

## Equalities

# Cognitive Question Testing Scotland's Census Ethnicity Classification

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Following the 2001 Census, some concerns were expressed that the 2001 ethnicity question used a combination of nationality, skin colour/race and geography to categorise ethnicity and did so inconsistently across ethnic group categories. The Scottish Government, in partnership with the General Register Office for Scotland, has conducted a wide-ranging review of the classification, and as part of this commissioned Ipsos MORI Scotland to conduct detailed cognitive question testing on a revised ethnic group question and a possible question on national identity. Eighty-eight interviews were conducted between September and November 2007.

## Main Findings

- Consideration should be given to not including the national identity question as there was evidence that the question was not being interpreted as intended: the terms 'nation' and 'identity' were not always understood; some respondents felt the question was designed to explore views on devolution and independence; others felt that it was a test of immigrants' loyalty and that the "right" answer was Scotland and/or Britain.
- The main problem with the ethnicity question was the layout. Several respondents interpreted the "Other white ethnic group" write-in box as a visual cue signifying the end of the ethnicity question. The most recent version of the ethnicity question should be further tested to ensure that this problem is resolved.
- All of the Polish respondents interviewed were happy that a Polish response option was included in the test question. However, respondents from other Eastern European countries had mixed views. It is suggested that the Polish response option should be retained.
- Most respondents were happy with the main heading and response categories that were included in the "Asian..." section but it is suggested that consideration should be given to adding Scottish and British to the individual response options (e.g. Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish or Pakistani British).
- Most Sikh respondents ticked the Indian response option, instead of the Sikh response option which had been a proposed addition. Most felt that Sikhism was a religion and were confused about its inclusion as an ethnic group.
- There was very little objection amongst African and Caribbean respondents towards the term "Black".
- The proposed wording "African, Caribbean or Black" caused confusion as people did not understand what "or Black" could mean, as it implied that the Africans and Caribbeans were not black (or not necessarily black). However, this did not appear to have a significant impact on respondents' choice of response option.

## Methods

Cognitive interviewing is a method which is widely used in the development and testing of survey questionnaires. Overall, 88 cognitive interviews were conducted. The sample was not intended to be statistically representative of the Scottish population but to cover a broad range in terms of ethnic background, religion, age, sex and location.

Most respondents had taken part in the Scottish Household Survey (SHS) and agreed to be recontacted for future Scottish Government research. Additional respondents were recruited via on street recruitment (in Glasgow and Edinburgh) and snowballing from contacts<sup>1</sup>.

During the cognitive interviews we used a combination of interviewer observation and retrospective probing. Most interviews were conducted in respondents' homes and lasted 45 minutes on average. Respondents were given £20 in cash to cover any expenses and to acknowledge that they had given up time to take part.

For context, respondents completed the proposed country of birth and religion questions before the national identity and ethnicity questions. Examples of the national identity and ethnicity questions tested are shown in Figure 1. Several versions of the ethnicity question were tested but only the last version has been included as an example.

## National Identity

Consideration should be given to not including this question. There are several reasons for this:

- there was ambiguity around the word “identify” and some confusion around the word “nation.”
- several respondents thought that the purpose of the question was to explore their views on Scottish devolution and independence.
- there was evidence that a social desirability effect might bias the results of this question: there was a view that immigrants should try to integrate and therefore the “correct” answer was Scotland and/or Britain.

Many respondents did not notice the instruction to “Tick all boxes that apply” and felt uncomfortable having to choose

<sup>1</sup> Snowballing involves asking respondents for an introduction to other potential respondents who fit the relevant criteria and may be willing to take part in the study – with the anticipated result that the original sample will “snowball” into a larger one. This technique is regularly used for hard-to-reach populations.

one nation. Respondents could not write-in more than one “other” nation, as the write-in box was too short. If the question is retained, the “Tick all boxes” instruction should be made clearer and the length of the write-in box should be increased.

Some respondents felt the question was important as it meant that they could express their “Scottishness” or “Britishness”. If the question is not included, the recommendation to include “Scottish” and “British” in the Asian ethnic group response options becomes even more important.

## Ethnicity

The main problem with this question was the layout. Many respondents initially thought that the White section constituted the entire ethnicity question because they interpreted the “Other white ethnic group” write-in space as a visual cue that signalled the end of the question and wrote their ethnicity (e.g. Black African) in that space. Several versions of this question were developed that tried to correct this problem, mainly by increasing the indentation of the write-in spaces. The final version also included a letter in front of each section heading. It had been argued by some that lettering the sections, in the order they are in, may be considered offensive because section A is White and, culturally, the letter “A” often signifies the best or most desirable category. However, there appeared to be very little objection to the lettering used in the final version. Nonetheless, the layout and lettering used in Version 6 (see Figure 1) should be tested further with more non-white respondents to explore whether this layout issue is still affecting the way respondents answer the question.

Most non-white respondents were happy with the ordering of the sections and assumed it reflected the numbers of people from different ethnic groups in the Scottish population.

Most respondents seemed to understand the term “ethnic group”. However, there were several respondents who struggled with the term. The word “group” seemed to mislead some into thinking “ethnic group” meant a social group. Consideration should be given to amending “ethnic group” to “ethnic background.”

Several non-white respondents did not like answering this question. It made some of them feel uncomfortable and some did not understand why this information was important. Some said that they “hated” being asked this question.

## **“White” section**

Virtually all respondents were comfortable with this section heading.

Scottish/British respondents sometimes found it difficult to choose between response options.

All of the Polish respondents interviewed were happy that a Polish response option was included - although a couple were unsure it should be included without recognising any other Eastern European countries. However, respondents from other Eastern European countries had mixed views towards the Polish option, with some feeling it should be removed as other countries were not represented, and others feeling it was good that the Polish population had been recognised.

We therefore suggest that the Polish response option should be retained.

## **“Mixed or multiple ethnic groups” section**

Although we did not specifically recruit respondents from “Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups”, several respondents were from this group or had children who were.

The term “Mixed” was viewed unfavourably by several respondents who believed the term was, or could be, offensive. We suggest the phrase “Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups” should be retained for the time being. As people become more familiar with the term “multiple ethnic groups”, it may be possible to phase out the word “Mixed.”

There was confusion about who should be included in this section. One interpretation was that it was only for a mix of different white ethnicities. Another interpretation was that it was only for a mix of white plus another ethnicity (and not, for example, Asian and African). Consideration should be given to adding a short explanation of who should be included in this group. It was also suggested that consideration should be given to moving this section so it does not appear immediately after the “White” section. However, previous research has shown that this section was likely to get missed if placed towards the end of the question<sup>2</sup>.

Some further confusion was caused by the use of the terms “Asian Scottish”, “African Scottish” and “Caribbean Scottish” and “Asian British”, “African British” and “Caribbean British” in other sections. Several respondents believed that these terms described people from mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds, which made it unclear who the “Mixed or

Multiple Ethnic Groups” section was intended for.

Other suggestions included expanding the write-in box so people feel able to write in an adequate description of their mixed or multiple ethnic groups.

## **“Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British” section**

Respondents were generally happy about the phrasing of the heading although, as discussed above, it is important to recognise that this heading may confuse some people from mixed or multiple ethnic groups.

Most respondents were happy with the response categories. However, several UK-born Asian respondents (and parents of UK-born Asians) found it difficult to accept that the response categories (unlike the heading) did not include any reference to Britain or Scotland. Consideration should be given to adding Scottish and British to the individual response options (e.g. Pakistani, Pakistani Scottish or Pakistani British.)

Most Sikh respondents ticked the Indian response option and believed that the Sikh response option should be removed. They felt that Sikhism was a religion rather than an ethnicity and were confused about its inclusion as an ethnic group. Most had either not noticed the Sikh option and ticked Indian “as usual” or had noticed and been uncomfortable having to choose between the two options.

## **“African, Caribbean or Black” section**

The use of the wording “or Black” in the section heading led to considerable confusion (however, this did not appear to have a significant impact on respondents’ choice of response option). Respondents wondered who the “or Black” people could be, or assumed that non-Black Africans or Caribbeans should be included. Most Black Africans and some White Africans therefore assumed that White Africans should be included in this section. Consideration should be given to changing the heading back to the 2001 Census wording of “Black, Black Scottish or Black British.”

Some Black African and Black Caribbean respondents were confused about whether to tick the “African...” or “Caribbean...” response option, or to tick the “Black...” option. Most selected “African...” or “Caribbean...” rather than “Black...”. This was because they felt it was more specific and they preferred to emphasise their area of origin rather than their skin colour. Consideration should be given to deleting the “Black, Black Scottish or Black British” response option.

In most cases, choice of response option did not stem from any objection to the word “Black...” and, indeed, many respondents had spontaneously described themselves as “Black”.

<sup>2</sup>

[http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/ethnic\\_group\\_statistics/downloads/ethnic\\_group\\_statistics.pdf](http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about/ethnic_group_statistics/downloads/ethnic_group_statistics.pdf)

**Figure 1. The most recent tested versions of the national identity and ethnic group questions.**

**6 Which nation or nations do you identify with most?**

◆ Tick all boxes that apply.

- Scotland
- England
- Wales
- Northern Ireland
- Britain
- Republic of Ireland
- Other nation or nations, *please write in*

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**7 What is your ethnic group?**

◆ Choose **ONE** section from A to E, then tick the appropriate box to indicate your ethnic group.

**A White**

- Scottish
- English
- Welsh
- Northern Irish
- British
- Irish
- Gypsy / Traveller
- Polish
- Other white ethnic group, *please write in*

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**B Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Groups**

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

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**C Asian, Asian Scottish or Asian British**

- Pakistani
- Indian
- Chinese
- Bangladeshi
- Sikh
- Other, *please write in*

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**D African, Caribbean or Black**

- African, African Scottish or African British
- Caribbean, Caribbean Scottish or Caribbean British
- Black, Black Scottish or Black British
- Other, *please write in*

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**E Other ethnic group**

- Arab
- Jewish
- Other, *please write in*

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The report, "Cognitive Question Testing Scotland's Census Ethnicity Classification", which is summarised in this research findings is a web only document and is available on the publications pages of the Scottish Government website at <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/Recent>

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ISBN 978-0-7559-7021-6

