



Census 2031 Topic Consultation Response Summary

This summary accompanies the detailed submission from the Market Research Society (MRS) and the MRS Census & GeoDems Group to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Census 2031 Topic Consultation for England and Wales. It highlights the key issues of importance to the market, opinion and social research sector, and the wider data, media, advertising and public policy ecosystem that were communicated via the ONS consultation questionnaire.

Importance of Social Grade and Approximated Social Grade

Social Grade (SG) is a foundational classification used extensively across market, opinion and social research, marketing, advertising, media measurement and related sectors. It provides a clear socio-economic hierarchy, from professionals through to households living on state benefits only, and is applied to every household based on the circumstances of the Chief Income Earner. Social Grade is a powerful discriminator for understanding consumer behaviour, media consumption, and market segmentation.

For methodological reasons, the Census cannot directly measure Social Grade. Since the 2001 Census, an Approximated Social Grade (ASG) has therefore been derived using an algorithm developed by members of the MRS Census & GeoDems Group. This approach has been consistently applied and refined for the 2001, 2011 and 2021 Censuses. As a result, ASG is now a well established and essential census output.

The continued production of ASG in 2031 depends on the preservation of a specific set of census variables. These are Standard Occupational Classification, employment status, qualifications, tenure, working status, ethnicity, car ownership, household size and gender. Any further loss of these variables would make the development of ASG unviable.

ASG underpins a wide range of critical uses. Media measurement currencies such as BARB, RAJAR, PAMCo and Route rely on Social Grade to evaluate audience reach and campaign effectiveness. In marketing and advertising, Social Grade defines target markets, supports market sizing and enables geographic targeting. Retailers use ASG to predict store performance and inform site location decisions. Local authorities use it to understand the socio-economic profile of their areas and to support inward investment. In opinion polling, ASG is essential for modelling and predicting outcomes at small area level, including electoral wards. Loss of Social Grade would have significant negative impacts across all these areas.



LSOA Communal and Household Population Data

As a member of JICPOPS, MRS supports the continued provision of Lower Super Output Area communal and household population data by age and sex. These data, together with household composition, are essential inputs to the JICPOPS production process, which generates annual updated population estimates at postcode sector level for both private household residents and those in communal establishments.

These data are used by JICPOPS member media currencies to set reporting targets and to control and weight their surveys. They are critical for panel control, weighting by household composition, setting universe estimates, and grossing survey results to population level. Without these census outputs, the robustness and comparability of audience measurement would be undermined.

Household Deprivation

Household deprivation, distinct from indices of multiple deprivation, is an important variable for the research industry. It was included in the 2021 Census and is the only deprivation measure that is comparable across Great Britain, with Scotland publishing equivalent data. Its inclusion in the 2031 Census is therefore vital for maintaining comparability and for understanding socio-economic conditions at household level.

Continuity with Previous Census Outputs

Continuity with previous census outputs is essential for the market, opinion and social research sector. Long term consistency enables robust trend analysis and ensures that research outputs remain comparable, relevant and accurate over time. Significant breaks in series or loss of established variables reduce the value of the Census for both commercial and public policy uses.

Consistency Across the Four Nations

Most research clients require Great Britain or UK level data. Compatibility between census outputs for England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is therefore crucial. MRS strongly encourages ONS to work closely with National Records of Scotland and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency to align census topics, questions and response categories as far as possible.



Equality, Identity and Inclusion Data

The research sector relies heavily on data relating to ethnic group, national identity, religion, gender identity and sexual orientation. These variables are essential for ensuring that research samples reflect the diversity of the population, and for enabling inclusive research that supports better commercial, social and policy outcomes.

Demography and Migration

Core demographic and migration data are used extensively for research, resource allocation, service planning and policy development. High quality granular population data are vital for understanding population change and supporting informed decision making across both the public and private sectors.

Health, Disability and Unpaid Care

Data on health, disability, and unpaid care are essential for understanding deprivation and for ensuring that research accurately represents the experiences and needs of these populations. Visibility of these groups in census data supports evidence-based decision making and more effective policy and service design.

Conclusion

The Census remains a critical national infrastructure dataset for the market, opinion and social research sector and many others. Preserving key variables, ensuring continuity with previous censuses and maintaining consistency across the UK will maximise the value of the 2031 Census for business, public services and society as a whole.