

## **CHAPTER 20: NEW QUESTIONS FOR THE 2001 CENSUS (REVISED DRAFT)**

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### **1. Summary**

This chapter introduces the new and revised questions which have been proposed by the Government (H.M. Government, 1999) for inclusion in the 2001 Census. It shows what form the questions are likely to take and discusses some of the key issues concerning those questions as well as highlighting how they might be used in future Census analysis. The choice of Census questions always involves a difficult balance between users' needs for additional information and the requirement to keep the burden on the public within reasonable bounds. This time the public consultation has been unprecedented in its scope and depth. However, there will remain issues of contention over what was asked in the Census and what should have been asked. Here we are concentrating only on those questions that would be new or revised from 1991. We do not consider those questions which were put forward but excluded from further consideration early on in the consultation process (see H.M. Government, 1999 for further information).

The final form of the Census was decided by Parliament early in the year 2000 (we are writing in Autumn 1999, but have updated this chapter to take into account any changes). In short, the significant changes in census content from 1991 are new questions on:

- general health;
- provision of unpaid care;
- time since last paid employment;
- size of employer's organisation; and
- there was a possibility of a question on religion (which will now not be asked);

and major revisions to the questions on:

- qualifications;
- relationship within the household;
- ethnic group; and
- accommodation.

The new question on religion would have required a change in legislation before it could be included. This change did not take place. A strong case has been made for information about income, but the Government Statistical Service has been undertaking research into whether or not needs could be met by alternative sources of data. The Government will make firm proposals once this research, and subsequent consultations with census users, have been completed. There will thus be no income question in the 2001 census.

### **2. Questionnaire Design**

The style of the census questionnaire will change between 1991 and 2001. The objective is to make the form as clear and easy to understand as possible by minimising instructions and the burden on respondents. The new Census questionnaire has been designed particularly with a view to increasing coverage (the proportion of households which returns a form). The changes will also enable the bulk of the responses to be captured by scanning and automatic mark and character recognition. Since the form must be as compact and legible as possible, space on the form is at a premium. The complexity of the questions and any explanatory text must be limited, and this constrains the topics that may be included. "Topics shown in testing to require substantial explanation, such as proficiency in English, have not been proposed for inclusion." (Moss, 1999).

### **3. Changes in Population Definitions**

In 2001, people will be recorded where they are usually resident. One major change from the 1991 definition of 'usually resident' is that students and school children will be enumerated as usually

resident at their term-time address. In addition, basic demographic data (age, sex, marital status and relationship) will be collected at their parental address. This will enable all children and students to be included in statistics on family composition.

#### **4. New Questions**

The criteria for accepting any topic (new or old) for inclusion in the census are that:

- there is a demonstrated need for the information;
- users' requirements cannot be adequately met by information from other sources;
- the topic should be shown, in tests, to have no significant adverse effect on the Census as a whole, particularly the level of public response; and
- practicable questions can be devised to collect data which is sufficiently accurate to meet users' requirements. (H.M. Government, 1999).

New questions increase the cost and complexity of taking the census so their introduction must always be strongly justified.

Five new questions have been proposed for inclusion in the 2001 Census. One of these, a question on religion, would require a change in law. That change in law did not take place and so the question will not be asked. It is important that readers realize that these five questions have been scrutinized in great detail. A large number of other possible new questions have been excluded during the preliminary user consultation which began in April 1995 and continued up to June 1998.

The programme of testing possible questions for the 2001 Census has been much more extensive than for any previous census, and has covered both the possible new questions and those asked in previous censuses. The programme has included cognitive research into how people understand question wording, small-scale quantitative tests, and 2 major census Tests in 1997 and 1999. The objective has been to ensure that all questions proposed for the census meet the criteria of practicality and reliability.

In addition, The Office For National Statistics has carried out a sample survey of over 2,000 households after the Census Rehearsal in April 1999 to measure the quality of responses to the proposed questions. This survey provided a further check on the effectiveness of the questions, and also about the public's views on the topics asked, before the final decision on census content was taken by Parliament.

#### **5. Income**

There has been a long and sustained call for a new question to be asked on income in the 2001 Census (Dorling 1999). "A question on income has not previously been included in a Census in the United Kingdom. However, consultation with users throughout 1995-98 clearly identified a widespread requirement for information on this topic. Income data is seen as a more discriminating variable than occupation or housing condition for the purposes of identifying areas of affluence or deprivation. Users consider that the information is critical in responding to Government initiatives on inequality, social exclusion and deprivation. They emphasise the importance of the availability of information on income for small geographical areas, and the ability to use this data in conjunction with other socio-economic information collected in the Census. The main requirement is for a measure of household income, particularly in relation to households at the lower end of the income scale." (Moss 1999: 34

If there had been income question it would have been asked of individuals as this would have been much less intrusive than asking household income. The responses could have been summed to give an approximate value for household income. The question would not have attempted to discern sources of income. It would also have contained a small number of income bands as the prime need of most users is for information about the less well-off, because people on higher incomes appear to object more strongly to stating their income, and because testing has shown that the width of the bands affects acceptability. The possible form of the question which will not be asked is shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. The possible question about individual income**

**What is your total current gross income from all sources?**

- Do not deduct Tax, National Insurance, Superannuation or Health Insurance payments
- Tick the box that covers your income

*Count all income, including*

Earnings  
Pensions  
Benefits  
Interest from savings or investments  
Rent from property  
Other (for example maintenance payments, grants)

<b>Per week</b>	<b>or</b>	<b>Per year (approximately)</b>
Nil	<input type="checkbox"/>	Nil
Less than £60	<input type="checkbox"/>	Less than £3,000
£60 to £119	<input type="checkbox"/>	£3,000 to £5,999
£120 to £199	<input type="checkbox"/>	£6,000 to £9,999
£200 to £299	<input type="checkbox"/>	£10,000 to £14,999
£300 to £479	<input type="checkbox"/>	£15,000 to £24,999
£480 or more	<input type="checkbox"/>	£25,000 or more

For an idea of the uses to which the income question could be put if it were included in the census one may look to the analyses of the United States Censuses of population over the last few decades where, for example, income information from the census is regularly used as an indicator of deprivation.

The table below shows annual individual income distribution table for all of Britain calculated for 1997 from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) which had a sample of just over 9000 people answering this question. It illustrates the kind of information that could be produced for every ward in Britain if statistics were available at small area level.

**TABLE 1: Individual Annual Income in Britain in 1997** (sample N=9,064)

<b>Income</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Ratio</b> (men : women)
Under £3,000	10.4%	23.8%	0.4
£3,000-£5,999	12.2%	26.9%	0.5
£6,000-£9,999	19.4%	22.7%	0.9
£10,000-£14,999	20.5%	14.0%	1.5
£15,000-£25,000	24.2%	9.6%	2.5
Over £25,000	13.2%	2.9%	0.5
	100.0%	100.0%	1.0

Source: BHPS wave 7 (weighted) Annual income by sex (1.9.96-1.9.97).

No official survey includes enough people in ethnic minority groups to be able to calculate reliably the degree of income inequality between different ethnic groups in Britain, let alone allowing for differences in age structure or other relevant variables. At a regional level, the Labour Force Survey and the Family Resources Survey are useful sources of information.

However, the census may not be the best way to provide this information at a small area level. There is evidence, both from the 1997 Census Test and from the more recent Census Rehearsal in 1999, that the question is not acceptable to some members of the public. "Analysis of response rates in the 1997 Census Test suggested that the inclusion of an income question lowered overall response in terms of

the proportion of Census forms returned, from 57.4 per cent to 54.6 per cent." (Moss, 1999). In addition, the programme of testing possible questions has shown that, even allowing for the banding of the response categories, the question is not answered with accuracy.

It would be of no overall benefit to the census users if information of limited precision about income were to be obtained at the cost of introducing unknown bias into the whole data set because of increased under-enumeration. For this reason, as the White Paper says, "... the preferred approach is to identify possible alternative means of securing relevant information". If the information were to be produced from administrative sources an additional benefit might be that it could be published more frequently than once a decade, for example annually or quarterly.

## **6. General Health**

A new question is proposed on the general health of the population. It is not possible in a short census question to go into precise definitions so the question would ask for a self-assessment. "The new question on general health asks respondents to assess their own health over the preceding 12 months as either 'Good', 'Fairly good', or 'Not good'. This information has been shown to be a good predictor for the use of health services. Testing revealed that there were a range of interpretations and references used by respondents in answering the question. However, there was broad agreement between responses and levels of medical attention sought during the past year. It was determined that, although subjective, the question meets the main requirements of users." (Moss, 1999).

The Limiting Long Term Illness question, introduced in the 1991 Census, will be retained. It has been used for allocating resources to the health service and predicting the use of medical services. In essence the reason for asking the two questions is that the wording of the Limiting Long Term Illness question implies permanent disability, whereas the general health question will collect information about a greater range of conditions.

## **7. Provision of Unpaid Care**

This new question would distinguish between people providing up to 19 hours, 20 to 49 hours, and 50 or more hours of unpaid care to someone who is ill or disabled.

There are a number of aspects of caring that are of concern to census users and there was a vigorous debate in the user community about what would be the most valuable focus for this question. The topic is not a simple one, and the question wording required careful testing to find an effective question. "In recognition of the increasing amount of voluntary help provided, there was strong support for information on the provision of unpaid care. Users were initially concerned with obtaining information on whether care was provided to someone inside or outside the respondent's household. The question has been refocused to obtain a measure of the amount of time spent providing care, to help provide information to support the Government's Carers Strategy. Testing indicated that the definition of care was not well understood and an explanatory note giving examples of care has been included in the final question in order to improve the quality of response." (Moss, 1999). Because of the change in focus, the testing of this question has been extended, using the ONS Omnibus Survey.

The break point of 20 hours is important for government policy on the support of carers, but some users may wish for a finer breakdown of the 1-19 hours category. It may be that cross-tabulating against the individual's other usual activities such as 'hours worked', and perhaps an allowance for commuting time, will aid interpretation of the breakdown of the census statistics.

## **8. Size of work organization**

This question would ask people aged between 16 and 74 who have ever worked whether their employer (or last employer) had 1-9, 10-24, 25-499, or 500 or more people working, at the place where they work (or worked). The self-employed would answer for the number of people they employ (or employed).

This question is needed for the new official socio-economic classification. "Consideration has also been given to the collection of information to enable the derivation of the new National Statistics Socio-economic Classification. Following evaluation of alternative questions including size of workplace and size of organisation, and questions covering supervisor/manager responsibilities, it was agreed that the 2001 Census would include questions on size of workplace and supervisory responsibilities. While size of organisation would provide the ideal information for differentiating social classes based on occupation, workplace details will be adequate for all but a minority of workers." (Moss, 1999).

For researchers interested in the size of organisations as such, The Census of Employment provides a convenient source.

**9. Religion**

A new question: 'What is your religion?' is proposed for the first census of the new millennium in England and Wales. The main user requirement is to determine the respondent's religious affiliation in order to supplement the question about ethnic group. Testing indicated that most respondents found the topic acceptable. In addition, some respondent saw the question as an opportunity to further define their cultural identity, or considered that religion was a better indicator of their ethnicity and culture than ethnic group. However, parliament did not view the question as acceptable and so it will not be asked.

The census in Northern Ireland has traditionally included a question about religion and this is proposed for 2001.

As with the ethnic group question in the 1991 Census, if this question had been included it would be expected to provide a wealth of opportunities for social and cultural analyses. There is at present very little reliable information available about the religious make up of the country.

**Figure 2. The possible question about religion in England and Wales**

<p><b>What is your religion?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tick one box only</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> None</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Buddhist</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hindu</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Muslim</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Sikh</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Jewish</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Any other religion,</li> </ul> <p><i>Please write in below</i></p> <p>.....</p>
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**10. Major Questions Revised**

Four question are proposed to be revised from their 1991 format for the 2001 Census as a result of the consultation with census users. In general these revisions increase the amount of information collected.

## **11. Qualifications**

The 1971, 1981 and 1991 Censuses asked a question about degrees and professional and vocational qualifications such as teaching and nursing, but did not cover school leaving qualifications. It thus had limited meaning for the majority of the population. Before 1971, age at leaving school was asked.

For the next Census, users have stated a requirement for information about a much broader range of qualifications. In view of the many changes to the educational system in recent decades, and the very large number of qualifications that a person may have, not to mention variations in Scotland and Northern Ireland, the development of a new question was a considerable challenge. In addition, it was required to have only tick-box responses, in order to contain the cost of processing.

"For the 2001 Census, information will be collected on broad levels of qualifications for all people aged 16 years and over, using pre-coded tick boxes. In England and Wales the question will also collect information on whether people have teaching, medical, nursing and/or dental qualifications. As there is less of a requirement in Scotland and Northern Ireland it is not proposed to collect information on specific professional qualifications there." (Moss, 1999).

An extended qualifications question would be a great step forward for social analysts, primarily because it would include a category for 'no qualifications' and cover the most common qualifications such as GCSE, CSE, and GCE O and A levels. It would allow research to be undertaken on issues such as race discrimination in employment practices, by area. The inclusion of vocational qualifications would also enable learning in later life to be measured. Because tick-box responses will be used 100% of responses will be processed, another welcome improvement.

As with any revised question, there would be some reduction in comparability over time. It should be possible to estimate changes in the levels of qualifications measured in the 1971 to 1991 Censuses using just census statistics. For the new levels of qualifications to be covered in 2001, the census will need to be used in conjunction with other sources to estimate changes.

## **12. Accommodation**

A useful revision of the accommodation question would allow the accommodation of families with small children or infirm or elderly people to be differentiated by floor level.

"A question is proposed on the lowest floor level of accommodation, providing a measure of households and people living in potentially unsuitable accommodation. This question is new to the Censuses for England and Wales and Northern Ireland, and is based on one previously asked in Scotland. In Northern Ireland there will also be a new question on the number of floor levels in the accommodation, however there was less of a requirement for this information in the rest of the United Kingdom." (Moss, 1999)

## **13. Relationship within the Household**

In 1991 respondents were asked to list the 'head of household' first on the Census form. The relationship of the other household members to this person was the only information collected. This was clearly unsatisfactory in households with complex structures. Even in simpler households, to be fully effective the question relied on the concept of 'head of household' which by 1991 was becoming a contentious term. It also relied on the respondent following the instruction to put the 'head of household' as 'person number one' on the form. This question was clerically coded, which meant that only 10% of replies could be processed. This limited the range of reliable statistics that could be produced at small area level.

In 2001 it is proposed to ask the question in the form of a tick-box matrix so that the relationship of each member of the household to every other member will be recorded, and all of the responses can be processed. To limit the burden on the form-filler the relationship will only be asked one way. Thus person 2 will be asked their relationship to person 1; person 3 will be asked their relationship to person

1 and their relationship to person 2; person 4 will be asked their relationships to persons 1,2 and 3, and so on.

This matrix approach requires an additional response from each successive member of the household. Thus 'person 17' in an 18-person household would need to respond no less than 17 times! The question is therefore further limited so that, in the larger households, from person 6 onwards information is only collected about a person's relationships to 'person 1' and to the 2 preceding people on the form.

Again, this was a challenging question to devise and it has been extensively tested. The Census Offices were somewhat surprised, but heartened, to find that it was possible to frame an effective question in this format.

There are many ways in which complex relationships could be tabulated, and this is an important topic for the current consultations about outputs. But is good that a meaningful question is being asked. This revision of the question will have important implications for a great deal of research. In particular, it could alter the methodology by which estimates of future housing need in Britain are calculated.

#### **14. Ethnic group**

The 1991 Census question on ethnic group was a major innovation, and has helped shape the subsequent collection of statistics about ethnicity in many administrative systems. However, measured against current requirements it has several drawbacks. "In England and Wales, users' requirements for additional information on people of mixed ethnic origin, and demands to sub-divide the 'White' population, in particular the 'Irish', have been met by an expanded *ethnic group* question. New response categories provide optimum comparability with information from the 1991 Census, while at the same time meeting the needs of those who prefer to describe themselves as 'Black British' or 'Asian British'. Test results indicated that the topic of ethnicity was acceptable to the public." (Moss, 1999).

In Scotland, the users' requirements for information about ethnicity were in line with the 1991 Census question but with the addition of the 'mixed ethnic group' category. In Northern Ireland, where the question is proposed for the first time in a census, the requirement was similar, but with the addition of a category for 'Irish Traveller'. Simpler extensions of the 1991 question are proposed for these countries.

Although the responses throughout the United Kingdom will be broadly comparable, some users may wish that the same question were asked everywhere. It is important to remember that balance must always be struck between having a uniform approach and having questions that reflect local conditions and needs for information.

**Figure 3. The possible question about ethnic group in England and Wales**

**What is your ethnic group?**  
 Choose one section from (a) to (e) then tick the appropriate box to indicate your cultural background

**White**  
 British  
 Irish  
 Any other White background  
*Please write in below*  
 .....

**Mixed**  
 White and Black Caribbean  
 White and Black African  
 White and Asian  
 Any other mixed background  
*Please write in below*  
 .....

**Asian or Asian British**  
 Indian  
 Pakistani  
 Bangladeshi  
 Any other Asian background  
*Please write in below*  
 .....

**Black or Black British**  
 Caribbean  
 African  
 Any other Black background  
*Please write in below*  
 .....

**Chinese or Other ethnic group**  
 Chinese  
 Any other  
*Please write in below*  
 .....

**15. Conclusion**

Four new questions have been proposed and four have been revised within the auspices of the Census Act. A further new question on religion was proposed that would require that act to be amended. The Act was not amended.

All of these new questions and revisions would be extremely useful, whether they are to aid comparison across the United Kingdom, to increase the detail of the information collected, or to add new topics to the census data set.

Such is the importance of the national Census that some users will no doubt feel that, for their purposes, it would have been better to have excluded such a topic in order to make room for some other. But the content of the census must be decided taking into account the needs of all user sectors, and to be acceptable to the public. Hopefully all users will feel that the many improvements to the census content proposed for 2001 far outweigh any disadvantages from their perspective.



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