
John Pullinger CB CStat | National Statistician

Professor Yaron Matras, University of Manchester
Dr Thomas H. Bak, University of Edinburgh
Dr Mark Sebba, University of Lancaster
Professor Wendy Ayres-Bennett, University of Cambridge

Multilingual Manchester
The University of Manchester
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Oxford Rd
Manchester M13 9PL

26 April 2018

Dear Professor Matras, Dr Bak, Dr Sebba and Professor Ayres-Bennett,

As National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority, I am replying to your recent open letter to Sir David Norgrove, Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, regarding the questions on language in the 2021 Censuses in the UK. I am responsible for Census 2021 in England and Wales and work closely with the Registrars General for Scotland and Northern Ireland (who are responsible for censuses in their countries) to facilitate harmonisation where it is in the interest of census users and the public good more generally¹.

In 2015, England and Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland all held topic consultations, asking stakeholders for views on initial thoughts on which topics, including language, should be included in each of the 2021 Censuses. The consultation in England and Wales² received 1,095 responses, of which 315 related to language topics. These were then evaluated and the next steps, published in topic reports, were built into testing plans. Some stakeholders did express an interest in first/second, 'native' or additional languages but the requests did not evidence a strong enough user need to pursue a change. Scotland³ and Northern Ireland⁴ received similar feedback, detailed in their consultation webpages.

The three census agencies intend to recommend that their respective censuses ask questions on the topics of 'main language' and 'English language proficiency', as all have strong evidence of a high user need (E&W⁵, Scotland⁶, NI⁷) to inform policy development, local planning and service provision such as education, health and local services. The aim of the language questions is to identify people for whom English is not their main language, and their level of proficiency in English.

The agencies will make recommendations on content later this year and the final topics and questions to be included in the 2021 Censuses will be put for approval, in the form of Census Orders and Census Regulations.

Before finalising 'main language' questions, it would be helpful to review any evidence you have that might help us to improve the question. We would also like to further understand your information

¹ [The Conduct of the 2021 Censuses in the UK](#)

² [2021 Census topic consultation, ONS](#)

³ [2021 Consultation, Scottish Census](#)

⁴ [2021 Census - Topic Consultation Documents, NISRA](#)

⁵ [Assessment of initial user requirements on content for England and Wales, Language Topic Report, ONS](#)

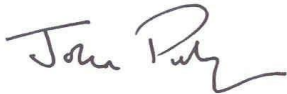
⁶ [Scotland Census 2021 Topic Consultation Report, August 2016](#)

⁷ [2021 Census: Topic Consultation for Northern Ireland](#)

requirements to assess if there is a strong enough need to collect this information via another method, for example, social surveys. I believe that members of your group have already taken part in talks with colleagues at National Records Scotland. If you are interested in providing information to our 2021 Census in England and Wales question development team, please contact the mailbox: 2021census.consultation@ons.gov.uk

Further information on the 2021 Census programmes can be found on the relevant websites for England and Wales⁸, Scotland⁹, and Northern Ireland¹⁰.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Pullinger". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

John Pullinger

⁸ [Census Transformation Programme, ONS](#)

⁹ [2021 Census for Scotland](#)

¹⁰ [2021 Census for Northern Ireland](#)