

Data collection and publication guidance

Religion/Belief

February 2022

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Introduction

The Equality Act 2010 (the 2010 Act)¹ protects people from discrimination because of religion or belief. The legislation covers areas including education, employment, the provision of goods and services to the public and the exercise of public functions.

The 2010 Act also introduced a public sector equality duty² which came into force on 5 April 2011. The duty requires public authorities, including the Scottish Ministers, to have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. The duty covers nine protected characteristics³, including religion or belief.

In addition to the public sector equality duty, Scottish Ministers have the power to supplement the public sector equality duty by placing specific duties on certain Scottish public authorities, and have done so by means of the Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) (Scotland) Regulations 2012⁴.

It is recommended that all public authorities follow good practice in gathering and using relevant evidence and information. Religion/belief statistics are important for monitoring discrimination and inequality. Good quality religion and belief data will help with understanding the issues faced by people of

¹ [Equality Act 2010 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15)

² [Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/schedule/1/1)

³ The duty only applies to the protected characteristic of marriage and civil partnership in relation to eliminating unlawful discrimination etc. relating to work under Part 5 of the 2010 Act.

⁴ [The Equality Act 2010 \(Specific Duties\) \(Scotland\) Regulations 2012 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/1200), as amended ([link to original version, with subsequent amendments not yet incorporated](#)).

different religions or beliefs, allowing for intersectional analysis with other socio-demographic characteristics, including those protected by the 2010 Act. The information may also be used to inform policy formulation and service delivery.

In order to promote more consistency, the Scottish Government developed harmonised questions for use in surveys in Scotland. The guidance, originally published in 2012, was reviewed in 2021. This document sets out the revised guidance.

Background

There are several different concepts of religion that can be measured on social surveys including **affiliation, belonging, belief and practice**⁵. It is important to be clear about what concept is being measured. For example:

- religious affiliation is the connection or identification with a religion irrespective of actual practice or belief
- religious belief includes beliefs typically expected to be held by followers of a religion and how important those beliefs are to a person's life
- practice includes specific religious activities expected of followers of a religion
- religious belonging can be interpreted as both loose self-identification and active or formal belonging to a religious group

The way people respond to questions on religion is sensitive to what question is being asked and how it is asked. The recommended question for surveys in Scotland measures religious belonging, in line with the question asked in

⁵ For more information about the different concepts of religion that can be measured, see ONS (2009) [Final Recommended Questions for the 2011 Census in England and Wales: Religion](#)

Scotland's Census 2022, however in some circumstances other questions may be required to measure religious affiliation, belief, and practice.

Recommended question

The Scottish Government recommends the following question on religion is used in order to harmonise with other data sources in Scotland:

Question:	What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?
Answer:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. None2. Church of Scotland3. Roman Catholic4. Other Christian, please write in5. Muslim, write in denomination or school6. Hindu7. Buddhist8. Sikh9. Jewish10. Pagan11. Another religion or body, please write in12. Refusal (spontaneous only)13. Prefer not to say (non-interviewer led questionnaires only)

The wording of the question is the same as that used in the 2022⁶, 2011⁷ and 2001⁸ Censuses, in which this question is voluntary.

⁶ Scotland's Census 2022 - [scotlands-census-2022-question-set-version-v4-0-09-09-2021.pdf](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/scotlandscensus-2022-question-set-version-v4-0-09-09-2021.pdf) ([scotlandscensus.gov.uk](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk))

⁷ Scotland's Census 2011 - [scotlands-census-2022-question-set-version-v4-0-09-09-2021.pdf](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/scotlandscensus-2022-question-set-version-v4-0-09-09-2021.pdf) ([scotlandscensus.gov.uk](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk))

⁸ Scotland's Census 2001 - [ENGform](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/engform) ([nrscotland.gov.uk](https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk))

Example question on religious practice

If further information on religious practice is required a follow on question about practice can be used, such as:

Question: Do you consider that you are actively practising your religion?

Answer: 1. Yes
2. No
3. Refusal (spontaneous only)
4. Prefer not to say (non-interviewer led questionnaires only)

Additional guidance for interviewers

Instructions and 'prefer not to say'

Instructions should be given at the beginning of the interview/survey saying why all of the questions are being asked, that they are all voluntary and, if a respondent does not wish to answer any of the questions, they do not have to. This ensures all questions are treated the same.

Testing by the ONS has shown that provision of a 'prefer not to say' option results in an increase in non-responses in telephone/face-to-face interviews. As such the recommendation is that this should only be included in online and paper surveys where refusal is not otherwise possible with the caveat that this may increase the rate of non-response to this question.

If a 'prefer not to say' option is added to this question then it should be added to all questions. In interviewer-led surveys clear instruction at the beginning should advise people that they do not have to answer any question that they do not wish to.

Presentation of the questions

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 2022 Census.

The categories for the recommended question are the same as the 2022 Census, which have undergone minor changes since the 2011 Census. These are:

- the addition of the 'Pagan' category (which was included the recommended question in the previous version of this guidance)
- the addition of a write in option under the 'Muslim' checkbox
- the change in position of 'Hindu', from 9th to 6th

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 must be 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***. It is recommended the breakdown of the Christian category is used when asking this question in Scotland in order to facilitate more detailed analysis of this group.

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

Because there are several dimensions to religion, talking and reading about religion or specific religions without qualification can be confusing and lead to misinterpretation by data users. Therefore, if presenting data from the harmonised religion question it is important to be explicit and refer to the

specific 'concept' being measured i.e. religious belonging. It is also recommended that when presenting data on **religious belonging** it should be accompanied by a short note, such as:

Respondents were asked the question 'what religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?' which measures belonging – that is both loose self-identification and active or formal belonging to a religious group

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 the figures for that category should be suppressed and an explanation provided of why this has been done. Care should be taken to ensure that if only one figure is suppressed, that the figure can then not be calculated by simple subtraction from the totals displayed. Alternatively, 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 the 2011 Census showed that there were differences in the unemployment rates between Buddhists, Hindus

and Muslims⁹ and the latest figures from the Scottish Surveys Core Questions (SSQC 2019) shows differences in employment rates between Roman Catholics and members of the Church of Scotland.¹⁰ However such aggregations may sometimes be necessary in order to present any data. It is recommended that the term 'non-Christian' is not to be used as it is offensive to some people.

Comparing the 2022 census with the 2011 and 2001 censuses
It is possible to compare data from the new 2022 question with data from the 2011 and the 2001 Censuses, but it must be noted that Pagans will have recorded their religion in the 'Other' write in box for the Census. When comparing data from the new question with data from the 2011 and 2001 Census questions this should be noted as numbers under the 'Other' heading may be reduced as a result.

Alternative questions on religion

A religion question on affiliation was asked in the 2021, 2011 and 2001 Censuses of England and Wales. This is the recommended religion question and layout for use on a survey in Scotland when wanting to harmonise with the rest of GB and the UK, or if information on religious affiliation is required, the following question should be asked:

⁹ Census 2011 Equality results - [Census 2011 equality results: analysis, part two - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

¹⁰ [Scottish Surveys Core Questions 2019 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](http://www.gov.scot)

Question: What is your religion?

1. None
2. Church of Scotland
3. Roman Catholic
4. Other Christian, please write in
5. Muslim, write in denomination or school
6. Hindu
7. Buddhist
8. Sikh
9. Jewish
10. Pagan
11. Another religion or body, please write in
- 12 Refusal (spontaneous only)
13. Prefer not to say (non-interviewer led questionnaires only)

The recommended breakdown for Christian denominations for Scotland (like Northern Ireland) is different to that of England and Wales. This is in order to provide data on which to examine the differences between the main Christian groups. Consultation by the General Register Office for Scotland revealed limited user demand for questions on active practise, belief (including non-religious belief) and religion of upbringing for the 2022 and 2011 Census.¹¹

Intersectionality

An intersectional analysis gives an insight into how a combination of socio-demographic characteristics might relate to specific forms of disadvantage. For example, disadvantage for a minority ethnic, Christian woman may be different to a white, Christian man.

¹¹ Scotland's Census 2021 Religion Topic Report (NB the Census was intended for 2021 but was delayed until 2022 due to the COVID-19 pandemic) - [religion topic report.pdf \(scotlandscensus.gov.uk\)](https://www.scotlandscensus.gov.uk/religion-topic-report.pdf)

There is an increasing awareness that taking an intersectional approach to research, policy making and operational decisions is important. This is because intersectionality can give insight into the experiences of different groups in society, and how particular characteristics can combine to impact on an individual's experiences. However, there is not always disaggregated data available to support such an approach. This is likely to mean that the information on which important decisions are made is not fully representative of the population it is intending to measure.

For example, data on demographic characteristics may be collected by a public body, but not disaggregated in an intersectional way due to issues around sample size and risk of disclosing an individual's identity. In these cases, organisations should not risk disclosing information about an individual's age.

Where sample size and quality allows, data should be disaggregated, including by sex, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, age, disability, and sexual orientation, where combinations of these factors can result in discrimination, disadvantage and inequality. Being able to identify cases where combinations of factors are resulting in disadvantage enables policies to be developed and action taken to address these issues.

Contact us

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

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