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**Chair of the UK Statistics Authority, Sir David Norgrove**

Sir Bernard Jenkin MP  
Chair, Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

14 December 2018

Dear Bernard,

I promised to write to keep the Committee updated about Census 2021 and beyond.

The Authority's final recommendations for the 2021 Census for England and Wales have been published today in the White Paper *'Help Shape Our Future: The 2021 Census of Population and Housing in England and Wales'*<sup>1</sup>.

As mentioned in my previous letter, in developing recommendations, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) has consulted widely on what changes in society should be reflected in the 2021 Census, and are making it easy to respond online on all devices including mobiles and tablets with help through Assisted Digital. Paper questionnaires will also be available, so that no-one is missed out.

With every Census we undertake, consideration is given to new questions which should be added to provide information which is not available from elsewhere. The 2021 Census will, for the first time, collect information on veterans of the UK Armed Forces. This enables monitoring of the Armed Forces covenant – the deal between the country and those who served it.

There will also be questions on gender identity (while keeping the existing question on sex) and sexual orientation for those aged 16 and over. As with the question on religious affiliation introduced in the 2001 Census, we believe these new questions should be voluntary and no individual should have to answer these questions if they prefer not to. The Government and UK Statistics Authority will now consider the appropriate mechanism to ensure this is the case.

We will continue to ask questions on key themes including carers, demography, education, ethnicity and national identity, health, housing, labour market, language, migration and citizenship, and religion<sup>2</sup>.

Our recommendations fully recognise the need for good data on all groups, backgrounds and communities. ONS has committed to work with them and their local authorities to ensure that data are easily available to decision-makers.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/census/censustransformationprogramme/legislationandpolicy/helpshapeourfuturethe2021censusofpopulationandhousinginenglandandwalesenglishlanguageversion.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> A full list of topics is available within the White Paper, page 32

As well as adding a new Roma tick-box to the ethnic topic in recognition of the specific needs of the Roma community, ONS will be making it easier for everyone to identify as they wish through the development of “search-as-you-type” capability. There will continue to be considerable community engagement. ONS will also be increasing the analytical offering and outputs for all groups and backgrounds and developing an on-line flexible dissemination system where users can specify the data they need and define their own queries to build tables.

Today the National Statistician has written to the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) for British Sikhs<sup>3</sup>, and to Cornish MPs<sup>4</sup>, detailing how their needs will be met.

As you are aware, ONS is transforming the way it collects, processes and shares data and the next Census is part of a wider drive towards making more use of existing data and moving surveys online. In my last letter I mentioned how other sources of data will be used to supplement the Census, so that ONS only asks questions where needed, to build the most comprehensive picture of society in 2021. In line with this commitment, two questions have been dropped from the 2011 Census – the last year a person worked and the number of rooms in a household – where we are now using alternative data.

As with previous censuses, ONS is planning for a rehearsal in October 2019 and is starting work on the Census Order and Regulations to enable the Census to take place on 21 March 2021.

Yours ever,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David". The script is cursive and somewhat informal.

**David**

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/census-2021-appg-sikhs/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/correspondence/census-2021-cornish/>