

Mr Jamie Greene MSP
M2.20
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

22 May 2019

Dear Mr Greene

The Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs has asked me to write to you, following Stage 2 of the Census (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill.

As you are aware, in my capacity as Registrar General for Scotland, I am responsible for the taking of Scotland's Census and for the subsequent production of statistics.

Can I thank you for your support for the Census (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill at stage 2. You had originally moved two amendments at Stage 2, which you subsequently agreed to withdraw, following discussions. As part of this you were advised that I would write to you to provide formal reassurance that the matters you raised were being addressed by NRS. I trust that the following information will be of assistance.

Your first amendment related to guidance which will be issued by me, in my role as Registrar General. In this you sought reassurance that this guidance would make it explicitly clear to respondents those census questions which are voluntary in nature. This clarity is something that NRS takes very seriously and we have been developing plans to ensure this is achieved.

I can confirm our intention to provide clear information on the voluntary questions which will be included within the supporting guidance, which we will prepare. In doing so it will also be stated that non-completion of voluntary questions will not result in the penalties that exist for non-compliance in respect of mandatory questions.

This important information will also be communicated through other routes in addition to our guidance. I can confirm that we also intend to provide a clear message to this effect, which will be included on the covering page of the census questionnaire itself. I can further advise that we will also include information within the body of the relevant questions, to indicate those that are voluntary. For your information I have attached the proposed layout for the draft questions on sexual orientation and transgender status and history as examples to illustrate this approach (Annex A). This mirrors the approach that was taken with the voluntary question on religion in the 2011 Census, which was found to work well.

We believe that the steps planned will provide helpful clarity to respondents both through our guidance and within the Census questionnaire itself. I hope this reassures you that NRS are developing robust plans to ensure that there is clear messaging about the voluntary nature of these questions.

The second amendment you moved was in relation to requiring Scottish Ministers to prepare a report that considers the implications of the changes to the Census, arising out of the Census (Amendment) (Scotland) Act. I agree that an evaluation of these important changes is appropriate. As you will be aware, I have a duty under section 4(1) of the Census Act 1920 to prepare reports on the Census returns and to lay these before the Scottish Parliament. I will therefore ensure that in my report for the 2021 Census that this will include the new questions being asked. This would cover not just the new voluntary questions associated with the Census Bill, but also all new questions planned, including matters such as, the use of British Sign Language, passports held, a veterans question and one relating to the number of bedrooms (replacing a previous question on the number of rooms).

Experience from previous Censuses shows that the production of high quality data and statistics covering Scotland does take time. Responses both online and on paper, require to be captured and coded. Follow up action is also required where responses are not provided. The data is then checked for completeness and consistency. Finally, we apply rigorous statistical disclosure controls to the data in order to ensure that we protect the confidentiality of the data.

National Records of Scotland will produce a schedule for the release of results in phases. This pre-announced approach to publication is a key principle of the Code of Practice on Official Statistics. We have already announced our intention to publish the first set of estimates from the 2021 Census within a year of census day. That first set of results will be population and household totals at local authority level broken down by age bands and sex. Over the course of the two years following that, National Records of Scotland intends to publish all remaining outputs. It is intended that publication of statistics on the new questions will happen during 2023, along with associated information on the quality of that data.

I trust this letter is helpful in addressing the matters that you raised at Stage 2. If you have any further queries in relation to these points please do not hesitate to contact me.

I have copied this letter to Joan McAlpine MSP, Convener of the Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee and to Fiona Hyslop MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Culture, Tourism and External Affairs.

Yours sincerely



PAUL LOWE
Chief Executive

Email: rg-keeper@nrscotland.gov.uk

ANNEX A

CURRENT LAYOUT OF QUESTIONS ON TRANSGENDER STATUS AND HISTORY AND ON SEXUAL ORIENTATION

4 Do you consider yourself to be trans, or have a trans history?

- ◆ This question is voluntary
- ◆ Answer only if you are aged 16 or over
- ◆ Trans is a term used to describe people whose gender is not the same as the sex they were assigned at birth
- ◆ Tick **one** box only

- No
- Yes, please describe your trans status (for example, non-binary, trans man, trans woman):

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

8 Which of the following best describes your sexual orientation?

- ◆ This question is voluntary
- ◆ Answer only if you are aged 16 or over
- ◆ Tick **one** box only

- Straight / Heterosexual
- Gay or Lesbian
- Bisexual
- Other sexual orientation, please write in:

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--