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Data and analysis from Census 2021

## National identity question in the 2021 Census

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Release date:

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### You asked

On the national identity question in the 2021 Census, the response option "British" has been moved to the top of the response options on the questionnaire in England only. In the previous census "English" was at the top of the response options.

I would like to know why this was only done in England, on whose recommendation this change was made and if any (and which) politicians were involved in this decision.

Please provide any relevant communication on the matter.

Additionally, I would like to know why the options of "Black English" and "Asian English" were not added to the high-level ethnic group category description. "Black Welsh" and "Asian Welsh" were added to the Welsh Census.

Was there any discussion about whether the English Census should mirror the Welsh model?

If there was, please provide any relevant communication on this matter.

## We said

Thank you for your enquiry about the national identity and ethnic group questions on the Census 2021 for England and Wales.

Review and development of the questions for Census 2021 was informed by a [topic consultation](#) that was open to the public, engagement with stakeholders, and extensive research and testing. The [Ethnic group, national identity, religion and language](#) section on the Office for National Statistics (ONS) website provides detailed information on the development and testing towards meeting user need for information on ethnic group and national identity (as well as religion and language). You may be particularly interested in the most recent research report: [National identity, ethnic group, language and religion question development report for Census 2021](#).

For the Census 2021 questionnaire in England, the response option 'British' has been moved to the top of the national identity question. As set out in the question development report linked above, this change was made to make it easier for people to respond to the question. This decision was made by the Deputy National Statistician with responsibility for the census, following a review of existing evidence on response option ordering for this question. Please see the accompanying PDF download named '[NI response ordering v1 Redacted](#)' summarising testing on response option ordering. It was concluded that there was not sufficient evidence for a similar change to be recommended in Wales.

You also asked about the wording of the high-level response options for the ethnic group question. Following the topic consultation, the ONS ran an Ethnic Group Stakeholder Follow-Up Survey, which provided evidence that helped the ONS evaluate the strength of user need for the data, the comparability of data over time, and the public acceptability of terminology being used in this question. Findings are detailed in the publications [2021 Census: Ethnic Group Stakeholder Follow-up Survey - Summary of responses](#).

Through the consultation and subsequent ethnic group stakeholder follow-up survey in 2016/2017, we received [55 requests for additional ethnic group tick-boxes](#). Requests were evaluated against the strength for user need. The [ethnic group tick-box prioritisation report for Census 2021 in England and Wales](#) outlines the assessment to determine the most appropriate response options for the ethnic group question. Neither 'Black English' nor 'Asian English' were suggested as additions to the high-level ethnic group descriptions or requested as tick boxes as part of this process.

As set out in section 3.5 of our December 2017 [2021 Census topic research publication](#), we conducted public acceptability research to assess the public's opinion on the acceptability of the terms used in the 2011 Census, which found that the majority of the sample was comfortable with the higher level categories and lower level terms tested.

Overall, testing of the ethnic group question for Census 2021 found that the high-level descriptions, as they were for Census 2011, continued to work well in England. An individual wishing to identify as 'Black English' or 'Asian English' in response to the ethnic group question could provide this as an answer in the write-in boxes, supported online by the new search-as-you-type functionality.

There were, as you note, changes to the high-level descriptions in the ethnic group question on the questionnaires in Wales. In response to requests from stakeholders in Wales, the ONS reviewed the wording of the ethnicity question in the questionnaires in Wales. Following this review, including the testing of options and taking account of other evidence and research, the ONS recommended that the questionnaire in Wales includes the terms 'Asian Welsh' and 'Black Welsh' in the high-level descriptions, alongside 'Asian British' and 'Black British' in the ethnic group question.

As noted above, our work on this question did not provide evidence of a need for similar changes in the questionnaire in England. Therefore, changes mirroring those proposed in Wales were not specifically tested.

## Download associated with request

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NI response ordering v1\_Redacted (428.9 kB pdf)

## Making an FOI request

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