 census](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/2022-results/) is available on the Scotland’s Census website. Information on the census questions is available from the [2022 census questionnaires](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/scotland-s-census-2022-paper-questionnaires/).

This section sets out NRS’s initial view on the topics to be collected in the 2031 census. This includes Subtopics that were not collected in 2022, but where we previously identified a user need. The initial view is presented using the classification system in the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  **Initial view** | **Definition** |
| Collect  | NRS propose to include based on our understanding of users’ needs and quality considerations. |
| Further information required   | NRS require further information based on quality considerations or to better understand users’ needs. |

Information is also provided for each subtopic on the availability of data in other, non-census, sources. This is intended to help users understand what data is available in the years between censuses.

## Overall population and household estimates

Scotland’s Census is the official estimate of every person and household in the country. The first outputs of Scotland’s Census are always the overall population and household estimates for Scotland down to local authority level. We subsequently publish population and household statistics from the census down to small area level. These estimates help government to develop policies and local authorities to plan services effectively to benefit the people of Scotland.

Each year NRS update the census estimates to obtain mid-year population and households estimates until the next census is available. These provide data at council area level 10 months after the reference date. For example, mid-year population estimates for 2018 were published in April 2019. They also provide data at data zone level around 14 months after the reference date. For example, the small area population estimates for 2018 were published in August 2019.

NRS’s initial view on the collection of topics in the 2031 Census

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Subtopic** | **Initial view** | **Comment** |
| Population  | Collect  | Essential output  |
| Household  | Collect  | Essential output  |

Availability of data in other, non-census sources

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Subtopic** | **Availability in other sources.** |
| Population  | NRS publish [mid-year population estimates](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/mid-2023-population-estimates/) annually, which provide population estimates as at 30 June for Scotland, Council Areas and Health Board Areas. The [Small Area Population Estimates](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/small-area-population-estimates-mid-2022/) provide population estimates for data zones. Population statistics are rebased when a new census becomes available, correcting for error in the annual process.NRS has also produced administrative-based population estimates (ABPEs) as part of a statistical research project to generate population estimates without conducting a census. These are produced by linking multiple administrative datasets to produce estimates of Scotland’s population down to data zone level. This research is still in development.NRS is working to improve the ABPEs by incorporating additional data sources and researching a Dynamic Population Model (DPM) for producing population estimates. This may improve the accuracy of the estimates and provide components of population change between years (such as births, deaths and migration). A Census is still required to provide detailed population data down to Output Area level and to provide a benchmark to compare with the ABPEs. |
| Households  | NRS release the Housing and Dwellings in Scotland publication annually. This provides estimates of households and dwellings for Scotland, Council Areas and data zones.NRS has also produced administrative-based household estimates (ABHEs). These are produced by linking multiple administrative datasets to produce estimates of household numbers down to data zone level. This is still research in development.NRS is working to improve the ABHEs by incorporating additional administrative data sources into the methodology, including council tax data, and exploring methods to estimate households not captured in administrative sources. A census will still be required to provide detailed household data down to Output Area level and to provide a benchmark to compare with the ABHEs. |

## Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion

NRS’s initial view on the collection of topics in the 2031 Census

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Subtopic** | **Initial view** | **Comment** |
| Country of birth | Collect | Country of birth information is a key indicator of population change through migration and is widely used.  |
| Ethnic group  | Collect  | A key census subtopic, ethnic group is used in the public sector and the wider user community. It is also a key equalities measure.  |
| National identity  | Collect  | National Identity provides complementary information to ethnic group, enabling a wider range of analyses to be undertaken, and allows respondents to record different aspects of their identity more fully.  |
| Passports held  | Further information required  | Asked for the first time in Scotland’s census in 2022. Further information is required to understand if users need this topic in the 2031 census.  |
| Main language  | Collect  | A question on main language was included in the 2022 census, which differed from the language used at home question introduced in the 2011 census. There is a strong user need for data on languages other than English to inform service planning and resource allocation.  |
| Gaelic language  | Collect  | Information on proficiency in Gaelic is used to inform policy development and monitoring as well as in local service provision, in the context  of legislative requirements.  |
| Scots language  | Collect  | Collected since the 2011 census. Information on proficiency in Scots language is used to inform policy development and monitoring.  |
| English language  | Collect  | Collected since the 2011 census. A strong user need exists for this data to inform service planning and resource allocation.  |
| British Sign language (BSL)  | Further information required  | Collected for the first time in the 2022 census. Information on BSL is used to inform policy development and monitoring. Since this was a new question in the 2022 census, collect further information on use and suitability of data from stakeholders.  |
| Religion  | Collect  | Collected in the census since 2001 as a voluntary question. There is a strong user need for this data, particularly for smaller religious groups that are not available from other sources. It is also a key equalities measure.  |

 Availability of data in other, non-census, sources

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Availability in other sources  |
| Country of birth  | * NRS publish statistics on population by country of birth and nationality based on data from the ONS Annual Population Survey. These data are available at the national and council area levels split into UK, EU and non-EU. These data have not been produced since 2021 due to pandemic related disruption to data collection.
* Scottish Survey Core Questions produces estimates for Scotland’s adult population by country of birth in the following categories: Scotland, rest of UK, EU and rest of World. This is available by age-band and sex at Scotland and Council Area level. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments.
 |
| Ethnic group  | * Scottish Survey Core Questions produces estimates for Scotland’s adult population by ethnic group in the following categories White: Scottish, White: Other British, White: Polish, White: Other, Asian and All other ethnic groups. This is available by age-band and sex at Scotland and Council Area level. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments.
* For school-aged children, the Scottish Government Pupil Census collects detailed ethnic group data which is available at national level. Data for broad ethnic groups is available at Council Area level. These data are for pupils attending publicly funded schools only.
 |
| National identity  | * The ONS Annual Population Survey collects data on the national identity of respondents in the following categories: Scottish, British, Irish, English, Welsh and Other. These data are available at national and Council Area level.
 |
| Passports held  | * NRS publishes data on country of birth and nationality from the ONS Annual Population Survey (see the Country of Birth section), but this differs from passports held and does not provide information on people who hold more than one passport.
 |
| Main language  | * For school-aged children the SG Pupil Census publishes data on language used at home at national and Council Area level, grouped into English and non-English. Nationally, the most common languages after English are also available. These data are for pupils attending publicly funded schools only.
* The ONS Labour Force Survey asks a similar question. It asks, “What is your first language at home?”
 |
| Gaelic language  | * The SG Pupil Census records the number of students receiving Gaelic education, learning Gaelic or with no Gaelic. This is available at national and Council Area level. These data are for pupils attending publicly funded schools only.
 |
| Scots language  | * No data covering the whole population available in other sources.
 |
| English language proficiency  | * The SG Pupil Census collects data on pupils with English as an additional language in the following categories: New to English, Early acquisition, Developing competence, Competent, Fluent and English as ‘First Language.’ This is available at national and Council Area level. These data are for pupils attending publicly funded schools only.
* No data covering the adult population available in other sources.
 |
| British Sign language  | * No data covering the whole population available in other sources.
 |
| Religion  | * Data on religion are available from Scottish Survey Core Questions for the adult population in the following categories: none, Church of Scotland, Roman Catholic, Other Christian, Muslim and Other. This is available by age-band and sex at Scotland level and overall at Council Area level. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments.
 |

## UK armed forces veterans

NRS’s initial view on the collection of topics in the 2031 Census

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Initial view  | Comment  |
| Veteran individuals  | Further information required  | This new question in the 2022 census identified veterans living in Scotland. In the future we may be able to use Ministry of Defence data to identify people who have left the armed forces since 2022. We could then link this information to future census data and produce veterans estimates without asking a veterans question in the census itself.  We require further information on this approach before we decide whether to include a veterans question or not.  |
| Veteran households  | Further information required  | Census data will help government, charities and other service providers to understand more about the needs of UK Armed Forces veterans, and their families. Since this was derived from the 2022 census, collect further information on use and suitability of data from stakeholders.  |

Availability of data in other, non-census, sources

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Availability in other sources  |
| Veteran individuals  | Data on numbers of veterans is available from Scottish Survey Core Questions. This is available by age-band and sex at Scotland level and overall at Council Area level. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments. |

## Sexual orientation and trans status or history

Initial view of NRS on collection of topics in a potential future census

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Initial view  | Comment  |
| Sexual orientation  | Further information required  | Collected for the first time in the 2022 census. Considerable user and data need was identified for the inclusion of a sexual orientation question. These numbers underpin the equality monitoring responsibilities of public sector organisations, which in turn informs policies and practices. Since this was a new question in the 2022 census, collect further information on use and suitability of data from stakeholders.  |
| Trans status or history  | Further information required  | Collected for the first time in the 2022 census. The trans status or history question was developed in response to data user need for information on the size and location of the trans population. These numbers underpin the equality monitoring responsibilities of public sector organisations, which in turn informs policies and practices. Since this was a new question in the 2022 census, collect further information on use and suitability of data from stakeholders.  |

Availability of data in other, non-census, sources

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Availability in other sources  |
| Sexual orientation  | Scottish Survey Core Questions produces data on sexual orientation in the categories 'Heterosexual' and 'LGB and other.’ This is available by age-band and sex at Scotland level and overall at Council Area level. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments. |
| Trans status or history  | Scottish Survey Core Questions produces data on trans status in the following categories ‘Has a trans status or history’ and ‘Does not have a trans status or history.’ However, due to small sample sizes, SSCQ do not routinely publish these data.  |

## Demography and migration

NRS’s initial view on the collection of topics in the 2031 Census

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Initial view  | Comment  |
| Age   | Collect  | Essential demographic information. Age is derived from date of birth.  |
| Marital and civil partnership status  | Collect   | Essential demographic information.  |
| Sex  | Collect  | Essential demographic information  |
| Household and family relationships  | Collect   | Essential demographic information.  |
| Student status  | Further information required   | Essential demographic information.  Further information is required to explore whether there is user need to distinguish between school students and further/higher education students in census outputs  |
| Date of arrival in UK  | Collect  | Information on date of arrival in the UK contributes to better understanding of patterns of international migration.  |

Availability of data in other, non-census, sources

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Availability in other sources  |
| Age and sex  | * NRS publish mid-year population estimates annually, which provide population estimates at 30 June for Scotland, Council Areas and Health Board Areas. The Small Area Population Estimates provide population estimates for data zones.
* NRS also produces administrative-based population estimates (ABPEs) as part of a statistical research project to generate population and household estimates including estimates by single year of age and sex.
 |
| Marital and civil partnership status  | * Scottish Survey Core Questions produces data on marital and civil partnership status split into the following categories: 'Never married - single', 'Married/Civil Partnership', 'Separated', 'Divorced/Dissolved civil partnership' and 'Widowed/Bereaved civil partner.' This is available by age-band and sex at Scotland level and overall at Council Area level.
 |
| Household and family relationships  | * The Scottish Survey Core Questions produces data on household and family relationships split into the following categories: Large Adult, Single Parent, Small Family, Large Family, Single Pensioner and Older Couple. This is available at Scotland and Council Area levels.
* The ONS Labour Force Survey also produces some data on families and household structure, this is available at Scotland level only.
 |
| Student status  | * The SG Pupil Census collects data on pupils covering all local authority and grant aided primary, secondary and special schools
* The Scottish Council of Independent Schools (SCIS) collects data on pupils covering independent schools
* Scottish Funding Council (SFC) publishes data on college students.
* Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA), part of the Joint Information Systems Committee (Jisc), publishes statistics on university students.
* Skills Development Scotland (SDS) publishes information on modern apprenticeships. As well as information on the number of 16- to 19-year-olds participating in education, broken down into subcategories including school pupil, higher education and further education.
* No data covering home schooled students is available in other sources.
 |
| Date of arrival in UK  | * No data covering the whole population is available in other sources. NRS publish [migration flow](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/migration-flows/) estimates annually. These estimates only cover those who have moved within the last year. The census question however covers previous years.
 |

## Housing

NRS propose exploring the use of Council Tax data and other sources to test if administrative data can replace some census questions relating to housing.

NRS’s initial view on the collection of topics in the 2031 Census

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Initial view  | Comment  |
| Accommodation type /  Self-contained accommodation  | Collect  | Collected since 2001 and 1971, respectively. Provides housing stock information used for national and local government planning.NRS are currently exploring whether administrative data from the Scottish Assessors Association could be used to provide statistics on this topic. |
| Tenure / landlord (if renting)   | Collect   | Collected since 1961. Provides tenure information used for national and local government planning  |
| Number of cars  | Collect  | Collected since 1971. Provides information to inform traffic planning not possible using the method of travel to work variable and historically has been used as a measure of deprivation/affluence  |
| Number of bedrooms / Occupancy rating  | Further information required   | New for 2022. Number of bedrooms replaced number of rooms in 2022 as it was deemed more accurate in characterising occupancy. Counts of bedrooms provide information on overcrowding and under- occupancy via occupancy rating. Information about overcrowding and under-occupancy are used for policy purposes such as the allocation of affordable housing by local authorities.  NRS require further information to better understand whether new question has met user need and continues to be needed. NRS are currently exploring whether administrative data from the Scottish Assessors Association could be used to provide statistics on this topic. |
| Type of central heating  | Further information required  | Collected since 2011 (previous two Censuses collected information on availability of central heating only). Information on type of central heating allows insight on deprivation and fuel poverty. Policies in place to promote the use of renewable heating systems may also mean that census information would be beneficial to understanding the impact of these on the mix of central heating types in the future.  |
| Communal establishment residency  | Further information required  | Administrative data was used to collect some of the information on communal establishment (CE) residents for the 2022 census alongside returns from CE managers and individuals living in CEs.  Further information is required to establish the extent to which this information could be collected from administrative data in future.  |
| Communal establishment management type  | Further information required  | Administrative data was used to collect some of the information on communal establishment (CE) management type for the 2022 census alongside returns from CE managers.  Further information is required to establish the extent to which this information could be collected from administrative data in future.  |

Availability of data in other, non-census, sources

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Availability in other sources  |
| Accommodation type / Self-contained accommodation  | * Scottish Household Survey produces estimates of accommodation type split into the following categories: house, flat, other. These data are available at Scotland and Council Area levels.
* NRS is investigating the use of council tax data to produce estimates for this topic.
* NRS will test the use of Scottish Assessors’ Association data to identify characteristics of households to determine if this can replace the data collected from the census.
 |
| Tenure / landlord (if renting)   | * Scottish Survey Core Questions produces estimates of tenure split into the following categories: Owned outright, mortgaged, social rented and private rented. These data are available at Scotland and Council Area levels.
* Scottish Household Survey produces estimates of tenure split into the following categories: Owned outright, mortgaged, social rented (local authority), social rented (housing association), private rented (landlord), private rented (friends/family), other (i.e., lives in rent free). These data are available at Scotland and Council Area levels.
 |
| Number of cars  | * Scottish Survey Core Questions produces estimates of number of cars in a household in the following categories: 0, 1, 2 or 3 cars. These data are available at Scotland and Council Area levels.
 |
| Number of bedrooms / Occupancy rating  | * Scottish Household Survey produces estimates of number of bedrooms (1, 2, 3, 4 or more) at Scotland and Council Area levels. Occupancy rating is available through the Scottish House Condition Survey at Scotland and Council Area levels.
* NRS will test the use of Scottish Assessors Association data to identify characteristics of households to determine if this can replace the data collected from the census.
 |
| Central heating  | * Scottish House Condition Survey (SHCS) produces estimates of primary heating fuel in the following categories mains gas, electricity, oil, communal heating, liquified petroleum gas bulk or bottled, solid mineral fuel and biomass. These data are available at Scotland and Council Area levels. Data at Council Area level requires three years of data from the SHCS.
 |
| Communal establishment residency  | * Some communal establishment types have reliable administrative data (e.g. prisons, care homes) but not all.
 |
| Communal establishment management type  | * Some communal establishment types have reliable administrative data (e.g. prisons, care homes) but not all.
 |

## Education, labour market and travel to work

NRS’s initial view on the collection of topics in the 2031 Census

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Initial view  | Comment  |
| Qualifications held  | Further information required  | There is a strong user need for this data to derive highest level of qualification. This is used for developing policy, service planning and resource allocation.  In 2022, response options for apprentice qualifications were added. Further information is required about the extent to which these have met user need.  |
| Economic activity  | Collect  | There is a user need for information about economic activity for central and local government resource allocation, planning and implementing policy, monitoring local economic performance, and analysing local labour supply  |
| Hours worked  | Collect   | There is user need for data on both full-time and part-time workers from census, including for policy development. It is also used to improve the coding of NS-SEC.  |
| Industry  | Collect  | There is a user need for industry information to understand local economic performance, local labour force, land use and planning needs. It is also used operationally to improve the coding of occupation.  |
| Occupation  | Collect  | There is a user need for information about occupation for central and local government resource allocation, understanding local economic performance and analysing local labour markets.  |
| National Statistics socioeconomic classification (NS-SEC)  | Collect  | NS-SEC provides a measure of advantage. It is an important tool for exploring inequalities. It is also used to assess local labour markets and the mix of skills.  |
| Address of place of work  | Collect  | Data on travel flows to places of work are widely used across central and local government for service provision and planning.  |
| Address of place of study  | Further information required – existing topic/question  | Information on address of place of study provides useful additional information on travel flows. The combined question on work and study address can be confusing for respondents who both work and study, so further information is required to better understand user need for address of place of study going forward.  |
| Method of travel to place of work/study  | Collect  | This information is widely used across central and local government for planning and monitoring transport policy.  |
| Distance travelled to place of work/study  | Collect  | This information is widely used across central and local government for planning and monitoring transport policy.  |

Availability of data in other, non-census, sources

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Availability in other sources  |
| Qualifications held   | Scottish Survey Core Questions produces estimates on highest qualification held for the adult population in the following categories: levels 1, 2, 3 or 4, other qualifications or no qualifications. This is available by age-band and sex at Scotland level and overall at Council Area level. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments. |
| Economic activity   | The ONS Annual Population Survey produces estimates for economically active adults and economically inactive adults including retired, long-term sick, looking after family, student, other.[[3]](#footnote-4) These data are available at Scotland and Council Area levels. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments. HMRC release labour market estimates based on real time information from the PAYE system. These are only for employees but include breakdowns on earnings, age, sex, and nationality. |
| Hours worked  | The ONS Annual Population Survey produces estimates for the adult population on hours worked in the following categories: under 10 hours, 10 to 34 hours, 35 to 44 hours and over 45 hours. These data are available at Scotland and Council Area levels. The ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings is the official source of hours and earnings. |
| Industry  | The ONS Business Register and Employment Survey produces estimates of the number of individuals by industry SIC2007 section code. These data are available at Scotland and Council Area level. Note that the data are not directly comparable with census data as they are based on the location of the business, rather than where the employee lives.  |
| Occupation  | The ONS Annual Population Survey contains estimates of the number of people whose occupations are in each of the 26 Standard Occupation Classification (SOC2020) sub-major groups. These data are available at Scotland and Council Area levels.  |
| National Statistics socio - economic classification (NS-SEC)  | The ONS Annual Population Survey contains estimates for each NS-SEC category at Scotland and Council Area levels.    |
| Method of transport  | Transport Scotland produces estimates of a person’s method of transport used to travel to a person’s main job or course of study (including school) published as Transport and Travel in Scotland statistics. The following categories are published: walking, driver car or van, passenger car or van, bicycle, bus, rail and other. The data are available at Scotland and Council Area levels. Data are available from the same source on the proportion of people that work from home, also at Scotland and Council Area levels. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments. |
| Distance travelled to work  | Transport Scotland produce estimates of distance travelled to work in the following categories: under 1km, 1–2km, 2–3km, 3–5km, 5–10km, 10–15km, 15–20km, 20–40km, 40km and over. These data are available at Scotland and Council Area levels. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments. |

## Health, disability and unpaid care

NRS’s initial view on the collection of topics in the 2031 Census

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Initial view  | Comment  |
| General health   | Collect  | Information on self-assessed health is used to inform resource allocation, understanding health inequalities and policy development and assessment.  |
| Long-term health problem or disability  | Collect  | Information on limitation of day-to-day activities due to a long-term health problem or disability is used to inform resource allocation, understanding health inequalities and policy development and assessment.  |
| Long-term health conditions  | Further information required   | Collected since the 2011 Census. Users have a strong need for information on long-term health conditions to inform resource allocation, understand health inequalities and to develop and assess policies. Data quality considerations with the census mean that further testing of the census questions is required. We need to test how users understand and respond to questions about long-term health conditions, particularly learning disability, learning difficulty and developmental disorder.  |
| Unpaid care  | Collect  | Information on provision of unpaid care is required for policy formulation, planning formal care needs and resource allocation.  |

Availability of data in other, non-census, sources

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Availability in other sources  |
| General health   | * Scottish Survey Core Questions produces estimates on self-assessed general health for the adult population. The categories available match the Census categories. This is available by 10-year age-band and sex at national level and overall at Council Area level. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments.
* The Scottish Health Survey produces estimates on self-assessed general health separately for adults and children. This is available by age-band and sex at national level, and overall at Council Area level for adults. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments.
 |
| Long-term health problem or disability  | * Scottish Survey Core Questions produces estimates on limiting long-term conditions for the adult population in the following categories: “Limiting condition” and “No limiting condition.” This is available by 10-year age-band and sex at national level and overall at Council Area level. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments.
* The Scottish Health Survey produces data on limiting long-term conditions for adults and children. This is available by age-band and sex at national level, and overall, at Council Area level for adults. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments.
 |
| Long-term health conditions  | * The Scottish Health Survey (SHeS) produces data on the type of long-term health conditions for adults and for children. This is available by age-band and sex at national level, and overall at Council Area level for adults. The categories used to classify types of conditions are different to the census categories. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments.
* The SG Pupil Census contains data on the numbers of school pupils with additional support needs and information on the nature of these needs (e.g. learning difficulty). These data are for pupils attending publicly funded schools only.
* NRS will test the use of admin data from Social Security Scotland to identify those in receipt of one or more disability benefits and therefore living with limiting long-term conditions
 |
| Unpaid care  | * Scottish Survey Core Questions produces estimates on provision of unpaid care for the adult population. The categories available are “Provides care” and “No care”. This is available by 10-year age-band and sex at national level and overall at Council Area level. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments.
* The Scottish Health Survey produces data on the hours spent each week providing unpaid care for adults and children. The categories available are “Up to 4 hours a week”, “5 - 19 hours a week”, “20 - 34 hours a week”, “35 - 49 hours a week”, “50 or more hours a week” and “Varies”. This is available by age-band and sex at national level, and overall at Council Area level for adults. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments.
 |

## Topics previously considered for inclusion in Scotland’s censuses

Before each census, NRS considers what topics it should cover. Previously we considered several topics that were not subsequently included in the census.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Initial view  | Comment  |
| Income  | Further information required | This topic was previously considered for inclusion in both the 2011 and 2022 Censuses. NRS are currently researching whether it is possible to produce income statistics using administrative data sources. This work may allow census data to include income statistics through linking to this data. |
| Voluntary and unpaid work | Further information required | This topic was previously considered for inclusion in the 2022 Census. Although limited user support for gathering information on voluntary work in the census has previously been identified in Scotland, alternative sources, such as the Scottish Household Survey, may offer greater scope to explore the topic to the level of detail required. |

Availability of data in other, non-census, sources

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Availability in other sources  |
| Income   | * The Scottish Household Survey (SHS) produces data on household income. This is available by Council Area and multivariate data is available at national level.
* The DWP Family Resources Survey also statistics on household income after housing costs at Scotland level. The Households Below Average Income dataset (HBAI) is derived from the Family Resources Survey and is the source of UK and Scottish Government official income and poverty estimates.
* The ONS Annual Survey of Hours and Earnings produces statistics on employee earnings and hours worked in the UK, including breakdowns by sex for Council Areas. This also includes breakdowns for occupation, industry, age group, and public/private sector for Scotland.
 |
| Voluntary and unpaid work | * Scottish Household Survey (SHS) produces data on formal volunteering annually and on informal volunteering biennially. This is available by Council Area and multivariate data is available at national level. Unlike the census, this data does not cover individuals who reside in communal establishments.
 |

## Topics in 2021 censuses in the rest of the UK

In 2021, the ONS and NISRA collected some topic data that NRS did not collect.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Initial view  | Comment  |
| Type of migration | Further information required | In 2021, the England and Wales Census asked people if they intended to stay in the UK for less than 12 months or 12 months or more. This allowed census population estimates to exclude short-term residents who intended to stay for less than 12 months. |
| Second address | Further information required | The 2021 England and Wales Census asked people if they stayed at another address for 30 days or more per year, collected the address information and asked what this address was. |
| Same or opposite sex civil partnership or marriage | Further information required | The 2021 England and Wales Census asked respondents who were currently or previously married or in a civil partnership if their marriage is/was to someone of the same or opposite sex.  |
| Renewable energy systems | Further information required | The 2021 Northern Ireland Census included a question on whether an accommodation had a renewable heating system. |
| Accommodation designed or adapted for people with disabilities | Further information required | The 2021 Northern Ireland Census asked if an accommodation had been designed or adapted for people with a disability or difficulty. |

Availability of data in other, non-census, sources

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Subtopic  | Availability in other sources  |
| Short-term migrants | * Not available in other sources.
 |
| Second address | * Not available in other sources.
 |
| Same or opposite sex civil partnership or marriage | * NRS vital events statistics provide information on marriages and civil partnerships by same and opposite sex. This is only available for marriages and civil partnerships registered in Scotland.
 |
| Renewable energy systems | * The Scottish House Condition Survey gathers data on heating systems.
 |
| Accommodation designed or adapted for people with disabilities | * Not available in other sources.
 |

# Consultation questions

To help us understand your data needs and to carefully assess your needs against those of other users, please provide as much detail as possible. Specify how you will use the census data and what impact it will have. This will ensure your view is fully considered in our evaluation.

**2022 Census**

Q1 Have you used any outputs from the 2022 Census?

* Yes
* No

**Your use of the 2022 Census outputs**

Q2 to Q8 These questions are about the topics from the 2022 Census and how you might use the outputs from those topics. The 2022 Census covered topics on:

* Ethnic group, national identity, language and religion
* UK armed forces veterans
* Sexual orientation and trans status or history
* demography and migration
* Housing
* Education, labour market and travel to work
* Health, disability and unpaid care

For each topic area, please indicate whether or not you use outputs from this topic and if you do use the outputs, complete the additional information.

* Yes, I currently use this data
* No, I do not use this data

What do you use this topic information for? Tick all that apply

* Allocating resources
* Planning services
* Delivering services
* Targeting investment
* Developing policies
* Monitoring policy impact
* Research
* Equality monitoring
* Other purposes – please specify below

If other, please specify.

Please give detailed examples of how you use the outputs for this topic.

What benefits do these topic outputs create for you or your organisation? Please give detailed examples.

Q9 At what geographical level do you use the 2022 Census outputs? (tick all that apply)

* All of Scotland
* Local authority
* Census locality
* Census settlement
* Civil Parish
* Data zone
* Electoral ward
* Health board area
* Integration authority
* Intermediate zone
* Island group
* National park
* Scottish Parliamentary constituency
* Scottish Parliamentary region
* UK Parliamentary constituency 2005
* UK Parliamentary constituency 2024
* Output area

**Multivariate outputs**

Multivariate outputs refer to statistical tables, datasets, or analyses that present data on two or more census variables simultaneously for the same population group or geographical area. Instead of showing a single characteristic (like age or sex) in isolation, multivariate outputs allow users to examine the relationships between different characteristics. This provides a much richer and nuanced understanding of the population.

Q10 What benefit do the multivariate outputs give you or your organisation? Please give a detailed answer.

**UK comparability**

Q11 How important is it for you to be able to compare census outputs across the UK?

* Very important
* Important
* Moderately important
* Slightly important
* Not important

Please explain your answer or provide more information.

**Need for continuity with previous census**

Q12 How important is the need for continuity with previous census outputs for your work?

* Very important
* Important
* Moderately important
* Slightly important
* Not important

Please explain your answer or provide more information.

**2031 Census**

Q13 Should National Records of Scotland add topics to the 2031 Census that were not included in the 2022 Census?

* Yes
* No

**Your requirements from the 2031 Census**

Q14 What additional topics should be included in the 2031 Census?

You are welcome to suggest topics that have not been considered in this paper. Please specify the topic and give detailed reasons why NRS should include this topic in the census.

Q15 At what geographical level do you require this information? (tick all that apply)

* All of Scotland
* Local authority
* Census locality
* Census settlement
* Civil Parish
* Data zone
* Electoral ward
* Health board area
* Integration authority
* Intermediate zone
* Island group
* National park
* Scottish parliamentary constituency
* Scottish parliamentary region
* UK Parliamentary constituency 2005
* UK parliamentary constituency 2024
* Output area

# Responding to the consultation

We invite responses to this consultation by 23:59 on 30 September 2025.

Please respond to this consultation using the Scottish Government’s consultation hub, [Citizen Space](https://consult.gov.scot/national-records-of-scotland/scotlands-census-2031/). You can access and respond to this consultation online. You can save and return to your responses while the consultation is still open. Please ensure that consultation responses are submitted before the closing date of 23:59 on 30 September 2025.

If you are unable to respond using our consultation hub, please complete the Respondent Information Form and send to:

Esta Clark
National Records of Scotland
HM General Register House
2 Princes Street
Edinburgh
EH1 3YY

**Handling your response**

If you respond using the consultation hub, you will be directed to the About You page before submitting your response. Please indicate how you wish your response to be handled and whether you are content for your response to published. If you ask for your response not to be published, we will regard it as confidential and treat it accordingly.

NRS is subject to the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002. We would therefore consider any request made to us under the Act for information relating to responses made to this consultation exercise.

If you are unable to respond via Citizen Space, please complete and return the Respondent Information Form included in this document (see supporting documents). To find out how we handle your personal data, please see our[privacy notice](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/privacy/).

Where respondents have given permission for their response to be made public, and after we have checked that they contain no defamatory material, we will make responses available to the public online. If you use the consultation hub to respond, you will receive a copy of your response via email. Following the closing date, all responses will be analysed and considered along with any other available evidence to help us. An analysis report will also be made available.

**Comments and complaints**

If you have any comments about how this consultation exercise has been conducted, please send them using our [contact form](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/contact-us/).

**Consultation process**

Consultation is an essential part of NRS’s policymaking process. It gives us the opportunity to consider your opinion and expertise on a proposed area of work.

NRS may develop topic groups and hold consultation events to inform the selection of topics in 2031 Census.

You can [find all our consultations online](http://consult.gov.scot/). Each consultation details the issues under consideration, as well as a way for you to give us your views, either online, by email or by post.

Responses will be analysed and used as part of the decision-making process, along with other available information and evidence. We will publish a report of this analysis. Depending on the nature of the consultation exercise the responses received may:

* indicate the need for policy development or review.
* inform the development of a particular policy.
* help decisions to be made between alternative policy proposals.
* be used to finalise legislation before it is implemented.

While details of circumstances described in a response to a consultation exercise may usefully inform the policy process, consultation exercises cannot address individual concerns and comments, which should be directed to the relevant public body.

# Next steps

Once we have analysed the responses to this consultation and engaged with topic experts and stakeholders, we will decide which topics to include in the next census. We will then start to formulate the questions. We will undertake research and testing to make sure we ask the right questions. We will talk to people and organisations to help us decide which question to ask. Among other criteria, we will consider:

* how acceptable the questions are to the public
* how to ask questions in a way that produces reliable answers
* whether other ways of collecting the information already exist

We will publish criteria to measure the effectiveness of our questions. For the 2022 Census, we used criteria for existing, changed and new questions, and for tick box responses. We will seek to understand user requirement for cross-UK harmonisation. We recognise that Scotland’s unique characteristics and needs will mean that harmonisation is not always possible. In 2017, ScotCen Social Research tested the 2022 questions on our behalf. We will consider commissioning similar testing for the 2031 questions. The Scottish Parliament will make the final decision on the questions.

National Records of Scotland

HM General Register House

2 Princes Street

Edinburgh

EH1 3YY

1. In 2017 we commissioned the Scottish Centre for Social Research to conduct cognitive and qualitative testing of questions for the 2022 Census. Their findings can be found in the cognitive and qualitative testing [report](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/documents/2022-census-cognitive-and-quantitative-testing/). NRS also held topic events, meetings and focus groups throughout Scotland to understand users’ needs and measure the quality and acceptability of new questions. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Every answer to each census question is assigned a numeric code, which we use to produce aggregated census results. We use a coding specification that defines how to code questionnaire responses in a way that we can analyse. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. ONS are currently transforming the Labour Force Survey. Further details can be found [here](https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/labourmarkettransformationupdateonprogressandplans/april2025). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)