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## 2021 Census: Topic Consultation for Northern Ireland

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## Introduction

The next census in Northern Ireland will be in 2021 and as part of the census consultation programme, NISRA organised three topic consultation events in October 2015. These events gave participants the chance to acquire further information, clarify queries and put their questions to experienced NISRA staff.

The purpose of the events was to:

- outline NISRA's initial view on topics
- explain how to respond to the consultation
- discuss how we will evaluate the responses.

NISRA would like to thank the 33 people who attended the three topic consultation events held in: Silverbirch Hotel, Omagh (6 October); Ramada Plaza Hotel, Belfast (8 October); and McAuley House, Belfast (5 November).

The slides used at the events are available on the NISRA website:

<http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/census/2021/planning/topic-consultation/presentation.pdf>

The purpose of this document is to summarise the questions raised by attendees at the events along with the Census Office responses and report how users responded to the event evaluation questions (see Annexes A and B).



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## Summary of questions, responses and comments

### **Silverbirch Hotel, Omagh (6 October 2015)**

#### **Q. How will a predominantly online Census improve quality?**

Increased use of routing, clarification messages, tick boxes and drop-down lists will enable more effective, in-built checking of responses, thus reducing the scope for respondent error / misinterpretation, enabling users to self-code and placing less reliance on hand-written responses.

#### **Q. Will an online Census not present difficulties for older people and those with limited internet access?**

We recognise a predominantly online Census may present difficulties for groups of people who are more likely to be 'digitally excluded', including older people, those living in rural areas, people with disabilities and those with lower incomes. With the assistance of the Digital Transformation Service (DTS), we will keep up to date with information about the extent of broadband usage among these groups and will investigate the optimum means of out-reach, such as workshops with Libraries NI, and testing alternative means of completion, which may include telephone or the use of handheld devices by field staff.

#### **Q. Will we create Smartphone apps for data collection?**

We recognise the changing technological environment and that an increasing proportion of internet access is 'on the go'. We plan to enable response across a range of platforms in 2021. While it's too early to say what these will be, it's highly likely these will cater for Smartphones and tablet devices. We will work with colleagues in the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and DTS to maximise this capacity.

#### **Q. Will the new council areas and District Electoral Areas (DEAs) be more widely reported on in the 2021 Census? Why are such outputs not available from the 2011 Census?**

Just as the focus of the 2011 Census outputs has been on the electoral boundaries in place on Census Day, the 2021 Census will report on whatever local government geography is in place at that time. While we have already published 2011 Census Key Statistics for the new Local Government Districts (LGDs), we appreciate that members of the new councils require statistics to be reported on the new 2014 DEAs they represent.

The protection of the confidentiality of respondents is a primary objective of the Census. Statistics for particularly small geographic areas or population groups will not be published if they involve an unacceptably high risk of disclosure of personal information. Although technically we could produce 2011 Census outputs for the exact boundaries of the new 2014 DEAs, we have concerns



about statistical disclosure and the possibility that information about individuals or their households could be discoverable through differencing as a result. In part related to a proposed review of spatial deprivation measures, NISRA is giving consideration to the optimum means of producing further 2011 Census outputs, possibly based on an approximation of the new 2014 DEAs.

**Q. Will all of the ‘collect’ topics definitely be on the next Census?**

Not necessarily. Please don't assume that, simply because it is our initial view, a topic will be collected on the Census. It is particularly important to gather sufficient information on how users are utilising the topics introduced in 2011 to form a sense of how useful these questions have been to date, for example, while we know the media have been interested in the national identity outputs, how valuable have these been to users generally?

**Q. Are you restricting responses to Northern Ireland?**

We welcome responses from anyone who uses Northern Ireland Census data.

**Q. Where can I find the topic consultation document and Citizen Space?**

Links to both the topic consultation document and Citizen Space are available through the NISRA 2021 Census webpages: <http://www.nisra.gov.uk/census/2021/planning/consultation.html>, as well as DFP Consultation Zone: <https://www.dfpni.gov.uk/consultations/2021-census-topic-consultation>, NI Direct: <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/have-your-say-current-consultations> and the email invitation you received for this event.

**Q. Can the response options on Citizen Space be amended to include additional geographies?**

Although the main focus of Question 3 on Citizen Space is on the use of the geographies for which 2011 Census outputs have been produced, it contains an ‘other’ option should users wish to mention their current or intended use of additional geographies. There is also space to provide this information in question 2c, if relevant, and in the Additional Information section at the end of the questionnaire. We would encourage users to tell us about their current and intended uses as this will feed into the analysis and ultimately provide us with information for planning the 2021 Census.



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## **Comments**

### **1. Use of Second Residence**

- This topic would be useful for planning in areas which are holiday locations, for example, Portstewart. It can be difficult to gather accurate data on whether dwellings are main homes or holidays homes, and the Census might be able to provide this information in the future.

### **2. Income**

- It is difficult to acquire accurate data on income, and secondary sources of this information are very expensive.

Census response – Income is a difficult topic to ask about, and it is not likely to be included in the 2021 Census, largely due to design constraints and data quality issues. Our long-term aim is to have access to robust administrative data on income, drawn on a regular basis. Accordingly, we are in discussions with potential sources, for example, HMRC.

### **3. Cross-border travel data**

- How were the Travel to Work and Study outputs developed for the NISRA / Central Statistics Office (CSO) publication, '2011 Census: Ireland and Northern Ireland'?

Census response – The NISRA / CSO publication included maps of locations where Northern Ireland residents work or study in the Republic and vice versa. In order to produce these maps, NISRA and CSO simply generated and mapped relevant lists of addresses.



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**Ramada Plaza Hotel, Belfast (8 October 2015)**

**Q. Will changes be made to low level geographies going forward to the 2021 Census?**

In light of the recent revisions to the LGDs and electoral wards, NISRA is giving consideration to geography issues with a view to producing a related consultation paper. This paper will aim to address issues surrounding continuity of geographies over time and will consider options, such as using existing low level geographies to approximate to new wards or creating new Small Area and Super Output Area geographies to form a hierarchical structure around the new LGDs and wards. Additionally, given that a review of spatial deprivation measures will be undertaken soon, the paper will consider the levels of geography for which the new measures may be reported.

**Q. Since most geographical boundaries are subject to alteration, the Census outputs tend not to be reported on consistent geographies over time. Given their fixed boundaries, has consideration been given to the production of outputs at the townland geography?**

To ensure their relevance to the decision-making process, we report Census outputs across the main administrative and statistical geographic hierarchies in use at the relevant time period. As geographies change over time, it is inevitable that some are no longer appropriate for use or indeed relevant from one census to the next. Documentation is available to explain changes from previous Censuses and enable users to find best fit comparisons for longitudinal analysis.

Although 2011 Census outputs have not been produced for townlands, and it is not planned to include townland as an output geography for the 2021 Census, should a need be demonstrated for such outputs, Census Office would consider this. 2011 Census outputs on townlands could be requested through Census Customer Services. Such a request would be subject to consideration of the risk of disclosure through differencing that may result from using an alternative geography and may attract a financial charge. It is noted that the local government boundaries commissioner has a duty to align local government boundaries to townland boundaries as much as possible.

**Q. What is the time frame for formal engagement with the public sector to gain access to administrative data that may be of use in the Census?**

Census Office has already started this process. For example, our Data Integration and Linkage (DIAL) team has worked with Land and Property Service to augment the Pointer dataset, has identified potential administrative sources that could inform the next Census and is investigating how to gain access to the data. In addition, legislation has been passed to permit Census Office to have access to Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data on students (a traditionally hard to enumerate group of the population). On an ongoing basis, Census Office will be engaging with other public sector bodies to promote more sharing of data. Through this consultation,



Census Office is asking respondents to identify other potential sources of administrative data they know of, or indeed work with, that may augment the census.

**Q. How will the use of administrative data sources be managed and how will they be associated to the Census? What are the implications for access to such records when they are opened to the public in 100 years' time?**

Pertinent access legislation will have to be in place at the time of the Census to enable an administrative data source to be used with the Census. The intention is that any administrative data source used to inform / augment the Census will be reported as a Census response. Issues such as whether the information is likely to be considered sensitive in the event of a future release of Census records and whether or not the quality of the data is sufficient will have to be determined before the 2021 Census. Users should note, as Northern Ireland Census records are permanently closed, the 100 year closure rule does not apply here.

**Q. Is there potential to collect more detailed information about type of long-term condition, for instance, whether it has existed since birth or has developed over time? Can further conditions, such as dementia, be added to the list of response options?**

*[This question was asked in the context of the first-time inclusion in the 2011 Northern Ireland Census of a question about long-term conditions, and the fact that it is now known that some 30,000 people have a long-term communication difficulty.]*

Should a need be demonstrated for more detailed information on long-term condition, this could be considered. The number of conditions that can be catered for in a question on a paper questionnaire is limited. It is envisaged that an online question should permit a larger drop down list than a paper questionnaire; the technical aspects of this will be considered further when this consultation is complete and as questions are developed thereafter. Census Office is willing to work with relevant agencies to explore how using the returns from censuses may be used to initiate further research in these areas. The Northern Ireland Longitudinal Study (NILS) is a source that should be explored by users who wish to undertake specific analysis; we are aware that NILS researchers are already using the long-term condition variables to generate health predictors.

**Q. In light of recent increases in inward migration, is consideration being given to expanding the Ethnicity, Identity, Language and Religion (EILR) question response categories?**

It is recognised that changes in migration patterns have led to an increase in the number of usual residents born outside Northern Ireland, notably those from the EU Accession countries, Portugal, India and Southeast Asia, and that this has resulted in an increased focus on the needs of new



minority groups, including those identifying as having a White ethnicity or a non-Christian religion. Users are reminded that, as the 2011 Census also provides outputs on country of birth, passports held and national identity, there are other ways in which they can define their own population / minority groups through cross-tabulations of variables. In addition, detailed breakdowns of main language and religion are provided in the standard Census outputs, although this may be limited to higher geographical areas given the small figures for lower geographies.

It is appreciated that the 2021 Census is likely to enumerate the locally born families of people who have settled in Northern Ireland. Accordingly, should sufficient need be demonstrated, consideration could be given to expanding the ethnicity categories. The online version of the 2021 Census questionnaire, in particular, could provide the potential for additional response options to be made available for EILR questions; although, given the large numbers of potential combinations, the ability to cover all of these in a multiple response question such as national identity is always going to be difficult.

**Q. Given the current interest in ‘zero hours’ contracts, will a question be asked about type of work contract in the 2021 Census?**

While the Labour Force Survey (LFS) may be a more suitable collection vehicle for such information, the suitability of such a topic for the 2021 Census could be considered further on the foot of this consultation.

**Q. How can an organisation coordinate its responses on Citizen Space?**

An organisation can appoint an administrator, who can set up the response and submit it using Citizen Space. In such a case, the administrator will be provided with a link, which they should email out to all contributing colleagues to build the response. How this works in practice is up to the organisation to decide, and can depend, for instance, on whether different areas within an organisation are interested in the same or different topics. Detailed guidance on how to complete a questionnaire on behalf of an organisation is available on both Citizen Space:

<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/department-of-finance-and-personnel/2021-census-topic-consultation-ni> and the NISRA 2021 Census consultation webpage:

<http://www.nisra.gov.uk/archive/census/2021/planning/topic-consultation/guidance-for-organisations-with-multiple-respondents.pdf>. Help is also available through the Census Customer Services team.



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**Q. When completing the questionnaire, do you need to respond to all topics?**

Users are advised to complete a response for every Census topic they have used or wish to use. It should not be assumed that certain topics will automatically be included. The more information users provide about their use or intended use of a topic, the greater the weight of evidence in relation to that topic when considering its potential inclusion in the 2021 Census.

**Q. When will NISRA publish the results of the topic consultation?**

We intend to publish a 'You Said' report on the responses to the consultation in early 2016, followed by a full assessment report in spring 2016. The results of the topic consultation will be used to inform the inclusion of topics and the development of questions, although the final content of the questionnaire will not be finalised for a few years yet. Users will be kept informed of progress.



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**McAuley House, Belfast (5 November 2015)**

**Q. How does the Census enumerate people who are homeless?**

In the lead up to a census, Census Office engages proactively with a wide range of groups that support homeless people, including, among others, Northern Ireland Council for the Homeless, Salvation Army and Simon Community. This helps identify where homeless people might be on Census night. The majority of homeless people are included in the Census through the enumeration of communal establishments, such as hostels and night shelters, as it is accepted that many of these people stay in accommodation of this nature during the night. Communal establishments are enumerated under a separate field strategy, and often those who work in these establishments are best placed to provide information on the people that use their services. It is accepted, however, that some homeless people will be missed on Census night.

**Q. What is the target for online completion?**

A target has not yet been set for online completion, although we hope most people will select this option. Many factors need to be considered, for example, potential different forms of online response, and varying levels of internet access and utility across demographic groups and geographical areas.

**Q. Is there potential to expand the remit of specific questions, for instance, those on travel to work and place of study, which currently exclude, for instance, travel during the day by older people who may be dependent on public transport?**

Although it is not yet the time for making decision on the inclusion of specific questions and how they are to be worded, the consultation does provide an opportunity for respondents to add suggestions or comments to topics of interest. Should a user need be demonstrated, consideration could be given to expanding the remit of specific questions.



**Annex A – 2021 Census: Topic Consultation Event Evaluation Form**

Your comments are extremely valuable in helping us to ensure that the standard of our Consultation Event is maintained from our users’ perspective. Therefore, we would greatly appreciate it if you would take a few minutes to complete this form.

Name: (optional) .....

Organisation: (optional) .....

Consultation Event attended (please circle):    Omagh    /    Belfast

**Please rate the following aspects of the Event on a scale of 1 – 5**

**1 = Very Poor      2 = Poor      3 = Average      4 = Good      5 = Excellent**

<b>(1)</b> Location	1	2	3	4	5
<b>(2)</b> Quality of Food / Refreshments	1	2	3	4	5
<b>(3)</b> Relevance / Usefulness of Consultation Event	1	2	3	4	5
<b>(4)</b> Quality of Presentations	1	2	3	4	5
<b>(5)</b> Quality of Audio-visual Equipment	1	2	3	4	5
<b><i>Relevance of content in Agenda item:</i></b>					
<b>(6)</b> Overview of event and aims	1	2	3	4	5
<b>(7)</b> Topics and our initial views	1	2	3	4	5
<b>(8)</b> Responding to the consultation	1	2	3	4	5
<b>(9)</b> Response evaluation	1	2	3	4	5
<b>(10)</b> Discussion / Q and A	1	2	3	4	5
<b>(11)</b> Overall Rating of the Consultation Event	1	2	3	4	5

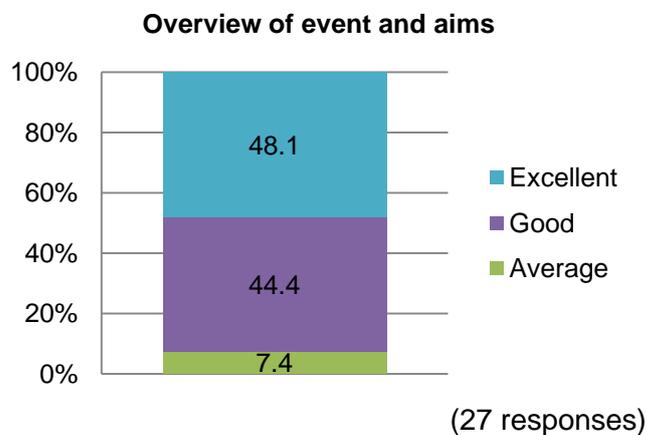
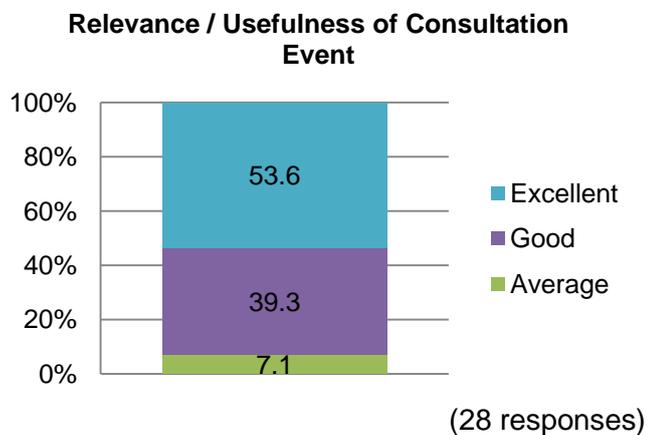
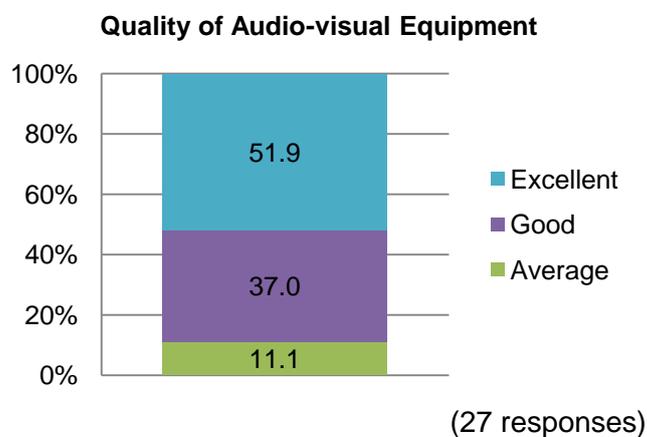
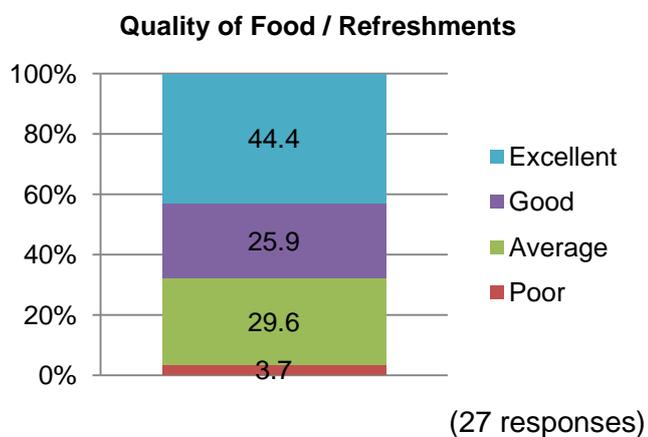
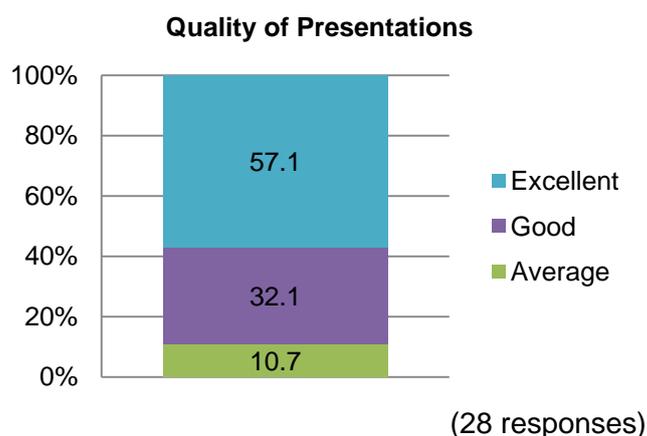
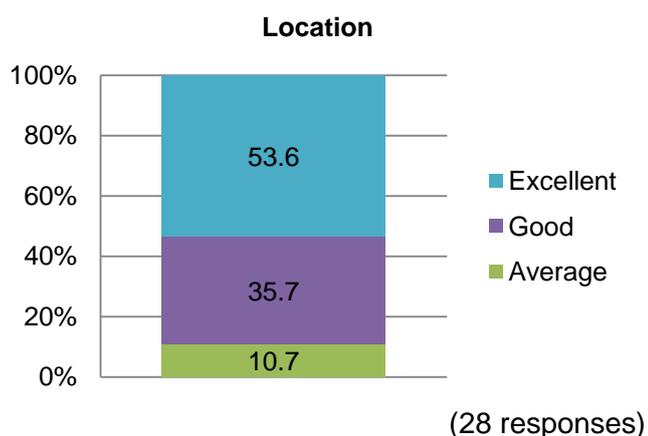
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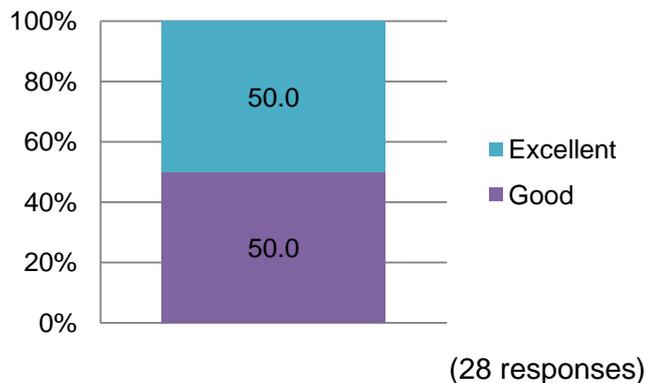
## Annex B – Topic Consultation Event Evaluation Results

We received 28 Topic Consultation Event Evaluation Forms from attendees in Omagh and both Belfast events. Due to the relatively small numbers involved, the results for the three events (which were broadly comparable) have been reported on a combined basis.

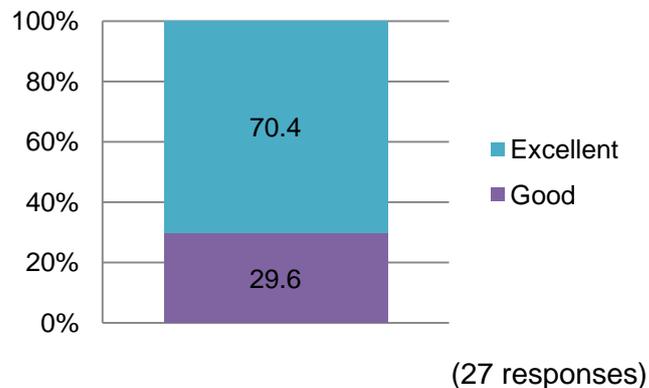




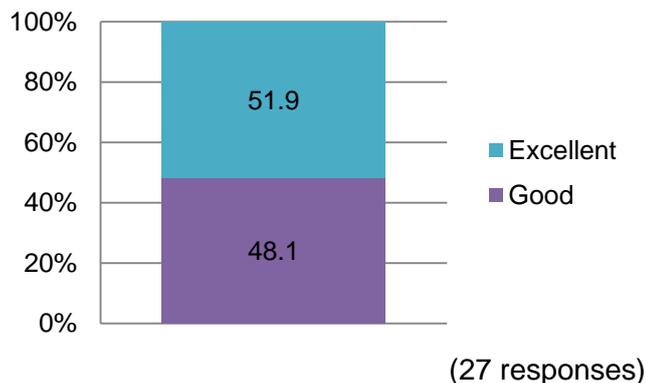
**Topics and our initial views**



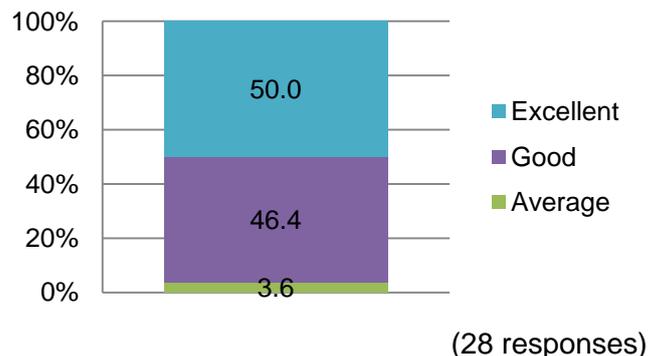
**Discussion / Q and A**



**Responding to the consultation**



**Overall Rating of the Consultation Event**



**Response evaluation**

