



Joan McAlpine
Convenor, Culture, Tourism, Europe & External Affairs Committee
M5.12
Scottish Parliament

10th July 2019

Dear Joan McAlpine MSP & Convenor of abovenamed Committee,

Consideration of Sikh inclusion in Ethnicity Question for Census 2021

I write to the Culture, Tourism, Europe & External Affairs Committee on behalf of the Sikh community in Scotland in my capacity as Executive Director of national charity, **Sikhs in Scotland**.

Ahead of the Committee's evidence session with the National Records of Scotland (NRS), I have provided representations in this letter to extend the voice of the Sikh community to the Scottish Parliament.

We share the principle that information from the Census is used for resource allocation, to inform policy development and make service planning decisions. It is for this very reason, we are gravely disappointed that the NRS is *'not proposing to include a Sikh tick box under the ethnic group question in 2021,'* as stated in Paper 2¹. We are also disappointed that the NRS has not offered other alternatives to accommodate the Sikh community in Scotland ahead of the 2021 Census.

As a fundamental principle, it should be noted that the notion of being a Sikh is not solely rooted in religious faith. Sikhs are in fact, a legally recognised ethnic group and have been protected under UK Law since 1983 (Mandla vs Howell Lee case). As a result, NRS's recommendation as outlined above, blocks the chance for individuals to express their ethnic identity as Sikh. Without the Sikh tick-box, or a suitable alternative accommodation, Sikhs are forced by questionnaire design to identify under the broad umbrella of Asian (Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi) or tick Other to then self-identify as Sikh. Across the UK, a staggering 83,362 individuals identified as Sikh in the Other box under the Ethnic question, of which over 873 were from Scotland, in the 2011 Census.

Sikhs as a group have distinct needs and service requirements compared to "Indians/Pakistani/Bangladeshi", therefore service providers are not able to meet the needs of Sikhs, if they are unable to delineate the Sikh population from that of the broader Asian category. It is also our assertion that the needs of Sikhs will not be met by an organisation in the process of meeting the needs of Indians. Thus, by labelling Sikhs as Indian/Pakistani/Bangladeshi, a distorted picture of the ethnic composition is taken and fails to capture the nuance of the Sikh community's needs.

¹ Scotland's Census 2021, page 29: https://www.parliament.scot/S5_European/Meeting%20Papers/20190912PublicPapersPart2.pdf



It is our belief that by including a Sikh-tick box, or an alternative consideration in the ethnic question, similar to that of NRS's proposal to accommodate the Jewish community, will provide a more accurate depiction of the community and the composition of Scotland's ethnic makeup. In addition, it enables more targeted allocation of funding and investment to the appropriate provision of services. It allows the Sikh community and the network of Sikh Gurdwaras to provide more efficient and relevant services to the population, enabling improved advocacy and support services if we can better understand the population of ethnic Sikhs.

In modern-day Scotland, it is important to state here that Sikhs have been present in Scotland for over 100 years, before the existence even of Pakistan, India and Bangladesh. Therefore, how is the ethnic identity of diasporic Sikhs who are 3rd or 4th generation Scottish adequately represented and captured through the existing labels? We would maintain that these labels poorly serve to define the Sikh identity.

In closing, I would urge the Committee to consider the following:

1. The religion question is clearly marked as voluntary, whereas the ethnicity question is mandatory. Therefore, the ethnicity question must adapt to reflect the needs of Scotland's population and reflect the Sikh community's unique position as both an ethnic group and a religious group;
2. On page 23 of the NRS Report², the conclusions state that Sikh participants preferred multiple versions of the questionnaire, all of which featured a Sikh tick box. It goes on to say that a large number of participants indicated they would select a tick box for "Sikh, Sikh Scottish or Sikh British." However, it appears that because "other participants indicated that they would not select" this option, the tick box has been completely discounted from consideration, despite evidence suggesting a tick box, or alternative option, would enhance the inclusion of the Sikh population when collecting data;
3. On page 36 of the NRS Report³, it states that "*acceptable comparability at category level would be achieved with a Sikh tick box under the Asian category. Comparable category level data would otherwise be achievable by aggregating a Sikh tick box under "Other ethnic group" with the Asian category.*" Given this statement, why is this change not being implemented for the Census?

We are pleased to see the wider recommendations from the NRS which will better accommodate communities in Scotland including the Roma, showpeople and Jewish community. However, by missing this opportunity to operate a Census that meets the needs of our population, we will exclude the needs of Scottish Sikhs for decades to come. The Scottish Sikh community is a visible and active contributor to civic, cultural, social and economic life in Scotland. We want to be counted: will the Scottish Parliament count us in for the 2021 Census?

Yours Sincerely,

Charandeep Singh
Executive Director
Sikhs in Scotland

