

Census 2011:

FIS Response to ONS Consultation

Seán Hutton
Community Policy Officer
Federation of Irish Societies
52 Camden Square
London NW1 9XB

0207 424 7293
SHutton@irishsocieties.org

www.irishsocieties.org

August 2005

FIS RESPONSE TO ONS CENSUS 2011 CONSULTATION PAPER, *INITIAL VIEW ON CONTENT FOR ENGLAND AND WALES*

General: Since this will be largely a post-out/post-back census, (a) clarity of guidance on census paper is a paramount necessity; and (b) special arrangements should be made to reach certain sections of the population, e.g. homeless, those with literacy problems.

BACKGROUND

The basic reasons why the Irish communities need Irish data from the Census - and other sources - relate to the formation of policy and the promotion of equal opportunities in such key areas as health, education, housing, employment, industry and carers.

Data from previous censuses has provided valuable baseline data which has been used to highlight Irish inequalities and to advocate Irish needs both at a national and local level. The data we have used to do this, drawing on the 1991 and 2001 censuses, has covered the following areas:

- Health
- Education (including qualifications/lack of qualifications and access to training and re-training for employment¹)
- Housing
- Social Class Configuration
- Employment

In the same context, there was new data in the 2001 Census on

- Unpaid carers
- People in institutions, where, generally, the Irish had an elevated presence
- Distance travelled to work, which is important for transport planning

We are aware that ONS has always argued that space and the need to encourage completion of the questionnaire restrict the amount of information that can be gathered, and we are aware of the need for ONS to argue the business case for the cost of the of the Census. However, we feel that equal attention needs to be given to the necessity to collect data for which need has been established – both with regard to the new information which ONS believes to be necessary to address the undercount in the 2001 Census and other data required by local authorities and communities.

FIS welcomes the recognition that Census data is required for small population groups and/or at detailed geographical levels. It is a point which we made to the ONS during the consultation for Census 2001. At present such statistics are required by local authorities and the health sector to identify and meet the needs of their populations; they are needed by Irish organisations for advocacy purposes at local levels and to support local/targeted bids, particularly in the light of the government's emphasis on Neighbourhood Renewal.

FIS argues in addition that because of the wide 'invisibility' of Irish needs that Irish communities need the data as well for wider advocacy.

¹ Access to government training schemes was collected in 1991 but not in 2001.

NEEDS

The Irish community's overarching need from the Census is for data on Irish people in Britain (or England & Wales in the case of this consultation), in a form which is comparable with data for other ethnic groups. This is the context in which the Irish 'Country of Birth' data was presented following the 1991 Census. It is also the context in which the 'Irish' data, collected via the Ethnic Group Question, has been presented in the detailed Ethnic Tables from the 2001 Census.

However the collective data on Irish people in Britain is made up from data covering a number of Census areas or topics, which are summarised in the bulleted points above on p. 1. The general message we wish to convey to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) concerning these topics is that we need at least the same amount of detail on these areas as was available in the 1991 and 2001 Censuses.

We need this data down to detailed geographical levels, for reasons given above (p. 1-2).

In terms of supplementary output population bases which ONS proposes², we would require these for

- the institutional population, by type of institution
- households
- families.

In the context of the three categories under which the ONS document sets out its list of Census Topics:

Most of the topics from which the Irish data of disadvantage is derived are in category 1. One of these topics, 'Ethnicity and Identity' – a key topic for the Irish community – is dealt with separately below (pp. 5-6).

FIS's analysis and recommendations in the rest of this document will concentrate on three areas:

- the demoted topics of interest
- Some of the newly suggested topics
- Ethnicity and the Irish data

DEMOTED TOPICS OF INTEREST AND NEWLY SUGGESTED TOPICS

Number of vehicles: We support the continuing collection of this information. It is used as an indirect indicator of deprivation and has implications in relation to travel to work. The question asked elsewhere 'Transport used to travel to work' will not capture exactly the same data. The 1991 and 2001 Censuses have shown low levels of car ownership for Irish people.

Central heating / Bath/Shower and toilet access: ONS has argued here on the basis of the small proportions of the population affected by the lack of these amenities. But it is necessary at the same time for ONS to take into consideration whether the reduced incidence of these disadvantages affect any section of the community disproportionately. Our affiliated housing associations tell us that they consider this data significant for their advocacy purposes, so we recommend their retention. They also tell us that their experience makes it difficult for them to accept the Census statistics on 'Bath/shower and toilet access', which may mean that they are dealing with a client group disproportionately affected.

² *The 2001 Census: Initial view on Content for England and Wales*, p. 6.

In addition, for London at least, the current housing deprivation indicator (which at present includes the above factors) does indicate Irish relative deprivation³, and FIS believes that housing deprivation should continue to be measured, if not in its present form perhaps in the form of an *Additional quality of housing measure* on which stakeholders will be consulted in advance.

Qualification/training required for occupation: There is a continuing need from the Irish and other BME communities for the collection of this data. It should be collected either through the means used in 1991 and 2001 Censuses or through the proposed new topic *Completed stages of education* – provided that this latter is designed to capture those who have left education without appropriate qualifications. It is especially important for those BMEs whose communities are added to by inward migration that this particular data be collected through the Census as well as through data collected within the educational system. The 1991 and 2001 Censuses showed relatively high levels of Irish with no qualifications. While those Irish of middle age and older are most seriously affected, this data is still extremely important in relation to training and retraining for employment. It is also relevant to the government's concerns with increasing participation in the workforce and the necessity of extending working life.

Health status, Carer information: The three Health Status areas on which ONS is considering data collection - disability, long-term illness and level of general health - are extremely important for the Irish and other BME communities. The 1991 and 2001 Census identified high levels of limiting long-term injury, permanent sickness, and self-stated poor general health for Irish people.

Apart from those subjects listed, we do need better data on function-limiting disabilities in general within the Irish community. Here again, our housing association affiliates inform us that they require information on wheelchair use because of the increasing requirements to build mobility units.

This baseline data is necessary for advocacy, development of local research programmes to fill information gaps, and for planning of services.

The 2001 Census marked the first occasion on which data on Unpaid Carers was collected. The data demonstrated the high level of such activity within a range of BME communities, including the Irish who were among the providers of the highest amounts of such care. This information on unpaid carers is required in addition to the data on paid care. Data on both types is very important, and - given the age profile of the Irish population of Britain – will continue to be important for the development of care services generally and to support Unpaid Carers and those for whom they care.

Migration: The data which ONS proposes to collect under this topic heading is sufficient to provide a continuing decennial update on in-migration from both parts of Ireland. We welcome the proposal to continue to collect the Country of Birth data, which, among other things, has delivered very useful data about significant differentials within the Irish-born population in Britain.⁴

³ Some 23% of Irish households are deprived in the housing dimension, as opposed to only 18% of White British households. (E Howes, *2001 Census Profiles: The Irish in London* (GLA 2004), p 25).

⁴ Using the 1991 Country of Birth data, and disaggregating by Born in Northern Ireland and Born in the Republic of Ireland, David Owen demonstrated significant differences with regard to (a) regional settlement in Britain, (b) industrial and occupational structure, and (c) educational qualifications. When, in addition, he disaggregated by gender he was able to show the concentrated occupational profile of men born in the Republic of Ireland, along with their high unemployment rate (19.3% as opposed to 11%

There is a proposed question in category 3 - *Country(ies) of Parents' birth* – which, if adapted to include grandparents, would - with the Country of Birth and 'Irish' data - add valuable surrogate data opening the way to a fuller indication the size and composition of the ethnic Irish population of England and Wales.

ETHNICITY AND THE IRISH DATA

Background Information and Analysis

Up to the last census this Irish data was derived from that of Country of Birth (Republic of Ireland/Northern Ireland). In the 2001 census, an 'Irish' category was included in the Ethnic Group Question.

The GLA analysis of the 2001 Census for London makes clear the complex ethnic situation within households with an 'Irish' household reference person⁵

- in only 33% of such households did 'All household members have the same ethnic group'⁶
- in 23% of such households there were 'Different identities between the generations only', i.e. children were declaring a different ethnicity than their parents

However, it is important to understand that this latter phenomenon is also occurring in similar proportions among some of the 'Other...' and 'Mixed' households, and in lesser proportions among Black Caribbean (15%) and Black African (10%) households.

This ethnic complexity suggests that one of the best ways of collecting ethnic data is on a basis more akin to the US model, where

- people can tick or indicate ethnicity from a wider range of choices
- individuals can identify multiple ethnicities

By comparison, ONS's present Ethnic Group Question is quite straitjacketing, particularly with the addition of a set of 'Mixed' categories constructed on a black/white binary, which excludes the recording of the complexity of Irish or any other multiple non-Black ethnicity.

However the paper space required by such a system as that of the USA, plus the cost of analysis, and the dissimilarity with the Ethnic Group Question in the British Census, makes us pessimistic – however desirable such a change might be – that we will persuade you (ONS) to adopt such a system.

However, MORI research commissioned by the Mayor of London in connection with the Howe publication⁷, points to the fact that for London, at least, an ancestry approach to ethnicity elicited a much more satisfactory response among those of Irish ancestry.

Representation on Irish data in this consultation

In the context of the present format of the Ethnic Group Question we request the ONS to collect data on Irish people in England & Wales in a form which is

for Born in Ireland) (*Irish-born people in Great Britain: Settlement patterns and socio-economic circumstances* (1995).

⁵ E Howes, *2001 Census Profiles: The Irish in London* (GLA 2004), pp 16-19.

⁶ The figure for England and Wales is 25%. Howes, p. 18.

⁷ Letter of the Mayor of London, 26 July 2004, ref: census1, distributed in conjunction with E Howes, *2001 Census Profiles: The Irish in London* (GLA 2004)

comparable with data for other ethnic groups. In requesting this, we emphasise the following related points:

- that Country of Birth or Nationality data will not be a satisfactory substitute for data on the Irish population of Britain collected via an ethnic category
- that an emphasis on the ancestry aspect of ethnicity appears to encourage a better capturing of Irish data; and that this aspect should be emphasised in a rubric to the Ethnic Group Question
- that the present breakdown of, and use of data from, the White category masks the degree of White British advantage vis à vis Black and Minority Ethnic Groups
- that the present form of the Ethnic Group Question needs to be modified by a further break down in the White category to make it more inclusive of White minority ethnic groups (e.g. through inclusion of those of Arab, Greek and Turkish ancestries)
- that the fact that the composite 'Other White' category forms the largest minority category in England (2.66%) and London (8.29%) is also an indicator of the need for further disaggregation here
- that the aggravated situation of Irish Travellers in terms of so many indicators of disadvantage suggests that they should be recorded under a separate category
- that the 'Mixed' category needs to be modified to capture the complex ethnicities of Irish and other White groups

Additional note: The Ethnicity question set out in the GRO Scotland's *New and Modified Scottish Census Questions* (July 2005) (p. 8) is far superior to the forms of the Ethnic Group Question used in England and Wales in 1991 or 2001:

- it emphasises the element of descent
- it normalises ethnicity, as we requested in the English consultation for Census 2001, in that it recognises that this is something we all carry as part of our inheritance whether we belong to the British indigenous majorities or to minorities with ancestries originating inside or outside the British state
- it allows for a very much better capture of Mixed origins, whether the basis of this is ethnicity or 'race' or a mixture of both – something which we have been arguing for above
- there is a welcome inclusion of those Arab or Middle Eastern descent and we hope that the write-in facility under Other European descent will facilitate a better understanding for policy development of what is now hidden away in 'Other White'
- generally, it is flexible enough to be able to capture data which will enable a more mature and meaningful understanding of disadvantage, and of racialisation and its consequences in British society, to take place without this being intellectually limited by a rigid black/white binary
- we welcome the reason for the proposed changes in the proposed Scottish question "The 2001 question, which was a mixture of colour and nationality, is considered inappropriate", having been perplexed by the strained arguments resulting from this combination in the ONS's 2003 publication *Ethnic Group Statistics: A guide for the collection and classification of ethnicity data*
- we strongly recommend you will seriously consider the form of the proposed Scottish question when drawing up the your proposed Ethnic Group Question