



# **ONS Census Transformation Programme**

The 2021 Census

Assessment of initial user  
requirements on content for  
England and Wales

Religion topic report

May 2016

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# 1. Introduction

In June 2015 the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published the public consultation document ‘[The 2021 Census initial view on content for England and Wales](https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/consultations/the2021censusinitialviewoncontentforenglandandwales)’<sup>1</sup>. This discussed the initial views of ONS regarding the potential inclusion of current (2011) and additional topics in the 2021 Census. The public consultation was open from 4 June 2015 to 27 August 2015 and aimed to promote discussion and encourage the development of strong cases for topics users wanted to be included in the 2021 Census. The focus was on information required from the 2021 Census, not the detailed questions that could be asked on the questionnaire.

ONS received 1,095 responses to the consultation; 279 of these were from organisations and 816 were from individuals. Of all consultation respondents 328 answered at least one consultation question, or discussed collection of data, on the ‘Religion’ topic.

There are no sub-topics within the ‘Religion’ topic.

Based on the evidence given by users, topics were evaluated using the criteria detailed in the consultation document using a standardised method. The criteria are listed in table 1 below. The criteria largely reflect those used in the 2011 Census topic consultation and have undergone expert review within ONS and via the Census Advisory Groups for use in the 2021 Census topic consultation. More detail on the scoring methodology is available in section 2 of the document ‘[The 2021 Census - Assessment of initial user requirements on content for England & Wales: Response to consultation](https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/consultations/2021censustopicconsultation/assessmentofinitialuserrequirementscontentforenglandandwalesresponsetoconsultation.pdf)’<sup>2</sup>.

**Table 1 Evaluation criteria**

<p><b>1. User requirement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose</li> <li>• Small geographies or populations</li> <li>• Alternative sources</li> <li>• Multivariate analysis</li> <li>• Comparability beyond England and Wales</li> <li>• Continuity with previous censuses</li> </ul>	<p><b>2. Other consideration</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data quality</li> <li>• Public acceptability</li> <li>• Respondent burden</li> <li>• Financial concerns</li> <li>• Questionnaire mode</li> </ul>
	<p><b>3. Operational requirement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximising coverage or population bases</li> <li>• Coding of derived variables and adjustment for non-response</li> <li>• Routing and validation</li> </ul>

This report provides ONS’s updated view based on our evaluation of user responses against these evaluation criteria.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/consultations/the2021censusinitialviewoncontentforenglandandwales>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/census/censustransformationprogramme/consultations/2021censustopicconsultation/assessmentofinitialuserrequirementscontentforenglandandwalesresponsetoconsultation.pdf>

## 2. Background

Concepts related to religion include religious affiliation, belief and practice. The 2011 Census question was on religious affiliation; that is how respondents connect or identify with a religion, irrespective of whether they actively practice it (for example by regularly attending services, or not). Religious belief relates to those beliefs followers of a religion are expected to hold. Religious practice includes activities such as worship, prayer, participation in special sacraments, and fasting. Practices and beliefs vary across religions making these more complex concepts to define and capture.

Prior to the 2001 Census a strong user need for data on religion was identified; related to monitoring levels of social exclusion and discrimination, and establishing differences in take-up of services. However, the Census Act 1920 did not include any provision for data to be collected on religion. Therefore, in response to this user need, ONS, with government support was able to seek approval from Parliament for the Census (Amendment) Bill. This, when approved, subsequently became the [Census \(Amendment\) Act 2000](#).

In view of specific public acceptability concerns linked to the collection of data on this topic, Parliament included the provision that no person shall be liable to a penalty for refusing or neglecting to state any particulars in respect of religion. Hence, the question on religion was treated as a voluntary question in both 2001 and 2011, and ONS' intention is that, if selected, this question will remain voluntary in 2021.

The [Equality Act 2010](#) consolidated previous equality legislation and included 'religion or belief' as one of nine protected characteristics. The Act provides a legal framework to protect the rights of individuals and advance equality of opportunity for all. For example, people are protected from discrimination, harassment or victimisation linked to protected characteristics and it is unlawful to discriminate against people because of religion or belief in relation to provision of goods and services, employment or vocational training in either the public or private sector.

The Act also includes some new provisions. For example, the [public sector Equality Duty](#) which came into force across Great Britain on 5 April 2011 and means that public bodies have to consider all individuals when carrying out their day-to-day work - in shaping policy, in delivering services and in relation to their own employees.

The Equality Act 2010 covers philosophical belief and the definition states that philosophical belief must: be genuinely held; be a belief and not an opinion or viewpoint based on the present state of information available; be a belief as to a weighty and substantial aspect of human life and behaviour; attain a certain level of cogency, seriousness, cohesion and importance; and be worthy of respect in a democratic society, compatible with human dignity and not conflict with the fundamental rights of others. The 2011 Census question did not ask about philosophical belief.

To enable them to meet requirements of the Equality Act 2010 users stated a need for population data about religion to inform equality monitoring. The Equality Act 2010 definition of religion notes that a religion must have a clear structure and belief system to be protected. The 2011 Census question "What is your religion?" collected information for the production of statistics on this aspect of the protected characteristic.

As the census question only covered religion, those who hold a philosophical belief that is protected by the Equality Act 2010 were not explicitly given the opportunity to state their non-

religious beliefs. Prior to the 2011 Census both qualitative and quantitative question testing was carried out using several different versions of the wording for the religion question. The results showed that amending the question to state “What is your religion or belief?” changed how respondents thought about the religion aspect of the question leading them to provide answers related to religious belief, rather than affiliation. Religious affiliation was the concept that most closely aligned to the definition of religion in the equalities legislation. The detrimental impact on the responses in relation to religious affiliation was considered to be greater than the advantage related to additionally collecting information on non-religious belief.

The testing concluded that the question “What is your religion?” best met the requirement of collecting good quality data on religious affiliation within the space constraints of the census questionnaire. As a result, the recommendation for 2011 was to use the same question as in 2001 which had eight response options including a write-in option which allowed any other religion to be recorded. The only change was the wording to one tick-box from ‘None’ in 2001 to ‘No religion’ in 2011.

Inclusion of the write-in option led to publication, where disclosure procedures allowed, of detailed religion outputs. In 2011 this included data for over 50 religions at England and Wales geographical level down to output area level. Some respondents with non-religious beliefs used the write-in option to state these beliefs. ONS published 2011 Census data for write-in responses to the religion question which showed, for example, that in England and Wales, of the respondents to this question, 29 thousand stated that they were atheists and 15 thousand stated that they were humanists. If users require tables on specific sub-groups, they can order commissioned output from ONS at a cost<sup>3</sup>.

ONS’s initial view on this topic, as published in the consultation document ‘The 2021 Census: Initial view on content for England and Wales’ is reproduced in table 2 below.

**Table 2 Initial view of ONS**

Topic detail	Initial view	Collected in 2011?
Religion	Collect	Yes

While all UK countries asked a question on religion in the 2011 Census, different questions were asked due to country specific user requirements and consistency with previous censuses. Tick-box categories also varied across countries to allow collection of data for country-specific user requirements such as a need to differentiate between different Christian denominations in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Hence it is not possible to make exact comparisons across the UK with this data. The different questions used in the 2011 Census in the four countries of the UK are shown in figure 1.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censuscustomerservices>

Figure 1 2011 Census questions on Religion across the UK

**England:**

20 What is your religion?

➔ This question is voluntary

No religion

Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)

Buddhist

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Sikh

Any other religion, write in

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**Scotland:**

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

◆ This question is voluntary.

None

Church of Scotland

Roman Catholic

Other Christian, please write in below

Muslim

Buddhist

Sikh

Jewish

Hindu

Another religion or body, please write in

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**Wales (in English):**

20 What is your religion?

➔ This question is voluntary

No religion

Christian (all denominations)

Buddhist

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Sikh

Any other religion, write in

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**Wales (in Welsh):**

20 Beth yw eich crefydd?

➔ Mae'r cwestiwn hwn yn wirfoddol

Dim crefydd

Cristnogaeth (pob enwad)

Bwdhaeth

Hindŵaeth

Iddewiaeth

Islam

Siciaeth

Unrhyw grefydd arall, nodwch

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**Northern Ireland (two questions):**

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

Roman Catholic → Go to 19

Presbyterian Church in Ireland → Go to 19

Church of Ireland → Go to 19

Methodist Church in Ireland → Go to 19

Other, write in → Go to 19

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None

18 What religion, religious denomination or body were you brought up in?

Roman Catholic

Presbyterian Church in Ireland

Church of Ireland

Methodist Church in Ireland

Other, write in

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None

### 3. Summary of consultation responses

Table 3 presents the number of responses by type of respondent and organisational sector. The organisations that responded to this topic are listed by sector in Annex A.

**Table 3 Religion topic - number of responses by type of respondent**

Type of respondent	Total responses	
	N	% total responses
Individual	216	66
Organisation (all sectors)	112	34
Sector		% organisation responses
- Government department/public body	8	7
- Local authority	67	60
- Health organisation	2	2
- Housing	1	1
- Academic / research	6	5
- Charity and voluntary	16	14
- Commercial	5	4
- Genealogist/family historian	1	1
- Other	6	5
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>328</b>	<b>100</b>

*Note: Percentages might not add to 100% due to rounding.*

*Note: An organisation may have submitted more than one response.*

The quotations below are used to illustrate why respondents have requested that data on religion be collected on the census. These provide additional context to the evaluation.

Respondents, including central government, noted the importance of collecting data on specific religious affiliations including those collected via the write in response option. These responses emphasised the relevance of such information for resource allocation and service planning decisions. For example:

**Welsh Government:** *“2011 Census data about religion has been used to produce an in-depth analysis about the populations identifying with different religions in Wales. Such analysis can set the context for some resource allocation decisions. They are important for policies on community cohesion and contribute to the Welsh Government’s ability to meet its statutory equality duties.”*

**Portsmouth Diocesan Council for Social Responsibility:** *“We use the data on religion to plan the location of new churches or close old ones. We also use it in our interfaith work to help others understand the extent of local religious affiliation.”*



**Individual:** *“We use it to understand the profile of the sikh community in localities. This is then used for facilities and service planning, campaigns and grant applications. Recently it is being used for planning for free schools. Without this data our task would be very difficult.”*

The data are also used for policy development and monitoring, and in relation to equality issues. For example:

**Tower Hamlets Council:** *“The figures also allow us to analyse the changes within faith groups, and to assess whether differentials across particular indicators (eg housing, employment) are changing over time. This type of research helps inform how effective past policies have been, and informs future policy development and priorities in the areas of equalities and cohesion.”*

**Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames:** *“There are many areas of policy and statute that call upon our use of equality information, and religious information is fundamental in equality impact assessments that we do for our services. The majority of our budget requires some consideration of its impact on minority groups. As an example we are beginning the process of Outcome Based Budgeting from 2016/17 as we analyse which non-essential services we can afford to keep”*

Faith groups are also using the data for policy briefings and to help the wider voluntary sector to understand diversity in Britain.

**Muslim Council of Britain:** *“If it was not for the 2011 census, this information would not be available to the voluntary sector, particularly in the BME and faith sector. The ONS census data has provided the basis for a report ‘British Muslims in Numbers, A demographic, socio-economic and health profile of Muslims in Britain.”*

*“The demographic data is being used for policy briefings”*

*“The religion question has had a profound impact on the capacity of civil society/voluntary sector organisations in better understanding diversity in Britain today.”*

However, although many respondents identified a continuing need for data, consistent with those collected in previous censuses, some needs would not be met by such data. For example, some users identified a need for data on religious practice or religious belief, either in place of, or in addition to, those previously collected:

**British Humanist Association:** *“...there is a pressing need to disambiguate the extent to which that affiliation leads to belief, belonging and/or practice, in order to enable the ONS to properly identify the genuinely religious population and the full size of the effectively non-religious population.”*

**Gloucestershire County Council:** *“we would welcome further consideration as to the wording of the question being changed to accurately reflect actual religion as opposed to a historical/cultural affiliation with religions.”*

The Hindu Forum of Britain asked for text to be added to clarify the branches of Hinduism which respondents should include when selecting this tick box option. They suggested something similar to the way the Christian denominations are presented in the 2011 Census question e.g. Christian (Including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations).

There were also requests for changes to the question and additional response options; requests included splitting the Christian denominations and including philosophical belief as this is part of the protected characteristic of ‘religion or belief’ within the Equality Act 2010. Other comments made by respondents included that differences between the religion questions asked in each of the countries of the UK made UK wide analysis difficult.



## 4. Evaluation

The following sections show the scores allocated to the topic by individual criterion based on the evidence given by users. The criteria largely reflect those used in 2011, but have undergone expert review within ONS and via the Census Advisory Groups. The document '[The 2021 Census - Assessment of initial user requirements on content for England & Wales: Response to consultation](https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/census/censustransformationprogramme/consultations/2021censustopicconsultation/assessmentofinitialuserrequirementscontentforenglandandwalesresponsetoconsultation.pdf)'<sup>4</sup> gives details on the scoring methodology including:

- 'user requirements criteria', including a description of relative weights, are described in section 2.1 of the document. Note that, in the following tables, the overall score is weighted and is not the sum of the scores for individual criteria
- 'other considerations' are described in section 2.2 of the document. These will predominately be used in conjunction with the user requirement score to steer the development of the census questionnaire and the production of administrative data research outputs
- 'operational requirements' are described in section 2.3, of the document. ONS has operational uses for some of the data collected in the census, of which the most important is maximising coverage of the 2021 Census. Each sub-topic is categorised as being of maximum, moderate or minimum importance in relation to operational requirements.

### 4.1 User requirements - religion

**Table 4 User requirement score by criterion**

Criterion	Score	Evidence
<b>Weighted Overall Score</b>	80	<b>High user need</b>
Purpose	8	<p>Data on religion are needed by a wide range of local authorities and by central government to help plan services and policies and to inform assessments to meet obligations under the Equality Act 2010. For example, the Welsh Government said that:</p> <p><i>“Accurate data on religion, alongside other equality information e.g. on ethnicity, age, sex and disability is necessary to plan services and policies in a way that ensures that the needs of all parts of the Welsh population are taken into account and that equality legislation requirements are met. The Welsh Government has statutory responsibilities under equality legislation and sets out its own Strategic Equality Plan. It is a requirement that all policy interventions have an equality impact assessment and data on religion is needed for such assessments to be based on a good understanding of the picture across Wales.”</i></p> <p>The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) noted some of the analyses data on religion has fed into:</p>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/file?uri=/census/censustransformationprogramme/consultations/2021censustopicconsultation/assessmentofinitialuserrequirementscontentforenglandandwalesresponsetoconsultation.pdf>

Criterion	Score	Evidence
		<p><i>“The Commission currently uses census information on religion in various ways.</i></p> <p><i>Census data are referred to in various Commission’s research briefings and reports on religion or belief, such as ‘Religion or belief, equality and human rights in England and Wales’ by Alice Donald (Research Report no. 84, published in 2012).</i></p> <p><i>Religion data were also used in Commission briefings on employment and hours of work and on residents of communal establishments. These publications analyse a range of census data to compare groups with the equality characteristics of age, disability, ethnicity, gender and religion.”</i></p> <p>Tower Hamlets Council showed how information on religion and other characteristics is used in relation to policy development and specific programmes:</p> <p><i>“The Census provides unparalleled intelligence about the size and characteristics of the borough’s different faith groups. These data are invaluable in a borough such as Tower Hamlets which has considerable faith diversity. The data are used across the Council as evidence to inform policy development and evaluation in the areas of equalities and cohesion. Faith data also inform needs assessments, equality impact assessments, and enable the Council to monitor its duties under the 2010 Equality Act. The faith profile of the borough is also considered in ‘Prevent’ related anti-radicalisation and anti-extremism programmes and funding allocation from central government. An understanding of the different groups is key to shaping our policy approaches to cohesion and the context in which we define service outputs and outcomes in this area of work.”</i></p> <p>A small number of religious organisations, such as the Church of England - Archbishop’s Council, also stated that they use these data for planning their operations and services:</p> <p><i>“In some dioceses the Church of England allocate resources (both financial and personnel) based on the service need of parishes. Religious affiliation provides an indication of the likely need for Church of England services. The Church of England have 20,000 ministerial personnel and 16,000 churches nationally, but with increasing financial burdens this resource must be used carefully.”</i></p>
<p>Small geographies or populations</p>	<p>8</p>	<p>Local authorities described using these data to assess the needs of people in their communities and to tailor services accordingly, including in relation to facilities such as housing and community centres. For example Tower Hamlets Council stated that:</p> <p><i>“To deliver services effectively, the Council needs to understand the characteristics and circumstances of residents living in different parts of the borough. Small area data are needed to profile local populations and inform decisions about how and where services should be delivered. Understanding the faith demography of Tower Hamlets is part of this, as it enables the Council to identify where particular populations are concentrated, and to profile their respective needs. Local area data on faith (coupled with information on need) also informs decisions around the allocation of Grant funding.”</i></p>

Criterion	Score	Evidence
		<p>Religious organisations also stated a requirement for data on religion at detailed geographical levels. The Church of England - Archbishop's Council use the data for decisions on resource allocation:</p> <p><i>“The small geography data enable best fit modelling to create estimates for the 12,000 Ecclesiastical parishes of the Church of England. This information does provide input into decision making on the provision of financial and personnel resource to parishes. Whilst some revenue is gathered and spent locally, a proportion of money is distributed from diocesan and national funds, based on information about parishes.”</i></p> <p>Furthermore, data from this topic can be used to facilitate work for specific sub-groups within the population. For example, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research said that:</p> <p><i>“The haredi (strictly Orthodox) community is especially localised and generally separate from the rest of the Jewish population. It is also demographically different and socio-economically disadvantaged. Fine-grained data are vital for monitoring this increasingly large sub-group and guide policy making.”</i></p>
Alternative sources	8	<p>The majority of respondents stated that, whilst alternative data sources exist, they do not fully meet their needs. For example, the Institute for Jewish Policy Research commented that:</p> <p><i>“We are not aware of any comparable administrative data sources which include the whole Jewish population (i.e. from age 0 and above) nor at anything like the level of geographical detail offered by the census. Further, the limited sources that do exist (such as the IHS and the GPPS) have proven to be poor substitutes by comparison. They exhibit irregular Jewish age/sex distributions, insufficiently fine grained geography, and have limited variables for cross-tabulation purposes.”</i></p> <p>Central and local government organisations also stated the drawbacks of non-census sources, particularly when identifying small religious groups. For example, the Welsh Government said that:</p> <p><i>“Some data may be available from the National Survey of Wales or the Annual Population Survey but the geographical detail available from the Census will not be available from those alternative sources. They are also not able to provide robust information on some of the smaller religious groups.”</i></p> <p>Other respondents told us that no other source provides data at the detailed level and breadth of topics that the census provides. For example, Sheffield City Council said:</p> <p><i>“To the best of my knowledge, there is no alternative source of information, particularly at a local level, and not having this would have a knock on affect on our ability to pay due regard to our Public Sector Equality duties.”</i></p> <p>The Economic History Society said:</p> <p><i>“Alternative sources of information about religion don’t provide the granularity - or the ability to cross-tabulate with other key aspects of economic and social behaviour - that the census does.”</i></p>

Criterion	Score	Evidence
Multivariate analysis	8	<p>Data users showed how they cross-tabulate information on religion with other census topics in order to fulfil duties under the Equality Act, 2010. For example, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) said that:</p> <p><i>“The Commission’s main use of religion data would be to compare different groups on a range of measures, which cover topics such as housing, language, migration, education, health, carers and the labour market.</i></p> <p><i>In addition, population data are often required cross-tabulating religion with other equality characteristics, for example by age and gender.”</i></p> <p>Kent County Council cross tabulate the data to create a number of project based reports:</p> <p><i>“We have used religion information with other topic information from the Census for various projects such as: Childcare Sufficiency Statement; School Places and Services reports; Equality and Diversity report”</i></p> <p>The Muslim Council of Britain told us about the way religion data is used with other variables by their affiliated organisations:</p> <p><i>“Muslim civil society groups are using the age demographics to plan elderly care needs. Other uses include planning voter registration campaigns in wards with potentially high numbers of younger, first-time voters.”</i></p> <p>And:</p> <p><i>“To highlight differences in type of housing tenure by ethnic and religious affiliation categories”</i></p>
Comparability beyond England and Wales	8	<p>Although all UK countries asked a question on religion in the 2011 Census, different questions were asked due to country specific user requirements and consistency with previous censuses. Respondents had UK data requirements and advocated having consistent questions across the UK.</p> <p>Respondents told us about their requirement for UK data. For example, the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) said that:</p> <p><i>“The Equality and Human Rights Commission’s remit covers Great Britain, and as a minimum we require comparable data for England, Scotland and Wales. According to the analysis, we may also require data at a regional and/or local authority level.”</i></p> <p>Local authorities also said that they need comparable data to make comparisons between their communities and UK averages. Some comparisons are possible despite differences in the questions asked and hence some respondents gave specific examples of uses of comparable data. For example, Gloucestershire County Council said that:</p> <p><i>“In order to understand religion in Gloucestershire, it is important to compare with the UK/region and other authorities. This allows us to put things in to context and benchmark with other authorities that share similar characteristics.”</i></p> <p>Religious organisations are also involved in UK policy and discussed this in relation to collecting comparable data beyond England and Wales. For example, the Presbyterian Church of Wales stated that:</p>

Criterion	Score	Evidence
		<i>“We work with churches and denominations in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland in a number of areas. We are involved in UK-wide policy-making through CYTUN and therefore the British Council of Churches.”</i>
Continuity with previous censuses	8	<p>The majority of data users who responded stated that they have used religion information from previous censuses to draw comparisons. For example, Essex County Council stated that:</p> <p><i>“Analysing censuses over time (between 2001 and 2011) enables us to assess how the population has changed and thereby how the needs of the population have changed, in order to respond to these changing needs and trends and to monitor and evaluate the impact of national and local policies and interventions.”</i></p> <p>Similarly, Gloucestershire County Council commented that:</p> <p><i>“We have used comparisons between censuses to see how religion in Gloucestershire has changed over time. Understanding the extent of this change helps us make better decisions about funding and service delivery, and ensures we are meeting the needs of our population.”</i></p> <p>London Borough of Hounslow told us how they analyse the change between censuses to target services:</p> <p><i>“2011 data on religion was used with 2001 data in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) to analyse demographic change in the borough and by ward. The JSNA is used to determine the level of health and social care need in the borough and plan services accordingly.”</i></p> <p>Similarly, Manchester City Council said that they use comparison over time to help inform the development of new services:</p> <p><i>“Monitor change over time and identify areas of growth that may require specialist support, e.g. faith school.”</i></p>
<b>Weighted Overall Score</b>	80	<b>High user need</b>

## 4.2 Other considerations - religion

**Table 5 ONS assessment of impact by criterion**

Criterion	Operational impact	Justification
Impact on data quality	Low	Despite this being a voluntary question the response rate for this topic was high at 92.9%. The agreement rate between the 2011 Census and 2011 Census Quality Survey (CQS) for this question (including all religions entered in “other”) was 90.4 per cent. The largest differences were found where the census indicated “no religion” but the CQS response was “Christian” and vice versa and these differences were mainly where a response had been provided on behalf of someone else.



Criterion	Operational impact	Justification
Impact on public acceptability	Low	This was the only voluntary question in the 2011 Census. This reflected parliamentary concerns in 2000 about the potential sensitivities associated with collection this information. As a result if respondents did not find the question acceptable they did not have to provide an answer, however the response rate of 92.9% would indicate that most respondents were happy to answer this question.
Impact on respondent burden	Medium	The previous CQS reported that some respondents who chose to answer this question needed time to consider various factors before answering this question such as what this question meant e.g. affiliation, practice, belief, or belonging.
Impact on financial concerns	Low	There were minor manual coding costs associated with the write-in text response option. However, as the question on Religion was voluntary, no data were imputed where respondents chose not to answer, thus minimising edit and imputation costs.
Impact on questionnaire mode	Low	This question displayed well online and on the paper questionnaire.

### 4.3 Operational requirements - religion

#### Minimum operational requirement

There is no census operational requirement to collect data on this topic.

## 5. Updated view

The following table gives the updated view of ONS at the topic level and the justification for this.

**Table 6 Updated view**

Topic detail	Initial view	Updated view	Justification
Religion	Collect	Collect	<p>Information on religion is a key variable for a range of data users, including government departments, local authorities and religious organisations, who require information down to low areas of geography and for small populations. This means that the census is the most appropriate method of collecting these data.</p> <p>The key user need relates to fulfilling duties under the Equality Act, 2010 for this protected characteristic.</p> <p>Previous research has shown that religious affiliation, as captured by the 2011 Census question is the dimension of religion most closely aligned to the definition of religion in the Equality Act.</p> <p>Some users have asked for data to be collected on religious practice but testing prior to the 2011 Census showed that respondents found the question about ‘practice’ ambiguous and that the data produced was inconsistent.</p> <p>Although some users put forward a case for the collection of data on philosophical belief and religious practice, testing ahead of the 2011 Census showed that including the term ‘belief’ within the question changed how respondents thought about religion. This may have led some to provide answers on religious belief rather than philosophical belief or religious affiliation. It is not intended to expand the scope of the religion question to include this aspect of the protected characteristic.</p> <p>There was a strong demand for continuity to allow comparison between censuses and therefore ONS intends to ask the same question in the 2021 Census as in the 2011 Census.</p>



## 6. Equality implications of the updated view of ONS

The Equality Act 2010 and associated public sector equality duty require public bodies to work towards eliminating discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity with regard to nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. These requirements are reinforced by secondary legislation in both England and Wales<sup>5</sup> as well as by the Equality Objectives published recently by the Welsh Government which seek to address the key equality challenges faced in Wales and to support progress towards the well-being goals in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The proposals made for the 2021 Census content will consider identified ‘User requirements’ for data alongside other factors such as ‘Other considerations’ and ‘Operational requirements’ specified in our evaluation criteria. In addition, it will be important to take account of the impact of any decisions that we may make on equality. Impacts can be:

- positive - actively promote equality of opportunity for one or more groups, or improve equal opportunities/relations between groups
- adverse or negative - cause disadvantage or exclusion (any such impact must be justified, eliminated, minimised or counter-balanced by other measures)
- neutral - have no notable consequences for any group

The Equality Act 2010 defines ‘religion or belief’ as a single protected characteristic. The 2011 Census question “What is your religion?” collects information on religious affiliation as this is the concept most closely aligned with the definition of religion in the Act.

The inclusion of a voluntary question on religion from 2001 was seen by users as a positive change with regard to increasing the visibility of minority religious groups. The voluntary nature of the question allows those who do not wish to answer such a question, for whatever reason, not to do so.

Its continued inclusion in the 2011 Census helped enable organisations to fulfil the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty (contained within the Equality Act 2010) by providing information on one aspect of this protected characteristic. The use of the same question in 2011 as in 2001 allowed measurement of change between these two points in time.

While there is a limitation to the number of groups that can be listed separately, a write-in option for other religions was also included allowing all groups to be recognised.

Testing prior to the 2011 Census of a question on ‘religion or belief’ showed a detrimental effect on the quality of data collected on religious affiliation so the phrase ‘or belief’ was not included in the 2011 Census question. The results of this research are still considered to be valid and therefore ONS is not intending to collect information on philosophical belief in the 2021 Census. As noted in the background section, some respondents with non-religious beliefs used the write-in option of the religion question to state these beliefs.

The next steps for this topic, discussed below, take into account the identified equality implications. As research and stakeholder engagement continues, if further equality implications emerge, these will be considered and mitigated where necessary.

<sup>5</sup> *The Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011 and The Equality Act 2010 (Statutory Duties) (Wales) Regulations 2011.*

## 7. Next steps

There is a clear user need for data on this topic at local authority level and below (for example, to enable central and local governments to plan services and policies to help meet requirements under the Equality Act 2010).

Prior to the 2011 Census ONS testing of different wording of the religion question and concluded that including the concept of philosophical belief within the religion question had a detrimental impact on the quality of the religious affiliation data collected. Due to this, and the need for consistency with previous censuses, ONS intends to use the same question in 2021 that was used in 2011.

In common with other topics, the online guidance relating to this question will be reviewed.

ONS will put forward proposals for the 2021 Census questionnaire which will be included in the Census White Paper in 2018 before the questions are submitted to Parliament for approval in 2019.

## Annex A: List of organisations that responded, by sector

This list includes organisations that responded to at least one consultation question, or discussed collection of data, on the 'Religion' topic. This list excludes organisations that did not provide the name of their organisation in their consultation response. If multiple responses were received from an organisation the name only appears once.

### Government department/public body

College of Arms	High Speed Two Limited
Department for Culture, Media and Sport ( <b>DCMS</b> )	National Assembly for Wales
Equality and Human Rights Commission ( <b>EHRC</b> )	Office for National Statistics ( <b>ONS</b> )
Health & Social Care Information Centre ( <b>HSCIC</b> )	Welsh Government

### Local authority

Arun District Council	East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council	East Sussex County Council
Bedford Borough Council	Essex County Council
Birmingham City Council	Gateshead Council
Blaby District Council	Gedling Borough Council
Blackpool Council	Gloucestershire County Council
Bournemouth Borough Council	Greater London Authority
Bristol City Council	Gwynedd Council
Caerphilly County Borough Council	Haringey Council
Carmarthenshire County Council	Hertfordshire County Council
Cheshire West and Chester Council	Horsham District Council
Chesterfield Borough Council	Kent County Council
City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council	London Borough of Bexley
City of London Corporation	London Borough of Camden
City of Wolverhampton Council	London Borough of Harrow
Cornwall Council	London Borough of Havering
Cumbria County Council	London Borough of Hounslow
Cyngor Sir Ceredigion/Ceredigion County Council	Manchester City Council
Derbyshire County Council	Mole Valley District Council
Devon County Council - Public Health	Newcastle City Council
Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council	North York Moors National Park Authority
Durham County Council	Northumberland County Council
	Oldham Council

## Local authority (continued)

Oxfordshire County Council  
Powys County Council  
Reigate & Banstead Borough Council  
Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea  
Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames  
Salford City Council  
Sheffield City Council  
Shropshire Council - Intelligence and Research Team  
Snowdonia National Park  
Somerset County Council

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council  
St Helens Council  
Surrey County Council  
Tameside Council  
Tower Hamlets Council  
Uttlesford District Council  
Waltham Forest Council  
Warwickshire Observatory  
Westminster City Council  
Wookey Parish Council  
Wycombe District Council

## Health organisation

Cardiff and Vale University Health Board

Hywel Dda University Health Board

## Housing

Yarlington Housing Group

## Academic/research

British Sociological Association  
Centre for Longitudinal Study Information and User Support (**CeLSIUS**)  
Economic History Society

Institute for Jewish Policy Research  
University of Wolverhampton  
University of York - Centre for Housing Policy

## Charity and voluntary

British Humanist Association  
Church of England - Archbishop's Council  
Discrimination Law Association  
Family and Childcare Trust  
Friends, Families and Travellers  
Hindu Forum of Britain  
Irish in Britain  
Khalsa Foundation  
Muslim Council of Britain

National Association of British Arabs  
Older Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans Association (**OLGA**)  
Portsmouth Diocesan Council for Social Responsibility  
Presbyterian Church of Wales  
Shelter  
The Salvation Army  
The Vegan Society

## Commercial

CACI Ltd

David Simmonds Consultancy Ltd. (**DSC**)

First UK Bus

Operational Research in Health Ltd (**ORH** Ltd)

Sainsbury's

## Genealogist/family historian

Tasmanian Family History Society Inc.

## Other

Emergency Planning Society -  
West Midlands Branch

Market Research Society (MRS) and MRS  
Census & Geodemographics Group

New Economy

Older People's Commissioner for Wales

Sikh Council

