

COVID impact options

Purpose

This paper is a follow up to the COVID impact options paper presented at MARP 10 and provides the panel with an update on their recommendations regarding COVID's impact on the 2021 Census question design and guidance.

Background

The 2021 Census is going to be conducted in March 2021. However, the extent to which a lockdown or local lockdowns, like the one in 2020, may occur during the census data collection time frame remains unknown. As a result, there remains a potential impact on how people interpret, understand, and ultimately answer the census questions.

In preparation for a potential lockdown type situation, ONS conducted a review of all the census questions and evaluated the potential impact a lockdown type situation could have on each question. Following this, ONS conducted two workstreams; stakeholder engagement and testing.

It should be noted that at the time of this work the census questions or response options could not be changed, due to these being stated in the census order and census regulations and had passed through the parliamentary processes. This limited the potential mitigations available to ONS.

Stakeholders were made aware that the questions and response options could not change but that ONS can adapt question instructions and online help guidance.

Stakeholder feedback was gathered from internal and external stakeholders on how their census questions were likely to be interpreted, understood, and responded to by the public and any potential mitigations that could be put into place. Stakeholders agreed with ONS's evaluation of the questions which for the most part were minimally impacted by the pandemic. However, for questions on; addresses, labour market, and travel to work the potential impact was greater.

For these topic areas further stakeholder engagement took place. Following all stakeholder engagement activity, the final consensus from stakeholders was to collect data as of the current circumstance, with the exception of address one year ago. Stakeholders acknowledged that every approach available had its limitations including the recommendation for collecting data as of the current circumstance.

Whilst conducting stakeholder engagement ONS was also conducting testing with various groups of people including; those furloughed, self-isolating, working from home, and those who had no change to their circumstance. This work aimed to test various approaches, through changing question instructions and interstitial pages, to help guide respondents how to answer the questions. The approaches tested included; looking back to pre-pandemic, as of the current circumstances, and looking to the future. The most consistent responses were seen in the 'current circumstance' groups. Additionally, when respondents did not read the guidance they tended to answer as of their current circumstances.

These findings along with the stakeholder feedback have been presented to a number of expert advisory groups both internal and external to ONS for review, advice, and recommendations.

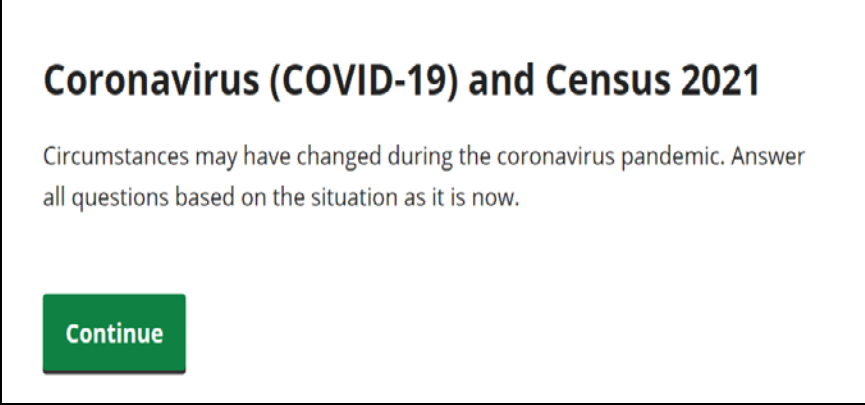
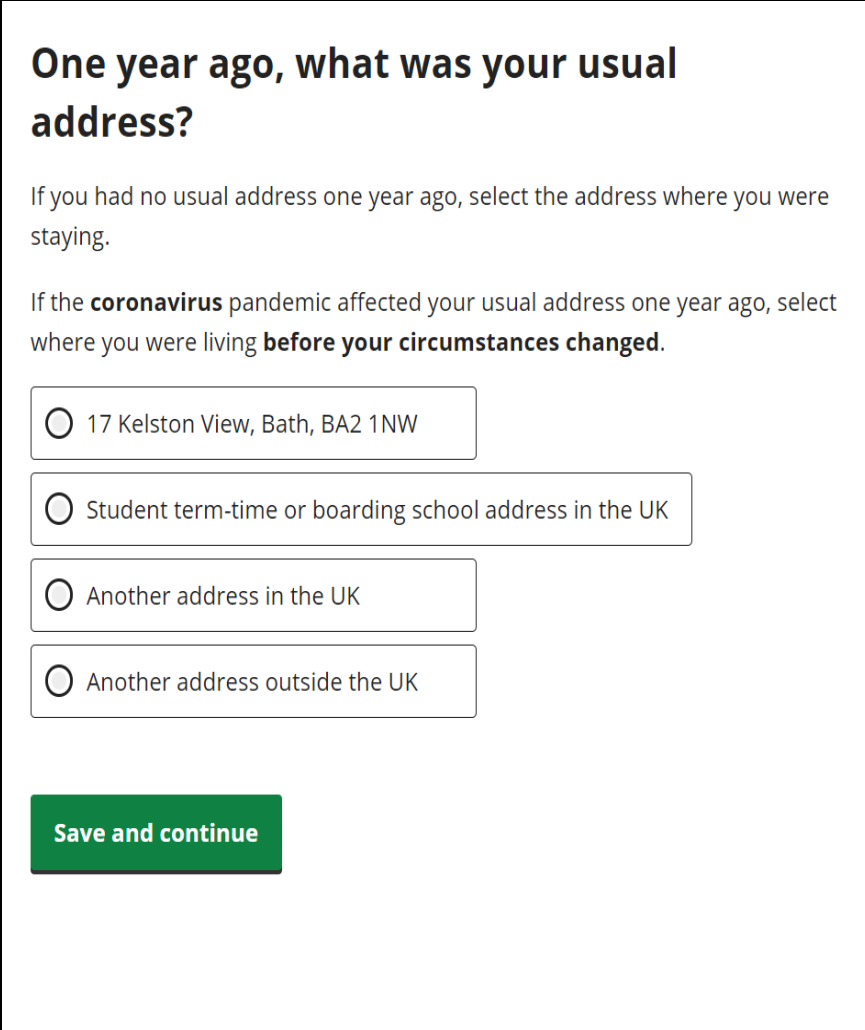
Recommendation

When reviewing the evidence from the testing, stakeholder feedback, and recommendations advisory groups led ONS to recommend that the census questions collect data as of the current

circumstances, with the exception of address one year which will look back for those whose address one year ago was affected by the pandemic.

This recommendation will be actioned through COVID 19 specific guidance being placed on two interstitial pages and on eight questions through instructions.

Final decision for Census 2021 electronic questionnaire.

Question	Screenshot
<p>Interstitial page</p>	
<p>Address one year ago</p> <p>This guidance differs from the panel’s recommendation due to the following findings in testing.</p> <p>Respondents who had moved at the start of lockdown found the guidance reassuring and provided them with a clear instruction as how to answer.</p> <p>Those who had no change in circumstance did not read the instruction and reported no problem answering the question.</p>	

Activity last week

In the last seven days, were you doing any of the following?

If you have a job but have been off work in **quarantine** or **self-isolating**, select "Temporarily away from work ill, on holiday or temporarily laid off"

Include any casual or temporary work, even if only for one hour

Select all that apply

Working as an employee

Self-employed or freelance

Freelance means that you are self-employed and work for different companies or people on particular pieces of work

Temporarily away from work ill, on holiday or temporarily laid off

On maternity or paternity leave

Doing any other kind of paid work

Or

None of these apply

Save and continue

Main Job Interstitial page

Main job

The next set of questions is about your main job. Your main job is the job in which you work the most hours.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Your circumstances may have changed during the coronavirus pandemic. Answer all questions based on your situation as it is now.

Continue

Supervisory status

Do you supervise or oversee the work of other employees on a day-to-day basis?

This could be remotely or in person

Yes

No

Save and continue

Hours worked

In your main job, how many hours a week do you usually work?

If the **coronavirus** pandemic has affected your working hours, select the answer that best describes your **current circumstances**

Include paid and unpaid overtime

0 to 15 hours

16 to 30 hours

31 to 48 hours

49 hours or more

Save and continue

Travel to work

How do you usually travel to work?

Answer for the longest part, **by distance**, of your current journey to work.

If the **coronavirus** pandemic has affected how you travel to work, select the answer that best describes your **current circumstances**.

- Work mainly at or from home
- Underground, metro, light rail or tram
- Train
- Bus, minibus or coach
- Taxi
- Motorcycle, scooter or moped
- Driving a car or van
- Passenger in a car or van
- Bicycle
- On foot
- Other

[Save and continue](#)

<p>Place of work</p>	<p>Where do you mainly work?</p> <p>If the coronavirus pandemic has affected where you mainly work, select the answer that best describes your current circumstances</p> <p>> What we mean by “mainly work”</p> <p><input type="radio"/> At a workplace</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Report to a depot</p> <p><input type="radio"/> At or from home</p> <p><input type="radio"/> An offshore installation</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No fixed place</p> <p>> Why we ask for workplace</p> <p>Save and continue</p>
<p>Place of work (inside / outside UK)</p>	<p>Do you mainly work in the UK?</p> <p>If the coronavirus pandemic has affected where you mainly work, select the answer that best describes your current circumstances</p> <p><input type="radio"/> Yes</p> <p><input type="radio"/> No</p> <p>Save and continue</p>

Additional work to emphasise the recommendation

This section outlines the various communication channels that will emphasise the ‘answer based on their current circumstances’ recommendation, to ensure a consistent message is being delivered from all respondent facing census teams.

Online help

All complimentary online help is being updated to reflect the recommendation. Additional guidance for niche groups such as those employed but temporarily away from work - e.g. Maternity, paternity, ill, laid-off, on holiday, quarantined or self-isolating should select the “temporarily away” response option as these are largely short-term and ~~we’d want to~~ therefore respondents should record their employment prior their temporary absence.

Communications and Digital Publications

Communications and digital publications teams will emphasise the recommended guidance. This will be achieved through updated all communications tools and messaging they are creating.

Contact centre

The contact centre training tools are being amended to reflect the recommendation and the contact centre will be using the online help (as above) during collection period.

Census Field

All census field staff training tools are being be amended to reflect the recommendation.