

Scottish Government: Collecting Equality Information Series

Guidance note on asking questions on: age

Introduction: Why it is necessary to collect information about age?

The Equality Act 2010 protects people from discrimination because of age. At the moment, the legislation covers employment and it is expected to be brought into force for other areas such as the provision of goods and services to the public and the exercise of public functions later in 2012. 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 tackle discrimination and promote equal opportunities. The duty covers nine protected characteristics, including age. It is recommended that Government and public authorities follow good practice in gathering and using relevant evidence and information. Age statistics are important for monitoring discrimination and inequality. The information may also be used to inform resource allocation, 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.

This guidance note provides a harmonised question for collecting information on **age**.

Recommended questions

The recommended question for collecting information on age directly from respondents in social surveys is:

What was your age last birthday?

If more detail is required then the recommended question for collecting date of birth is:

What is your date of birth?

The question should be addressed directly to the respondent. Where the respondent is unable to provide an answer, for example they are unable to use a computer, then

another member of the household can be asked to give a response on their behalf. This should only be allowed as a last resort and the interviewer should record that a proxy response was given. It is very important the interviewers do not attempt to provide an answer on behalf of the respondent.

Analysis and presentation of results

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. This will depend on which subject area the data relate to and there are no harmonised age bands or categories.

Where age is unknown the data should either be presented as 'unknown' or 'missing' or if missing values are unacceptable for your analysis it may be worth imputing the missing values.

Due to changes in the state pension age (specifically the current female state pension age which is changing dynamically to match the male state pension age) the phrases 'pensionable age' and 'pensionable adults' should not be used. Instead, data should be presented clearly stating the age range to which it refers. For the same reason the terms 'working age' and 'working age adults' should not be used and the term 'child' or 'school age' may mean different things to different people so should be avoided.. It is recommended that data are presented with age group labels that are unambiguous, such as 'age 65 years and over' or '16 years and under'.

Statistical disclosure issues should always be considered when publishing data.

Contact us

This document has been provided to help people collect information on age in Scotland. We welcome any comments you have on this guidance note. It will be revised and updated when necessary.

equality-and-poverty-analysis@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

May 2012

Useful Links

Equalities Review:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100807034701/http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/equalitiesreview/>

UK Statistics Authority - Code of Practice:

<http://www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html>

ONS Report from the review of equality data:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/measuring-equality/equality/equality-data-review/review-of-equality-data--final-report.pdf>