



ONS Consultation on the 2021 Census – Initial view on content for England and Wales

The Association of North East Councils is the representative voice for local government in the North East. It represents all 12 local authorities in the North East, throughout Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Durham and the Tees Valley on issues of concern to them and the communities they serve. It is a cross-party organisation, with all of its members democratically elected and accountable politicians.

The Association welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation having responded to the previous consultation in December 2013 on the future provision of population statistics. In that response, given how much of local authority funding depends on census data, our members were concerned that any major shift in the approach to the census could have far-reaching consequences for their communities.

Approach

This response focuses on some of the broader principles and potential implications of the proposals as set out in the consultation document. Alongside this we are aware that some of our councils will be submitting more detailed on-line technical template responses. In addition, the response emphasises support for the key topics/sub-topics under consideration and provides comment on those where decisions are still to be made. Where there are varying views these will be picked up through individual council responses.

Key Principles

Our response in December 2013 set out our member councils' preference for an online census for 2021 on the basis that this would continue to be conducted once a decade thereafter. We note that, although not part of the ONS' original recommendations, the government has expressed its ambition that the 2021 census would be the last.

Historically the census has provided a very useful and rich source of data that generally has not been available from any other source and it remains the most comprehensive statistical reflection of modern life. Its withdrawal will not only mean the loss of this important source but will also affect local authorities' ability to track changes over time and build an understanding of the impact of their policies and interventions.

The census also provides data which is available and robust down to very small geographic and population levels which is another critical feature valued by our authorities. This 'granular' data remains an essential requirement as it enables authorities to obtain an accurate picture of conditions at a local level to support the targeting of resources and interventions. This function has taken on a greater significance given the significant levels of funding reductions local authorities have faced since 2010 and are anticipated to continue to face going forwards.

Although the intention is to move towards increased use of administrative data and it is recognised that there has been improvement in some of these datasets the concern remains that these cannot be a robust alternative to the census. In light of this we would ask that you urge the government to review its ambition for delivering the census after 2021. There is also the question of why put the effort and resource into an on-line census in 2021 if it is to be a one off exercise?

Census 2021 Topics

Notwithstanding our concerns regarding the issues set out above, our authorities are happy to work with ONS on the development of the on-line census for 2021. Our councils are supportive of the majority of the proposed inclusions and deletions but we would also like to highlight some views on the topic areas within the consultation where the ONS initial view is 'further information required'. These are set out below:

Topic	Sub-Topic	Comment
Housing	Number of Rooms	Important to issues of local demographic profiling and deprivation. Strongly support collection via the on-line census.
	Cars or vans	Important for issues of local demographic profiling and access to services. Strongly support collection via the on-line census.
Health	Long-term health problem or disability	Key to profiling, policy development and resource targeting around equalities. Strongly support collection via the on-line census.
Education		We strongly support the work ONS is undertaking with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS) to create and assess the coverage of an All Education Database from government administrative sources. This will include information on attainment and qualifications through further and higher education for all those born from 1985 onwards. In general it is noted that people can struggle to articulate what qualification(s) they have and/or what programme(s) of study they

		<p>have followed – a proposal is suggested to include a separate section to capture Apprenticeship information – this will need careful consideration particularly in light of the current Government consultation into protecting the term ‘Apprenticeship’. A specific definition of what constitutes an Apprenticeship would need to be agreed if this section is to be included in the 2021 Census, or we may end up with a situation where people think they have completed an Apprenticeship but it was delivered during a period when the ‘quality’ of some Apprenticeships were being questioned. A further point to take into consideration is that some people start an Apprenticeship but for one reason or another don’t complete the Apprenticeship framework.</p> <p>Many people undertake in-house training at work, which quite often is non-accredited but is very job specific and in some cases mandatory. It would be extremely useful to be able to gain an understanding of what and how much training is being delivered by employers which may not necessarily be being captured in a meaningful way at present. This may then be able to inform future policy in relation to funding eligibility for some qualifications.</p>
Labour market and socio-economic classifications	Industry	<p>Supports local economic and demographic profiling. Strongly support collection via the on-line census.</p>
	Volunteering and unpaid work	<p>Local demographic profile use. Strongly support collection via the on-line census.</p>
Travel		<p>Although there are no changes proposed specifically to the travel questions in 2021, the previous request regarding address of place of study which was declined for the 2011 census is indicated to remain uncollected.</p> <p>The removal from the school census of travel information leaves Councils with no specific methodology to determine education related transport patterns. Individual establishments are able to provide some information relating to individual projects but no wider data upon</p>

		<p>which to measure effectiveness is available.</p> <p>Councils' activities are intended to both reduce car trips and improve health outcomes by increasing active travel for young people. Accordingly we request that the place of study question be introduced.</p> <p>As per the Scottish survey, in order to maximise the value of including a place of study question, we would advocate that there be an additional requirement to use the existing travel to work question to include travel to study.</p>
Income		<p>This is a new topic and would welcome the production of data on income although current ONS income outputs would need to be considerably improved.</p> <p>Strongly support this topic being addressed via administrative data sources but need improvement on current outputs.</p>
Sexual Identity		<p>As a further new topic, notwithstanding concerns regarding privacy etc, data on sexual identity would add to ability to profile local populations.</p> <p>Strongly support collection via the on-line census.</p>

Summary

This response represents a number of high-level concerns shared by our councils regarding the overall proposed approach to the census beyond 2021. However, we recognise the positive aspects of the proposals for the on-line census in 2021 and offer our support to these where appropriate and have included additional comments where the initial proposals are subject to further consideration and decisions. We would be happy to engage further with the ONS to explore these issues in more detail if that would be helpful.

Association of North East Councils
27 August 2015