



MANCHESTER
CITY COUNCIL

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Sir David Norgrove
Chair, UK Statistics Authority
1 Drummond Gate
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Date : 17 April 2018

Dear Sir David

Ref: Question on Language in 2021 Census

The 2011 national census for England and Wales was the first to contain a question about language other than that about Welsh, which was asked in earlier censuses. This provided information on the linguistic composition of communities and the spatial and demographic distribution of languages that has been of immense value to local authorities.

However, we are also aware that researchers have expressed some concerns that the question 'What is your main language?' may not have allowed the census to collect all relevant data. Experts at the University of Manchester have found evidence that many respondents under-reported their use of languages other than English. These findings have been communicated through media reports, briefings, and academic publications:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-manchester-21278437>

<http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/item12.pdf>

<http://mlm.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/item5.pdf>

The researchers have raised three principal issues:

- the subjectivity of the concept 'main language'
- the juxtaposition between English and another language, which prompts respondents to rank their languages rather than report on languages that they may be using side by side
- the fact that just one language other than English can be listed.

Several communities in Manchester are known to be multilingual: for example, many residents of Pakistani background use Urdu alongside Panjabi and Potwari in the home; Kurds speak Kurdish alongside Arabic, Persian or Turkish; Somalis often use

Arabic in addition to Somali and many also use as home language Bravanese, a dialect of Swahili; eastern European Roma speak their own ethnic language in addition to the national language of their country of origin, as do most residents of African background.

A slight amendment to the census question could help map languages more accurately. This would be very helpful to the city council, as it would greatly improve our ability to assess the outreach potential of community based initiatives such as supplementary schools and advice and support groups that target particular language-based communities; it would also help the council and key public services assess requirements for interpreting and translation to ensure access to services; and it would help us survey our pool of language skills, which is an important asset on which the city draws for growth and development.

I hope that the Statistics Authority will find an opportunity to enhance its consultation and to take on board some of the recommendations coming from experts on this matter.

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joanne Roney', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Joanne Roney OBE
Chief Executive
Manchester City Council