

Scottish Government: Collecting Equality Information Series

Guidance note on asking questions on: ethnic group

Introduction: why is it necessary to collect information about ethnic groups?

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination because of someone's ethnicity. The legislation covers areas including education, employment, the provision of goods and services to the public and the exercise of public functions. The Act also introduces a public sector equality duty which came into force on 5 April 2011. The duty requires Government and public authorities to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. The duty covers nine protected characteristics, including ethnicity. It is recommended that Government and public authorities follow good practice in gathering and using relevant evidence and information. Ethnic group statistics are important for monitoring discrimination and inequality. The information may also be used to inform policy formulation and service delivery.

“Poor measurement and a lack of transparency have contributed to society and governments being unable to tackle persistent inequalities and their causes. The data available on inequality are utterly inadequate in many ways, limiting people's ability to understand problems and their causes, set priorities and track progress. And even where data do exist, they are not consistently used well or published in a way that makes sense”.

This was one of the conclusions of ['Fairness and Freedom, The Final Report of the Equalities Review'](#) in 2007. This was followed by a [report from the Office of National Statistics](#) which identified 8 principles for collection and dissemination of equality data. Principle 4 states that

“Consistency of methods, concepts and classifications is fundamental in the collection, analysis and presentation of equality statistics”.

In order to promote more consistency the Scottish Government has developed harmonised questions for use in surveys in Scotland.

Ethnicity is a complex issue. There is no consensus about what constitutes an 'ethnic group'. Research shows that it means different things to different people, which can depend on the context or situation, and understanding of the term evolves over time. It encompasses aspects of identity, race, ancestry, history, culture, and it is very diverse. We have provided this guidance to help you use the questions and classifications to get the best quality information you can on **ethnic group**.

Background to the ethnic group question

In 2002 the then Communities Minister promised to review the way that Scottish surveys classify ethnicity, to ensure that they reflect modern circumstances, meet users' information needs and have broad community support.

This followed recommendations by the Race Equality Advisory Forum (REAF) in 2001 and some community concerns about the classification used in Scotland's 2001 Census - in particular the different use of colour and geography across ethnic group categories.

The Scottish Government (SG) worked in partnership with the General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) (now the National Records of Scotland) to conduct the review. The review identified benefits in separating out issues around ethnic group and national identity and developing a separate national identity question for use on the Census and relevant Scottish Official Statistics. When used with the ethnic group classification this would allow people to self-express their 'Scottish-ness', 'British-ness' or any other national identity, more fully, before they go on to express their ethnic origin or heritage.

The original version of the new ethnicity classification was finalised in July 2008 and was recommended for Scotland's 2011 Census and relevant Scottish Official Statistics. Details of the background to the development of the classification together with the wide ranging evidence (including research, consultation and question testing) are set out in the detailed report '[Scotland's New Ethnicity Classification for Scottish Official Statistics and Recommended for Scotland's 2011 Census](#)'.

The classification was discussed by Members of the Scottish Parliament during considerations of the 2011 Census in Scotland and was subsequently amended for use in the Census. Details of the committee discussions can be seen in the [Official Reports of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee](#) (9th and 12th meetings)

After further consultation and consideration, the Scottish Government has revised the ethnicity classification for use in Scottish Official Statistics to be consistent with the new Census question.

Recommended question

What is your ethnic group?

Choose **ONE** section from A to F, then tick **ONE** box which **best describes** your ethnic group or background.

A White

- ☐ Scottish
- ☐ Other British
- ☐ Irish
- ☐ Gypsy / Traveller
- ☐ Polish
- ☐ Other white ethnic group, please write in

[illegible]

B Mixed or multiple ethnic group

- ☐ Any mixed or multiple ethnic groups, please write in

[illegible][illegible]

C Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British

- ☐ Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish or Pakistani British
- ☐ Indian, Indian Scottish or Indian British
- ☐ Bangladeshi, Bangladeshi Scottish or Bangladeshi British
- ☐ Chinese, Chinese Scottish or Chinese British
- ☐ Other, please write in _____

[illegible]

D African

- ☐ African, African Scottish or African British
- ☐ Other, please write in _____

E Caribbean or Black

- ☐ Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British
- ☐ Black, Black Scottish or Black British
- ☐ Other, please write in _____

[illegible]

F Other ethnic group

- ☐ Arab, Arab Scottish or Arab British
- ☐ Other, please write in _____

[illegible]

Making changes to the questions and categories

The ethnic group question has been developed to be acceptable to both respondents and users. It is very strongly recommended that you retain it in its entirety and using the exact format .

Presentation of the questions

The words used in the question have been carefully selected to be acceptable so far as possible to respondents, to aid understanding of what is being asked and to provide the most reliable data for users. If the wording is changed then people may not answer or may answer with a less suitable response. The capitalisation and bold font are used to emphasise the instructions and therefore reduce response errors. The ethnic group question is split into sections (which contain a number of categories including write in boxes) and each one is assigned a letter. The use of these letters is very important and testing showed that they act as a visual cue to ensure the respondent keeps reading down the list, through each section, until they find the most appropriate category, rather than choosing prematurely.

Length of the ethnic group question

Due to the complex nature of ethnicity this question is much longer than other survey questions. The number and description of the categories has been selected carefully to best represent the Scottish population and to improve response rates by making the question acceptable to respondents. Removing categories could result in people answering with a less suitable response and your data will not be directly comparable with other information. It may also result in your question being less acceptable to some people and consequently this could affect response rates. We strongly recommend using the full question as it is. If this is not possible, for example, because your survey is very short and cannot be extended or you require information on people not listed then **please contact us directly for advice**.

Ordering of the sections and categories

It is important that you retain the order of the categories as they are arranged this way to minimise response errors. Research has shown that people tend to read down the list only as far as the first suitable answer and for that reason the sections and categories are generally listed by population size. The Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups section is placed after the White section as tests have shown that this section is likely to be missed if placed further down the list.

Write in boxes

The list of categories is by no means definitive and as a result write in boxes are present in each section and under 'Other' at the end so that people can identify in another way if they wish. These write in boxes are very important to the acceptability of the question. Removing these could have implications for the response rate and acceptability of your survey. Ethnic group is a self-defining concept and people should be able to identify as they wish. We would strongly recommend that you retain them. If resources are not available to process and output the write in

responses and you need to reduce their number, **please contact us directly for advice.**

Single tick response of the ethnic group question

Respondents are requested to answer the ethnic group question with a single response only. It is strongly advised that you adhere to this. The length of the ethnic group question means the number of combinations that could be produced by multiple responses would make it difficult to output usable data and it would be extremely difficult to cross reference ethnic group data with other data (for example on health, education or housing) to obtain information about inequalities. Response errors, where a respondent has ticked one category at the top of the question and then selected a more appropriate category lower down (which they did not initially see) without crossing out the earlier response occurred in question testing. Allowing multiple responses would make it difficult to determine if this type of response error has occurred or if the response is a genuine multiple tick.

The Scottish Census in 2001 had single tick responses. If multi tick responses are used the data will not be comparable with the 2001 Census and consequently changes over time could not be explored.

How to deal with multiple ticking of the ethnic group question

Despite respondents being asked to answer the ethnic group question with a single response, inevitably there will be a few who give multiple responses, either within a section or across categories.

Due to the significance of ethnic group data and the small numbers that can be associated with some of the categories in Scotland, it is important that information is available at the most specific level possible. Therefore, the general rule is where more than one box has been ticked the more specific or smaller category should be retained. This will show if a specific ethnic group is more likely to be experiencing discrimination or has specific service needs.

For example, if multiple responses occur:

- when one category is a subset of another, the most specific category should be used. For example, if both Scottish and Other British are ticked, then the Scottish response should be retained.
- when two non-overlapping responses are given in the same section the smaller population ticked should be retained. For example, if Scottish and Polish are both ticked then Polish should be retained.
- when boxes have been ticked in two different sections then the tick that occurs in the section with the smallest population size should be used.
- when a respondent has ticked a category and then provided a write in response to an 'Other' box then the write in answer should be used as this information is most likely to reflect their ethnic group.

- when boxes have been ticked in three or more sections the response should be recorded as 'unknown'.

Information on population size can be obtained from the NRS website using the link below.

If you require help when dealing with multiple responses **please contact us directly.**

National Identity

The ethnic group question has been developed so that it can be used as a stand alone question, however sometimes it is desirable to collect more specific information on national identity, particularly in relation to 'British ' identities.

National identity is a self defining concept in which a person expresses what country or countries, nation or nations, they feel most connected to and like ethnicity it involves a range of concepts.

The Scottish Government and the NRS developed a national identity question for use in the Census alongside the ethnic group question. It is recommended that this question is asked wherever feasible and is asked BEFORE the ethnic group question. The report on the development of the ethnic group question provides more details on the benefits of asking a national identity question.

Recommended National Identity Question:

[illegible]

Data collection method

There are a number of considerations to be made when deciding on the mode of data collection. When a survey is administered by an interviewer, it is important to remind the interviewer to provide the respondents with clear instructions to read or listen to the whole question before answering and to respond with a single answer on the ethnic group question, although multiple responses can be given for the national identity question. Having an interviewer present means that extra guidance can be provided to respondents who are having difficulty understanding the question. If show cards are being used, they should reflect the questions as they are published here, with all the categories and in the same order.

Using a computer, either for self or interviewer completion, can limit the respondent to a single tick for the ethnic group question as the script can be moved to the next question after one box has been completed. When using computers to administer surveys or when employing an internet based survey, it is especially important that the bold font and capitalisation of the question are adhered to.

When conducting a telephone interview, it is important that all the response options are read out before the respondent gives an answer.

For postal surveys and other data collections administered using paper forms, it is important that the form is clearly designed, easy to read and the ethnic group question is presented as published here.

Proxy Responses

These questions are designed to collect information on a person's self-defined ethnic group and national identity and should be addressed directly to the respondent. Where the respondent is unable to provide an answer another member of the household, or the person's carer, can be asked to give a response on the respondent's behalf. This should be a last resort and the interviewer should record that a proxy response was given. It is very important that interviewers, administrative staff or anyone other than the individual's family member or carer does not provide an answer on behalf of the respondent.

The questions were designed and tested with adults, but changes should not be made when asking children. If possible the response should be provided by the child although a proxy response may be needed, especially if they are under the age of 12. Proxy responses should only be accepted from a parent or guardian. Extra guidance may be needed for parents when the child is under 12. If you require help with extra guidance **please contact us directly**.

Analysing and presenting data

Data should be analysed and presented in a way that is most useful to users of the data, with consideration of what kind of analysis would be most likely to reveal any inequalities that require action. In Scotland, many ethnic groups are small in number which could lead to statistical unreliability when analysing data and hinder

publication of figures because of the need to avoid identification of individuals. The problem of small numbers can be overcome by combining categories under a section heading, for example combining the counts of people who responded "Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British", "Black, Black Scottish or Black British" and the "Other, please write in" category within the section E. This is not an ideal solution as it can hide inequalities that occur between each of the separate categories.

Where it is necessary to combine categories, the headings used should be fully reflective of the individual categories that have been combined. In the example above in which the categories within Section E are combined, the results must be labelled as "Caribbean **or** Black" and not just "Black" or "Caribbean **and** Black". This is because there are some people who find the term Black offensive and others who feel very strongly that their ethnic group is Black and take pride in that term. It is important that data are presented in a way that is respectful of both these points of view.

If it is necessary to combine categories B, C, D E and F you must label the results as "Mixed or Multiple; Asian,; African; Caribbean or Black; and Other ethnic groups". While this is a very long heading to use in a data table, it is important to avoid offence. Combining categories B, C, D E and F and labelling them "Non-White", "Coloured", "Black", "Black or Minority Ethnic", or "Other" is unacceptable. The term Black and Minority Ethnic Groups (BME) should not be used, as it is a very general term, offensive to some people and inaccurate (because some categories under the White section are also small in number).

It is important that the results should be presented in as much detail as possible. It is better to list all of the categories and where possible the figures. If the numbers are too small to publish, then suppress the figures for that category with an explanation of why this has been done, taking care to ensure that if only one figure is suppressed, that figure can then not be calculated by simple subtraction from the totals displayed. Consideration should be given to increasing sample sizes by aggregating several years of data where that can be done.

Comparing the ethnicity data with data collected using the 2001 classification

Due to the changes in the classification, new data will not be directly comparable to the 2001 Census data and a number of considerations will have to be taken into account when you are looking at trends over time. It will still be possible to compare the data at the 'White', 'Mixed or Multiple', 'Asian', 'African and Caribbean or Black combined', and 'Other' level. The differences in the data collected from the new 2011 question and that collected from the 2001 Census for each section are described below:

'White' category. At category level, total counts of 'White' should be broadly comparable. However, some people identifying as 'Gypsy/Traveller', 'Polish' and to some extent other people from Central and Eastern European countries may have responded in the previous classification using the 'Other ethnic background' category. At tick box level only the 'Scottish' 'Other British' and 'Irish' tick boxes are directly comparable although the 'Other British' category in 2001 may have included

people who will now identify using the 'Gypsy/Traveller' category. The 'Any other White Background' (2001) is broadly comparable with the sum of the new 'Any other White ethnic group' and 'Polish' tick box.

'Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups' category. Total counts of this category are broadly comparable. However, some people identifying as, for example, 'Indian Scottish' or 'African British' (who answered using the 'Mixed' category in the previous classification) may now answer using the new 'Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British' tick boxes or the 'African, African Scottish or African British' or 'Caribbean or Black' tick boxes.

'Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British'. At category level, total counts should be broadly comparable. However, as detailed above, we may expect some who responded using the 'Mixed' category in the previous classification to identify as, say, 'Indian Scottish' in this category using the new 'Indian, Indian Scottish or Indian British' tick box' for example. The same applies to all the 'Asian' groups listed in the new classification.

'African, African Scottish or African British' and 'Caribbean or Black'. In 2001 categories E and F were presented as one category. It is therefore necessary to combine 'African, African Scottish and African British' and 'Caribbean or Black' together to get a total which allows comparison with data from 2001. Once again, some respondents who previously responded using the 'Mixed' category may now identify as, say, 'African Scottish' in this category using the new 'African, African Scottish or African British' tick box. It is also possible that some people who would have previously identified as 'African' under the 'White' section will now identify under the 'African, African Scottish or African British'. Comparisons are not recommended at tick box level given the differences between the 2001 and the 2011 classifications.

Changes affecting all the above categories. An analysis of responses from people identifying as 'Arab' in the 2001 Census, shows that 47 per cent did so under 'Any other ethnic background', 22 per cent under the 'Asian' category, 13 per cent under the 'Mixed' category, 7 per cent under the 'White' category, 1 per cent under the 'Black' category and 9 per cent gave multiple responses across several categories. The inclusion of the new 'Arab' tick box in the 'Other Ethnic Group' category means that most of these people are now likely to respond here instead. This will reduce somewhat the total counts of each of the above categories.

'Other Ethnic Group'. At category level, total counts should be broadly comparable. However, as detailed above, the inclusion of the new 'Arab' tick box should mean that more people identifying as 'Arab' use this category (with the possible exception of the people identifying as say 'Arab Scottish' or 'Arab British' who may continue to identify using the 'Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Group' category). As detailed above, we may expect fewer people from Central and Eastern Europe to identify using this category than under the previous classification, because the inclusion of the new 'Polish' tick box under the 'White' category is likely to encourage such respondents to give their answers here instead. The same is true to some extent of people identifying as 'Gypsy/Traveller'.

UK data comparisons

It is important to some data users that there are UK and GB level figures and that Scottish data can be compared to that of the other UK or GB countries. Scotland has different user requirements for ethnic group data and a different ethnic group profile than the other UK countries and as a result there are differences in the categories in the Scottish census question and those of England and Wales and Northern Ireland. It will not be possible to directly compare the Scottish data at the category level with that of the other UK or GB countries but it can be compared at the section level (although the 'African, African Scottish or African British' and the 'Caribbean or Black' categories will need to be combined) and a UK and GB count can be achieved for the section level.

Religion

It is recommended that a question on religion should be asked along with the ethnic group question as religion and ethnicity are closely related concepts. In order to get a better understanding of how these two concepts interact, these two questions should be asked and analysed together.

Recommended religion question:

What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?

None

Church of Scotland

Roman Catholic

Other Christian

Muslim

Buddhist

Sikh

Jewish

Hindu

Pagan

Another religion, please write in

For more information on asking questions on religion, please refer to the guidance on asking questions on religion.

Contact us

This document has been provide to help people collect information on ethnic groups in Scotland and covers a range of issues. We welcome any comments you have on this guidance note, especially any relating to the practical application of the guidance. It will be revised and updated when necessary.

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Links

National Records of Scotland (NRS) home page:

<http://www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/index.html>

2001 Census Results:

<http://www.scot.gov.uk/scot/common/home.jsp>

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) home page:

<http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/Pages/default.aspx>

Scottish Governments equalities duties:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/People/Equality/PublicEqualityDuties>

Government Equalities Office:

<http://www.equalities.gov.uk/>

Office for National Statistics (ONS) home page:

<http://www.statistics.gov.uk/default.asp>