

**Scotland's Census 2021
Topic Consultation Follow-Up
Number of Rooms, Number of Bedrooms
User Need Survey Summary**

March 2018

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1. Main Points

National Records of Scotland conducted a survey to investigate the user need for data on number of rooms and number of bedrooms.

The majority of respondents indicated that data on number of bedrooms would meet their needs sufficiently. Respondents indicated that the bedrooms question shown in the survey would meet these needs.

NRS intend to propose the inclusion of a question on number of bedrooms in Scotland's Census 2021, which would replace the question on number of rooms.

2. Introduction

2.1 Topic Consultation

National Records of Scotland (NRS) invited views on [Scotland's Census 2021 – Topic Consultation](#) (PDF) between 8 October 2015 and 15 January 2016.

The consultation document presented the initial views from NRS on the topics under consideration for collection in the census in 2021, with the aim of encouraging discussion and to help build strong cases to justify the inclusion of topics.

The consultation was a key step towards understanding what information users will need from the census in 2021. The focus of the consultation was on information required at topic-level, not the detail of the questions that should be asked on the questionnaire.

In order to develop the question set that will be recommended for inclusion in the census questionnaire, NRS is working with stakeholders and undertaking research, question testing and consideration of acceptable burden. The final decision on the content of Scotland's Census 2021 questionnaire will ultimately be made by the Scottish Parliament. NRS will make recommendations on content to parliament, likely in late 2018.

As in previous years, there will be separate censuses conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in England & Wales and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) in Northern Ireland. The three census offices will work together to develop a set of questions that, wherever possible and necessary, deliver harmonised outputs across the UK.

ONS and NISRA published responses to the consultations on the content for the 2021 Censuses in England & Wales¹ and Northern Ireland² in 2016.

Footnotes

1) 'The 2021 Census – Assessment of initial user requirements on content for England and Wales: response to consultation' [2021 Census topic consultation - Office for National Statistics](#)

2.2 Topic Consultation Follow-up

In the Topic Consultation, NRS outlined the next steps for each topic or sub-topic where question changes or new questions may be required. NRS proposed to continue to collect data on number of rooms and to give further consideration to whether information on number of bedrooms should be collected in 2021. NRS noted in the Topic Consultation Report that in the interest of minimising respondent burden, trade-offs may be required.

Topic Consultation responses indicated that data on number of rooms and number of bedrooms are generally required to meet the same key user needs:

- Calculating overcrowding/under-occupancy
- Estimating property size
- Informing housing policy and strategy

NRS considerations came to the conclusion that it would be disproportionate to ask two questions to meet one data need and therefore began analysis to look at which data – number of rooms or number of bedrooms – would best meet user needs.

As part of this analysis a User Need Survey was made available from 30 May 2017 to 30 June 2017.

NRS recognised the importance of including a wide range of stakeholders in follow-up discussions. Topic Consultation respondents who indicated that they were happy to be contacted by NRS about the Number of rooms and/or Number of bedrooms topics were invited to complete the survey. The survey was also widely promoted through the [Scotland's Census newsletter](#) which has a distribution list of around 2,000 contacts.

This report summarises the responses to this survey.

2) 'Assessment of the responses received – Response to Consultation' [2021 Census Topic consultation – Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)

3. Background to the Questions

3.1 Number of Rooms

Data on number of rooms has been collected historically by Scotland's Census. In 2011 the question was as follows:

Figure 1: Scotland's Census 2011 – Number of Rooms Question

H8 How many rooms are available for use only by this household?

◆ **Do NOT count:**

- bathrooms
- toilets
- halls or landings
- rooms that can only be used for storage such as cupboards.

◆ **Count** all other rooms, for example:

- kitchens
- living rooms
- utility rooms
- bedrooms
- studies
- conservatories.

◆ If two rooms have been converted into one, count them as one room.

Number of rooms

The Census Quality Survey (CQS)³ agreement rate for number of rooms, i.e. the percentage of CQS respondents giving the same response to the census and the CQS survey, was 86.6 per cent. This was the lowest agreement rate of all the questions in the Housing and Accommodation section of the census questionnaire, with all the rest having rates of 94.8 per cent or higher.

The CQS investigation identified that differences between the answers given in the CQS and census were caused by simple mistakes or respondents misunderstanding the question.

Footnote

3) The Census Quality Survey (CQS) is a voluntary survey carried out after the census to measure the accuracy of responses in the census. The survey asked a sample of the population the same questions as asked in the census so answers could be compared between the census and the CQS. Where responses differed, follow-up questions were asked of the respondents to determine why. Agreement rates were calculated for each question. These are the percentage of CQS respondents that gave the same response to the census and the CQS question.

3.2 Number of Bedrooms

Data on number of bedrooms has not been collected by Scotland's Census before. However, In 2011 ONS collected data on both number of rooms and number of bedrooms, in England and Wales, with the following questions:

Figure 2: England & Wales Census 2011 – Number of Rooms Question

H9 How many rooms are available for use only by this household?

↪ Do NOT count:

- bathrooms
- toilets
- halls or landings
- rooms that can only be used for storage such as cupboards

↪ Count all other rooms, for example:

- kitchens
- living rooms
- utility rooms
- bedrooms
- studies
- conservatories

↪ If two rooms have been converted into one, count them as one room

Number of rooms

H10 How many of these rooms are bedrooms?

↪ Include all rooms built or converted for use as bedrooms, even if they are not currently used as bedrooms

Number of bedrooms

As data on number of bedrooms was not collected in Scotland in 2011 there are no Scottish CQS agreement rates for this. However, ONS ran a CQS in England and Wales and their agreement rate for number of bedrooms was 91.4 per cent.

For comparison, their CQS agreement rate for number of rooms was 66.5 per cent with all other questions in the Housing and Accommodation section of the questionnaire having agreement rates of over 88 per cent.

These results indicate that respondents found the Number of Bedrooms question easier to answer than the Number of Rooms question. This suggests that the Number of Bedrooms question would provide higher quality data.

ONS also noted that the process of defining which spaces meet the definition of a 'room' increases burden for respondents.

4. Known Uses of the Data

Topic Consultation responses on Number of Rooms and Number of Bedrooms identified the following key uses of the data:

- Calculating overcrowding/under-occupancy
- Estimating property size
- Informing housing policy and strategy, including Housing Needs and Demand Assessments (HNDA)

NRS held conversations with housing colleagues in Scottish Government to investigate their thoughts on which of the questions (Number of Rooms or Number of Bedrooms) would provide the best data to meet these needs.

These conversations included representatives from the Centre for Housing Market Analysis who undertake the HNDA and Housing Statistics.

Throughout these conversations it was identified that data on number of bedrooms (rather than number of rooms) would best meet requirements for all three of the key uses listed above.

The following points were made:

- Data on number of bedrooms are used for overcrowding estimates which feed into Local and Planning Authority HNDAs which estimate future levels of housing need across Scotland.
- Housing professionals tend to think about property size in terms of number of bedrooms rather than number of rooms, as it is number of bedrooms that can often drive property prices, overcrowding and decisions to buy bigger houses as families grow.
- Rent Pressure Zone (RPZ) (rent capping) legislation means that local authorities will require to know the number of private rented sector (PRS) properties by size. They will then sample properties of different sizes to find out what the average rent is to try to ascertain if rents have been rising excessively. Number of bedrooms, rather than number of rooms tends to be more related to PRS rents and how these are advertised. Currently the Scottish Household Condition Survey (SHCS) has to be used to map number of rooms (from Scotland's Census 2011) to number of bedrooms for the national RPZ sample frame produced by the Scottish Government.

These notes were presented before the main questions in the 'Scotland's Census 2021 Topic Consultation Follow Up: Number of rooms, number of bedrooms' survey which ran between 30 May 2017 and 30 June 2017. Information on the quality of the questions from the CQS was also available. This text can be found in [Annex A](#).

5. User Need Survey

5.1 Number of Rooms vs Number of Bedrooms

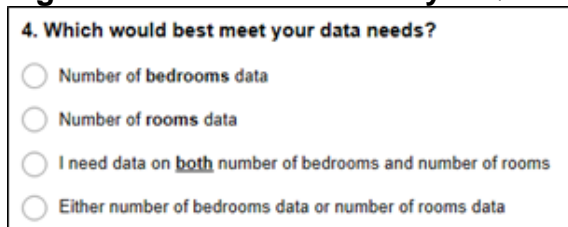
As part of follow-up work to the Topic Consultation, NRS investigated which data – number of rooms or number of bedrooms – would best meet user needs. Part of this analysis was a survey which was available from 30 May 2017 to 30 June 2017.

The survey questions and text can be found in [Annex A](#).

There were 15 responses to the survey: 6 from individuals and 9 on behalf of organisations or groups. The respondents included the Scottish Government and 6 local authorities.

All respondents were asked the following question to gauge their preference on which data would best meet their needs: number of rooms, or number of bedrooms.

Figure 3: User Needs Survey – Question 4



4. Which would best meet your data needs?

- Number of bedrooms data
- Number of rooms data
- I need data on **both** number of bedrooms and number of rooms
- Either number of bedrooms data or number of rooms data

Of the 15 respondents, 60 per cent said that data on number of bedrooms would best meet their data needs (by selecting the first option), while the remaining 40 per cent said that they needed data on number of rooms (by either selecting the second or third option). No respondents selected the fourth option.

All those who indicated that they needed data on number of rooms were asked a follow-up question: *'If data on number of rooms were not available, would data on number of bedrooms meet your user need?'*

Half of these respondents said that data on number of bedrooms would meet their data needs with the other half reporting that it would not. One local authority said that data on number of bedrooms would not meet their data needs if data on number of rooms were not available as there would be a gap in the information they provide to services for locality planning.

Another reason given was that identical houses may have a different number of bedrooms to each other depending on how people use their rooms, thus rendering data on number of bedrooms of no use if total number of rooms is not also collected. However, the question asked in England and Wales' census in 2011 (which is likely to be the question used if this is included in Scotland's Census 2021) specified that respondents should count *'all rooms built or converted for use as bedrooms, even if they are not currently used as bedrooms'*.

There are also similar issues with data on number of rooms. Firstly, houses which were identical when built could now have different number of rooms due to interior

work done to the property, e.g. where one house has knocked through one or more walls to create open-plan living spaces.

Secondly, it is not clear what respondents would or should count as one room or as multiple rooms. For example, consider:

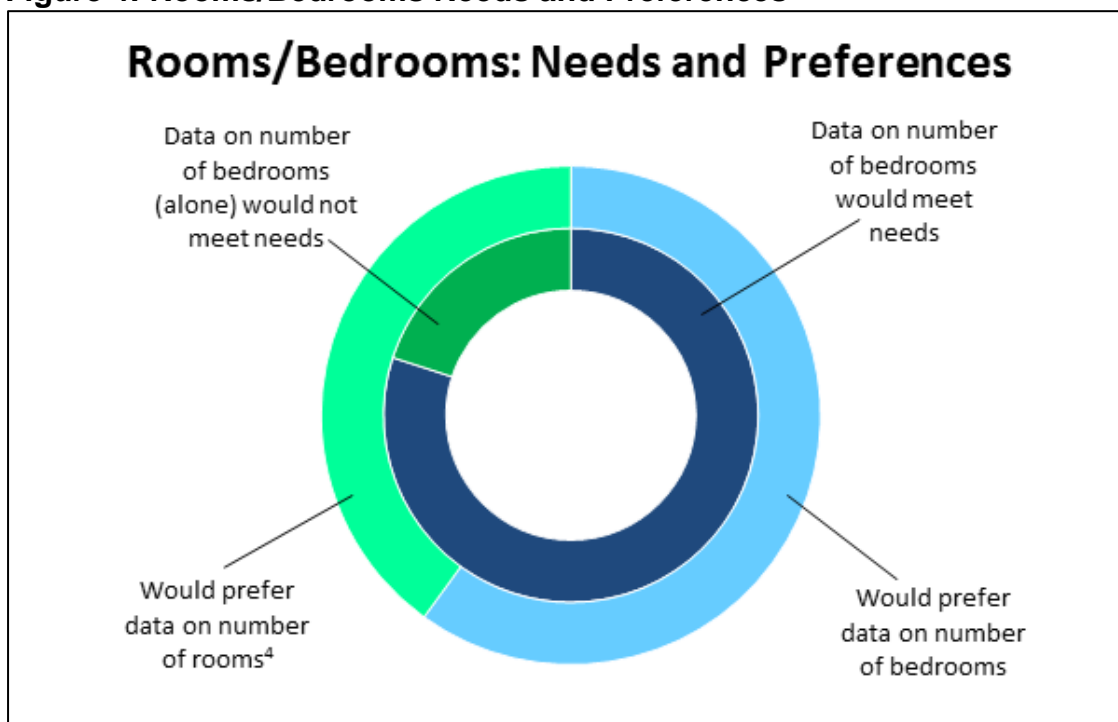
- A large room
- A large room with multiple distinct spaces (e.g. kitchen, dining, living, etc.) but no physical barrier between them
- Spaces separated by a lintel
- Spaces separated by an open archway
- Spaces separated by an archway with a soft covering such as a curtain
- Spaces separated by a glass door
- Spaces separated by solid door

The first example in the list clearly describes a space that is one room while the last example describes a space that is clearly more than one room. It is not clear where the distinction should be made.

Combining respondents who indicated that they would prefer to have bedrooms data (Question 4) with those who reported in the follow-up question that data on number of bedrooms would meet their needs (if data on number of rooms were not available) – data on number of bedrooms would be sufficient for 80 per cent of respondents. This is shown in the inner circle of Figure 4.

The outer circle of Figure 4 shows respondents' preference for bedrooms data (blue) against rooms⁴ data (green) when answering Question 4 of the survey.

Figure 4: Rooms/Bedrooms Needs and Preferences



⁴ Including where respondents said that they needed both data on number of rooms and bedrooms.

Those who responded to Question 4 that data on number of rooms would best meet their needs were asked what they would/have used data on number of rooms for. All of the responses to this question fell into the categories listed in [Section 3](#):

- Calculating overcrowding/under-occupancy
- Estimating property size
- Informing housing policy and strategy, including Housing Needs and Demand Assessments (HNDA)

A local authority said ‘We use the information for our policy development, service planning and delivery or locality planning, housing needs and demands’.

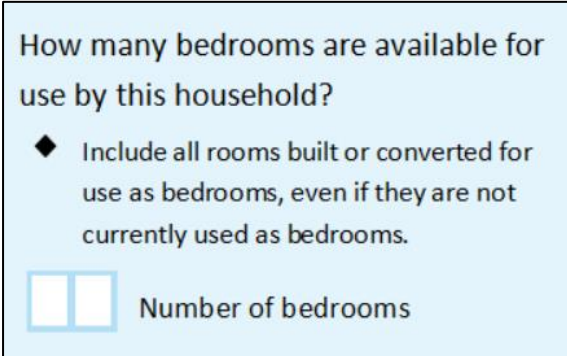
Rent Service Scotland said that they ‘use this for collecting rental data in the PRS and setting LHA rates. Also for [Scottish Government] Private Rent Statistics and feed into ONS.’

As [Section 3](#) explains, it has been identified that data on number of bedrooms would be most suitable for these purposes.

5.2 Number of Bedrooms Question

All respondents were presented with the following example question and asked whether it would suit their needs for data on number of bedrooms:

Figure 5: User Needs Survey - Number of Bedrooms Example Question



How many bedrooms are available for use by this household?

◆ Include all rooms built or converted for use as bedrooms, even if they are not currently used as bedrooms.

Number of bedrooms

All respondents who stated that data on number of bedrooms would meet their needs responded that this question would be suitable.

Those who responded that this question would not meet their needs were those who reported needing data on number of rooms.

There were a number of comments noting need for comparability between 2011 and 2021 data. The NRS Administrative Data Team are looking into whether there is scope to support this need through administrative data sources.

6. Conclusion

Prior to this survey quality issues had been identified in the question on number of rooms from Scotland's Census 2011. Respondents reported that the reason for the issue was that the question was difficult to understand. Similar issues were identified in England and Wales, where the question on number of bedrooms was of much higher quality.

The majority of respondents to the User Needs Survey indicated that data on number of bedrooms would meet their needs sufficiently. Those who indicated otherwise cited uses of the data for which data on number of bedrooms has been deemed to be sufficient. For these reasons, NRS intend to propose the inclusion of a question on number of bedrooms in Scotland's Census 2021, which would replace the question on number of rooms.

7. Next Steps

As some need for continuity between 2011 and 2021 census data was identified, the NRS Administrative Data Team are looking into whether there is scope to support this need through administrative data sources.

More information and details about upcoming events can be found on the [Scotland's Census website](#), by subscribing to the [Scotland's Census newsletter](#) and following us on Twitter [@NatRecordsScot](#).


Annex

A. Survey Questions

The following are screenshots of the 'Scotland's Census 2021 Topic Consultation Follow Up: Number of rooms, number of bedrooms' survey which was open between 30 May 2017 and 30 June 2017.

Scotland's Census 2021 Topic Consultation Follow Up: Number of rooms, number of bedrooms


We would be grateful if you could use this survey to give us more information about your requirements of the **number of rooms and/or number of bedrooms** census data. We will use this information in planning for Scotland's Census 2021 and will share your responses internally with colleagues in Scottish Government who may be addressing the issues you discuss.

*** 1. Please provide your contact details** 

Name

Organisation

E-mail

*** 2. I am responding...** 

as an individual


on behalf of my organisation / group

[Next](#)

Those who responded 'as an individual' in question 2 saw this follow-up page:

Scotland's Census 2021 Topic Consultation Follow Up: Number of rooms, number of bedrooms

We will only share your response publically if you give us permission to do so.

*** 3. Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the National Records of Scotland and Scotland's Census websites)?** 

Yes, I am happy for my name and response to be available

Yes, make my response available, but not my name


No

[Prev](#) [Next](#)

Those who responded 'on behalf of my organisation / group' in question 2 saw this follow-up page:

Scotland's Census 2021 Topic Consultation Follow Up: Number of rooms, number of bedrooms

We will only share your response publically if you give us permission to do so.

*** 3. Do you agree to your response being made available to the public (in Scottish Government library and/or on the National Records of Scotland and Scotland's Census websites)?** 

Yes, I am happy for the name of my organisation and response to be made available

No

All respondents were then presented with this information, which is available in [Section 2](#) and [Section 3](#):

Scotland's Census 2021 Topic Consultation Follow Up: Number of rooms, number of bedrooms

Please ensure you have read the following information before proceeding to complete the survey.

Quality of the data

The Census Quality Survey (CQS) was a voluntary survey carried out after the census to measure the accuracy of responses in the census. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with a sample of the population, asking the same questions as asked on the census. Answers to the census and the CQS were compared and where responses differed, follow-up questions were asked of the respondents to determine why this was.

The number of rooms question agreement rate (i.e. the proportion of CQS responses which agreed with the census response) of 86.6 per cent was amongst the lowest agreement rates of all questions asked.


For the census in England and Wales, which is run by ONS, the 2011 CQS agreement rates for number of rooms was 66.5 per cent compared with 91.4 per cent for number of bedrooms. ONS deemed that the low rate for number of rooms was because respondents had misunderstood the question. They also noted that the process of defining which spaces meet the definition of a 'room' increases burden for respondents[1].

Known uses of the data

NRS have had conversations with colleagues in Scottish Government with an interest in housing topics (including the Centre for Housing Market Analysis who undertake the Housing Needs and Demand Assessments and Housing Statistics). They indicated that data on number of bedrooms would meet requirements for overcrowding, under occupancy and Housing Needs and Demand Assessments. The following points were made:

- Data on number of bedrooms are used for overcrowding estimates which feed into Local and Planning Authority Housing Needs and Demand Assessments which estimate future levels of housing need across Scotland.
- Housing professionals tend to think about property size in terms of number of bedrooms rather than number of rooms, as it is number of bedrooms that can often drive property prices, overcrowding, decisions to buy bigger houses as families grow etc.
- The Rent Pressure Zone (RPZ) (rent capping) legislation means that Local Authorities will require to know the number of private rented sector (PRS) properties by size. They will then sample properties of different sizes to find out what the average rent is, to try to ascertain if rents have been rising excessively. Number of bedrooms, rather than number of rooms tends to be more related to PRS rents and how these are advertised. Currently the Scottish Household Condition Survey (SHCS) has to be used to map number of rooms (from Census) to number of bedrooms for the national RPZ sample frame produced by the Scottish Government.

All respondents were then asked:

* 4. Which would best meet your data needs? 

- Number of bedrooms data
- Number of rooms data
- I need data on both number of bedrooms and number of rooms
- Either number of bedrooms data or number of rooms data


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Those who indicated that they needed data on number of rooms (i.e. ticked 'Number of rooms data' or 'I need data on both number of bedrooms and number of rooms') were directed to answer the following questions (5-15) on use of data on number of rooms:


Scotland's Census 2021 Topic Consultation Follow Up: Number of rooms, number of bedrooms


You said that you need data on **number of rooms** either as well as or instead of data on number of bedrooms. Please complete the following questions on your use of **number of rooms** data.

* 5. What do you use, or have you used 2011 Census information about number of rooms for? 

- Equality monitoring
- Policy development and monitoring
- Resource allocation
- Service planning and delivery
- Targeting investment
- Research
- Other purposes (please specify)


* 6. Please give us specific examples of your use of number of rooms census data: 


* 7. What would the implications be if data on number of rooms were not available? (Please specify) 

* 8. If data on number of rooms were not available, would data on number of bedrooms meet your user need? 


- Yes
- No (please specify why)

* 9. At what geographical level do you, or have you used information on number of rooms? (Please specify) 


* 10. Do you need information about number of rooms for population sub-groups? (Please specify) 

* 11. Are you aware of alternative (non-census) sources of number of rooms data? 


- No
- Yes (please specify)

12. Do you, or have you analysed information about number of rooms in combination with any other 2011 Census topics (multivariate analysis) 


- No
- Yes (please specify)

* 13. Is UK comparability a requirement for you/your work on number of rooms? 

- No
- Yes, some need
- Yes, essential

* 14. Is maintaining comparability with 2011 and/or earlier censuses for number of rooms important for you/your work? 

- No
- Yes


15. If you have any other comments you wish to make relevant to this topic, please enter: 

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All respondents were then presented with the following two pages:

Scotland's Census 2021 Topic Consultation Follow Up: Number of rooms, number of bedrooms

* 5. Would the question shown below suit your needs for data on number of bedrooms? 

Yes

No, please specify




How many bedrooms are available for use by this household?

◆ Include all rooms built or converted for use as bedrooms, even if they are not currently used as bedrooms.

Number of bedrooms

Scotland's Census 2021 Topic Consultation Follow Up: Number of rooms, number of bedrooms

* 6. Are you content for National Records of Scotland to contact you again in relation to this topic? 

Yes

No