



Information paper

The 2011 Census: Assessment of initial user requirements on content for England and Wales

-Qualifications

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1. Summary

In May 2005 ONS published a consultation document 'The 2011 Census: Initial view on content for England and Wales'. Responses were received from nearly 500 users, presenting arguments for the inclusion of around 70 topics (over 2,000 'topic responses').

Each topic was evaluated using the criteria detailed in the consultation document and a scoring system based on the criteria was used to rank the topics according to the strength of user requirement.

This paper provides a summary of the user requirements, and the score given, for the following topic:

- Academic and vocational qualifications

2. Academic and vocational qualifications: Total score = 85

2.1 Introduction

The ONS consultation document published in May 2005 identified concerns with the quality of qualifications data collected in 2001. The topics of academic and professional qualifications were both placed in category 3 which meant that at that time ONS believed there was insufficient evidence of user demand to justify inclusion of the topics in the 2011 Census. A range of alternatives were proposed which included qualifications/training required for occupation and completed stages of education.

Over 90 responses were received commenting on the subject of qualifications from a variety of central government, local authority and other data users. Upon reviewing the consultation responses it is clear that the main user requirement is to collect information on academic and vocational qualifications in order to determine highest level of qualification held. There was some support for the other proposed alternatives, but little demand for professional qualifications.

2.2 User Need: Score= 10

A wide range of potential uses of information on qualifications have been identified from across the user community.

There is a strong central government requirement to collect information on qualifications to inform decisions on resource allocation and provision of services. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) use data on qualifications as an indicator in the allocation of spending share for personal social services for children and the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) make the case that qualifications data are used to focus resources at a local and regional level. DfES state, *"we aim to help people develop the skills they need for employment and personal fulfilment. We have to prioritise public funds where they will make most difference"*. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) also state that the information may be used to target resources at areas or groups needing particular types of support. At a local government level there is also a strong user need to collect information on qualifications to aid service planning and resource allocation. Users require the data as evidence for funding for neighbourhood renewal schemes, educational, training and workforce initiatives and for improved planning, providing and monitoring of education services.

Central government, local government and other data users also require qualifications data for evidence based policy making, especially in relation to disadvantaged population groups, educationally deprived areas and promoting

equal opportunity. Local government use the data for labour market planning, to inform council strategies and to report on government targets relating to raising attainment.

There is a strong central and local government interest in areas of educational deprivation, and improving the opportunities in areas where people have either no or very low qualifications. DfES state that qualifications data are used in the indices of deprivation and a number of local government users require the data to identify pockets of educational deprivation with an aim to narrow the gap between deprived and less deprived areas. Local government users also have an interest in higher level qualifications and looking at highly qualified areas with the capacity for further economic development.

DfES and other respondents mention the use of qualifications data to help code some occupations in the Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) which is used to derive the National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (NS-SEC).

2.3 Small Geographies and Populations: Score= 8

Users identified a clear need to collect information on qualifications at a detailed level of geography. ODPM state that, "*interventions are often made at the relatively local level and regional and sub-regional splits are valuable for targeting*". Local government users require data down to Ward and Super Output Area level to identify pockets of educational deprivation and compare local areas.

2.4 Alternative Sources: Score = 7

A large proportion of users were unable to identify an alternative source of qualifications data for local areas. ODPM state that, "*there are either no alternative sources for the data at a national basis or no alternative reliable sources for all authorities. Therefore, we would have to continue to use information from the 2001 Census in our formula post 2011*".

Of those users that could provide an alternative, the major alternative source identified is the Labour Force Survey (LFS). However, this survey cannot provide the small area data that is required, and it needs to be benchmarked by the Census. DfES also state that the LFS undercounts the contribution from those holding higher level foreign qualifications.

Other suggestions include the Annual Population Survey (APS) and the proposed Integrated Household Survey (IHS). However, the IHS is not yet fully developed so it is unclear what will be delivered through this survey.

Generally, it was agreed that the Census is the only source of data that allows multivariate analysis at a small area level. The alternative sources available would not be able to fully meet the user needs.

2.5 Multivariate Analysis: Score = 5

Information on qualifications would be analysed with a range of other Census variables including age, gender and ethnicity. Users were also interested in multivariate analysis with labour market variables such as occupation, industry and economic activity to look at the link between qualifications and employment.

2.6 UK Comparability: Score = 7

Although the major uses of this data would be at a local level, a large number of users who responded to the consultation require data for the whole of the UK to inform national policy and to assess the needs for national initiatives such as neighbourhood renewal funding consistently. Detailed information is required on a consistent basis from local to national level so that local areas can be compared

with other areas and national averages. DFES state that there is international interest in qualifications data at a UK level.

2.7 Continuity: Score = 8

A question on qualifications has appeared on the Census since 1961, however there has been some variation in the information collected in each Census.

2.8 Conclusion

The consultation responses identified a strong user requirement for the collection of data on academic and vocational qualifications from a variety of respondents. The main uses of the data include central and local government resource allocation, service provision and policy development and monitoring.

The majority of users requested that data should be available at small levels of geography, ideally down to Super Output Area level. The Labour Force Survey was the main alternative source that was identified; however this source would not fully meet user requirements. A case was made for using qualifications data for multivariate analysis and the majority of users require data for the whole of the UK for consistency and comparability reasons. A question on qualifications has appeared on the Census for a number of years, although there has been some variation in the information collected.

The score that this topic receives currently moves it to category 1 which means there is now a clear case for inclusion of this topic in the 2011 Census. However, this is still dependent on whether or not a workable question can be devised.