ACADEMY of SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Dear ONS Consultations Team

Census 2031 consultation

The Academy of Social Sciences are pleased to submit the following short response to the current consultation regarding the 2031 census. We have not submitted granular responses to many of the detailed individual questions, as we are aware that both the British Society for Population Studies and the Royal Statistical Society will be doing so. Both are member learned societies of the Academy of Social Sciences, and we support and endorse their submissions. Nevertheless, we do wish to raise a small number of top-line responses to the principles of the consultation.

By way of background, the Academy of Social Sciences promotes social sciences in the UK for public benefit. We showcase, champion and advocate for the social sciences, raising awareness of their immense influence and evidence-based insights, helping to secure a flourishing future for them. We convene, broker and facilitate sharing of evidence and insight, drawing on the expertise in our Fellowship of 1700 leading academics and practitioners and in our 47 learned society members that embrace the breadth of the social sciences[1].

UK social science draws extensively on the consistent, granular data provided by the decennial census. Evidence-based policymaking, planning and resource allocation depend heavily on census-based research. While improvements and supplementations to the census would be welcome, the Academy and our stakeholders would strongly emphasise the importance of continuity over the course of census cycles. Social scientists both in academia and in practice also emphasise the importance of aligning census categories with other social surveys, especially the longitudinal and cohort studies, which now form such a valuable complement to the decennial census.

With that in mind, we would like to submit six specific comments which we would urge you to take on board as you deliberate next steps for Census 2031, namely:

1) Whilst innovation is to be encouraged, a Census is too important to be subjected to experimental approaches which might not work. As such, we would urge caution and gradual evolution for any changes so that these can be robustly trialled and tested without damaging the long-term comparability of censuses over time.

[1] The social science disciplines include: anthropology, architecture & planning, business & management, criminology, development studies, economics, education, human geography & environmental studies, law, politics & international studies, psychology & behavioural sciences, regional studies, sociology, social work and social policy.

2) We see benefits to adhering to the same principle regarding census questions, which must be well tested and be acceptable to (and understandable by) the broad public.

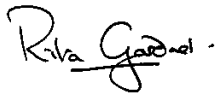
3) The expertise and commitment of the whole research and scientific community (including the professional societies and AcSS) should be harnessed to help to encourage the population to respond with effort and integrity. The current consultation is a welcome component of that, but we would urge further dialogue as the details of Census 2031 are finalised.

4) Our community are very clear that liaison with statisticians and researchers in local government is critical as they need the census to verify the quality of their local data – but they also have expertise about their area which can be helpful and should be utilised.

5) There is a very strong consensus from the social science community and beyond that there must be a UK-wide approach to the census which avoids individual nations varying from the core questions and practices (except, of course, where specific topics make this particularly relevant, such as the Welsh language).

I hope these comments are of assistance in the consultation. We would, of course, be happy to speak further if that would be of assistance.

Yours faithfully



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