

Convener
Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh, EH99 1SP

2 April 2020

Dear Convener,

I am writing to update you on a couple of practical developments being made to Scotland's Census Collection functionality.

The first matter is in relation to the predictive text being used in the Census. As discussed with the Committee, this approach to gather data is an important component of a digital first Census. It improves the respondent experience, data quality and efficiencies in coding and processing.

Following feedback from a range of stakeholders NRS has taken the decision not to have online type-ahead predictive list functionality for the 'Other' category of the sexual orientation question. The 'Other' category will now enable respondents to free type the response they wish to provide without any prompts. All other Census questions where NRS had proposed to use this functionality will continue.

The second matter is in relation to how the sex and transgender status/history questions are presented online. Early cognitive testing of these questions noted that it was important to see or be aware that the transgender status/history question would follow the sex question. Initial development of the online collection platform, which you received a demonstration of, reflected this evidence by having both questions appear on the same screen. This approach was taken forward for the Census rehearsal in October 2019.

However, usability testing was subsequently undertaken and the conclusion was that the questions should appear on separate screens. An important aspect of this was that the evaluation exercise of the census rehearsal recommended that automatic routing should be applied to the transgender status/history question to ensure that the data is not inadvertently captured for respondents aged under 16. Moving the transgender status/history question to its own screen immediately after the sex question is the most suitable solution.

A note will be added on the sex question screen to inform respondents that the transgender status/history will (for those aged 16 or over) be the next question. This approach ensures that respondents are aware of the transgender question that follows, which still follows the early cognitive testing advice, and delivers on the evidence gathered from the usability testing and Census Rehearsal.

I hope this update is helpful.

Yours sincerely

Peter Whitehouse

Director of Statistical Services
National Records of Scotland