



Final recommended questions for the 2011 Census in England and Wales

Religion

October 2009

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1. Summary

Question development for the 2011 Census began in 2005. An iterative and comprehensive process of user consultation, evaluation and prioritisation of user requirements, and qualitative and quantitative question testing has been carried out to inform decisions on the questions to be included in the 2011 Census. This paper presents the final religion question recommendations for the 2011 Census in England and Wales.

The 2001 Census was the first time a religion question had been asked in England, Scotland and Wales, although Northern Ireland censuses have included a religion question since 1861. A question on religious affiliation was proposed for inclusion in the 2001 Census in England and Wales to:

- Learn more about religious affiliation as a variable in its own right
- Collect data on religious minorities that cut across national and ethnic boundaries
- Capture data on two ethnic minority groups, Sikhs and Jews, ensuring that obligations under the Race Relations Act could be met

To determine the need for a religion question in the 2011 Census, consultations with key users of census data were held in 2005 and 2007. The consultations revealed strong demand for the inclusion of a question on religion. Overall, 81 per cent of respondents to the 2007 consultation expressed a requirement for information on religion. Respondents to the consultations recognised a number of ways in which information on religion would be used, including:

- Policy delivery including meeting statutory requirements under the Race Relations Act
- Resource allocation and service provision
- Providing a clearer view of society and gaining a better understanding of certain ethnic groups

A variety of quantitative and qualitative methodologies have been employed to test the questions recommended for inclusion in the 2011 Census. Qualitative question testing on religion has primarily been conducted by the data collection methodology (DCM) branch in ONS through a programme of cognitive testing, running since February 2005. Quantitative question testing has been conducted at various intervals since May 2006 using a variety of methodologies.

There are a number of dimensions to the concept of religion, the key ones for survey and census questions being affiliation, practice and belief. Based on the evidence of a lengthy programme of research and consultation, ONS believes that the most appropriate question for the 2011 Census, that best meets user needs, is one that asks about religious affiliation. Several different question wordings have been tested, including:

- What is your religion?
- What is your religion or belief?
- What is your religion, even if not currently practising?
- Do you regard yourself as belonging to a religion?
- Which of these best describes you?

Testing found that the question 'what is your religion?' best meets the requirement of collecting good quality data on religious affiliation within the space constraints of the census questionnaire. The question will also provide comparability between the 2001 and 2011 Censuses. The questions presented below are those that are recommended for the 2011 Census, subject to Parliamentary approval which ONS hopes to obtain by the end of 2009.

Figure 1.1: Final recommended religion question for England

20 What is your religion?

➤ This question is voluntary

- No religion
- Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh
- Any other religion, write in

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Figure 1.2: Final recommended English language version of the religion question for Wales

20 What is your religion?

➤ This question is voluntary

- No religion
- Christian (all denominations)
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh
- Any other religion, write in

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Figure 1.3: Final recommended Welsh language version of the religion question for Wales

20 Beth yw'ch crefydd?

➤ Mae'r cwestiwn hwn yn wirfoddol

- Dim crefydd
- Cristnogaeth (pob enwad)
- Bwdhaeth
- Hindŵaeth
- Iddewiaeth
- Islam
- Siciaeth
- Unrhyw grefydd arall, nodwch

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2. Introduction

The next Census will take place on 27 March 2011. The proposed topics to be included were announced in the 2011 Census White Paper published in December 2008. To access the White Paper and read further information about how the content of the 2011 Census was determined, please refer to the ONS website at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/2011-census-questionnaire-content/question-and-content-recommendations-for-2011/index.html>

Question development for the 2011 Census began in 2005. An iterative and comprehensive process of user consultation, evaluation and prioritisation of user requirements, and qualitative and quantitative question testing has been carried out to inform the decisions on the questions to be included in the 2011 Census. The questions for England and Wales have been developed with the Welsh Assembly Government and through close collaboration with the census offices in Scotland and Northern Ireland. A key aim of this collaboration is to minimise differences between questionnaires across the UK, though it is recognised that differing circumstances will sometimes require different solutions.

This paper outlines the development of the religion question for England and Wales, including the Welsh language version. There are equivalent papers which present the recommendations for each of the other questions within the ethnicity, identity, language and religion (EILR) topic area. Questions on the following topics have been recommended:

- National identity
- Ethnic group
- Knowledge of Welsh language (Wales only)
- Main language
- Spoken English proficiency
- Religious affiliation

These questions complement the suite of migration questions that have been recommended:

- Country of birth
- Usual address one year ago
- Passports held (as a proxy for citizenship)
- Month and year of arrival to the UK
- Intended length of stay in the UK

A previous information paper '*Recommended questions for the 2009 Census Rehearsal and 2011 Census: religion*' outlined user requirements and documented the development of the religion question prior to December 2008. Since that point ONS has conducted a final phase of testing to refine and finalise questions in preparation for the 2011 Census. The relevant findings arising from the final testing are incorporated in this updated information paper which presents the final question recommendations for religion in the 2011 Census. These recommendations are subject to Parliamentary approval which ONS hope to obtain by the end of 2009.

3. Background

3.1 Dimensions of religion

It is generally understood (for example Purdam et al 2007) that surveys can measure three different dimensions of religion depending on the question that is asked. The three dimensions are affiliation, practice and belief.

O'Beirne (2001) defines religious **affiliation** as meaning 'a present or past personal or familial connection' with a religion while Purdam et al describe two measures of affiliation: community (which could be understood as weaker affiliation) or membership (stronger affiliation):

- The Christian community, for example, has been defined as being made up of those who positively identify as belonging to a church, even if they rarely attend or were just baptised as a child. Indeed they may have no current connection with the church.
- The concept of membership is defined in different ways within different denominations in the Christian church. For example you must have been baptised to be a member of a Baptist church.

Purdam et al discuss how **practice** includes specific religious activities that are expected of believers 'such as worship, prayer, participation in special sacraments, and fasting'. It is a difficult concept to measure as there are no specific measures that will easily apply across all religions. Frequency of attendance at place of worship or frequency of prayer, for example, may not be relevant if this is not an essential feature of a religion. For these reasons, a broad question such as 'do you consider yourself to be currently practising?' may offer something that is not explicitly culturally biased but it is likely to be interpreted in different ways. None of these measures will record the significance of the practice to individuals' lives.

Purdam et al explain how religious **belief** encompasses beliefs that are expected to be held by followers, but also refer to an element of the importance of religious beliefs to a person's life. The words 'belief' and 'faith' tend to be used synonymously¹. Ruel (1982) describes strong and weak forms of belief where a weak, everyday version of belief generally refers to a sense of expectation or assumption, either of oneself or others, and is therefore not generally misunderstood nor problematic. It is when, Ruel argues, the term arises in a 'strong' sense, as part of a definition, categorisation or problem that it will usually draw on connotations from its Christian use.

The term 'belonging' is also found in the literature, and used in different ways. For example Purdam et al use the term in relation to affiliation and being part of a Christian community – including 'those who belong to a church, even if they may only attend irregularly or were just baptised as a child' or 'those who belong, however loosely, to a particular denomination'. It is also implicit in their alternative definition of affiliation that they are referring to membership such as that conferred by baptism. Voas and Crocket (2005) use the term in relation to both affiliation (passive belonging based on self-identification) and regular churchgoing (active belonging).

These dimensions can be summarised as a diagram (Figure 3.1).

¹ Faith has become a preferred term used by religion-based organisations as those most actively involved in a religion tend to emphasise the personal aspect of faith rather than the organisational or doctrinal aspect of religion. As a result policy formulations often talk of 'faith communities'. However the word 'faith' is synonymous with 'belief' and may be inappropriate when applied to affiliation data. It is therefore misleading to use 'religion', 'religious identity', 'religious affiliation' and 'faith' interchangeably.

Figure 3.2: 2001 Census, question for England

10 What is your religion?

◆ This question is voluntary.

◆ ✓ *one box only.*

None

Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)

Buddhist

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Sikh

Any other religion, *please write in*

Figure 3.3: 2001 Census, English language version of the question for Wales

10 What is your religion?

◆ This question is voluntary.

◆ ✓ *one box only.*

None

Christian (including Church in Wales, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)

Buddhist

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Sikh

Any other religion, *please write in*

Figure 3.4: 2001 Census, Welsh language version of the question for Wales

10 Beth yw eich crefydd?

◆ Mae'r cwestiwn hwn yn wirfoddol.

◆ ✓ *un blwch yn unig.*

Dim

Cristnogaeth (gan gynnwys yr Eglwys yng Nghymru, yr Eglwys Gatholig, Protestannaidd a phob enwad Cristnogol arall)

Bwdaeth

Hindw

Iddewiaeth

Moslem

Siciaeth

Unrhyw grefydd arall, *nodwch*

The 2001 Censuses in Scotland and Northern Ireland also asked about religion of upbringing.

The question did not attempt to collect detailed information about the nature of their belief or the extent to which people practice their religion. Although questions on belief are asked in the British Social Attitudes Survey and the British Household Panel Survey, they are not seen as appropriate or acceptable for a census and nor would they meet the needs of most users of census data.

ONS has developed harmonised questions which are recommended for inclusion in National Statistics surveys (where space constraints are often less prohibitive than those of the census questionnaire). The harmonised question on religion is split into two parts, the first focussing on the 'affiliation' dimension and the second, which is non-compulsory, focussing on the 'practice' dimension (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5: The harmonised National Statistics religion question

What is your religion, even if you are not currently practising?

- Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh
- Any other religion, please describe
- No religion

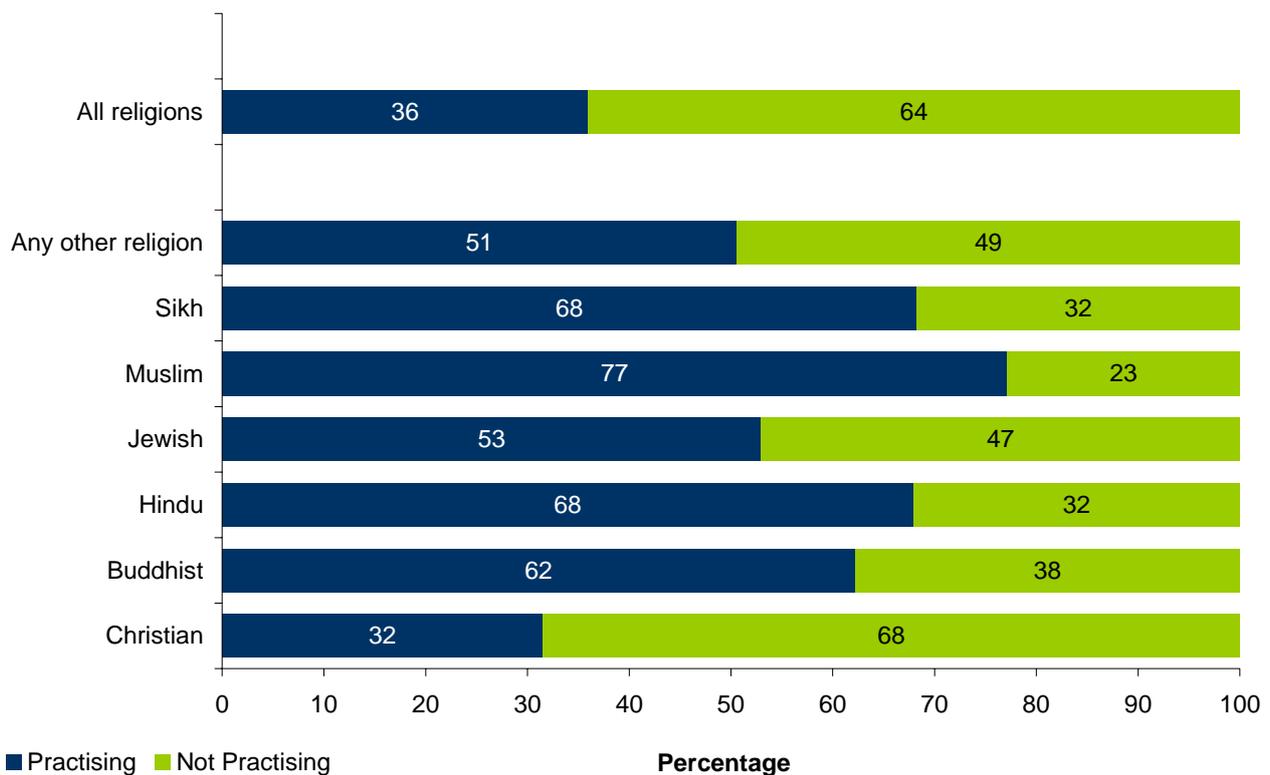
Do you consider that you are actively practising your religion?

- Yes
- No

The harmonised question is asked on ONS social surveys, for example the Labour Force Survey. The wording of the first part of the question is expanded from the census question to emphasise the distinction of the second part. However it produces a religious distribution very similar to that obtained from the 2001 Census question in England and Wales, ‘What is your religion?’ In both sources, around eight in ten people were classified as Christian. The proportion reporting that they had no religion was also similar, as were the proportions identifying as Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim or Sikh (Bosveld et al 2003: 3).

Both parts of the harmonised question were asked in the 2005 Citizenship Survey which provides a comparison of affiliation and practice (Figure 3.6).

Figure 3.6: Religious practice by affiliation, 2005 England and Wales



1 All religions column based on core sample (a representative sample of people aged 16 and over in England and Wales. Other columns based on combination of core and boost sample (additional sample of ethnic minority respondents aged 16 and over)

2 Respondents with missing answers excluded

Source: 2005 Citizenship Survey, Communities and Local Government and Local Government

It would be misleading to regard any one of these dimensions to be ‘truer’ or more accurate than the others – they simply capture different populations. The idea of a ‘Christian’ population, for example, could quite reasonably be used to refer to a number of different groups including people who had a Christian upbringing; people who hold some definitive Christian beliefs; or people who attend a Christian church and/or pray regularly.

4. User consultations

The inclusion of questions in the census must be supported by a clear user requirement for the information. The user consultation process for the 2011 Census began in 2005 with a formal three month general topics consultation in which there were around 50 responses received commenting on the subject of religion, from a variety of central government, local authority and other data users. A summary of the comments relating to religion can be found at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/about/consultations/closed-consultations/consultation-on-2011-census---responses/ethnicity--identity--language---religion.pdf>

The Welsh Assembly Government produced a summary of 2005 consultation responses from Welsh organisations or referring to 'Wales specific' topics. The summary is available at:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/pop-2007/pop-2006/hdw200603081/?skip=1&lang=en>

In addition to this another formal three month consultation exercise was carried out between December 2006 and March 2007 (referred to throughout the paper as the 2007 consultation) to refine the user requirements for information on ethnicity, identity, language and religion from the 2011 Census. The report of the 2007 consultation can be found at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/consultations/eth-group-nat-iden/over-sum-rep.pdf>

The summary of Welsh organisations and 'Wales specific' topics from the 2007 consultation can be found at:

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/statistics/headlines/pop-2007/hdw200710312/?lang=en>

4.1 User requirements for information on religion

Table 4.1 below shows that 81 per cent of respondents to the 2007 consultation had a requirement for information on religion, with the greatest requirement coming from local and regional government.

Table 4.1 2007 consultation respondents requiring information on religion

Organisation type	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total Respondents
Central and devolved government	68	32	22
Experts, community and special interest groups	78	23	120
Local and regional government	91	9	81
Local service providers	77	23	43
All respondents	81	19	266

Respondents to the consultations identified a number of reasons for requiring information on religion, including:

- Policy delivery including meeting statutory requirements under the Race Relations Act
- Resource allocation and service provision
- Providing a clearer view of society and gaining a better understanding of certain ethnic groups.

4.1.1 Policy delivery including meeting statutory requirements under the Race Relations Act

Respondents to the 2007 consultation emphasised the use of religion data to enable better understanding of the social and economic position of different religious and ethnic groups, and to help to identify cases of social exclusion. This information would be used to inform policy

development and monitoring, and enable public bodies to meet their statutory obligations under the Race Relations Act 1976, Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and other equality legislation.

In response to the 2007 consultation, one Borough authority commented that *'the Race Relation (Amendment) Act requirements mean that the Council needs adequate data on particularly significant groups within its area. Some people in the community think of themselves as belonging to a particular religion rather than for example an ethnic group, so this should be recognised.'*

Another authority emphasised the use of information on religion for monitoring purposes, stating that *'the Employment Equality (Religion and Belief) Act 2003 places a duty on all local authorities to monitor employment practices and to address the needs of religious groups.'*

4.1.2 Resource allocation and service provision

In addition to meeting legal obligations, a requirement was expressed in the consultations for information on religion to better target resource allocation and service provision. One local authority required the information *'for effective service planning and allocation of resources in all council activities (housing, education and social services, etc).'*

4.1.3 Providing a clearer view of society and gaining a better understanding of certain ethnic groups

Respondents to the consultations articulated the view that religious populations are socially meaningful groups that need to be understood better in order to identify and address inequalities and to encourage interaction and participation. In response to the 2007 consultation, one central government department commented that *'there are clear links between religion and health inequalities. The population data from the Census would provide the necessary population base for making health comparisons across religious groups.'* A city council confirmed the need for information on religion to complement that on ethnic group stating that *'religion complements data about some ethnic group, for example the religious composition of the Indian and Black African groups.'*

4.2 Acceptability of suggested response options

Respondents who indicated a need for information on religion in the 2007 consultation were asked whether they thought the response options provided in the 2007 Census Test were suitable. Table 4.2 below shows that 74 per cent of those respondents felt that the proposed religion categories were suitable, with 11 per cent considering the categories unsuitable.

Table 4.2: Suitability of proposed religion categories in the 2007 Census Test: by organisation type

Organisation type	Yes (%)	No (%)	Partially (%)	Total Respondents
Central and devolved government	79	0	21	14
Experts, community and special interest groups	65	19	17	96
Local and regional government	82	4	14	72
Local service providers	85	11	4	27
All respondents	74	11	14	209

The comments of those respondents who did not think the proposed response categories were suitable can be grouped into three main areas:

- Additional or alternative concepts should be included
- Information on additional religions and non-religious beliefs is required
- The Christian (and to a lesser degree Muslim) category is too broad

These comments primarily came from experts, community and special interest groups.

4.3 Comparability over time

Trends in religious affiliation over time are required by many data users, primarily for service planning. It was noted to be very important to measure and monitor change. One example given was to monitor the employment of Muslim women. It is also vital to monitor changes of circumstances within groups, for example economic activity rates.

Table 4.3 Need to compare information on religion in the 2011 Census with the 2001 Census: by organisation type

Organisation Type	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total Respondents
Central and devolved government	73	27	11
Experts, community and special interest groups	69	31	51
Local and regional government	85	15	52
Local service providers	70	30	10
All respondents	76	24	124

Three quarters of respondents to ONS's 2007 consultation on the ethnicity, identity, language and religion questions felt that comparability with the 2001 question was essential.

The census question on religious affiliation will be one of a suite of questions (along with ethnic group, national identity and language) that will allow individual respondents to indicate their identity in the ways they consider most appropriate, and which ONS will be able to measure in the most statistically relevant way to meet the expressed needs of users.

5. Methods of question testing

A variety of quantitative and qualitative methodologies have been employed to test the questions recommended for inclusion in the 2011 Census.

5.1 Qualitative testing

Qualitative testing on religion has been conducted by the data collection methodology (DCM) branch of ONS through a programme of cognitive testing which began in February 2005.

5.1.1 Cognitive testing

DCM was commissioned to carry out a programme of cognitive question testing on census questions. The aim of this testing was to develop questions that collect accurate and meaningful information that meet user requirements, minimise the burden on respondents and are designed to conform as closely as possible to best practice of questionnaire design. The testing was split into the following phases:

- Pre-testing for the 2007 Census Test (February 2005 – April 2006)
- Whole Questionnaire Testing for the 2007 Census Test (June 2006 – August 2006)
- Testing for the 2009 Census Rehearsal
 - **Wave 1** (November 2006 to January 2007)
 - **Wave 2** (April to May 2007)
 - **Wave 3** (July to September 2007)
 - **Wave 4** (October and November 2007)
 - **Wave 5** (January to March 2008)
 - **Wave 6** (April to July 2008)
 - **Welsh language testing, Wave 1** (October to November 2007)
 - **Welsh language testing, Wave 2** (June to July 2008)
- Testing for the 2011 Census
 - **Wave 7** (March to April 2009)
 - **Whole questionnaire testing – English language** (June to July 2009)
 - **Whole questionnaire testing - Welsh language** (June to July 2009)

In addition, the Welsh Assembly Government conducted cognitive testing in August 2008, specifically focussing on alternative versions of the religious affiliation question.

5.2 Quantitative testing

ONS has also conducted quantitative question testing at various intervals since May 2006 using a variety of methodologies.

5.2.1 Lambeth Postal Test

From June to July 2006, a test of postal enumeration procedures was carried out in the London Borough of Lambeth. Although this test was designed to test aspects of the field operation for the 2011 Census, it allowed the opportunity to analyse and evaluate the performance of the questions. A response rate of 25 per cent was obtained and 366 household questionnaires were returned, giving 787 individual respondents. Some of this data was analysed to help inform the development of the religion question prior to the 2007 Census Test.

5.2.2 2007 Postal Test

The ONS questionnaire design and content (QDC) team ran a postal test of 10,400 households across England in April 2007. Although the main objective of this test was aimed at testing issues related to questionnaire length, it also provided valuable information on the acceptability and understanding of definitions and questions, particularly new questions such as language.

5.2.3 2007 Census Test

A large scale census test was carried out covering 100,000 households in England and Wales on 13 May 2007. The test took place in Bath and North East Somerset, Camden, Carmarthenshire, Liverpool and Stoke-on-Trent. This allowed the opportunity to test new and updated questions.

A detailed evaluation of the 2007 test can be found on the ONS website at:

<http://www.ons.gov.uk/census/2011-census/2011-census-project/2007-test/index.html>

5.2.4 2008 Postal Test

In July 2008 two postal surveys were carried out, each with a sample of 10,200 households, one across England and the other in Northampton. The main purpose was to test any impact on response rates of including a question on intended length of stay in the UK. The test also allowed valuable analysis to be conducted on the performance of the questions developed for the 2009 rehearsal.

5.2.5 March 2009 Postal Test

In March 2009, a postal test was conducted with the primary aim of assisting the development of questions relating to the student population. 20,000 questionnaires were sent to three separate sample areas. 10,000 were sent to a random sample of households in England, 5,000 were sent to Durham city and 5,000 were sent to an area of central Norwich. The latter two areas were chosen because they are known to have a high concentration of students, along with a number of other characteristics desirable for testing.

5.2.6 July 2009 Postal Test

In July 2009, a postal test was conducted with the primary aim of testing the questions relating to ethnicity and identity. 27,000 questionnaires were sent to areas of England selected for characteristics that were desirable for testing.

5.2.7 Opinions (Omnibus) survey question testing

The Opinions (Omnibus) survey is an ONS run, multi-purpose survey based on interviews with a monthly sample of around 1,200 adults (aged 16 and over) in private households. It currently forms part of the Integrated Household Survey (IHS). One adult is selected from each household to answer the questions. It differs from the census in that all interviews are carried out face-to-face by members of the general field force of interviewers in ONS.

As part of the testing process, the question 'what is your religion or belief?' was included in the Opinions (Omnibus) Survey in September 2007, November 2007 and December 2007. In these three months of testing, a Pagan tick box was also added to the question and reactions to the inclusion of this tick box were recorded. The question 'what is your religion?' was included in May 2008. The question 'do you regard yourself as belonging to a religion?' was included in June 2008.

Testing of an alternative question 'which of these best describes you?', as well as different combinations of response options, took place in April, May, June and July 2009.

6. Development of the question

This section provides a detailed description of how the question evolved from the beginning of testing through to the finalisation of the question. It uses evidence gathered from all the strands of research described in the previous sections.

6.1 What concept to measure?

As outlined in section four, there are different dimensions of religion that can be captured in surveys. The convention is to measure current affiliation as a bare minimum, although supplementary questions may be asked to identify affiliation of upbringing, practice or belief. There was no strong user need for asking a question about belief in the 2011 Census in England and Wales, although some users required information on religion of upbringing and practice.

6.1.1 Current affiliation

There is general agreement that *'religious affiliation [is a] a socially relevant variable'* (Kosmin in Southworth 2005: 80) and there are compelling arguments that it will meet user needs as identified by ONS.

For fulfilling legal obligations to monitor inequalities

- Information collected through a question on religious affiliation allows data to be collected about Sikhs and Jews, two groups protected by the Race Relations Act:

'In the British case law that has accompanied the 30 years of the 1976 Race Relations Act (and its amendment in 2000), many groups have been defined as, or not, coming under the Act. While religion itself was not originally covered by anti-discrimination legislation, some groups defined according to religion (notably Jews and Sikhs) were considered as coming under its remit through their constitution as cultural/ ethnic groups bound by common expression of religious observance, group belonging or cultural communalities that are closely linked to the religious groups' histories, and responses to them over time, or to the visibility of expressions of religious belonging or of religion as ancestry.' (Burton et al 2008)

Evidence suggests that the 2001 question provides a reasonable proxy for Sikh and Jewish ethnic groups. In the 2007 consultation, data users commenting on the issue of counting Sikh and Jewish groups made the point that the question should be phrased to be as broad as possible.

- There is some evidence that ethnic Jews (as well as practising ones) are experiencing some disadvantage and that there is particular policy interest in this group. There are concerns that isolated Jewish people who are susceptible to discrimination are more likely to be secular Jews. It appears that many 'ethnic only' Jews used the religious affiliation question to proclaim the Jewish aspect of their ethnic identity rather than as a measure of their religiosity. For example a 2003 survey of Jews in London and the south east found that while only 42 per cent described themselves as religious or somewhat religious, 84 per cent recalled identifying as 'Jewish' in the religious affiliation question in the 2001 England and Wales Census (Institute for Jewish Policy Research 2003).

To supplement ethnicity data to gain an understanding of society

- Burton et al state that religious affiliation (along with religion of upbringing and importance of religion to self) can *'shed light both on religion as a cultural attribute or an element of ethnic identity and religiosity as an important element of identity more broadly'* and *'will be of interest to those interested in religion as a primary source of identity.'* (Burton et al 2008)

- Leslie Francis makes the case that affiliation is a *'theoretically coherent and socially significant indicator'* that relates to a person's cultural background and value orientation so that those without belief or practice *'may still show the effect of the meaning system and plausibility structure with which they identify'* (Bouma in Francis 2003). He argues that religious affiliation impacts on behaviour and so is a better cultural predictor than nationality for some groups (in Southworth 2005) and shows significant differences in social capital indicators between religious affiliates (Francis 2003).
- The 2005 Citizenship Survey revealed that affiliation is a significant factor in relation to a number of active citizenship and social capital indicators, and that within the main religious groups there were no significant differences in views of religious prejudice between those who did and did not actively practise their religion (Kitchen et al 2006).
- A study, using 2001 Census data, conducted by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) in 2006 found that, after taking account of a range of key individual differences, men with a Muslim affiliation are only half as likely to be in work, and Muslim women less than half as likely, compared to their Christian counterparts (Simpson et al 2006).
- A 2001 Home Office study found that religions with large numbers of visible minorities (such as Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus) reported the most discrimination overall, often identifying a degree of overlap between religious and racial discrimination, suggesting that even 'weaker' affiliation could be relevant. (Weller et al 2001)

To inform service provision and resource allocations

- Non-practising affiliates may also have culture-specific needs that will need to be identified by service providers as community resources may reach more than just people who are practising.
- There is also some evidence that ethnic Jews are of particular interest for service delivery. A couple of local authorities responding to the 2007 consultation stated that they would like to monitor their Jewish communities, and community organisations claimed that without a count of ethnic-only Jews the provision of culturally relevant services (in terms of local authority services), care services and other public services is difficult. It is not clear whether the service delivery needs of ethnic-only Jews are as pronounced as those of religious Jews however.

6.1.2 Religion of upbringing

Some data users responding to the 2007 consultation wanted current affiliation to be distinguished from affiliation of upbringing:

'Our first recommendation is that England and Wales use a double question such as was used in Scotland in 2001.... 'Were you brought up in a religion... Yes/No; If so, how would you describe the religion you were brought up in?'...'

ONS does not believe that there is sufficient user need to recommend a question on religion of upbringing for the 2011 Census in England and Wales. Similarly, consultation by the General Register Office for Scotland revealed limited user demand for the religion of upbringing question for the 2011 Census, and the space created by the omission of this question allowed a question on another topic (for which there was greater demand) to be added.

6.1.3 Practice

In the 2007 consultation, some data users wanted the question to distinguish religious affiliation from practice. For example a police force expressed an interest in ‘*knowing more about the status of respondents’ faith – from devout to people whose faith is a less defining quality, that is whether they practised their religion regularly, occasionally, or never – to understand potential tensions in our communities.*’

ONS acknowledges that for some user needs additional information about practice may be useful.

For fulfilling legal obligations to monitor inequalities

- A qualitative study by the Home Office in 2001 into religious discrimination produced evidence that practice and belief were the key factors in religious discrimination for white people of British descent with no outward, visible signs of their religion. In other cases it may be the strength of belief and its effect on behaviour or the degree to which people seek to convert others (Weller et al 2001).

To supplement ethnicity data to gain an understanding of society

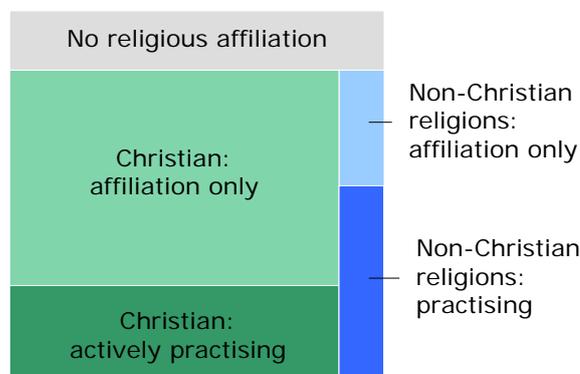
- Burton et al assert that questions on religious practice/religiosity potentially ‘explain more variation in different socio-economic behaviours such as education, marital and fertility choice than simply religious affiliation’ (Burton et al 2008: 30).
- The 2005 Citizenship Survey revealed that participation is also a significant factor in relation to a number of active citizenship and social capital indicators (Kitchen et al 2006).

To inform service provision and resource allocations

- The literature on service provision also identifies examples where religious beliefs can impact directly upon use of public services such as medication (for example Kumar and Jivan 2004, Sattar 2007). Evidence suggests that the level of practice and belief may impact on issues like dietary requirements (for example Graham 2003, and Yadav and Kumar 2006) and support for faith schools (Orb 2005).

ONS believes that additional information about religious practice would provide a richer picture of religion in England and Wales (Figure 6.1) and could go some way towards improving users understanding religious-specific need, although this would not capture the *significance* of religious practices or reveal how it would impact on *particular* needs.

Figure 6.1: A model of religious practice and affiliation in England and Wales



Source: Citizenship Survey 2007/08

Practice rates vary across non-Christian religions (see Figure 4.6) – these groups only aggregated for reasons of simplicity

However, there is only enough space on the questionnaire to ask one religion question in the 2011 Census and ONS does not believe that the question should ask about practice instead of affiliation. Asking about practice would leave a large undifferentiated group of people who are not practising, including people with different (meaningful) religious identities as well as those with no religious affiliation. Furthermore, it may not be publicly acceptable to ask questions about practice in the census as it may be seen as a private matter (Southworth 2005).

ONS therefore believes that current affiliation will continue to be the best single concept to meet user needs. However, ONS continues to recommend that where possible surveys include both questions set out in the harmonised questions for use in National Statistics surveys (see section 3.2).

Question concept recommendation

It is recommended that the religion question continues to ask about religious affiliation.

6.2 Wording of the affiliation question

Having decided to ask a religious affiliation question, ONS considered two issues:

- 1) How to ensure respondents are clear that the question asks about affiliation rather than belief or practice
- 2) Should the question collect data about 'weak' or 'strong' affiliation?

With regard to the first issue, a person may identify with a religion in some dimensions and not others – so for example they may be agnostic (belief) but identify as 'Christian' (affiliation). In the 2007 Census Test, 84 people (0.1 per cent) ticked two or more boxes in response to the religion question, despite being instructed not to do so. The most common multi-tick (28 people) was 'No religion' and 'Christian', which may be explained by the multiple dimensions. To avoid this occurring on a large scale - and more importantly to meet user needs for data – the question needs to be clear that it is about religious affiliation. This can be done explicitly or implicitly.

Explicitly, the question can spell out which concept we are trying to measure, for example 'Do you have a religious affiliation?' or 'Do you have a religion even if you are not currently practising?'

In 1997, ONS cognitively tested the term 'religious affiliation'. Many respondents did not understand the term and a few commented that they would look up the words in a dictionary after the interview. Respondents were confused between whether it meant practising a religion; membership of a religion; or believing in a particular religion. As a consequence, subsequent questions did not use the term affiliation (Assessment of Small Scale Testing, January 1997).

The wording 'What is your religion even if you are not currently practising?' was better understood by respondents although there is not space in the census questionnaire to include the full instruction². Testing indicated that people do not respond differently when the '..even if you are not currently practising?' instruction is omitted. 'What is your religion?' therefore offers the best way of implicitly making respondents focus on affiliation.

The wording of the 2001 Census question 'What is your religion?' implicitly assumes that people have a religion and is therefore potentially leading as some respondents may feel that they are

² In question development for the 2011 Census ONS reconsidered the explicit wording 'What is your religion even if you are not currently practising?' (Section 6.2.2) before space constraints were confirmed

expected to identify with a religion. To reduce the potential bias, ONS placed 'none' as the first response option in order that respondents would realise they did not have to answer the question by identifying with a religion. Although ONS normally aims to avoid asking potentially leading questions, there are some situations where asking such a question might be favourable over asking a neutral question, for example, if it makes the question clearer or more accurately collects the data required by users.

On the issue of whether to collect 'weak' or 'strong' affiliation, ONS acknowledges that response rates are sensitive to question wording. The census question ('What is your religion?') may be inferred to assume a person has a religion, whereas the British Social Attitudes Survey (BSA) question ('Do you regard yourself as belonging to a particular religion?') does not support that inference. The use of the term 'belonging' in the BSA question may be inferred as meaning more formal affiliation (Voas and Bruce 2004: 26). The differences present between the 2001 Census and BSA data may in part be due to differences in question wording.

6.2.1 What is your religion?

To inform the decision-making process for the 2011 Census, ONS extensively tested the question wording that appeared on the 2001 Census – 'What is your religion?' (Figure 6.2).

Figure 6.2: Example of religion question in cognitive testing Wave 1 and Wave 2

14 What is your religion?

- ◆ This question is voluntary.
- ◆ Tick one box only.
- None
- Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh
- Any other religion, write in

Respondents varied in how they decided on their answer. Reasons given for their choice of tick-box included: religious practice, belief, or a family background which had involved an upbringing within a particular religion.

The question was mainly interpreted as asking about belief, and in the wider sense about identification and affiliation with a faith. Some example comments include:

'... not necessarily what you practise or preach,... just if you've got a belief.'
(Wave 6)

'What religion you identify to ...' (Wave 6)

'How do you see yourself?' (Wave 6)

'What club you belong to.' (Wave 6)

Those who actively practised a religion found this question straightforward and easy to answer:

'I'm a Christian and I go to church every Sunday, it's Church of Wales ... it's blindingly obvious to me ... I've been a Christian all my life so I have no problems putting that down' (Wave 2). Ticked Christian

'...because I'm actively involved in the Church.' (Wave 6). Ticked Christian.

However, practice was not necessarily a prerequisite for ticking a box and other respondents appeared to understand the question in terms of affiliation.

Amongst respondents who were currently not practising, but who had been raised in a particular faith, there were mixed decisions about whether or not to declare this faith. Those who chose to declare the religion felt an affiliation or identification with it in some way. Justification for ticking a religion included being christened or baptised, being married and choosing to get married in church, or wanting to get married in a church and wanting their children to be raised in a particular faith:

'I have been christened, but I'm not religious. So for me at first I was hesitant as to whether I tick 'None', but at the same time I know I've been christened and I'm part of the Church of England.' (Whole Questionnaire Testing) Ticked Christian.

Such respondents also talked about religion in terms of being part of their cultural background and upbringing:

'I ticked because that's my background' (Wave 2). Ticked Muslim.

'Well I'm going to put Christian down because I come from a Christian background.' (Whole Questionnaire Testing). Ticked Christian.

'I'm Catholic, I was born Catholic, Catholic school, I don't really go to church anymore but I still put it down.' (Wave 2). Ticked Christian.

Occasionally these non-practising individuals directly referred to having a belief:

'The fact that I believe in God, sometimes, and I'm a non-practising Christian in my opinion. Well, that was the way I was brought up' (Wave 2). Ticked Christian.

'I do see myself as Christian, I do have a faith...' (Wave 6).

Alternatively, for those respondents who were brought up in a religion and who decided that as they were not practising they would tick 'No religion', they often justified this by saying that they no longer had a belief in that religion or felt any sense of identification or affiliation with it. For example:

'I was brought up in the Christian faith but I wouldn't call myself a Christian because it's not my beliefs, it's my parent's beliefs, and that doesn't reflect what I believe.' (Wave 6)

'People could say I was [Catholic] but I don't feel as if I was now.' (Whole Questionnaire Testing)

Those respondents who ticked 'None' or 'No religion' but who had not necessarily been brought up in a particular religion were confident of their answer. They often justified their response by talking about their lack of belief in religion:

'I don't believe...I often challenge my own perception and I keep coming back with the same answer.' (Wave 2)

'I don't really consider myself any religion at all, so none ...I'm not a religious person, I don't think I ever have been so none is what I'd always tick.'(Wave 2)

Cognitive testing has shown that respondents are able to understand and answer the question and provide an appropriate response. As this question captures wide affiliation to religion it is clear that amongst those declaring a religion, practising habits vary from none to frequent.

6.2.2 What is your religion even if you are not currently practising?

Prior to recommending the religion question for the 2001 Census, ONS tested a version based on the Canadian census question which asked 'What is this person's religion?' followed by an instruction to 'Indicate a specific denomination or religion even if this person is not a currently practising member of that group.' (Figure 6.3)

Figure 6.3: Religion question asked in 1991 Canada census

<p>RELIGION</p> <p>What is this person's religion?</p> <p><i>Indicate a specific denomination or religion even if the person is not currently a practising member of the group.</i></p> <p><i>For example, Roman Catholic, Ukrainian Catholic, United Church, Anglican, Presbyterian, Lutheran, Baptist, Pentecostal, Greek Catholic, Jewish, Muslim, Jehovah's Witnesses, Salvadoran Army, Hindu, Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh</i></p>	<p>Specify one denomination or religion only</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div> <p><input type="checkbox"/> No religion</p>
--	---

Taken from Kosmin 1999

In 1997 ONS tested the question 'What is your religion?' followed by an invitation to 'Indicate a religion even if you are not a practising member of that group'. Whereas the Canadian question used a write-in box with examples, the test question used pre-designated response options as well as an 'Other' write-in box (Figure 6.4).

Figure 6.4: Question tested by ONS in 1997

<p>What is your religion?</p> <p>Indicate a specific religion even if you are not a practising member of that group. X one box only.</p> <p>None Christian (Including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations) Buddhist Hindu Sikh Islam Jain Jewish Zoroastrian</p> <p>Any other religious faith? Please write-in _____</p>
--

Some respondents commented about ‘practising’ religion although the question was intended to measure ‘association’ with a religion rather than whether the respondent was actively following a religion.

Some respondents commented on ‘involvement’; the Church of England was seen as ‘more relaxed’ about attendance whereas it was felt that Catholics would have to attend more to be ‘practising’. Some respondents saw the term ‘practising’ as usually associated with Catholicism as in ‘practising Catholic’.

Overall, however, the question seems to have been understood, and the request to ‘indicate even if not practising’ was followed. Some respondents who had ticked the Christian tick-box indicated that they had been ‘brought up’ as Christian and retained the belief even though they did not attend church. Others had ticked ‘none’ and were very clear that despite having been born into a ‘Christian’ environment they had no religion, were not baptised and did not believe (ONS 1998).

This instruction was eventually rejected for the 2001 Census, in favour of a shorter question. However the wording was adapted for the National Statistics Harmonised question, which would appear in surveys such as the Labour Force Survey facing less space constraints, to become ‘What is your religion, even if you are not currently practising?’

After 2001, ONS revisited this wording for the 2011 Census. Three variations of the question were tested with small differences in question and instruction wording and layout (Figures 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7). The wording changes were made as attempts to adopt plain English and hence make the question clearer and easier to understand.

Figure 6.5: Question tested in Pre-testing, Wave 1

4 What is your religion even if not currently practising?
 ♦ ✓ only one box.

None

Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)

Buddhist

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Sikh

Any other religion, please write in

Figure 6.6: Question tested in Pre-testing, Wave 2

16 What is your religion, even if not currently practising?
 ♦ This question is voluntary.
 ♦ ✓ one box only.

None

Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)

Buddhist

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Sikh

Any other religion, please write in

Figure 6.7: Question tested in Pre-testing, Wave 3

7 What is your religion, even if you are not currently practising it?
 ♦ This question is voluntary.
 ♦ ✓ one box only.

None

Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)

Buddhist

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Sikh

Any other religion, please write in

There was a tendency for some respondents not to read the whole of the question, only reading the first part, ‘What is your religion’, and then moving on to give an answer. This suggests that respondents only read enough in order to make sense of the question, and that such a long question places a cognitive burden on individuals who may try to avoid this by skipping over what they deem to be unnecessary text.

Respondents generally understood the question to either be asking about what religion they have (an affiliation with a faith) or about belief, rather than practice. For example:

‘Asking, basically, people, what religion they follow.’ (Pre-testing)

‘... what you believe... do you believe in a faith rather than go to church every Sunday.’ (Pre-testing)

‘I’m a Hindu but I never go to temple.’ (Pre-testing)

Interpretations differed, largely depending on an individual’s own situation and whether they had read the entire question or not. When respondents followed the phenomenon of ‘least read’ (Dillman 2000) and only read the first part of the question, they were less likely to interpret it as asking about belief, but more about a religion they currently follow. Some respondents also had trouble understanding the meaning of the second part of the question.

Introducing a reference to practice made the question ambiguous for some respondents, especially those who felt you couldn't have a religion if you didn't actively practise it:

'If you're not currently practising it you don't have it really... if someone has a religion and they're not practising it, yeah, that doesn't make that person, to me, belong to that religion.'
(Pre-testing)

Testing of this religion question revealed it collected inconsistent data because respondents differed in the amount of the question they read. The data this question gathered would also lead to discontinuity with the 2001 Census data.

Crucially, the question was also seen as unsuitable because it required two lines of space on the questionnaire. The inclusion of the second line would have made it necessary to compromise other sections of the questionnaire.

6.2.3 Do you regard yourself as belonging to a religion?

In the British Social Attitudes (BSA) survey question respondents are first asked by the interviewer - '*Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?*' – and if they respond yes they are asked 'which?' without being prompted with names of religions.

The term 'belonging' is used in the literature to refer to both strong affiliation and regular churchgoing. It may be that this conflation occurs in the minds of respondents too. Differences in the proportion of religious affiliates between the census ('what is your religion?') and the BSA ('Do you regard yourself as belonging to a particular religion?') may be partly explained if people are more likely to understand the latter in terms of *active* belonging – that is, as requiring membership of a church or other practising religious group, reducing the number identifying as such (Voas and Bruce 2004). The differences may also be partly explained by a number of other factors:

- 'What is your religion?' is phrased in a way that may expect a religion to be listed
- The census question includes pre-designated religions that respondents will look at along with the question when deciding how to respond. Even though 'none' was also provided as the first option these may make the respondent think that the question is interested in recording a religious identity

Some interest groups have made the case to ONS that the user requirements of religion data would be better met with a question that records strong affiliation particularly for the Christian population. Therefore in the June 2008 module of the Omnibus survey ONS tested a shortened version of the question used in the BSA (Figure 6.8).

There are several key differences between the question tested and the BSA question:

- Unlike the BSA, the census is a written questionnaire with pre-designated response options which were repeated in the interviewer-led Omnibus testing. The BSA does not give examples of religions to respondents.
- There is no room for a filter question in the census questionnaire so this was not tested.
- The question wording was shortened because of space constraints in the census questionnaire - '...any particular religion' changed to '...a religion'.

Figure 6.8: Question asked in June 2008 module of Opinions (Omnibus) survey

<p>Do you regard yourself as belonging to a religion?</p> <p>No</p> <p>Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant, and all other Christian denominations)</p> <p>Buddhist</p> <p>Hindu</p> <p>Jewish</p> <p>Muslim</p> <p>Sikh</p> <p>Any other religion (please specify)</p>
--

ONS analysis revealed that the difference between response rates to the two questions is statistically significant for 'Christian', 'Sikh' and 'No religion'.

Although ONS did not cognitively test this version, testing was carried out in 1997 on the somewhat similar question wording 'Do you consider you belong to a religious group?' (Figure 6.9).

Figure 6.9: Question asked in 1997 testing

<p>Do you consider you belong to a religious group?</p> <p>No</p> <p>Christian</p> <p>Buddhist</p> <p>Hindu</p> <p>Islam/Muslim</p> <p>Jewish</p> <p>Sikh</p> <p>Any other religion_____</p>

The meaning of 'belonging to a religious group' was interpreted in a number of different ways during testing. Some respondents thought the question referred to practising a particular religion. 'Practising' was mainly thought to mean attending a place of worship regularly, but not all respondents were able to explain what they thought of as 'practising'. Others thought that the question was asking respondents if they belonged to a specific sect or group:

'So I felt, 'Should I tick Christian?'. I thought no because Christian clearly states a religious group and I don't belong to a religious group. I don't go to church, only 4 or 5 times a year, when the urge comes over me..' (This respondent answered no to the question). (1997 Cognitive testing)

The answers respondents were prepared to give differed according to the interpretation they gave of the question. This left some respondents confused as to whether they were answering correctly or not. Some answered 'no' because they were not actively practising a particular religion although they did have a religious belief. This confusion meant that some later changed their answers either on the questionnaire or during the interview:

'I put no, because I am actually a Catholic. I'm assuming do you actually follow a faith, you go to church or whatever or you don't go to church, that's why I actually put no, then I'm

denying my faith, so I actually put Catholic.' (This respondent answered no and then changed to writing Catholic into the 'Any other religion' box). (1997 Cognitive testing)

It was concluded that the question was unclear as to how 'belonging' should be interpreted. Most respondents were forced to choose between the two broadest interpretations (being brought up in a faith or belief in a religion and active participation or 'practising' a religion). Therefore, asking a question about 'belonging' would not be consistent with the decision to collect information on religious affiliation.

6.2.4 'What is your religion or belief?'

One of the main user needs for religion data that ONS identified was to assist legal obligations to prevent discrimination and promote equality (Section 4). Since the introduction of a religion question in the 2001 Census, the British Government has passed several laws to protect religious freedom, including the freedom to have no religion or belief. These laws include:

- the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003
- the Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006
- the Equality Act 2006.

The Government also announced the Equality Bill in December 2008 which will simplify and strengthen the existing laws to include an extension of a new equality duty to religion or belief.

Religion or belief was defined in the Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003 as '*any religion, religious belief, or similar philosophical belief*' for example atheism and Humanism, but excluded '*any philosophical or political belief unless that belief is similar to a religious belief*' (Commission for Racial Equality 2007).

Under the Equality Act 2006, it is unlawful for someone to discriminate against you because of your religion or belief, your non-religious belief or because you have no religion or belief in a number of areas. ONS's interpretation of the legislation is that it is unlawful to discriminate against a person because of their affiliation to a religion or belief even if they are not practising or believers. A religious affiliation question will therefore meet user needs under this new legislation.

The equality impact assessment commissioned by ONS in 2008 recommended that ONS should 'investigate whether the religion question can be rephrased to collect information on religion or other (including non-religious) belief systems.'

ONS first explored whether the question could be reworded to reflect the new legislation by including the term 'belief'. The wording 'what is your religion or non-religious belief?' was suggested but took up too much space on the census questionnaire. The wording subsequently developed and tested was 'What is your religion or belief?'

The question was included in cognitive testing Waves 3-5 and Welsh language testing Wave 1 (Self-completion questionnaire – Figures 6.10, 6.11 and 6.12) and Omnibus modules September, November and December 2007 (interviewer-administered questionnaire).

Those who reported a religion but who were not practising often drew on their belief as a qualifying factor:

"... I am Christian but I don't go to church everyday or every Sunday, but I believe in Jesus Christ." (Wave 3)

"I'm not a big church goer but I do believe, you know, I suppose...I was married in church, so yes." (Wave 3) Ticked Christian

Some respondents did still see the question in terms of background, upbringing and affiliation even if they might not spontaneously consider themselves 'religious':

"What is your background, even if you don't go to church, or whatever religion you are, do you believe in a faith, is your family background from a faith." (Wave 5)

For some respondents who had been christened, baptised or raised with parental affiliation to a certain faith, but who were not actively practising, sometimes a deeper consideration of what answer to give was required. Some respondents explained that they chose their answers because of their parents' beliefs and how they were raised, even though they didn't practise themselves. There were mixed responses amongst those who did not actively practise the religion in which they had been brought up when deciding whether or not to report this or to tick 'No religion'. Of these respondents, some chose to report the religion rather than tick 'No religion' as they still felt some connection or affiliation or held a belief in the religion even if it wasn't very strong:

"I guess I've got some connection to that. I'd probably like to get married in a church for instance." (Wave 5) Ticked Christian.

"I would say it was something I was brought up with, going to church, then lapsed at fifteen or sixteen, but I always hold myself to be a Christian although I don't practise it." (Wave 3). Ticked Christian.

This seemed particularly true for those respondents whose religion is deemed to be a way of life:

"My parents are Muslim and I'm Muslim, but the thing is I'm Muslim by birth but I don't really follow everything so I just put it down... I thought about ticking no religion but I just put that down." (Wave 4). Ticked Muslim.

"I've been Muslim since I was born." (Wave 4). Ticked Muslim.

"I'm not religious at all." (Wave 4). Ticked Muslim.

"Well... Jews and Sikhs we're in a peculiar situation in British law where you have to be born Jewish or Sikh but you can't get out of it." (Wave 4). Ticked Jewish.

However those respondents who decided to tick 'No religion' included those who felt you could not report a religion if you were not practising:

"I think if you are going to say you are a Christian you should be a regular church goer and I'm not. Yes, nominally I'm Church of England but I'm not practising." (Wave 3)

"...we don't go to church or anything, so I'm not practising so that's why I'm putting no religion." (Wave 3)

A few respondents recorded 'no religion', despite having had a Christian upbringing. For example, the following respondent explained that "officially" both themselves and their partner were Church of England, yet they chose not to record this because:

"I'm thinking well, I am actually baptised, like me and my [spouse] we both are, but neither of us ever actually, you know, go to church or anything like that." (Wave 5)

In the Welsh language testing, a couple of respondents with a Christian upbringing recorded 'no religion':

"Dim crefydd rois i...mae'n bosib mai dyna'r tro cyntaf imi dicio hwnna yn hytrach na christnogaeth oherwydd ces i 'magu fel Cristion...ond mae hwn yn nes at y bywyd dw i'n ei fyw, a'r hyn dw i'n ei gredu, yn hytrach na'r etifeddiaeth oedd geni. Felly mae 'dim crefydd' yn sôn amdana i, ac nid fy nghefndir."

[I put no religion...it's possible that that's the first time for me to tick that instead of 'Christianity', because I was brought up as a Christian...but this is closer to the life I live, and what I believe, rather than the heritage I had. So 'no religion' is about me, and not my background.]

(Welsh language testing, Wave 1) Ticked 'no religion'

Other reasons given by respondents who ticked 'no religion' was a lack of belief:

"I celebrate Christmas, and do Japanese Buddhist things, but I don't really believe in it so I just said no ..." (Wave 3)

"I've just got no belief at all, I don't believe there's anything there." (Wave 3)

Or lack of attachment / affiliation to a religion:

"I haven't been baptised or anything like that so I'm not officially any religion. I am interested in Christianity but I'm not yet part of that religion". (Wave 4)

"I suppose I live in a Christian country and have been brought up in a Christian way but I don't feel as if I'm attached to any religion at all so I thought no religion is the honest answer, other than thinking what would people expect." (Wave 3)

Comparison between response rates of this question from the Omnibus survey and the 'what is your religion?' question also asked in the Omnibus survey revealed the religion or belief question produced proportions that were significantly lower for 'Christian' but higher for 'No religion' 'Any other religion [or belief]' and 'Buddhist'. The difference between the two questions were:

Version A	Version B
Question asked 'What is your religion?'	Question asked 'What is your religion or belief?'
First option was 'No religion'	First option was 'No religion (including Humanist, Atheist, Agnostic)'
No 'Pagan' category	'Pagan' category included [combined with 'other' for statistical comparison]
Last option was 'Any other religion'	Last option was 'Any other religion or belief'

Despite the number of question differences, these results appear to confirm that the change in wording alters respondents' understanding of the question. So people who would otherwise affiliate as 'Christian' but do not have a Christian belief may be more inclined to state they have no religion.

The use of the term 'belief' may make people more willing to identify with beliefs that do not correspond to formal religions – many people in Britain identify themselves as 'spiritual' even when they no longer have traditional religious belief (Voas and Day 2007). Cognitive testing suggests there may also have been some confusion over what belief refers to allowing people to reference beliefs that may be held without any overt affiliation.

“Ces i drafferth yn 2001, achos tydw i ddim yn ymarfer unrhyw grefydd...ces i fy nwyn i fynd yn mynd i'r capel, ond dw i ddim yn gwneud hynny rwan. Felly dw i di cael hi'n anodd i ddiffinio fy hun fel Cristion...mae gynna i ffydd, ond dw i ddim yn meddwl ei bod hi'n rhywbeth y gallwch chi ei ddiffinio mor dwt fel crefyddau 'specific' fel petai...mae 'dim crefydd' falle'n rhy gry', ond mae'r crefyddau penodol ddim yn teimlo'n addas...felly...” Hoffai fod wedi ticio 'Agnostigiaeth', pe byddai hyn ar wahân i 'Anffyddiaeth'.

I had trouble in 2001, because I don't practise any religion...I was brought up going to chapel, but I don't do that now. So I find it hard to define myself as a Christian...I do have a faith, but I don't think it's something you can define as neatly as 'specific' religions, so to speak...perhaps 'no religion' is too strong, but the specific religions don't feel appropriate...so] Would have liked to have ticked 'Agnosticism', if this were separated from 'Atheism'.

(Welsh language testing, Wave 1) Ticked 'no religion'

ONS concluded that adding the term 'belief' altered respondent understanding of the question with the result that the concept frequently being measured was religious belief rather than religious affiliation. ONS rejected the question on these grounds.

6.2.5 Which of these best describes you?

Following the publication of the White Paper in December 2008, dialogue with a number of stakeholders led ONS to carry out further work on the religion question. Testing was conducted in 2009 on an alternative question following concerns that the question, 'what is your religion?' was a potentially leading question that would encourage respondents to record very loose religious affiliations. This effect would likely be greater amongst those recording their affiliation as Christian due to the large number of people in England and Wales that have a cultural connection with Christianity. The concern expressed was that some respondents, for example, may record their affiliation as 'Christian' simply because they live in an historically Christian country, rather than because of any personal affiliation.

It has been suggested that the problem is exacerbated by a discrepancy between the concept being measured and the way in which the data is interpreted and used in government resource allocation and the media. More specifically, it has been suggested that data from the question is frequently used as if it were based on religious belief or religious practice, rather than religious affiliation. Although this concern relates more to the misinterpretation of published data than it does to the method of data collection, ONS acknowledges that it has a duty to produce statistics that are clear and not likely to cause misunderstanding. ONS launched a research programme to explore the issues raised by testing a neutrally worded question. The research programme included a postal test, four months of Opinions Survey testing, cognitive testing and engagement with key stakeholders to discuss the concerns and interpret the findings of the tests.

Postal test

Following discussions with key stakeholders and consideration of previous question testing, ONS decided to test the question 'which of these best describes you?' in order to explore the effect of question wording that was not leading. In the March 2009 Postal Test, the new question was tested with

the same order of responses as the 'What is your religion?' question in the 2008 Postal Test (Figure 6.13).

Figure 6.13: 2009 Postal Test religion question

20 Which of these best describes you?

➔ This question is voluntary

No religion

Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)

Buddhist

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Sikh

Any other religion, write in

Results from the March 2009 Postal Test were compared to those from the 2008 Postal Test which included the question 'what is your religion?'. Both tests included a 10,000 questionnaire random sample of households in England. 5,639 individual responses were received from the 2008 test and at the time of analysis 3,679 individual responses had been entered from the 2009 test. The demographic profiles of respondents to the two tests were found to differ significantly by the variable of ethnic group (Table 6.14), but not by the variables of age and gender.

Table 6.14: Comparison of response percentages for ethnic group question

Ethnic group (broad level)	2008 Postal Test (%)	2009 Postal Test (%)
White	95.5	94.9
Mixed	1.1	0.8
Asian***	2.1	3.3
Black	0.9	0.7
Arab	0.1	0.3
Other	0.2	0.1
Total	(Base = 5,639) 100	(Base = 3,679) 100

*** significant difference at 99% confidence level

Table 6.15 has therefore been constructed to show response frequencies to the religion question which are adjusted to account for the difference in ethnic group³. This adjustment provides a more consistent comparison between the two samples and ensures that any effect of ethnic group doesn't skew the comparison of the difference in responses to the two questions.

³ The demographic profile of respondents to the March 2009 Postal Test was adjusted to match that of the 2008 Postal Test.

Table 6.15: Comparison of response percentages (adjusted by ethnic group)

Religion	2008 Postal Test (What is your religion?)	2009 Postal Test adjusted for ethnic group (‘Which of these best describes you?’)
Non-response***	5.0	6.5
No religion	19.3	19.6
Christian**	72.2	70.3
Buddhist	0.2	0.3
Hindu	0.5	0.6
Jewish	0.5	0.6
Muslim	1.0	1.3
Sikh	0.1	0.2
Any other**	0.9	0.5
Multiple response	0.3	0.1
Total	(Base = 5,639) 100	(Base = 3,679) 100

** significant difference at 95% confidence level

*** significant difference at 99% confidence level

Table 6.15 provides some evidence that ‘which of these best describes you?’ would result in a slightly lower ‘Christian’ count, which borders on being statistically significant. There is also evidence that the question will not have a significant impact on the number of people identifying with the minority religions with tick boxes. There is some evidence, however, of a decrease in the ‘any other’ category. The wording ‘which of these best describe you?’ may suggest to respondents that they should be looking for the most appropriate of the pre-designated categories rather than writing in their own description. If this is the case, there may be a resultant loss of information on minority religions and non-religious beliefs.

The greatest concern is the unexpected increase in the proportion of people not responding to the question. Although the question is voluntary and the 2009 Postal Test response rate is still within acceptable limits, high response rates remain a key goal.

A possible reason for the increase in non-response rate is given by a comment made by a respondent to the religion question in the April 2009 Omnibus survey who spontaneously said ‘none of these describe me.’ This suggests the possibility that the ‘no religion’ category has taken on a more active meaning. When asking ‘what is your religion?’, ‘no religion’ may have been used as a default option for people without a religious affiliation. Stating that ‘no religion’ is the best description of oneself may seem to have a stronger meaning, indicating that the person in question is actively non-religious rather than simply uncertain or undecided. In the absence of an appropriate category, respondents may choose to leave the question blank.

Opinions survey

The question ‘which of these best describes you?’ was included in the Opinions Survey between April and July 2009, with varying combinations of response options (Figures 6.16 to 6.19).

Figure 6.16: April 2009 Opinions Survey religion question

Which of these best describes you?

Christian (Including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
Buddhist
Hindu
Jewish
Muslim
Sikh
Any other religion (Please specify)
No religion

Figure 6.17: May 2009 Opinions Survey religion question

Which of these best describes you?

No religion
Christian (Including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
Buddhist
Hindu
Jewish
Muslim
Sikh
any other religion or belief, write in

Figure 6.18: June 2009 Opinions Survey religion question

Which of these best describes you?

Christian (Including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
Buddhist
Hindu
Jewish
Muslim
Sikh
Any other religion or belief (Please specify)
No religion

Figure 6.19: July 2009 Opinions Survey religion question

Which of these best describes you?

No religion
Christian (Including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
Buddhist
Hindu
Jewish
Muslim
Sikh
any other religion, write in

The four questions asked in the census module of the Opinions Survey are designed to test different combinations of response ordering. In the question 'what is your religion?', 'no religion' has been included as the first response option in order to make it clear that the question is meant for everyone, not just those who have a religious affiliation. However, asking 'which of these best describes you?' presents no clear reason to include this as the first response option and questionnaire design theory suggests that the best place to include a 'none' or 'no' response is at the bottom of the list. The four questions are also designed to test the impact of including the term 'belief' in the 'any other' category. The results can also be compared to previous Opinions Surveys to gain evidence on the effect that 'which of these best describes you?' has on response frequencies.

Annex A shows response frequencies for the eight Opinions Surveys in which additional religion questions have been tested. It should be noted that the presence of the core religion question since May 2008 may have a bias effect on respondents when they come to answer a second question on religion in the census module. A further difficulty in interpreting the data is that, as an interview based survey, there is no close equivalent of non-response in the Opinions Survey. This is particularly crucial as non-response rates were a significant area of concern arising from the analysis of the postal tests.

The Opinions Survey results suggest that, when compared to 'what is your religion?' and 'what is your religion, even if not currently practising?', the question 'which of these best describes you?' has the impact of reducing the number of people choosing 'Christian' and increasing the number of people choosing 'No religion' when the same response options are provided. However, in April and June when the 'no religion' response option is placed last in the list for 'which of these best describes you?', there was little difference between the core question and the module question.

Overall, there is some evidence from testing that the question 'which of these best describes you?' has the effect of a decrease in the proportion of respondents identifying as Christian and an increase in the proportion identifying as non-religious. There is no evidence that the question 'which of these best describes you?' reduces the count of minority religions with tick-boxes. While these factors may be considered supportive of the question 'which of these best describes you?', the overriding concerns are those suggested by the 2009 Postal Test, where non-response rates increased from 2008 and the proportion of 'any other' responses decreased. Furthermore, introducing the question 'which of these best describes you?' may require the re-ordering of response categories to place 'no religion' at the bottom of the list. Opinions Survey testing has suggested that in this format the question would have little or no impact when compared to 'what is your religion?' In choosing between two questions which elicit similar responses, the requirement from 76 per cent of data users responding to the 2007 consultation for comparability of outputs with the 2001 question would be an important consideration.

Impact on write-in responses

A further potential problem with the question 'which of these best describes you?' is that it does not mention religion and may result in more respondents writing in descriptions that are unrelated to religion. The question was included in Wave 7 of cognitive testing which found that all respondents understood that the question was asking about religion and answered accordingly. However, people providing unrelated responses do not necessarily do so because they do not understand the question. Furthermore, the bias effect of the cognitive interviewer's presence with the respondent in cognitive testing is likely to reduce the number of people writing in unrelated responses and so this evidence was not considered to be indicative of behaviour in the 2011 Census.

The random samples in the 2008 Postal Test and March 2009 Postal Test did not return any responses that were unrelated to religion. However, the non-random sample in the March 2009

Postal Test returned two unrelated responses. The non-random sample in the 2008 Postal Test did not return any unrelated responses.

As the two unrelated responses took place in a non-random sample and represent a very small proportion of overall test responses it is not possible to draw any firm conclusions about the comparative likelihood of the two questions eliciting such responses. However, the vagueness of the question 'which of these best describes you?' remains a concern as it is possible that the incidence of unrelated responses will scale up significantly for the 2011 Census due to media and public involvement, as seen in the 2001 Census where a campaign resulted in a large number of 'Jedi' responses to the religion question. Through testing it is therefore difficult to ascertain the likely number of unrelated responses in the 2011 Census.

Subsequent engagement with stakeholders

Following the programme of testing, ONS engaged with a number of key stakeholders to discuss the research findings and related issues. A number of central government departments confirmed their preference for a question asking about religious affiliation, as did some religious/faith groups. The majority of stakeholders who expressed views were supportive of ONS's decision to collect information on affiliation and believed that the question 'What is your religion?' was the preferable means of collecting that information when compared with 'which of these best describes you?' The main reason cited for this preference was the need for comparability with 2001 Census data. A small number of stakeholders remained of the opinion that affiliation should not be the only, or preferred, concept measured.

Taking into account all the elements of the research programme, ONS decided that, on balance, the question 'what is your religion?' remains the preferred method of collecting data on religious affiliation in the 2011 Census.

Question wording recommendation

It is recommended that the religious affiliation question continues to ask 'What is your religion?'

6.3 Response categories

The first response option in the 2001 Census was 'none' followed by 'Christian' and then the five minority religions in alphabetical order ('Buddhist', 'Hindu', 'Jewish', 'Muslim', 'Sikh'). In the 2007 consultation, three quarters of data users felt the 2001 religion categories would provide them with the information that they require.

Some respondents to 2007 consultation suggested additional religions and non-religious beliefs should be recognised in the 2011 Census, possibly with their own tick-boxes. These suggestions were sometimes motivated by a requirement for information, and sometimes by the need to ensure the question is acceptable and inclusive.

However, there was not sufficient space to add new tick-boxes.

6.3.1 Recording non-religious beliefs

Aside from changing the wording of the question to include the term 'belief' (see Section 6.2.4), ONS considered three alternative ways of capturing more detail on non-religious beliefs by changing the response options:

- Providing examples in the 'No religion' box
- Introducing additional tick-boxes
- Providing non-religious examples in the 'Other' box

Examples in 'No religion' box

In 2001 the question was designed so that people with no religious affiliation ticked the 'none' box. One interest group argued that people identifying with non-religious belief systems, such as agnosticism, atheism or humanism would not have necessarily ticked a box and therefore the 'No religion' category should be explicit that it includes non-religious belief systems.

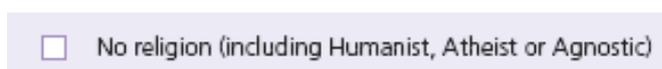
In the 2001 Census religion question, some people with specific non-religious affiliations chose to use the 'other religion' write-in space, including 14,909 Agnostics, 10,357 Atheists, 8,297 Humanists and 11 Secularists. This gives credence to the view that some respondents (in total less than 0.1 per cent of the size of those who ticked 'none') from those groups did not feel sufficiently represented by the 'no religion' box.

ONS tested the question with and without examples after the 'No religion' tick-box (Figures 6.20 and 6.21).

Figure 6.20: 'None' tick-box



Figure 6.21: 'No religion (including Humanist, Atheist or Agnostic)' tick-box



The inclusion of the examples 'Humanist, Atheist or Agnostic' changes the meaning of the 'No religion' category as with them it is no longer mutually exclusive with the other categories – people with a religious affiliation or beliefs may, for example, be Humanists, Atheists or Agnostics.

Not only is this bad practice for a census question but it may also change what the question is measuring by introducing belief-related concepts. This would risk reducing comparability with 2001, thus making the data less valuable to data users.

Some respondents, in cognitive testing of a version of the religion question that listed 'humanist', 'atheist' or 'agnostic' as examples for the 'No religion' tick-box, noted that these might be more appropriate being given as a separate option to 'No religion'. One respondent stated that:

“Atheist and agnostic are totally different things to put ‘agnostic’ under ‘no religion’ but if you’re agnostic you could argue that you are [religious] and then I thought it’s strange to link Humanists in with Agnostics because Humanists are totally different from Agnostics so it just threw me that all sorts of people, probably the majority of the population if they were honest were all getting lumped in here but were all coming out as ‘no religion’...it confused me as to how to answer it...I’d have thought you should have separated all three [humanists, atheists, and agnostics.]” (Wave 3)

Similarly in Welsh language testing, another respondent mentioned that Agnosticism and Humanism were different to 'No religion' and 'Atheism', stating that they are 'faiths', although not systematic ones. This respondent selected 'No religion' but would have liked to have recorded 'Agnosticism' to demonstrate that they do have a faith. If Agnosticism and Humanism were separate options, they said that they probably would have chosen Agnosticism. When this respondent was asked whether they would have liked to have seen another option, they said:

'Bosib baswn i'n meddwl bod eisiau gwahanu Dyneiddiaeth ac Agnostigiaeth ac Anffyddiaeth...yn ddau beth ar wahân...Anffyddiaeth, yn ddim crefydd, ond mae'r ddau arall yn wahanol...mae 'na gred ond dim falle un systematig fel Hindwaeth.'

[Possibly, I would think that there was a need to separate Humanism and Agnosticism from Atheism...two separate things...Atheism...no religion, but the other two are different...there is a belief, but perhaps not a systematic one like Hinduism.]

(Welsh language testing, Wave 1)

Furthermore there is some evidence that such examples may confuse people who would otherwise select 'No religion'. In cognitive testing, those who ticked 'No religion' were generally brought up in a religion or belief and have since decided not to pursue this. Frequently respondents chose this option as they no longer felt they belonged to a particular religion as opposed to identifying with the humanist, atheist or agnostic descriptions.

"Religion wasn't something I personally gelled with. I wouldn't classify myself an atheist as such but at this present time in my life I don't follow any particular religions." (Wave 3)

One respondent who took part in cognitive testing for Wave 3 left the question blank as they could not find an appropriate tick-box for their situation. They felt that although they did not follow the majority religion of their home country they did not feel immediately able to tick any of the boxes as they did not consider themselves atheist or agnostic.

Examples in 'other' tick-box

ONS also considered the implications of adding non-religious examples in the 'other' box to encourage people with non-religious beliefs to write them in.

To ensure that the 'No religion' and 'other' options remained mutually exclusive, ONS would need to change the wording of the question and the 'other' tick-box which would be very difficult to do clearly, succinctly and without changing the concept that the question measures (see Section 6.2.4). Furthermore if ONS was to include examples for the write-in option, it would need to consider other requests that have been made by other groups.

If individuals wish they may still choose to write-in a non-religious belief in the write-in space and as with 2001 a count of these will be outputted.

Separate tick-boxes

In line with some of the cognitive testing comments several data users responding to the 2007 consultation required information on non-religious beliefs as well as on religions, for example:

'Local authorities need to monitor for both religion and belief to prevent unlawful discrimination according to the Employment and Equality (Religion or Belief) regulations (2003) and the Equality Act (2006).' (London Borough of Greenwich)

'The category 'No religion' is too vague and simplistic. A further breakdown of categories, including ideologies and beliefs such as secularism, agnosticism, humanism and atheism, among others, should be made.' (The Ethnic Minority Foundation)

Space constraints mean that specific tick-boxes or a separate write-in option for non-religious beliefs cannot be included in the 2011 Census. Furthermore, such an addition would require a change to the wording of the question (for example to 'what is your religion or non-religious belief?') and the 'other' tick-box (for example to 'other religion or non-religious belief') which would be impossible to do clearly, succinctly and without changing the concept that the question measures (see Section 6.2.4).

However ONS testing has indicated that changing the wording to 'No religion' adds clarity to the question (Figure 6.22).

Figure 6.22 'No religion' tick-box



Recording non-religious beliefs recommendation

It is recommended that the question does not include examples or separate tick-boxes for non-religious beliefs.

It is recommended that the 'None' response option is reworded 'No religion'.

6.3.2 Recording Christian denominations

The religion questions in Scotland's 2001 Census included a breakdown of the Christian category, reflecting the fact the questions were introduced in the context of anti-Catholic discrimination and Catholic disadvantage in Scotland (Wallis 2001) (Figure 6.23). The Northern Ireland Census also focussed on Christian denominations (Figure 6.24). Although religious groups made the case for capturing data on Christian denominations in the 2001 England and Wales Census, this was rejected by ONS on the grounds of insufficient user need (Aspinall 2000, Frances 2003, Southworth 2005).

Figure 6.23: 2001 Scotland Census

13 What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?

- None
- Church of Scotland
- Roman Catholic
- Other Christian, *please write in*

- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Muslim
- Another Religion, *please write in*
- Jewish
- Sikh

Figure 6.24: 2001 Northern Ireland Census

8a What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?

- Roman Catholic
- Presbyterian Church in Ireland
- Church of Ireland
- Methodist Church in Ireland
- Other, *please write in*

8b What religion, religious denomination or body do you belong to?

Some respondents to the 2007 consultation asked for the Christian category to be broken down further to better allow provision of services that are sensitive to religious belief and to understand

inequalities by denomination, particularly in the field of health. However, the majority did not elaborate

'Christian' conceals heterogeneity. [It] could be made a free text field or subdivided through predesignated categories. [This would be] useful for investigating health inequalities in some of the different ethnic communities, for example to have a Catholic/Protestant/Other breakdown. It would also provide a useful basis for subdividing the 'Irish group'.

Similarly, some respondents required information that would differentiate between different types of Muslims. For example:

'... There might also be good reasons for separating Sunni and Shia Muslims. The advice of the Muslim Council should be sought on this matter ... A fuller breakdown of religion would allow a fuller analysis of the links between religious affiliation and health inequalities.'

However, it is worth noting that this suggestion was not made by Muslim respondents and prior to the 2001 question minority religion groups on the Religious Affiliation Sub-group (that advised ONS on the question development) generally accepted that they should be treated as single entities, unlike Christianity which has a particular history in England and Wales (Francis 2003).

Respondents to Pre-testing and Whole Questionnaire Testing expressed different views about placing all of the different Christian denominations into one response option. Some felt splitting the category would make it easier for them to find the appropriate response (Pre-testing). Some preferred the denominations to be split as they felt there were differences between the denominations, for example:

'I don't assume myself like Christian. I'm Roman Catholic.' (Whole Questionnaire Testing)

Some respondents found that their denomination was not listed, but they seemed able to report their religion to their satisfaction. The following respondent chose to tick 'Christian' but explained:

"I'm a Christian who goes to church regularly and a Methodist, which isn't in there, but it's got 'other denominations'." (Wave 5)

However others found a single 'Christian' category acceptable:

'We all preach to the same one up there.' (Whole Questionnaire Testing)

A small number of respondents did not find their preferred answer. A Quaker said that many Quakers have Christian beliefs, but are also different to Christians. However this respondent did not choose to use the write-in box and ticked 'Christian' instead (Wave 2). A respondent with English as a second language would have preferred the term 'Roman Catholic' rather than simply 'Catholic'. However, this did not stop them ticking the 'Christian' option (Whole Questionnaire Testing). A few respondents mentioned that their particular non-conformist religion was not included in the 'Christianity' option.

In light of these issues, ONS considered the feasibility of an extended list of denominations as used in Scotland and Northern Ireland (Figure 6.25).

Figure 6.25: Religion question with Christian denomination tick-boxes

19 What is your religion?

This question is voluntary

No religion

Church of England

Other Protestant

Catholic

Other Christian

Buddhist

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Sikh

Any other religion, write in

However there was not enough space on the census questionnaire to adopt this approach. ONS also identified two further problems with the expanded religion question:

- Cognitive testing indicated that some respondents may interpret and answer the expanded question differently. Most users (75 per cent) required data comparability with the 2001 Census.
- Different categories would be needed in Wales and also potentially five rather than four categories as there are a higher number of prominent Christian denominations in Wales which would therefore require more tick-boxes. This would make comparisons across England and Wales difficult.

ONS also explored a double banked question based on the one used in New Zealand in previous Censuses (Figure 6.26) and this was cognitively tested by the Welsh Assembly Government in 2008 (Figure 6.27).

Figure 6.26: 2006 New Zealand Census religion question

18 What is your religion?

no religion

Christian

Buddhist

Hindu

Muslim

Jewish

other religion. Print what it is:

or object to answering this question

Which of these, if any, are you?

Anglican

Catholic

Presbyterian

Methodist

Ratana

Ringatū

other. Print what it is:

Figure 6.27: Religion question with Christian denomination follow-up question (Wales version)

19 What is your religion?

This question is voluntary

No religion

Christian

Buddhist

Hindu

Jewish

Muslim

Sikh

Any other religion, write in

Which of these, if any, are you?

Church in Wales

Presbyterian

Welsh Union of Independents

Catholic

Other Christian, write in

Although this testing revealed the Christian breakdown was welcomed by some (generally when their denomination was listed) it also identified a number of problems:

- There was some evidence that people thought of the new question in terms of religious practice because there were specific tick-boxes for denominations. There was some suggestion that people were choosing 'No religion' when they would otherwise have picked 'Christian' because of the need to think of the denomination that they belonged to. This supports suggestions that the undifferentiated category 'Christian' in the 2001 England and Wales Census made it appear more as a cultural question than a religious one (Voas and Bruce 2004: 27).
- Some respondents did not tick the Christian box even if they ticked a specific denomination and others ticked 'Other Christian' but didn't write-in their denomination in the text boxes. If this inconsistency was repeated on a large scale it could seriously undermine the quality of the data.
- There was some confusion over the write-in box for Christian being the same as that for 'Any other religion'.
- There was some adverse reaction when respondents had to write in their respective Christian denomination, as they would then have to be classified as 'Other Christian'.
- The question was not tested on non-Christians to see if there was any adverse reaction amongst other groups but some Christian respondents picked up the fact that the question was not asking for breakdowns of other religions. This was raised as a possible contentious issue, particularly if non-Christian respondents would want to note which denomination in their particular religion they belonged to.

ONS also had a number of methodological concerns. Firstly, the format of the question is different to other questions and may appear more complex, so the way respondents answer the question could change. The change to the question would increase respondent burden which may lead to higher non-response rates for the question.

Secondly, the question would fail to satisfy a UK-wide agreement that was made to avoid the double-banking of response categories where possible except for scalar questions and for the marital/civil partnership status question. Double-banking is where the tick-boxes are listed side-by-side in two columns rather than in a longer list, and therefore is a method designed to save space on the questionnaire. When tick boxes are double-banked respondents may fail to notice the boxes to the right-hand side (Dillman, 2007). This can occur because they are busy visually attending to the answer procedure of reading down a list, which they have become accustomed to for the vast majority of the other questions on the census questionnaire. In an attempt to overcome this and attract visual attention to the Christian breakdown the question was developed giving these options in a bordered box using a different colour for the background. However whilst encouraging respondents to notice the Christian breakdown boxes, this can lead to the opposite effect of making the remaining religion tick-boxes less visible, which means they could be missed. Again this would lead to incomplete and incorrect data and a possible undercount for the remaining religions listed.

Christian denominations recommendation

It is recommended that the question does not separately record Christian denominations.

6.3.3 Recording Pagan affiliation

Of the religions without a tick-box in the 2001 Census religion question, 'Pagan', and its associated traditions, was the most common write-in response (excluding Jedi). A number of Pagan interest groups responded to the 2007 consultation to request the inclusion of a Pagan tick-box in the 2011 Census religion question.

'We believe that "Modern Paganism" should be a separately listed category, as in the 2001 Census, the information had to be compiled by looking at all individual paths. A "Pagan" tick box would enable a better and more accurate view of how many considered themselves to be practising one of the Pagan religions.'

However, a requirement for continued detail on Pagan denominations was also expressed by a Pagan interest group.

'... encourage ONS to put "Pagan" as a tick box on the census form. However, this must be accompanied by an option whereby Pagans can mark which of the many different Pagan traditions they work within, whether Druidry, Wicca, Witchcraft, Heathenism, Asatru, and so on.'

Including a Pagan tick-box would be likely to result in less respondents writing in their specific Pagan tradition and as a consequence there would be less detail available on the numbers of each tradition.

However, ONS decided to include 'Pagan' as a response category in the Opinions Survey in September, November and December 2007 to collect further evidence on the size of the group, and the reaction of respondents to the inclusion of the tick-box.

In all three months of Opinions Survey testing, the Pagan tick-box returned the lowest response frequency of the response options available, though in September and November the frequencies were comparable with Sikh and Jewish tick-boxes. There was no strong evidence of a negative reaction from non-Pagan respondents to the inclusion of the Pagan tick-box.

ONS concluded that a specific Pagan tick-box should not be included in the 2011 Census religion question. Space constraints on the questionnaire mean that it is not possible to include a further tick-box.

However, collecting information on Pagans using the write-in option will have the benefit of meeting user requirements for a breakdown of Pagan traditions. ONS acknowledge that there were problems with the way that Pagan traditions were reproduced in 2001 Census outputs and work is underway to ensure that the correct outputs are produced in 2011. With this in place, ONS believe that information on Paganism would be better collected in the 2011 Census religion question through the write-in section.

Recording Pagan affiliation recommendation

It is recommended that the question does not include a Pagan tick-box.

6.3.4 Groups without tick-boxes

Cognitive testing of both the questionnaire for England and the English language version of the questionnaire for Wales has not indicated that respondents find it difficult to provide a response with which they feel satisfied. Furthermore, people who feel they have a religious affiliation which is not listed tend to write it in whether there is an example there or not. One respondent felt able to report their Pagan religion to their satisfaction by writing it in. They didn't expect to see it as a tick-box option and had no problem with writing in:

'No, mine is not on there ... we're a very small lot ... I think the catch is with these sort of things if you covered every single religion, wouldn't you, you'd have a whole book on its own separately for go to sub-section, you know, are you A) a Pagan, that does what, so yeah 'Any other religion's fine ...' (Wave 6)

Throughout the testing there were a small number of respondents who were unable to report their religion to their satisfaction. They usually left the question blank. These tended to be people who felt they had some kind of belief and were not non-religious but that they did not practise, and as they drew on a variety of religions their particular beliefs were not named. For example, a respondent from eastern Europe explained that former Soviets often believe, but not in a specific religion:

'I grow up without religion before, so to put none, I can't do that, because I believe in God but in general, not in strict example like, to go in church or mosque, to pray'. (Wave 1)

It is unlikely that additional tick-boxes would make the question clearer for such people.

6.3.5 Tick-box descriptions

The English language and Welsh language questionnaires employ slightly differing terminology to describe the tick-boxes for the religions.

In 1998, testing of the English language tick-box descriptions found that using the names given to the followers of that religion (e.g. Muslim, Christian, Sikh) was generally what respondents expected to find in answer to the question. As these labels can also be taken to mean 'the Muslim religion', 'the Christian religion' or 'the Sikh religion', a decision was made to use the names given to the followers of the religions rather than the names of the religions themselves.

In contrast, the Welsh language uses different terms for religions, for the followers of religions and for the associated adjectives. It is more suitable for the category labels in the Welsh language questionnaires to reflect the names of the religions themselves (e.g. Islam [Islam], Cristnogaeth [Christianity], Siciaeth [Sikhism]). The names of the religions were used in the Welsh language questionnaires for the 2001 Census and in the 2007 Census Test. They have also been successfully tested in two waves of cognitive testing, and so a decision was made to use the names of the religions in the Welsh language questionnaires.

Tick-box descriptions recommendation

It is recommended that the English language questionnaire should continue to use the terms 'Christian', 'Muslim', 'Sikh' etc. The Welsh language questionnaire should continue to use the names of the 'religions' as descriptors.

6.3.6 Changing the Christian examples in Wales

In testing before the 2001 Census, Catholics and members of other historic churches, such as the Church of England, looked for a specific option to identify with, and on not finding one tended to write in the 'other' category.

There was a desire amongst some respondents for tick-boxes to be more specific than 'Christian'. This is because cognitive testing in 1997 found that members of both pre-twentieth-century protestant groups (such as Baptist and Methodist) and new Protestant churches (such as Seventh Day Adventist and Jehovah's Witness) did not always identify with the 'Christian' category.

Given this result ONS decided it would be useful to include guidance notes which would inform respondents of the possible range of denominations that are considered to fall within the 'Christian' category. Therefore in 2001 the Christian tick-box was accompanied by a list of examples. In England the examples were 'Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations'. The term 'Catholic' was used rather than 'Roman Catholic' in order to fit the available space (Figure 6.28):

Figure 6.28: Christian tick-box in England's 2001 Census and 2007 Census Test



Similarly, in the 2001 Census the examples used in Wales for the Christian tick-box were 'Church in Wales, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations' (Figure 6.29).

Figure 6.29: Christian tick-box in Wales's 2001 Census and 2007 Census Test



This approach was effective. In 2001 only 0.8 per cent of the total Christian count in England and Wales ticked other and wrote in a Christian denomination. The remaining 99.2 per cent used the 'Christian' tick-box.

The *Digest of Welsh Statistics 2003* (Welsh Assembly Government 2003) gave a breakdown of membership of Christian churches in Wales by denomination for 1995 and showed that the total number of members of non-conformist chapels (e.g. Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists and Methodists) was higher than the number of those belonging to the Anglican Church or to the Catholic Church.

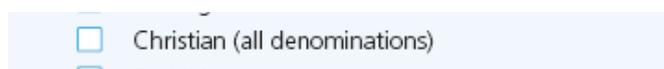
These figures give an indication of the situation in Wales and how this differs to the situation in England, where members of non-conformist chapels are a significantly smaller proportion of the Christian population. The first wave of cognitive testing of the Welsh language questionnaire supported this - all but one of the 20 respondents were non-conformist chapel-goers. A few of the respondents mentioned that their particular non-conformist religion was not included in the brackets following Christian. One respondent who was completing the English language version of the Welsh questionnaire commented:

"You haven't got Church of England there which I am but I think 'Church in Wales' is equivalent." (Wave 5)

Welsh language testing found that a few respondents mentioned that their particular non-conformist religion was not included in the 'Christianity' option. (Welsh language testing, Wave 1). Only one respondent in the Wave 1 Welsh language testing was a member of the Church in Wales, all of the other respondents were non-conformist chapel-goers. It was therefore recommended that either some non-conformist examples be included in the Christianity option, or that the examples be replaced by 'all denominations'.

As a result of the Welsh language testing, the Census Advisory Group for Wales (whose members include representatives from Cytun: Churches Together in Wales) were consulted on how relevant the 2001 religion question was for Wales, and many individuals suggested changing the category to 'Christian (all denominations)' (Figure 6.30). Others thought that 'Christian' as a stand-alone category would suffice, as no other religions had 'all denominations' in their categories. The Welsh Assembly Government advised ONS to change the category to 'Christian (all denominations)', subject to performance in testing.

Figure 6.30: Recommended Christian tick-box for Wales's 2011 Census



In Wave 2 of Welsh cognitive testing all respondents understood the meaning of 'pob enwad' ['all denominations']. A couple of respondents commented that 'enwad' didn't refer to the Church in Wales, or Church of England, or Evangelists, that it was more restricted, and that perhaps 'denomination' was not the best word. However, these respondents understood the intending meaning.

Christian examples in Wales recommendation

It is recommended that in the 2011 Census in Wales, the wording of the Christian category is 'Christian (all denominations)'.

6.3.7 Tick-box order

Some expert, community and special interest group respondents to the 2007 consultation requested that the religion categories should be reordered on the questionnaire. For example the East African Network stated that the list '*should ...be reordered so that "No religion" appears at the bottom rather than top of the list ...*'.

This issue was also raised in response to the then Department for Education and Skills's 2007 consultation on diversity monitoring: ten (13 per cent) respondents to the consultation suggested that in order to ensure no hierarchy was implied, the categories should be in alphabetical order rather than in order of numerical strength.

When questions have answers that are obvious to the person that is answering them, the order in which the answer choices are presented is not likely to affect the answers given (Government Social Research Unit 2007). In such situations the response order should be driven by what is acceptable to users and as a general rule it is desirable to present options in a non-hierarchical way (such as, alphabetically).

However in a good question, responses should also be mutually exclusive so that there is only one appropriate choice for the respondent to make. The religious affiliation question raises a challenge in this regard.

As already discussed, the 2001 Census question on religion was designed to capture religious affiliation rather than practice or belief and ONS decided that a potentially leading religion question is justified on the grounds that it is clear and encourages people with an affiliation to identify as such (Section 6.2). Because religion is a multidimensional concept and because of the probable order effects of altering the list more generally, moving 'none' to the bottom would almost certainly confuse respondents and increase the apparent numbers of Christians in 2011 compared with 2001, a change which in many cases would not reflect any actual change in belief or religious affiliation. Respondents who actually have no current affiliation may tick Christian if it is first in the list because they assume they should (for example because they were baptised, or because of the semi-official status of the Church of England).

While the question is aimed at religious affiliation, it should not risk counting as Christian people who actually have no religious affiliation whatsoever. The 'no religion' tick-box has therefore been put first to ensure that people who do not have a religious affiliation realise that the question is also for them to answer, and not only for people who have a religious affiliation.

There was also concern that placing religion response options in alphabetical order may make the question unclear for the large number of respondents who would identify as Christian. The 'Christian' category is therefore located as the first religion to enable respondents to move on quickly to the next question and minimise respondent burden (the same principle means that the 'White' category is first in the ethnic group question). The remaining categories are listed in alphabetical order.

There is no consistent position taken internationally. The Swiss 2000 and Irish 2006 censuses placed a 'no religion' option at the bottom but other recent censuses have made efforts to be very clear in offering 'no religion' as an option.

- The Australian 2006 census placed a 'no religion' option at the bottom but in the instruction at the beginning stated 'if no religion mark last box'
- The Canadian 2001 census offered a single write-in box first and then a 'no religion' box. Canada did not ask a religion question in their 2006 Census
- The 2001 Czech census offered a 'no religion' box first and then a single write-in space
- The 2006 New Zealand census gave a 'no religion' option first

All the censuses ask potentially leading questions 'What is your religion?/ what is this person's religion?/ to what church, denomination or religious community do you belong?' except the Czech question which simply states 'Religion, belief or without denomination'.

Tick-box order recommendation

It is recommended that the tick box order remains as in 2001 with 'no religion' first followed by 'Christian' and then 'Buddhist', 'Hindu', 'Jewish', 'Muslim', 'Sikh' and 'other'.

6.4 Voluntary nature of the question

ONS's original intention in drafting the Census Amendment Bill in 2000 - providing for a change in the Census Act to allow a question on religion to be permitted - was to make the question mandatory as are all the other questions.

However, it soon became clear that the Bill would not be acceptable in the House of Lords (where it was introduced as a Private Members bill) unless there was a specific provision to make it clear

that the question would be voluntary, with peers concerned that a mandatory question would be seen as an infringement of respondents' civil liberties. Consequently, an amendment to the Bill was made at Second Reading removing the penalty for failure to provide information in response to any question on religion.

This provision in effect makes the question voluntary, and assurances were also made by government ministers at the time that the census questionnaire would make it quite clear that the question on religion is voluntary. This provision cannot be changed without primary legislation to amend the Act further.

In the 2007 consultation, some data users commented on the voluntary nature of the question. A few local government respondents asked for a Jewish category to be included in the ethnic group question, arguing that the Jewish community was undercounted because of the voluntary nature of the religious question in the 2001 Census.

Others expressed principled concerns about the sensitivity of the question. In response to the 2007 consultation, Coventry University stated that *'respondents will need to be assured that they cannot be personally identified by responses - many are very frightened of anti-Muslim feeling in Britain at the moment.'*

Cognitive testing undertaken in England and Wales between 2006 and 2008 demonstrated that the religion question receives a good response rate. A minority of respondents raised concerns about having to answer this question, but most of these went on to provide an answer.

Some individuals confirmed that they had noticed the instruction which told them the question was voluntary. Others did not notice it, for example, one respondent said:

'Are you allowed to ask me this?' (Wave 6)

Of those who were reluctant to answer, the reasons given included that the question was too personal in nature, the answer was not factual, but could change over time, and that it was not clear why this information should be collected. For example:

'If it says that it's voluntary I would leave that because I think that is too personal ... I can't see why that is necessary for a national statistic.' (Wave 2)

'I personally think that asking people what their personal religion is intrusive.' (Wave 3)

Some Jewish and Muslim respondents, in particular, expressed concerns focused around social prejudice against their religions, however they still decided to answer the question. Example comments include:

'Some Muslim people might prefer not to answer this or give the correct answer because they don't want to be mis-judged or pre-judged.' (Wave 4 - ticked 'Muslim')

One respondent (religion unknown) stated that: *'I never answer that question'* (Wave 4). Another, who did not see the voluntary instruction made his own tick-box on the questionnaire which stated, *'Don't want to give'*. These respondents had no issue with answering the national identity and ethnic group questions.

Despite being voluntary, the non-response rate of the religion question in England and Wales was 7.6 per cent. While this was higher than the rate for the ethnic group question (2.9 per cent) or country of birth question (2.5 per cent), it was similar to some *mandatory* questions; for example employment type (6.5 per cent); industry (7.8 per cent); professional qualifications (17.2 per cent); and method of travel to work (6.3 per cent). Of course reasons for non-completion will vary from

question to question but ONS believes that this shows that the response rate for the religion question was in an acceptable range.

The non-response rate to the religion question asked in the 2007 Census Test was 8.9 per cent, and in the 2007 Postal Test was 7.7 per cent for a short version of the questionnaire and 5.5 per cent for a long version, suggesting that attitudes towards completion have not changed significantly since 2001.

The religion question(s) asked in the Northern Ireland and Scotland censuses are also voluntary and, although the questions being asked are different, ONS believes it is important to harmonise on the voluntary nature of the question.

ONS believe that despite the good response rate, with a significant minority of people who are still unwilling to answer the question it would be unwise to risk provoking that minority (and possibly others) by making the question compulsory. This may draw negative attention to the census that might reduce response rates to that question (or to the census more widely) and thus compromise the role of the Census to provide an accurate and reliable population count.

Voluntary status recommendation

It is recommended that the question remains voluntary in the 2011 Census.

7. Impact of changes since 2001 on comparability

There are two changes recommended from the 2001 Census question on religion. The first is that the 'tick one box only' is removed in order to fit the question within the space available on the 2011 Census questionnaire. This may have the effect of increasing the number of people ticking more than one box for the religion question. However, testing of the question without the 'tick one box only' instruction has suggested rates of multiple ticking will remain low. In the 2008 Postal Test, for example, less than 0.1 per cent of the sample ticked more than one response option. The impact of this change on comparability is therefore expected to be negligible.

The second change is that the 'none' tick-box is reworded to 'no religion' for clarity. This is not expected to have a significant impact on comparability and question testing has not provided any evidence of an effect on comparability.

8. Recommended location of the question

To maintain respondent familiarity with the questionnaire, it is recommended that the question order used in the 2001 Census is retained unless this conflicts with any other recommendation:

1. Ethnic group
2. Knowledge of Welsh language (Wales only)
3. Religious affiliation

Some further research and analysis of the 2001 questions suggests that because the religious affiliation question followed the ethnic group question in 2001 (only separated by the knowledge of Welsh language in Wales) the two may become associated in respondents minds: 'I'm White British therefore I must be Christian' (Voas and Bruce 2004: 27). Since the religious affiliation question is intended to measure just that - individuals with a cultural affiliation with a religion, ONS did not see this association as a problem. For 2011 the additional language questions will follow the knowledge of Welsh language question although the continued focus on ethnicity is not expected to significantly change how people interpret the religious affiliation question.

It is recommended that religious affiliation is the last question to be asked within the ethnicity, identity, language and religion suite of questions. The recommended question order is:

1. National identity
2. Ethnic group
3. Knowledge of Welsh language (Wales only)
4. Main language
5. Spoken English proficiency
6. Religious affiliation

9. Final recommendations

The religious affiliation question development process has produced questions that are recommended for the 2011 Census subject to approval by Parliament through the legislative process. The images below present the final recommended questions for England, Wales (in English) and Wales (in Welsh).

Figure 9.1: Final recommended religion question for England

20 What is your religion?

➔ This question is voluntary

- No religion
- Christian (including Church of England, Catholic, Protestant and all other Christian denominations)
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh
- Any other religion, write in

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

Figure 9.2: Final recommended English language version of the religion question for Wales

20 What is your religion?

➔ This question is voluntary

- No religion
- Christian (all denominations)
- Buddhist
- Hindu
- Jewish
- Muslim
- Sikh
- Any other religion, write in

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Annex A: Opinions Survey response percentages

	Sep-07	Nov-07	Dec-07	May-08		Jun-08		Apr-09		May-09		Jun-09		Jul-09	
	Module	Module	Module	Core	Module	Core	Module	Core	Module	Core	Module	Core	Module	Core	Module
	What is your religion or belief?	What is your religion or belief?	What is your religion or belief?	What is your religion, even if not currently practising?	What is your religion?	What is your religion, even if not currently practising?	Do you regard yourself as belonging to a religion?	What is your religion, even if not currently practising?	Which of these best describes you?	What is your religion, even if not currently practising?	Which of these best describes you?	What is your religion, even if not currently practising?	Which of these best describes you?	What is your religion, even if not currently practising?	Which of these best describes you?
No religion	25	25	25	18	17	15	29	18	19	21	26	22	23	18	23
Christian	64	67	66	74	76	77	65	74	73	73	68	69	68	77	71
Buddhist	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	0	1
Hindu	3	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0
Jewish	1	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Muslim	4	4	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	2	5	4	2	2
Sikh	1	1	1	0	2	2	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	1	1
Pagan	1	0	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Other	1	2	2	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Don't know	0	N/A	0	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

* Columns may not add to 100% due to rounding