



HOUSE OF COMMONS

Sir David Norgrove
Chair UK Statistics Authority LONDON SW1A 0AA
1 Drummond Gate
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27 February 2018

Dear Sir David,

'Main language' question in 2021 National Census

Preparations are underway to finalise the questionnaire for the upcoming national Census in 2021.

The last national Census of 2011 was the first census to contain a question about language.

In Manchester, 16.6% of residents declared a 'main language' other than English – twice the national average. In my own constituency of Manchester-Gorton, 22.7% declared a language other than English as their 'main language' – almost three times the national average.

The inclusion of a question on language acknowledged for the first time the country's language diversity. This gave the government and the public an opportunity to assess language needs, to take an inventory of valuable language skills, and to gain a better understanding of a key element of the country's cultural fabric.

Researchers at the University of Manchester's Multilingual Manchester Research Unit have been critical about the wording of the question. The question 'What is your main language?' prompts a response that is subjective, since different people have different understandings of 'main language'. Many respondents under-report their use of languages other than English.

Will the Office of National Statistics be consulting on this question ahead of the 2021 census? Would you invite a groups of experts on Britain's language diversity to put forward their suggestions, and to consider amending the question on languages so that we can obtain more meaningful results.

Yours sincerely

Afzal Khan MP