

Assessment of the responses received

2021 Census: Topic Consultation for Northern Ireland

August 2016

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1. Introduction

The Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) is responsible for the Census in Northern Ireland. This consultation was NISRA's first step towards understanding what information users need from the 2021 Census. NISRA wants to build on the success of the 2011 Census and ensure that the 2021 Census reflects the changing information needs of users. NISRA aims to maintain or improve the quality of the data for those topics collected, provide comparability where users say it is important and deliver information that is relevant to their needs in 2021 and beyond.

This report presents the views expressed in response to the 2021 Census Topic Consultation exercise in Northern Ireland and the results of NISRA's assessment of those responses. The topic consultation was launched on 25 September 2015 and ran for a period of 12 weeks, ending on 17 December 2015. Through the consultation, users were invited to share their thoughts on the topics to be included in the 2021 Census, encompassing a range of measures including:

- Purpose of user need
- Need for information on lower-level geographical areas or population sub-groups
- Need for comparability beyond Northern Ireland
- Need for continuity with previous censuses
- Requirement for multivariate analysis and
- Suitability of alternative sources

The views expressed by users have been presented irrespective of NISRA's views on their accuracy – their inclusion in the report is in no way intended to indicate that NISRA endorses the views expressed.

Distribution List

Details of the consultation were issued to over 1,400 key users who were identified by Census Office with the support of the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland, the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) and Machinery of Government Branch within the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS). These details were also passed to 1,300 contacts identified by Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS).

The list of consultees included:

- Leaders of the main political parties in Northern Ireland, MPs and MEPs

- Key advisory groups such as Demographic Statistics, Statistics Advisory Committee and Statistics Coordinating Group
- Bodies such as the Education Authority, Health & Social Services Boards, Local District Councils and Local Strategy Partnerships
- Key officials with Government Departments in the NICS and
- Other census users known to Census Office

To ensure that the general public were aware of the consultation and that their responses were very welcome, the consultation was also promoted on the NISRA website, through the NISRA and nidirect official social media pages and in both the NINIS e-zine and Census mailing lists.

Methods of completion

The recommended way to respond to the consultation was online at the nidirect consultation hub using the Citizen Space online consultation package, and users were encouraged to comment on as many topics as were of interest. To encourage response and cater for a variety of user preferences, users were also able to respond by email or post using printed copies of the questionnaire.

Responses

A total of 46 responses were received, 32 were received via the consultation hub where users were able to type their responses directly into the Citizen Space system, and 14 were received via email. The majority of responses (35) were received from organisations, and 11 were received from individuals. The breakdown by respondent type is given in Table 1.

Table 1 – Respondent type

Type of sector	Number of respondents
Government	21
Charity / Community / Voluntary	15
Other	10

NISRA published the 46 responses to the consultation on Tuesday 8 March 2016 – those responses can be accessed on the NISRA website:

<http://www.nisra.gov.uk/census/2021/planning/consultation/topic.html>

2. Summary of topic recommendations for the 2021 Census

The '[2021 Census: Topic Consultation for Northern Ireland](#)' report described NISRA's initial views, prior to the consultation, for each topic being considered for the 2021 Census.

Following the evaluation of the responses received and an assessment of the considerations and operational requirements NISRA's initial views have been revised. Table 2 provides a definition for each view.

Table 2 – Classification of initial and revised views

Views	Definition
Collect	Proposed to include based on current understanding of user needs and quality issues. Further research and testing may be carried out.
Further information required	Where further information about the user need is required to make an assessment. In some cases there may be potential to use administrative data to meet the need.
Consider how to meet need	Following the identification of user need, NISRA propose to include this topic in research and testing to determine whether and how this need can be met. It may be the case that the user need can be met through sources other than the Census.
Do not collect: Explore administrative data potential	This topic will not be included in the 2021 Census, but will be considered where NISRA can see potential to use administrative data to meet the need.

This initial consultation refers solely to the topics. The wording of the associated questions will be considered separately. In particular, where a topic was covered in 2011 and this report indicates it will be covered again in 2021, the question to be used in 2021 will be considered further but may not be the same as that used in 2011.

It is important to recognise that the views expressed in this document are revised views, and will not be finalised until further research and testing is completed. NISRA is aware that the number of questions currently asked in the Census is approaching the limits of respondent burden and careful consideration of the constraints on the length of the questionnaire and the costs associated with a longer questionnaire will be assessed before any final decisions are made.

Table 3 gives a summary across all themes and topics of NISRA's initial and revised (where appropriate) view on each topic's suitability for inclusion in the 2021 Census.

Table 3 – Initial and revised view by topic within theme

		Initial view	Revised view
Demography	Sex	Collect	Collect
	Age	Collect	Collect
	Marital or Legal Partnership status	Collect	Collect
	Household and family relationships	Collect	Collect
Ethnicity, Identity, Language and Religion	Country of Birth	Collect	Collect
	Passports held	Collect	Collect
	National identity	Collect	Collect
	Ethnic group	Collect	Collect
	Main language	Collect	Collect
	Proficiency in English	Collect	Collect
	Knowledge of Irish	Collect	Collect
	Knowledge of Ulster-Scots	Collect	Collect
	Current religion and religion brought up in	Collect	Collect
Health	Long-term health problem or disability	Collect	Collect
	Nature of long-term conditions	Collect	Collect
	General health	Collect	Collect
	Provision of unpaid care	Collect	Collect
Housing and accommodation	Type and self-containment of accommodation	Collect	Collect
	Rooms	Collect	Collect
	Household adaptations	Collect	Collect
	Tenure and landlord (if renting)	Collect	Collect

		Initial view	Revised view
	Central heating	Further information required	Collect
	Cars or vans	Further information required	Collect
Qualifications	Qualifications held	Collect	Collect
Labour market	Economic activity	Collect	Collect
	Occupation	Collect	Collect
	Volunteering	Further information required	Collect
	Year last worked	Further information required	Collect
	Supervisory status	Further information required	Collect
	Industry	Further information required	Collect
	National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SeC)	Collect (derive)	Collect (derive)
Travel to work or place of study	Travel to work	Collect	Collect
	Travel to place of study	Collect	Collect
Migration	Intention to stay in UK	Collect	Collect
	Ever lived outside NI	Collect	Collect
	Country of previous residence	Collect	Collect
	Most recent arrival to NI	Collect	Collect
	Address one year ago	Collect	Collect

		Initial view	Revised view
New topics	Income	Do not collect: Explore administrative data potential	Do not collect: Explore administrative data potential
	Sexual identity	Further information required	Consider how to meet need
	Second residence	Further information required	Consider how to meet need
Additional topics	Gender identity	-	Consider how to meet need
	Knowledge and proficiency in languages other than English	-	Consider how to meet need
	Use of British Sign Language / Irish Sign Language	-	Consider how to meet need
	Wellbeing	-	Do not collect
	Obesity	-	Do not collect
	Vacant properties	-	Consider how to meet need
	Technology	-	Do not collect
	Immigration status: Asylum Seekers and Refugees	-	Do not collect
	Reason for Migration	-	Do not collect
	Armed forces community	-	Do not collect
	Programme for Government indicators	-	Do not collect

The revised views reflect NISRA’s current assessment on each topic, and the exact content of the questionnaire for the 2021 Census will only be proposed after further research, testing and engagement. The final decision about the information collected in the 2021 Census will ultimately be for the Northern Ireland Assembly to take.

[Section 3](#) reports on the responses received to the topic consultation and NISRA’s assessment for each theme and the list of topics it includes. It also covers the additional topics and comments raised during the consultation.

[Section 4](#) describes how NISRA intends to take this work forward with regard to the 2021 Census.

[Annex A](#) describes the methodology used in the evaluation of the responses to the consultation.

3. Themes and Topics

This section outlines in detail the responses received for each theme and topic, describing NISRA’s assessment of the response received and NISRA’s revised view (where appropriate). This section also reports and discusses the additional topics suggested by users.

3.1 Demography

Basic demographic information such as sex, age and marital or legal partnership status are essential for the majority of census outputs and a key requirement of census users. This view has been borne out by the responses received. As a result, NISRA’s initial view for these topics remains unchanged, and all will be collected in the 2021 Census questionnaire.

Topic	Initial view	No. of responses	Revised view
Sex	Collect	16	Collect
Age	Collect	17	Collect
Marital or Legal Partnership status	Collect	14	Collect
Household and family relationships	Collect	16	Collect

3.2 Ethnicity, Identity, Language and Religion

Information on ethnicity, identity, language and religion are essential for the majority of census outputs and a key requirement of census users. A number of topics within this theme are used by organisations to meet and monitor their statutory obligations stemming from the Race Relations (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Some are also relevant to the Racial Equality Strategy for Northern Ireland 2014-2024. There is also recognition that these topics allow users to more fully articulate different aspects of their identity.

This need has been borne out by the responses received. As a result, NISRA’s initial view for these topics remains unchanged, and all will continue to be collected in the 2021 Census questionnaire. Respondents identified a need for further information to be collected on some topics (for example, knowledge of Irish and ethnic group). These topics will be subject to further research and testing to see whether these needs can be accommodated within the confines of the Census.

Topic	Initial view	No. of responses	Revised view
Country of Birth	Collect	16	Collect

Topic	Initial view	No. of responses	Revised view
Passports held	Collect	11	Collect
National identity	Collect	15	Collect
Ethnic group	Collect	20	Collect
Main language	Collect	14	Collect
Proficiency in English	Collect	9	Collect
Knowledge of Irish	Collect	14	Collect
Knowledge of Ulster-Scots	Collect	13	Collect
Current religion and religion brought up in	Collect	20	Collect

3.3 Health

Health information is a key requirement of census users. The range of health topics collected are important in the assessment of inequality and are used to help target interventions aimed at reducing inequality nationally and locally. Information on disability is also required to allow organisations to meet and monitor their statutory obligations stemming from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

This need has been borne out by the responses received. As a result, NISRA's initial view for these topics remains unchanged, and all will continue to be collected in the 2021 Census questionnaire. Respondents identified a need for further information to be collected on some topics (for example, nature of long-term conditions and provision of unpaid care). These topics will be subject to further research and testing to see whether these needs can be accommodated within the confines of the Census.

Topic	Initial view	No. of responses	Revised view
Long-term health problem or disability	Collect	18	Collect
Nature of long-term conditions	Collect	16	Collect
General health	Collect	15	Collect
Provision of unpaid care	Collect	16	Collect

3.4 Housing and accommodation

Information on housing and accommodation is a key requirement of census users. This is used to inform estimates of housing stock and future housing need, as well as other policy and planning purposes. A number of the topics within this theme were also requirements for the 2011 Census under the European Union (2008) Regulation of the European Parliament and Council on Population and Housing Censuses (Regulation (EC) No. 763/2008), which sets out the requirements for the provision of data from each EU member state from a decennial Census. A similar regulation is anticipated for the 2021 Census.

This need has been borne out by the responses received. Four of the topics within the housing and accommodation theme had an initial view of 'Collect'. Following an assessment of the responses received, that view is unchanged and NISRA intends to collect this information in the 2021 Census questionnaire. With regard to rooms, NISRA intends to also explore the potential to source this information from administrative sources.

Central heating and cars and vans had initial views of 'Further information required'. Users cited a need for these topics to support policy development and monitoring, service planning and delivery and as a research requirement. Following an assessment of these responses, NISRA intends to continue to collect information on central heating and cars and vans.

Topic	Initial view	No. of responses	Revised view
Type and self-containment of accommodation	Collect	8	Collect
Rooms	Collect	8	Collect
Household adaptations	Collect	7	Collect
Tenure and landlord (if renting)	Collect	8	Collect
Central heating	Further information required	9	Collect
Cars or vans	Further information required	8	Collect

3.5 Qualifications

Information on qualifications is a key requirement of census users. This information is used widely across central and local government to inform service delivery and policy development. In particular, it is used to plan interventions to address areas where low

skills levels had been identified and to target economic inactivity, employment and training schemes.

This need has been borne out by the responses received. As a result, NISRA's initial view for this topic remains unchanged, and it will be collected in the 2021 Census questionnaire.

Topic	Initial view	No. of responses	Revised view
Qualifications held	Collect	17	Collect

3.6 Labour market

Labour market information is a key requirement of census users. A number of topics within this theme are used by organisations to monitor areas of deprivation and to plan interventions to address areas of economic inactivity and unemployment.

This need has been borne out by the responses received. Two of the topics within the labour market theme had an initial view of 'Collect'. Following an assessment of the responses received, that view is unchanged and NISRA intends to continue to collect this information in the 2021 Census questionnaire.

Volunteering, year last worked, supervisory status and industry had initial views of 'Further information required'. Users cited a need for these topics to support service planning and delivery, policy development and monitoring and as a research requirement. Information on year last worked was also useful as an indication of long-term unemployment. Following an assessment of these responses, NISRA intends to collect information on these topics.

Topic	Initial view	No. of responses	Revised view
Economic activity	Collect	13	Collect
Occupation	Collect	13	Collect
Volunteering	Further information required	12	Collect
Year last worked	Further information required	10	Collect
Supervisory status	Further information required	11	Collect

Topic	Initial view	No. of responses	Revised view
Industry	Further information required	12	Collect
National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SeC)	Collect (derive)	8	Collect (derive)

3.7 Travel to work or place of study

Information on travel to work or place of study is a key requirement of census users. This information provides valuable data on transport patterns and trends, which have value in the area of transport modelling.

This need has been borne out by the responses received. As a result, NISRA's initial view for these topics remains unchanged, and all will be collected in the 2021 Census questionnaire.

Topic	Initial view	No. of responses	Revised view
Travel to work	Collect	10	Collect
Travel to place of study	Collect	7	Collect

3.8 Migration

Migration information is a key requirement of census users. This information is used to support the development of migration policy, as well as monitoring the national and local impacts of international migration, informing community cohesion work and providing information about phenomena such as 'brain drain' and those returning to live in Northern Ireland.

This need has been borne out by the responses received. As a result, NISRA's initial view for these topics remains unchanged, and all will be collected in the 2021 Census questionnaire.

Topic	Initial view	No. of responses	Revised view
Intention to stay in UK	Collect	7	Collect
Ever lived outside NI	Collect	8	Collect
Country of previous residence	Collect	8	Collect
Most recent arrival to NI	Collect	8	Collect

Topic	Initial view	No. of responses	Revised view
Address one year ago	Collect	7	Collect

3.9 Income

Respondents to previous census consultations have cited many potential uses of income data, for instance as an indicator of relative advantage and disadvantage and economic wellbeing, especially for low geographic levels and small population groups. Key users of income data include central government, private organisations and researchers.

NISRA's initial view on the collection of information on income in the 2021 Census was 'Do not collect – explore administrative data potential'. This view was informed by the findings of the work completed to test an income question for the 2011 Census in the 2007 Census Test. At that time, concerns were identified around obtaining accurate information that was fit for purpose and difficulties were identified around defining income sufficiently clearly within the context of a Census.

The evidence presented in the responses to this consultation confirm that information on income is still very important to users and it would be used for a variety of purposes, including resource allocation and policy development and monitoring across all geographic levels, and would inform comparisons with the rest of the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

However, following an assessment of the responses against the combined criteria, and bearing in mind the considered assessment in 2007, NISRA's updated view is unchanged – information on income will not be collected in the 2021 Census.

As an alternative, NISRA will explore the potential to source information on Income from administrative sources and enable the ability for that data to be linked to census outputs. The availability of such data will be subject to the appropriate legislation on data sharing being enacted in time to support the 2021 Census and data suppliers being willing to share the information.

Topic	Initial view	No. of responses	Revised view
Income	Do not collect: Explore administrative data	12	Do not collect: Explore administrative data potential

3.10 Sexual identity

Government and other organisations have data requirements to enable them to meet and monitor their statutory obligations stemming from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and other relevant legislation.

Section 75 refers to sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is composed of three dimensions; identity, attraction and behaviour. Sexual identity is a subjective view of oneself which may change over time, in different contexts, and may differ from sexual attraction and behaviour. In this consultation, NISRA has referred to sexual identity, but this should be taken as referring to the wider concept of sexual identity/orientation. Further research will examine the appropriate terminology for any potential questions.

NISRA’s initial view on the collection of information on sexual identity was ‘Further information required’. While accepting there is a user need for relevant information, NISRA has concerns which need to be considered, including individual privacy and public acceptability within the context of a census, the quality of the resulting data and the effect that the inclusion of a question on sexual identity might have on the overall response to the Census.

Following an assessment of the responses against the combined criteria, NISRA’s updated view is that NISRA will consider how to meet the need. A harmonised approach will be taken with both the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and the National Records of Scotland (NRS), and NISRA will work on shared research and testing to inform a decision on whether a question on sexual identity should be included in the 2021 Census. Part of this work will be to examine public acceptability of a potential question to be used in a census context.

Topic	Initial view	No. of responses	Revised view
Sexual identity	Further information required	16	Consider how to meet need

3.11 Second residence

NISRA was keen to establish the level of user need for information on second residence, and so the initial view for this topic was ‘Further information required’.

Following an assessment of the responses against the combined criteria this need has been confirmed, and so NISRA’s revised view is that a question on second residence should be considered for inclusion in the 2021 Census.

Topic	Initial view	No. of responses	Revised view
Second residence	Further information required	6	Consider how to meet need

3.12 Additional topics

A range of additional topics, across a number of themes, were suggested for inclusion in the 2021 Census in the responses to the topic consultation.

Topic	Revised view
Gender identity	Consider how to meet need
Knowledge and proficiency in languages other than English	Consider how to meet need
Use of British Sign Language / Irish Sign Language	Consider how to meet need
Wellbeing	Do not collect
Obesity	Do not collect
Vacant properties	Consider how to meet need
Technology	Do not collect
Immigration status: Asylum Seekers and Refugees	Do not collect
Reason for Migration	Do not collect
Armed forces community	Do not collect
Programme for Government indicators	Do not collect

Gender identity

Gender identity was suggested as an additional topic for inclusion. It is accepted that there is a user need for this information, in order to inform policy development and enable organisations to meet and monitor their statutory obligations stemming from Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and other relevant legislation.

However, there are concerns about individual privacy and public acceptability within the context of a census, the quality of the resulting data, the space on the questionnaire that would be required to collect the information and the effect that the inclusion of a question on gender identity might have on the overall response to the Census.

Following an assessment of the responses, NISRA intends to consider this topic for inclusion and determine whether it can be incorporated with the existing demography questions. As a result, NISRA plans to carry out further research into the feasibility of including this topic and take a harmonised approach with both ONS and NRS, working closely with both on shared research and testing to inform a decision on whether a question on gender identity should be included in the 2021 Census. Part of this work will be to examine public acceptability of the question, as per sexual identity.

Knowledge and proficiency in languages other than English

Knowledge and proficiency in languages other than English was suggested as an additional topic for inclusion, in order to gain a better understanding of the range of languages spoken in Northern Ireland, as well as the main language spoken. The main use for information on knowledge and proficiency in languages other than English was to gain an understanding of the capability of the Northern Ireland population that could support foreign investment. This information was required at a range of geographical levels within Northern Ireland, and there was strong support for the need to have comparable data with the rest of the United Kingdom, and moderate support for the need for comparable data with the Republic of Ireland, and further afield. There was also a need for the ability to use this topic in multivariate tables across a range of themes.

Following an assessment of the users' responses, NISRA intends to consider this topic for inclusion and determine whether it can be incorporated with the existing language questions.

Use of British Sign Language / Irish Sign Language

Use of British Sign Language / Irish Sign Language was suggested as an additional topic for inclusion, in order to identify those using sign language more effectively and to provide reliable statistics to support new legislation following the public consultation being held by Department for Communities on a sign language framework. Uses for information on use of British Sign Language / Irish Sign Language included resource allocation, service planning and delivery and policy development and monitoring. This information was required at a range of geographical levels within Northern Ireland, and there was strong support for the need to have comparable data with the rest of the United Kingdom, and moderate support for the need for comparable data with the Republic of Ireland, and further afield. There was also a need for the ability to use this topic in multivariate tables across a range of themes.

Following an assessment of the user's response, NISRA intends to consider this topic to further establish the user need and determine whether this can be incorporated with the existing language questions.

Wellbeing

Wellbeing was suggested as an additional topic for inclusion. Following an assessment of the user's response and research into the feasibility of including this topic, NISRA does not intend to collect information on wellbeing due to the space required to derive an appropriate measure of wellbeing and its current availability in a host of other social surveys, including the Northern Ireland Health Survey. As a result, there are no plans to undertake further work for a census question on this topic.

Obesity

Obesity was suggested as an additional topic for inclusion. Following an assessment of the user's response and research into the feasibility of including this topic, NISRA does not intend to collect information on obesity as the user need is not strong enough to include it ahead of other topics, the space required to derive an appropriate measure of obesity and its current availability in other social surveys, such as the Northern Ireland Health Survey. As a result, there are no plans to undertake further work for a census question on this topic.

Vacant properties

Vacant properties was suggested as an additional topic for inclusion. Information on vacant properties is available in current census outputs, which quantify numbers of households and household spaces; the difference being, essentially, households with no usual residents. These are 'vacant properties' except that they include houses which are sometimes vacant, for example, holiday homes. Following an assessment of the user's response, NISRA does not intend to collect information on this topic as the user need is not strong enough to include this topic ahead of other topics. However, NISRA will consider whether this need can be met through administrative data, due to its benefits to those working in the housing sector and its operational use in the Census.

Technology

Information on the technology available including mobile phone use and internet access was suggested as an additional topic for inclusion. Following an assessment of the user's response, NISRA does not intend to collect information on technology as the user need is not strong enough to include this topic ahead of other topics. Research into the feasibility of including this topic suggests these characteristics change rapidly and would quickly be out of date. As a result, there are no plans to undertake further work for a census question on this topic.

Immigration status: Asylum Seekers and Refugees

Immigration status was suggested as an additional topic for inclusion. Research into this topic has shown that although there is no published information available that relates to the number of asylum seekers specifically in Northern Ireland, the most recent Home Office figures available show that in 2012 there were 240 applications for asylum in Northern Ireland compared to 28,000 across the UK. This suggests that the number of asylum seekers in Northern Ireland is relatively low and that the number who would be classified as usual residents would be lower again.

Although an assessment of the user's response showed a moderate level of user need, it is outweighed by the concern on low numbers and potential difficulties with enumeration. As a result, there are no plans to undertake further work for a census question on this topic.

Reason for Migration

Reason for migration was suggested as an additional topic for inclusion. As with immigration status above, although an assessment of the user's response showed a moderate level of user need, there are concerns on low numbers and potential difficulties in enumeration. There are also issues relating to definitions which would require guidance to be included in the question – this again raises concerns about the amount of available space on the questionnaire. As a result, there are no plans to undertake further work for a census question on this topic.

Armed forces community

Information on the armed forces community was suggested as an additional topic for inclusion. Following an assessment of the user's response and research into the feasibility of including this topic, NISRA does not intend to collect information on this topic in the 2021 Census. As a result, there are no plans to undertake further detailed work for a census question on this topic. However, as an alternative, NISRA will explore the potential to source information on armed forces veterans from other sources.

Programme for Government indicators

Programme for Government indicators were suggested as an additional topic for inclusion. Following an assessment of the user's response and research into the feasibility of including this topic, NISRA does not intend to collect information on this topic as a decennial Census is not considered to be the most appropriate means of collecting this information. Programme for Government indicators are wide-ranging and would require a significant number of questions and space on the census questionnaire. As a result, there are no plans to undertake further work for a census question on this topic.

3.13 Any other comments

This section was used to capture any additional information that respondents were either not able to provide in earlier parts of the questionnaire or felt were particularly relevant to the consultation. Several respondents took the opportunity to make further comments on the consultation, the topics or on the census process generally.

These comments included:

- Implications of an online census (including security)

NISRA is planning for the 2021 Census to be predominantly online and the questionnaire will take account of best practice standards, security and guidance, and will be monitored throughout the development phase to ensure compatibility with the most common browsers, devices and operating systems.
- Use of administrative data (including data protection, representativeness, impact on researchers and data quality)

NISRA will continue to meet all of its responsibilities under the 2009 Code of Practice for Official Statistics. NISRA has identified the need to make better use of administrative data to supplement the 2021 Census and to quality assure the outputs. For instance, in 2011, NISRA had to produce an Address Register and will once again need to deliver an address frame to underpin the 2021 Census. The potential to undertake this work will be determined by data availability and the appropriate legislation. Concerns surrounding the need for data protection, data security, research availability and data quality will be key aspects of NISRA's work in this process.

- Future geography considerations (particularly District Electoral Areas)

The need to continue to provide census information at a wide range of current and future geographical areas is paramount. NISRA will consult on 2021 Census output geography, but the default position will be outputs based on the local geography boundaries in place in 2021.

- Importance of availability of low-level data for research purposes

In 2001 and 2011, Census Office has made microdata files and a grid square product available for research purposes. NISRA expects to continue to provide products of this nature for the 2021 Census.

- Availability of flexible outputs

NISRA will consult with users about outputs and are investigating the use of technology to facilitate outputs that allow the user greater flexibility, while ensuring the required level of statistical disclosure control.

- The flexibility of the consultation process

Comments on the structure, delivery and response mechanism of the 2021 Census Topic Consultation were gratefully received and will be taken into account in the planning of future census consultations.

- Willingness to be involved at any further user consultations

Many respondents indicated they were willing to be contacted by Census Office in the continued work to understand users' needs and ultimately provide this information. These respondents have been added to our mailing lists and we will ensure they kept informed of future census consultations.

4. Next steps

This initial consultation marks the start of a detailed and inclusive consultation process that will underpin the 2021 Census.

The responses which have been presented in the report are currently being considered by NISRA alongside those which are emerging across the rest of the UK as a result of similar exercises conducted by the Office for National Statistics and the National Records for Scotland (NRS) who have responsibility for the Censuses in England & Wales and Scotland respectively.

If you are interesting in receiving further information about the 2021 Census please forward your contact details (name, organisation, address, telephone number and email address) to the Census Office by email, phone or mail:

Email: census.nisra@finance-ni.gov.uk

Telephone: 028 9034 8160

Census Office
McAuley House
2-14 Castle Street
Belfast
BT1 1SA

Annex A: Evaluation of responses

The final decision about the information collected in the 2021 Census will ultimately be for the Northern Ireland Assembly to take. The NISRA recommendations for the content will be based on a number of factors, among which user requirements are a key consideration. User requirements were considered alongside issues of data quality, respondent burden and public acceptability, as well as operational and financial considerations.

A range of criteria have been assessed across the following three main areas of: user requirements; considerations; and operational requirements.

User requirements	Considerations	Operational requirements
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Purpose of user need ✓ Need for information on lower-level geographical areas or population sub-groups ✓ Need for comparability beyond Northern Ireland ✓ Need for continuity with previous censuses ✓ Requirement for multivariate analysis ✓ Suitability of alternative sources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Data quality ✓ Public acceptability ✓ Respondent burden ✓ Financial concerns ✓ Questionnaire design 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Improving coverage ✓ Coding of derived variables ✓ Routing around questions

User requirements

Topics to be included must carry a strong and clearly defined user requirement. Unless a robust case has been made for gathering information from the 2021 Census, it will not be collected. Responses from users on the importance of the information helped inform the final list of topics to be included in the 2021 Census.

The six criteria used to assess user requirements are shown below. Each criterion links directly to a question on the consultation, however if users provided strong evidence elsewhere in their response that did not fit into the framework being used this was also taken into account. This approach was designed to aid respondents in providing the information needed to inform a robust, evidence-based assessment and to increase the transparency of the assessment approach used.

Although the maximum weighted score is 100, some criteria are more important than others and have been weighted accordingly (i.e. from the 3rd column, 'Purpose of User Need' carries three times the weight of 'Need for continuity with previous censuses').

Two sets of weights are given: the first set is used for topics that were included in the 2011 Census; while the second set, although similar, are used for new or additional topics that were not in the 2011 Census. Both were devised using an approach harmonised with both ONS and NRS. Each topic was scored for each criterion using all responses received relating to it. Its final weighted score for each criterion was arrived at by multiplying the appropriate weight by the score.

The weighted scores for each topic were combined into an overall weighted score. An overall weighted score of 70 or more indicates a very strong user requirement for information on this topic, a value between 35 and 69 indicates a strong requirement whereas a value of less than 35 indicates a limited requirement.

A summary of the user requirement scores assigned to each topic can be found in Table A1.

Criteria	Description	2011 Census topic weight	Non-2011 Census topics weight	Max. Score	Max. weighted score
Purpose of user need	<p>The purpose to which the information will be used, if collected, is central to the process. Purposes include, but are not restricted to, resource allocation, service planning, policy evaluation, and diversity monitoring.</p> <p>Conversely; the implications if the data are not collected, for example, increased financial costs or reduced quality of data used in planning, are also key.</p> <p>Additionally, requirements arising from legislation (including European Union legislation) strengthen the case for inclusion.</p>	3.0	3.3	10	30

Criteria	Description	2011 Census topic weight	Non-2011 Census topics weight	Max. Score	Max. weighted score
Need for information on lower-level geographical areas or population sub-groups	<p>There must be a need for information for population sub-groups and/or at lower-level geographical areas. Information that is only required for broad geographical areas or large population groups might be better obtained from other statistical sources.</p> <p>In general, lower-level geography data must be easily aggregated to higher levels of geography, enabling outputs to be consistent and comparable.</p>	2.0	2.2	10	20
Need for comparability beyond Northern Ireland	<p>Data collected from the Census should be required on a comparable basis. Where possible, if there is a user need, the three UK Census Offices will release census outputs that are consistent across the UK.</p> <p>International requirements will be taken into account.</p>	1.0	1.1	10	10
Need for continuity with previous censuses	<p>Comparison with previous censuses is an important aspect of census analysis and, wherever appropriate, the 2021 Census questionnaire will collect the same information as the 2011 Census</p>	1.0	N/A	10	10

Criteria	Description	2011 Census topic weight	Non-2011 Census topics weight	Max. Score	Max. weighted score
	questionnaire. However, plans for future comparisons will also be taken into account.				
Requirement for multivariate analysis	A key benefit of census data is the ability to analyse particular variables against one another. A requirement to undertake multivariate analysis will affect whether suitable alternative sources for the information exist and may strengthen the case for inclusion in the Census	1.5	1.7	10	15
Suitability of alternative sources	<p>The 2021 Census will only seek to collect information that there is no other means of obtaining. Consideration should be given to whether or not suitable information is available from other sources; for example administrative records or sample surveys.</p> <p>In addition, the Census should primarily aim to collect information that will remain relevant for a significant time after collection.</p>	1.5	1.7	10	15
Maximum overall weighted score					100

Considerations

In addition to user requirements, other considerations were taken into account. These were data quality, public acceptability, respondent burden, financial concerns and questionnaire design.

These considerations will be used in conjunction with the user requirement score to steer the development of the census questionnaire and administrative data research outputs. However, issues identified during question development using these criteria may mean a topic is not included in the 2021 Census despite a known user or operational need, for instance if we cannot develop a question that respondents can accurately answer.

Each existing census topic included in the consultation was assessed against the considerations criteria by collating evidence from the 2011 Census, while information from a range of sources was used in the assessment of new topics proposed by NISRA. Where development and testing activities are taken forward for these topics, this work will be key to informing a final assessment as to their inclusion in the 2021 Census questionnaire.

The evaluation of considerations meant that each topic was given an assessment of Red, Amber or Green, separately for each consideration. These are identified as:

- Green – The inclusion of questions relating to this topic have been assessed to have a low adverse impact. For example, where data quality from the 2011 Census was considered to be good the impact on the data quality consideration would be low.
- Amber – The inclusion of questions relating to this topic have been assessed to have a medium adverse impact. For example where respondents are presented with several 'tick-boxes' to choose from with a set of short instructions to assist them the impact on the respondent burden consideration would be medium.
- Red – The inclusion of questions relating to this topic have been assessed to have a high adverse impact. For example where respondents may not find questions acceptable for reasons related to privacy the impact on the public acceptability criterion would be high.

A summary of the considerations scores assigned to each topic can be found in Table A2.

Criteria	Description
Data quality	The data collected in the 2021 Census should be of sufficient quality for outputs to be useful. Hence, information collected should neither require a lengthy instruction or explanation nor seek information that is not readily known or remembered accurately.
Public acceptability	The Census is carried out primarily for statistical purposes. It should not collect data that would deliberately promote political or

Criteria	Description
	<p>sectarian groups, or sponsor particular causes.</p> <p>It should not ask sensitive or potentially intrusive questions that have a negative impact on response or may lead to respondents giving socially acceptable rather than accurate answers; nor should it enquire about opinions or attitudes.</p>
Respondent burden	<p>The inclusion of questions on a topic should not impose an excessive burden on respondents.</p> <p>Burden could, for example, result from lengthy instruction or explanation, many response categories, or several questions on a single topic.</p>
Financial concerns	<p>Questions should not present major coding problems, require extensive processing, or significantly add to the overall cost of the Census.</p>
Questionnaire design	<p>The move to predominantly online data collection creates new opportunities as well as challenges.</p> <p>These will be taken into account when considering which topics to include in the 2021 Census.</p>

Operational Requirements

A number of operational factors could affect the decision on the content of the 2021 Census. The most important of these is their effect on improving coverage, as the primary aim of the Census is to provide a robust count of the population of Northern Ireland. Other operational uses include coding derived variables, routing respondents and validation.

Criteria	Description
Maximising coverage or population bases	<p>The 2021 Census questionnaire may include some questions that aid respondents in identifying who should be included in the response; for example, questions on visitors and defining the types of usual resident that live in the household.</p> <p>Such questions may be included despite a lack of strong user need for outputs related to these questions, as they are important to delivering high quality outputs.</p>
Coding of derived variables or adjustment for non-response	<p>It is expected that some key outputs will be based on derived variables (for example, age is derived from date of birth).</p> <p>Topics may be included in the 2021 Census questionnaire should a user need be identified for outputs that are derived from a variable, even if there is no user need for outputs relating to the question itself or because they enable a better assessment and adjustment</p>

Criteria	Description
	for the characteristics of non-responders.
Routing and validation	<p>Due to a move to a predominantly online Census, respondents can be automatically routed around questions that are irrelevant to them. However, this criterion has been retained to reflect the fact that there may still be a paper version of the form that would require routing questions.</p> <p>Some questions were also used for validation, for example cross checking between age and marital and legal partnership status.</p>

For each topic, NISRA identified whether any of the associated questions were used in this way in the 2011 Census. The final evaluation of operational requirements meant that each topic was given an assessment of Red, Amber or Green, which reflects its importance during questionnaire completion and subsequent data processing. The categories are identified as:

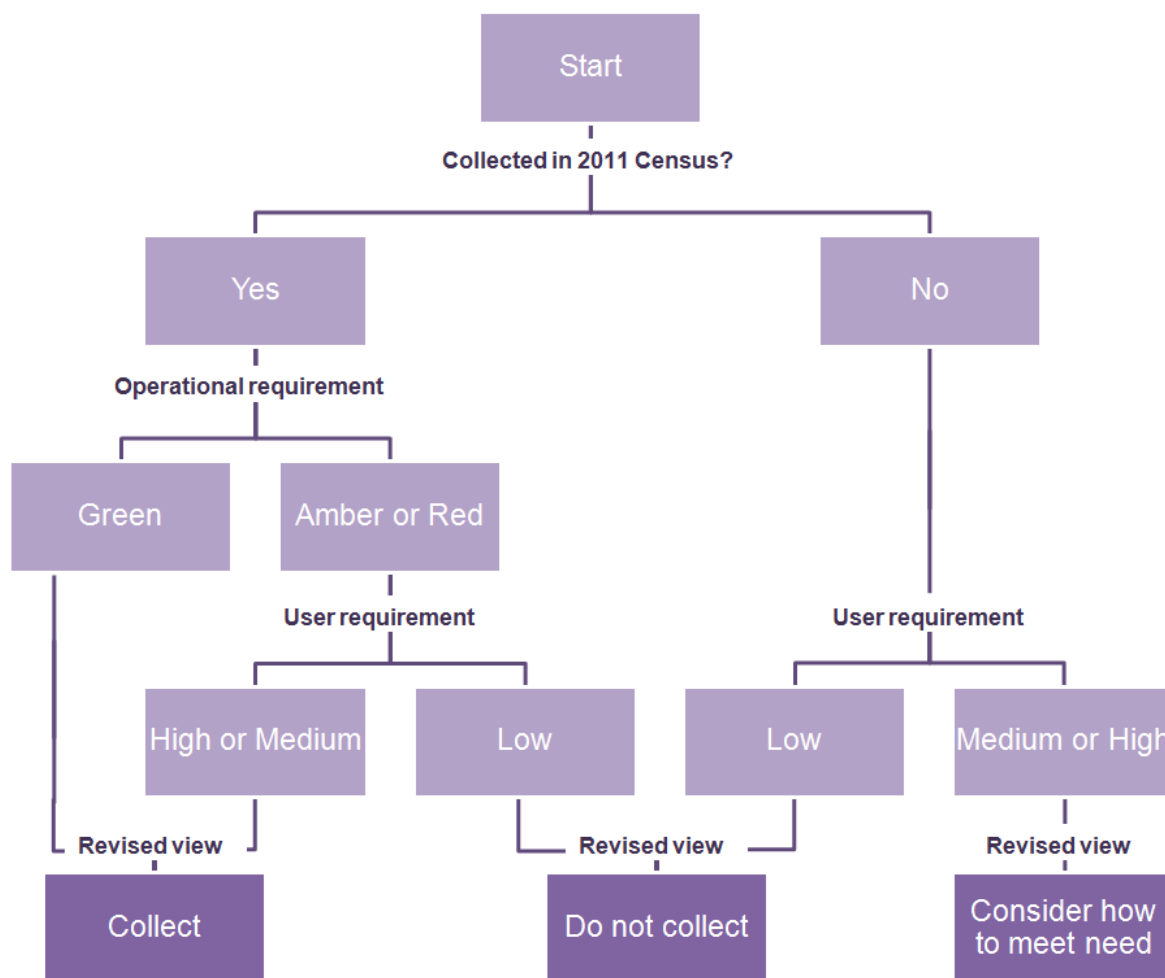
- Green – this topic contributes to maximising coverage or population bases - Where data collected on a topic was used to maximise coverage or to define a population base it was given high importance.
- Amber – this topic does not contribute to coverage or population bases but does contribute to coding of derived variables or adjustment for non-response - It is expected that some key outputs will be based on derived variables.
- Red – this topic does not contribute to coverage or derived variables but may support the routing on the paper questionnaire or validation.

A single overall Red/Amber/Green score across operational requirements is given for each topic. A summary of the operational requirements scores assigned to each topic can be found in Table A3.

Combining the assessment

The flow diagram shown in Figure 1 below was used to arrive at the revised view for each topic.

Figure 1: Combining the criteria to give a revised view on inclusion of topics in the 2021 Census



As Figure 1 shows, topics included in the 2011 Census were assessed differently from those potential new topics for 2021. If topics had a high operational requirement for improving coverage it will be retained. Existing census topics with a high or medium user requirement will also be collected. New topics for 2021 will be considered for inclusion based on a high or medium user requirement. New topics with a low user requirement will not be recommended for inclusion.

Although not represented in Figure 1 above, the assessment of each topic against the five criteria listed under 'Considerations' will inform the development and testing of the questions for those topics being collected or considered for the 2021 Census questionnaire.

Evaluation results

Table A1: User requirements scores

Theme	Topic	Purpose of user need	Need for information on lower-level geographical areas or population sub-groups	Need for comparability beyond Northern Ireland	Need for continuity with previous censuses	Requirement for multivariate analysis	Suitability of alternative sources	Overall weighted score
Demography	Sex	7	9	9	7	8	10	82.0
	Age	8	10	9	8	8	10	87.3
	Marital or Legal Partnership status	7	9	8	1	6	10	72.5
	Household and family relationships	7	9	8	6	7	10	77.5
Ethnicity, Identity, Language and Religion	Country of Birth	7	9	8	7	10	10	83.3
	Passports held	6	9	8	4	7	9	71.9
	National identity	6	9	8	4	6	10	72.0
	Ethnic group	7	9	8	7	8	10	81.5
	Main language	8	9	10	4	8	10	83.6
	Proficiency in English	8	9	7	4	8	9	77.6
	Knowledge of Irish	8	9	9	6	5	10	79.7
	Knowledge of Ulster-Scots	6	9	7	3	5	9	67.0
	Current religion and religion brought up in	7	10	8	5	7	10	79.8
Health	Long-term health problem or disability	7	9	8	6	7	10	77.4
	Nature of long-term conditions	7	9	7	5	7	10	76.8
	General health	7	9	8	6	6	10	77.0
	Provision of unpaid care	7	9	9	7	7	10	80.0
Housing	Type and self-containment of accommodation	7	9	6	1	6	10	69.5
	Rooms	6	9	6	1	6	10	66.2
	Household adaptations	6	9	5	4	5	10	67.8
	Tenure and landlord (if renting)	6	9	6	4	6	10	70.0

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Theme	Topic	Purpose of user need	Need for information on lower-level geographical areas or population sub-groups	Need for comparability beyond Northern Ireland	Need for continuity with previous censuses	Requirement for multivariate analysis	Suitability of alternative sources	Overall weighted score
	Central heating	6	9	6	4	6	10	70.1
	Cars or vans	6	9	6	5	6	10	70.4
Education	Qualifications held	8	10	9	6	7	10	84.4
Labour market	Economic activity	7	10	8	6	8	10	81.3
	Occupation	6	9	8	5	7	10	74.1
	Volunteering	6	9	8	5	7	10	74.5
	Year last worked	6	10	8	4	5	10	72.8
	Supervisory status	6	9	7	3	6	10	69.9
	Industry	7	9	8	5	6	10	76.3
	National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SeC)	7	9	8	6	8	10	79.5
	Travel to work or place of study	7	9	7	5	7	10	76.5
	Travel to place of study	6	9	8	4	6	9	69.6
Migration	Intention to stay in UK	6	9	8	5	6	9	71.7
	Ever lived outside NI	6	9	8	5	6	9	71.2
	Country of previous residence	6	9	7	4	7	9	70.4
	Most recent arrival to NI	6	9	8	5	5	9	69.2
	Address one year ago	6	9	8	6	6	9	71.6
New topics	Income	7	9	8	0	8	8	79.5
	Sexual identity	7	9	8	0	7	9	79.3
	Second residence	5	1	6	0	3	5	39.5
Additional topics	Gender identity	6	3	4	0	10	9	63.5
	Knowledge and proficiency in languages other than English	5	9	6	0	5	6	61.6
	Use of British Sign Language / Irish Sign Language	5	5	5	0	10	7	61.5
	Wellbeing	6	9	5	0	10	7	73.6
	Obesity	0	0	6	0	10	4.2	30.4
	Vacant properties	5	1	0	0	0	2.1	22.3

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Theme	Topic	Purpose of user need	Need for information on lower-level geographical areas or population sub-groups	Need for comparability beyond Northern Ireland	Need for continuity with previous censuses	Requirement for multivariate analysis	Suitability of alternative sources	Overall weighted score
	Technology	0	7	3	0	0	9	34.4
	Immigration status: Asylum Seekers and Refugees	6	3	4	0	10	9	63.5
	Reason for Migration	7	0	7	0	10	3.5	53.8
	Armed forces community	5	9	8	0	10	6.3	72.8
	Programme for Government indicators	7	9	0	0	10	7	70.6

Table A2: Considerations scores

Theme	Topic	Data quality	Public acceptability	Respondent burden	Financial concerns	Questionnaire Design
Demography	Sex	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
	Age	Green	Green	Green	Amber	Green
	Marital or Legal Partnership status	Amber	Amber	Amber	Amber	Green
	Household and family relationships	Amber	Green	Red	Red	Amber
Ethnicity, Identity, Language and Religion	Country of Birth	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
	Passports held	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
	National identity	Red	Green	Amber	Green	Green
	Ethnic group	Green	Green	Amber	Green	Amber
	Main language	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
	Proficiency in English	Amber	Green	Green	Green	Green
	Knowledge of Irish	Green	Green	Amber	Green	Green
	Knowledge of Ulster-Scots	Green	Green	Amber	Green	Green
	Current religion and religion brought up in	Amber	Green	Green	Amber	Amber
Health	Long-term health problem or disability	Amber	Green	Amber	Green	Green
	Nature of long-term conditions	Amber	Green	Red	Green	Amber
	General health	Amber	Green	Green	Green	Green
	Provision of unpaid care	Amber	Green	Red	Green	Amber
Housing	Type and self-containment of accommodation	Green	Green	Amber	Green	Amber
	Rooms	Red	Green	Amber	Green	Green
	Household adaptations	Amber	Amber	Green	Green	Amber
	Tenure and landlord (if renting)	Green	Amber	Green	Green	Amber
	Central heating	Red	Amber	Green	Green	Green
	Cars or vans	Amber	Amber	Green	Green	Amber
Education	Qualifications held	Red	Green	Red	Green	Amber
Labour market	Economic activity	Amber	Amber	Red	Amber	Amber
	Occupation	Green	Green	Red	Red	Green
	Volunteering	Amber	Amber	Green	Green	Green
	Year last worked	Red	Amber	Amber	Green	Green
	Supervisory status	Amber	Amber	Green	Green	Green
	Industry	Red	Amber	Red	Red	Amber
	National Statistics Socio-economic	Amber	Green	Red	Red	Amber

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Theme	Topic	Data quality	Public acceptability	Respondent burden	Financial concerns	Questionnaire Design
	Classification (NS-SeC)					
Travel to work or place of study	Method of travel to work or place of study	Amber	Green	Amber	Green	Green
	Address of work or place of study	Red	Amber	Red	Amber	Amber
Migration	Intention to stay in UK	Amber	Amber	Amber	Green	Green
	Ever lived outside NI	Green	Green	Green	Green	Green
	Country of previous residence	Red	Amber	Amber	Green	Green
	Most recent arrival to NI	Amber	Amber	Amber	Green	Green
	Address one year ago	Red	Amber	Red	Amber	Amber
New topics	Income	Red	Red	Green	Red	Green
	Sexual identity	Red	Red	Amber	Green	Amber
	Second residence	Amber	Green	Amber	Green	Amber

Table A3: Operational requirements scores

Theme	Topic	Score
Demography	Sex	Green
	Age	Green
	Marital or Legal Partnership status	Amber
	Household and family relationships	Green
Ethnicity, Identity, Language and Religion	Country of Birth	Green
	Passports held	Amber
	National identity	Amber
	Ethnic group	Green
	Main language	Red
	Proficiency in English	Red
	Knowledge of Irish	Red
	Knowledge of Ulster-Scots	Red
	Current religion and religion brought up in	Green
Health	Long-term health problem or disability	Red
	Nature of long-term conditions	Red
	General health	Red
	Provision of unpaid care	Red
Housing	Type and self-containment of accommodation	Green
	Rooms	Amber
	Household adaptations	Red
	Tenure and landlord (if renting)	Green
	Central heating	Red
	Cars or vans	Red
Education	Qualifications held	Amber
Labour market	Economic activity	Green
	Occupation	Amber
	Volunteering	Red
	Year last worked	Amber
	Supervisory status	Amber
	Industry	Amber
	National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SeC)	Red
Travel to work or place of study	Method of travel to work or place of study	Red
	Address of work or place of study	Green
Migration	Intention to stay in UK	Green
	Ever lived outside NI	Amber
	Country of previous residence	Amber
	Most recent arrival to NI	Amber
	Address one year ago	Green
New topics	Income	Red
	Sexual identity	Red
	Second residence	Green