

COLLECTING EQUALITY INFORMATION
GUIDANCE ON ASKING QUESTIONS ON:

RELIGION/BELIEF



one
scotland
SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

Introduction: Why is it necessary to collect information about religion/belief?

“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 eight 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 been working on providing harmonised questions for use in surveys in Scotland.


There are six equality strands: age, gender, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion/belief. This guidance note provides a recommended question for collecting information on **religion/belief**.

Recommended 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



The wording of the question is the same as that used in the 2001 Census. The categories from the 2001 question were reviewed and amended slightly. The addition of a Pagan tick box was tested in the 2006 Census test. It is strongly recommended that you do not change the wording of the question as it could have implications on the data you receive. The wording of this question affects the way in which people answer, especially if they only have a loose affiliation with religion. Any changes to the wording of the question may result in people either not answering or providing a less suitable response and you will not be able to make comparisons to results from the 2011 Census.

The categories have been carefully selected to best represent the Scottish population and to ensure the highest response rates by making it relevant and acceptable to respondents. This list of categories is not definitive and a write-in box has been provided so that respondents can answer as they wish. Making changes to the categories could affect response rates if people feel that they are unable to record their religion accurately. It is very important to the completeness and acceptability of the question that the 'Other' write-in box is retained. If you need to make changes to the categories, for example you require information on a specific religious group not listed, **please contact us directly for advice.**

Multiple ticks

The recommended religion question is a single tick response question. In order to obtain a complete count if a respondent has provided multiple responses then the rule should be that the response is recorded as 'don't know'. The exception to this rule would be if a respondent has ticked one of the categories and also the 'Other' box. In which case:

- If the respondent has ticked a category and written in a response in the 'Other' write in box then the write in answer should be used.
- If the respondent has ticked one category and then ticked the other box without writing in a response then the first category they ticked should be used.

Proxy responses

This question is designed to collect information on a person's own religion and should be addressed directly to the respondent. Where the respondent is unable to provide an answer then another member of the household, or the person's carer, can be asked to give a response on their behalf. This should be a last resort and the interviewers 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.

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.

Small numbers can cause problems with statistical reliability when analysing data and hinder publication of figures because of the need to avoid identification of individuals. 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 increase sample size by aggregating several years of data where appropriate.

Another way to overcome the problem of small numbers is to aggregate data together under the headings 'Christian' and 'All Other religions' but this may not be an ideal solution as it can hide inequalities that are occurring between the groups under each heading. For example there are differences in the unemployment rates between Roman Catholics and members of the Church of Scotland and between Muslims and Sikhs (see link to the High Level Summary Equalities Statistics below). However, such aggregations may sometimes be necessary in order to present any data. The term 'non-Christian' should not be used as it is offensive to some people.

Comparing the 2001 Census with the 2011 Census

It is possible to compare data from the new question with data from the 2001 Census, but it must be noted that in 2001 Pagans would have recorded their religion in the "Other" write-in box whereas there is now a separate tick box. When comparing data from the new question with data from the 2001 Census question this should be noted, as numbers under the "Other" heading may be reduced as a result. This will not be an issue when data are published from the 2011 Census.

Contact us

This document has been provided to help people collect information on religion in Scotland. 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.

social-justice-analysis@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

Useful links

Equalities Review:

<http://archive.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/equalitiesreview/publications.html>

Scottish Government High Level Summary of Equality Statistics:

<http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/11/20102424/0>

Statistical Code of Practice and Disclosure Control:

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about_ns/cop/
http://www.statistics.gov.uk/about_ns/cop/downloads/prot_data_access_confidentiality.pdf

ONS Report from the review of equality data:

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