Evaluation of Evidence to Assist in the Development of a new Ethnic Group Harmonised Standard

Key Messages

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) Harmonisation team are currently working to update the ethnicity harmonised standard (see Annex 1). The goal of this update is to make the standard more inclusive; this is largely driven by the Inclusive Data Task Force's recommendation to ensure concepts are being measured clearly and appropriately.

A portion of this work includes reviewing the response options available, and importantly those not available, within the current ethnicity standard. Currently, individuals who cannot self-identify through one of the 14 tick box response options can write in their ethnic group within one of the 5 'Other' textbox response options. The Harmonisation team are aiming to expand the available tick box response options of the current question, while recognising the need to balance the addition of new response options with impacts on respondent burden and data quality.

This work will:

- enable a wider range of people to self-identify through a tick box, as opposed to writing-in their ethnic group through an 'Other' option

- alleviate feelings of being 'othered'

- increase the inclusivity of the question

The team have previously consulted with MARP regarding their methodology for a review of write-in text responses to support the development of recommendations for additional tick boxes. This review analysed the use of write-in responses from census, surveys, and admin data sources employing the harmonised standard ethnic group question across the UK. However this review cannot provide complete evidence for the determination of future response options. For example, some community groups may have a high data need for a response option, or be of particular interest for equality monitoring and policy development, but may be too small to be identified via the review of write-in data.

To seek further evidence of user need, and particularly community need, for additional tick boxes, the Harmonisation team will be running a public consultation in the Autumn. This paper is being shared with MARP in order to consult on the draft evaluation criteria that will be used to determine the final recommended options.

This activity to determine additional community and data user needs for tick box response options forms a small component of a larger programme of work that has been ongoing since early 2022 to update the ethnicity harmonised standard (see Annex 2). The whole project also considers question design and structure, guidance, analytical outputs, respondent burden, and data user needs, including needs for data

comparability and operational delivery of questions. Recommendations for additions to the standard will be subject to rigorous question testing with members of the public, for example through cognitive interviewing. We expect to announce the response options prioritised for a new standard in the summer of 2026, and a fully tested new online data collection standard before the end of that year. Work to consider implementation changes for other modes will continue thereafter.

Research Aim

To evaluate evidence gathered on community and data user needs for additional tickboxes within the ethnicity standard, specifically in the context of updating the ethnicity harmonised standard by the GSS Harmonisation team. Evidence will be considered from submissions to a public consultation on the topic, from a review of write-in responses to ethnic group questions from a variety of data sources across the UK, and from research conducted by the Harmonisation team during their review and testing of iterations to a new standard (e.g. through focus groups, in-depth interviewing, cognitive testing and surveys).

Key Asks of MARP

This paper shares a draft proposal for how the team will conduct the evaluation of evidence of community and data user need when considering the addition of new tickboxes to the ethnicity standard. This is not a highly technical piece of work, but the work it feeds into is sensitive and will be subject to scrutiny by various stakeholder groups. The team would benefit from the assurances of expert groups who are able to provide insight and feedback on the suitability of our methods, to ensure we are acting in a methodologically rigorous manner.

The team would like MARP's view on the strengths, limitations, and risks of the proposed evaluation criteria

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Executive Summary

The work to develop a new, more inclusive version of the ethnicity harmonised standard is highly anticipated but also highly sensitive. Its importance has been emphasised by the National Statistician at several stages, and the project is a priority for the Harmonisation team. Many stakeholder and community groups are keen for an updated version of the standard which better meets a diverse set of needs.

While keeping the need to collect inclusive data that is understandable and usable is at the forefront of this work, it is recognised that the standard must also meet the needs of data processors, research teams, and other survey practitioners.

A key consideration to making the question more inclusive is to reduce the reliance on write-in response options as they are currently being used by respondents, data collectors, processors, and users to supplement the 14 pre-set tick boxes in the standard (see Annex 1) via 5 'Other' categories:

- Any other White background

- Any other Mixed or Multiple background

- Any other Asian background

- Any other Black, Black British or Caribbean background

- Any other ethnic group

Write-in responses give respondents the opportunity to fully self-identify in the absence of a tick-box that they feel represents them. However, open-text box data collection can cause a resource burden for teams working on the data collected and the analysis. Moreover, the increasing use of write-in options over time demonstrates further evidence that the response options provided in the current standard, are not sufficient for our changing society.

In December 2024, the Harmonisation team published an update on the review of the ethnicity harmonised standard, outlining work it is conducting to review 'write-in' responses to ethnic group questions used across various UK data sources. The approach used for this Write-in Review (WiR) was discussed with MARP at the time, and aims to:

- better understand user needs for potential new tick-box response options identified during the Discovery phase.

- investigate potential user needs for additional tick-box response options not raised during the Discovery phase.

- understand how 'write-in' response options are currently used by respondents in different contexts and modes of data collection.

By exploring high-frequency write-ins as potential new response options, the use of 'Other' should be reduced. However, as the WiR is respondent-driven, it is essential to balance this against community and data user needs for new response options. Some community groups may have a high data need for a response option, or be of particular interest for equality monitoring and policy development, but may be too small to be identified via the WiR.

This paper proposes the development and implementation of the User Needs Measurement Tool (UNM-Tool) to ensure that the work to update the ethnicity harmonised standard reflects both respondent needs and data user needs. The UNM-Tool will provide a structured approach to identifying and prioritising needs for new response options, ensuring a more inclusive and representative ethnicity standard.

Background to the User Needs Measurement Tool

To develop a structured approach to evaluating evidence for new response options within the ethnicity standard, we have reviewed two previous evaluation frameworks used for question design; for the England and Wales Census 2021, and Scotland's Census 2022.

1. England and Wales Census 2021 Tool

a) *Overview of Method*

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) developed the Ethnic Group Prioritisation Tool to evaluate requests for new ethnic group tick-boxes in the 2021 Census. This tool was designed to ensure that the census accurately reflected the diverse population of England and Wales and met the data needs for policy development, resource allocation, and service planning.

Development and Evaluation Process

The prioritisation tool was first used in the 2011 Census and was updated for the 2021 Census to reflect changes in legislation and stakeholder engagement. The tool assessed potential new tick-boxes against seven principles grouped into five criteria:

1. **User Need**: Evaluated the necessity of collecting data on the requested ethnic group to support equality monitoring, policy development, and service delivery.

2. **Data Quality**: Assessed whether data of sufficient quality could be collected for the requested group.

3. **Comparability**: Considered the impact on comparability with previous census data.

4. **Alternative Data Sources**: Examined whether the requested data was already collected within the census or other data sources.

5. **Public Acceptability**: Evaluated whether it was acceptable to explicitly include the group with a tick-box, both to the general public and the group being measured.

Implementation and Findings

The ONS conducted extensive analysis, research, consultation, and question testing to evaluate 55 new ethnic group tick-box requests. The evaluation process involved:

- **Public Consultation**: Between June and August 2015, the ONS conducted a public consultation to identify specific needs for ethnic group data

- **Stakeholder Engagement**: Follow-up surveys and consultations with stakeholders to understand user needs and gather evidence for the evaluation

- **Question Testing**: Testing the proposed tick-boxes to ensure they meet the criteria and principles outlined in the prioritisation tool

The prioritisation exercise recognised all requests for ethnic group tick-boxes as valid and made no judgment on the legitimacy of the groups' requests. Instead, it focused on the strength of user need, data quality, and public acceptability.

The updated ethnic group question for the 2021 Census aimed to provide a more inclusive and accurate representation of the population, ensuring that the data collected supports effective policy-making and resource allocation.

b) *Publications*

[Information Paper](#)

[Methods and Results](#)

2. Scotland Census 2021 Methods

a) *Overview of Methods*

The National Records of Scotland (NRS) undertook a comprehensive and iterative process to update the ethnicity question for Scotland's Census 2021. This process involved extensive consultation, evaluation, and testing to ensure the census accurately reflects the diverse population and meets the data needs for policy development, resource allocation, and service planning.

User Need and Stakeholder Engagement

The NRS engaged with various communities to understand their needs and preferences. This engagement included public consultations, cognitive focus groups, and qualitative surveys. Feedback from these activities was crucial in identifying the necessity of new tick-box options for specific ethnic groups. For example, there was a strong user need for adding tick boxes for "Roma" and "Showman/Showwoman" and including a prompt to write in "Sikh" and "Jewish" in the "Other ethnic group" category.

Data Quality and Public Acceptability

Ensuring data quality and public acceptability was a key consideration. The NRS conducted cognitive and quantitative testing to assess the clarity and acceptability of the proposed questions. This testing aimed to minimise respondent burden whilst maintaining high data quality. For instance, the "African" category was redesigned to "African, Scottish African, or British African" to improve data quality and acceptability.

Comparability and Harmonisation

Maintaining comparability with previous census data and harmonising across the UK were essential. The NRS aimed to ensure that the new data collected would be comparable over time and consistent with other UK regions. This involved aligning the new questions with existing standards where possible.

Operational Considerations

Practical aspects of implementing the new tick boxes were carefully considered. This included the design of digital and paper formats, space constraints, and financial implications. The NRS developed a framework to evaluate the effectiveness of question designs and response options, considering operational feasibility.

Evaluation Criteria

The NRS used a structured framework to evaluate potential new tick boxes against five main criteria:

1. **Strength of User Need**: Ensuring the data collected meets the needs for equality monitoring, policy development, and service delivery.

2. **Lack of Alternative Sources**: Confirming that the required data cannot be obtained from other sources.

3. **Acceptability, Clarity, and Data Quality**: Ensuring questions are acceptable to the public, clear, and designed to minimise respondent burden while maintaining data quality.

4. **Comparability**: Ensuring data is comparable over time and harmonised across the UK where possible.

5. **Operational Considerations**: Considering the practical aspects of conducting the census, including digital and paper design, space, and financial constraints.

The development process was iterative, involving multiple stages of user consultation, evaluation, and testing. Key findings included a strong user need for detailed ethnic group data and positive feedback on the two-stage ethnic group question format. The NRS also conducted ongoing development and user testing to refine the digital presentation of the questions to maximise response rates and data quality.

The decision-making process for new tick boxes in Scotland's Census 2021 was thorough and inclusive. By engaging with various communities and stakeholders, the NRS ensured that the final questions and response options were representative, inclusive, and capable of providing high-quality data for policy development and resource allocation.

b) *Publications*

[Ethnic Group Update](#)

[Question Design and Inclusion Evaluation Criteria](#)

[Ethnic Group Topic Report](#)

[Ethnic Group and Religion Update](#)

Considerations for the User Needs Measurement Tool

Implementing a tool to measure user and community needs for the UK-wide adoption of a new harmonised ethnicity question involves several key considerations.

1. User Need and Stakeholder Engagement

- **Identifying User Needs**: It's crucial to understand the specific needs of different communities and stakeholders. This involves extensive consultation and engagement to gather evidence on the necessity of new tick-box options.

- **Balancing Respondent and Community Needs**: The tool should balance the needs of respondents (those filling out the forms), data users, and the broader community needs, ensuring that communities are adequately represented where this does not conflict with data quality and respondent burden.

2. Data Quality and Public Acceptability

- **Ensuring Data Quality**: The tool must ensure that the data collected is of high quality, reliable, and can be used effectively for policy development and resource allocation

- **Public Acceptability**: Questions and response options must be acceptable to the public, clear, and designed to minimise respondent burden. This includes testing for clarity and ease of understanding

3. Comparability and Harmonisation

- **Maintaining Comparability**: It's important to ensure that the new data is comparable with previous data sets to track changes over time. This involves harmonising the new questions with existing standards where possible

- **UK-Wide Harmonisation**: The tool should aim for consistency across the UK, ensuring that the data collected is comparable across different regions and can be integrated into a national framework

4. Inclusivity and Representation

- **Expanding Response Options**: The tool should aim to expand the tick-box response options to allow a wider range of people to self-identify accurately, reducing the need for 'Other' write-ins

- **Addressing Smaller Communities**: Ensure that smaller communities, which may not be identified through high-frequency write-ins, are still considered and represented in the new response options

6. Evaluation and Feedback

- **Continuous Evaluation**: Implement a framework for continuous evaluation and feedback to ensure the tool remains relevant and effective in capturing user and community needs

- **Stakeholder Feedback**: Regularly engage with stakeholders to gather feedback and make necessary adjustments to the tool based on their input

By considering these factors, the implementation of a tool to measure user and community needs for a new ethnicity question can be more inclusive, accurate, and effective in reflecting the diverse population of the UK.

Proposed Methodology

Overview of the Proposed Method

This section outlines the structured approach proposed to evaluate the need for additional response options for the new ethnicity harmonised standard. The proposal focuses on three criteria: 1) strength of user need, 2) lack of alternative sources, and 3) acceptability, clarity, and data quality. This method is shared with MARP in draft form for their consideration and feedback on the suitability of our approach.

Each criterion is designed to ensure that the data collected is accurate, relevant, and respondent-friendly. The methods involve rigorous data collection, evidence assessment, and scoring processes, all quality assured by an Ethnic Group Assurance Panel. We would expect to publish a summary table of all the testing so that the process followed in reaching a recommendation is made transparent to stakeholders.

Step 1 – [Criteria 1] Strength of User Need for Information on Ethnic Group:

- o **Data collection:** Information is gathered through targeted round tables and surveys.

- o **Evidence assessment:** The collected evidence is assessed for accuracy by the ethnicity Harmonisation team and scored.

- o **Scoring proposal:** Scores (0, 1, 2) are proposed to the assurance panel based on the evidence.

Each request will be scored on two principles within the "strength of user need for information" criterion:

Principle 1: Strength of need for equality monitoring and policy development.

Principle 2: Strength of need for resource allocation and service delivery.

Requests scoring 0 on both principles are not scored further.

Step 2A – [Criteria 2] Lack of Alternative Sources of Information:

- o **Current reflection in ethnic group questions:** Assess how the group is currently reflected in the ethnicity questions, such as whether respondents are using the "Other" category.

- o **Alternative data sources:** Determine if the data is collected elsewhere, such as in other harmonised standards like national identity or religion.

- o **Evidence assessment:** The collected evidence is assessed for accuracy by the ethnicity Harmonisation team and scored.

- o **Scoring proposal:** Scores (0, 1, 2) are proposed to the assurance panel based on the evidence.

Each request is evaluated on two principles within the "lack of alternative sources of information" criterion:

Principle 1: Write-in answers are not adequate for measuring this group.

Principle 2: Other data collection questions are inadequate as a suitable proxy (e.g., country of birth, religion, national identity).

Step 2B – [Criteria 3] Acceptability, Clarity, and Data Quality:

- o **Data Quality of Information Collected:** Ensures that without the tick-box, respondents would not be unduly confused or burdened, which could reduce the quality of information. The question needs to be respondent-friendly and structured to gather the most useful information.

- o **Minimising Confusion:** If expected tick-boxes are omitted, respondents may tick inconsistently due to a lack of obvious options. Harmonisation aims to minimise confusion to ensure consistent responses and maximise data quality.

- o **Evidence assessment:** The collected evidence is assessed for accuracy by the ethnicity Harmonisation team and scored.

- o **Scoring proposal:** Scores using a RAG status (Red, Amber, Green) are proposed to the assurance panel based on the evidence.

Each request is evaluated on the following principle:

Principle: The addition of the tick-box and/or revised terminology is acceptable to respondents and clear in both wording and context (e.g., mutually exclusive categories) and provides the required information to an acceptable level of quality.

Step 3 – Tick-box recommendation

To reach a final recommendation, evidence from steps 2A and 2B will be reviewed. For 2A, higher scores will be considered alongside a Green RAG status from 2B. The final decision on whether to include a tick-box will be considered alongside the assessed scores from step 1: strength of user need.

The process for evaluating proposed tick-boxes and reaching this recommendation will be assured by an Ethnic Group Assurance Panel. We also intend to seek assurance from the GSS Inclusive Data Advisory Committee, reflecting the importance of the Inclusive Data Task Force's recommendations to this work.

Data and Evidence Collection

In addition to evidence provided via public consultation, the Harmonisation team will consider evidence obtained from the following sources:

Step 1 – [Criteria 1] Strength of User Need for Information on Ethnic Group

Principle 1: Strength of need for equality monitoring and policy development.

Principle 2: Strength of need for resource allocation and service delivery.

Strength of user need (for both principles) will be gathered from round-table discussions involving Local Authorities, government departments, Devolved Governments, charities, and community groups; and from the Write-in Review. If the public consultation identifies a need for further evidence on policy needs once community needs are evaluated, a targeted survey may be considered.

Step 2A – [Criteria 2] Lack of Alternative Sources of Information

Principle 1: Write-in answers are not adequate for measuring this group.

Quantitative and qualitative evidence will be provided from the Harmonisation ethnicity team's research with the public, step 1's round tables, and ethnic group literature.

Principle 2: Other data collection questions are inadequate as a suitable proxy (e.g., country of birth, religion, national identity).

A review of the implemented cultural identity questions across major GSS surveys will be used. To evaluate evidence on this principle for a GSS-wide recommendation it is important we consider the operation of multiple surveys, and therefore our review will extend beyond the questions currently used in UK Census. A shortlist of data collection surveys for inclusion will be drawn up and shared with the Ethnic Group Assurance Panel prior to evaluating evidence against this principle.

Step 2B – [Criteria 3] Acceptability, Clarity, and Data Quality

Principle: The addition of the tick-box and/or revised terminology is acceptable to respondents and clear in both wording and context (e.g., mutually exclusive categories) and provides the required information to an acceptable level of quality.

Qualitative evidence from the Harmonisation ethnicity team's research with the public and stakeholders, including question testing and cognitive research.

Conclusion

The GSS Harmonisation team propose implementing a User Needs Measurement Tool (UNM-Tool) for structured evaluation of user and community needs. This will consider evidence provided via a public consultation in Autumn 2025, alongside evidence from a review of write-in text responses to ethnicity questions, and research from the GSS Harmonisation's larger programme of work. The UNM-Tool will provide a structured approach to identifying and prioritising needs for new

response options, ensuring a more inclusive and representative ethnicity standard which reflects both respondent needs and data user needs.

Annex 1: The current Ethnicity standard

The current harmonised standard is based on the 2011 Census question for England and Wales. However, the Census question was reviewed and adjusted to be used in the:

- 2021 Census for England and Wales

- 2021 Census for Northern Ireland

- 2022 Census for Scotland

Therefore, the 2021 and 2022 Census questions are the most up to date ways of collecting data about ethnic group.

We are aware that user needs may have changed since the research for the Census 2021 question commenced (in 2015). Therefore, we recommend data collectors across the GSS use the 2021 and 2022 Census questions, shown below.

15 What is your ethnic group?

Choose **one** section from A to E, then **tick one box** to best describe your ethnic group or background

A White

- English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish or British
- Irish
- Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- Roma
- Any other White background, write in

B Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups

- White and Black Caribbean
- White and Black African
- White and Asian
- Any other Mixed or Multiple background, write in

C Asian or Asian British

- Indian
- Pakistani
- Bangladeshi
- Chinese
- Any other Asian background, write in

D Black, Black British, Caribbean or African

- Caribbean
- African background, write in below
- Any other Black, Black British or Caribbean background, write in

E Other ethnic group

- Arab
- Any other ethnic group, write in

Annex 2: The GSS ethnicity harmonisation project

Background

The Harmonisation team works to produce guidance on questions that commonly appear in surveys produced across the GSS. The aim of this is to ensure that data produced will be high quality, comparable, consistent, and coherent, and therefore more useful for the public providing their data and the data users alike. There are some topic areas where this may not be possible or appropriate, but where it is useful, standards are developed and distributed as best practice guidance for survey producers to follow.

The priority for the ethnicity harmonisation team, as set by the National Statistician in Autumn 2023, is to continue the review of the ethnicity harmonised standard. In 2020, the National Statistician created the Inclusive Data Taskforce (IDTF) to improve the inclusivity of data held by government. The nine protected characteristics were core to its considerations, and recommendations were proposed for improving inclusivity across the UK's statistical system. The implementation plan emphasises the need for data producers across government to ensure that well researched and inclusive approaches to data collection are established.

Furthermore, ONS undertook extensive ethnicity research and public engagement activities as part of development of the 2021 Census ethnicity question. But ethnicity is a topic that is evolving. Definitions, terminology, and thinking on the topic are changing and developing. The Census 2021 question development was primarily completed before 2020 and new drivers for change have emerged. Events such as the Black Lives Matter movement have affected how people feel about ethnicity. The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and the disparities in outcomes and prevalence between ethnic groups have demonstrated the need for more granular ethnicity data, which aligns to the IDTF recommendations.

Although the creation of a more inclusive question is at the forefront of this redesign, the new question will also need to retain some level of comparability to the current harmonised standard. It is inevitable that the timeseries will be affected in some capacity following changes to a survey question. It is imperative to minimise the impact of timeseries change as far as possible. Harmonised standards are used not only internally by the Office for National Statistics, but also by survey providers in other government departments and beyond. Creating a survey question that is significantly different to the current design may limit the uptake of the new standard, minimising the comparability, consistency, and coherence of data across the UK. As a result, we are not able to start completely from scratch with the redesign of the ethnicity harmonised standard; instead, we plan to use the current question as a base point to improve upon throughout this work programme.

User needs and issues with the current standard

Our research during the discovery phase of our work ([Phase 1](#) and [Phase 2](#)) has highlighted the extent of the issue of inclusivity in the current question, as well as identifying multiple data user needs:

- Issue 1: selecting a response option

- Issue 2: terminology use and presentation

- Issue 3: the Mixed category

- Issue 4: ethnicity means different things to different people

- Issue 5: conflicting views on whether ethnicity can change over time

- Issue 6: identifying with different ethnic groups can be affected by context

- User need 1: ethnicity data which can be compared across multiple dimensions

- User need 2: a harmonised standard which works for stakeholders

- User need 3: aggregate levels of ethnicity data

- User need 4: change implementation and the need for time

- User need 5: support from stakeholders and partners for change

- User need 6: clearer guidance on what is being measured

- User need 7: output alignment to census

- User need 8: current harmonised standard options are limited and there is a need for more detailed data

- User need 9: it is better to reduce the use of the Other category

In the current harmonised standard, respondents can select from 5 high-level categories (White, Black, Mixed, Asian, or Other) and then from a list of low-level categories within these. The low-level categories offer 14 different ethnic group response options as well as 5 Other response options: 19 in total. However, the current design pigeon-holes respondents into selecting a tick-box based on their initial choice at the first 5 high-level responses. If a respondent were to select 'Black' from the initial 5 high-level choices, they then must select between 'African', 'Caribbean', or 'Other'. This further highlights the lack of inclusivity in the question; if a respondent wished to identify as Black British, they would need to select Other and write this in as a response.

Within each of the high-level categories, an Other response option is available to select. Dependent on the data collection tool and capability, individuals can either just 'select' other, or they may be able to write-in free-text, or even be able to use search-as-you-type. In Census 2021, 10.6% of respondents selected one of the

Other response options in the mandated ethnicity question, leading to them identifying through search-as-you-type and write-in responses. Mandated ethnicity questions often result in a higher percentage of Other responses than non-mandated ethnicity questions, as respondents are unable to skip without providing an answer. Adding additional response options, as well as improving the overall format of the ethnicity standard, should reduce the percentage of respondents having to identify through Other response options.

The design of the current ethnicity standard causes some individuals to experience a sense of marginalisation; this is particularly felt amongst minority ethnic groups . The absence of inclusive response options can lead to individuals feeling 'othered', overlooked and/or forgotten. In 2022, we commissioned a collaborative ethnicity project with the Cabinet Office Race Disparity Unit. This research provided evidence that the absence of inclusive responses not only cause frustration and confusion, but also places particular burden on respondents who cannot identify through a tick-box. As a result of this, oftentimes individuals are compelled to select one of the existing response options that 'best fits' in an effort to avoid the burden of having to write-in at an Other response option. This suggests that the percentage of participants that cannot identify with one of the response options in the current design, may be higher.

Feedback from consultations during our discovery work indicated a desire for a greater number of response options to increase visibility for particular groups, as well as concerns regarding how relatable the present response options are. These concerns are not unique and have been reported elsewhere. For example, researchers looking at health survey responses in the United States found that the ethnicity response options that appear on their surveys do not sufficiently capture the multifaceted nature of their population, especially for respondents from Mixed or minority ethnic groups

Our research has also shown that data collectors and processors often encounter technical or financial limitations and are therefore unable to conduct analysis of the write-in responses. Thus, the analysis of this data is not only cumbersome, but has implications for:

- data quality

- the ability to aggregate data

- comparability with other data sources

- the inclusivity of ethnicity outputs if write-in responses are omitted

 We conducted a survey with data collectors and processors across the GSS. This research highlighted that 45% of GSS data collectors and processors cannot implement write-in responses within their survey design. Further, only 24% of GSS data collectors and processors reported that their organisation was able to process or analyse any write-in data they collected. The other 76% reported they would be unlikely to be able to process or analyse write-in data due to a lack of capacity or expertise. The inability to accurately process this write-in data may lead to incomplete or unreliable results, undermining the integrity of these data collection

tools. Therefore, to meet user need, we aim to minimize the necessity for write-in responses in our updated ethnic group data collection tool, by increasing the number of response options.

An additional issue with the current question arises in the context of the greater use of administrative data to produce population statistics. We see similar issues regarding the processing of write-in data in admin data settings. Often, admin data ethnicity questions allow respondents to identify through a write in, but analysts are unable to store or process such responses. Insufficient processing of write-in responses across administrative data settings may cause difficulty when it comes to comparability between admin data sources and sources such as the Census. This issue is also seen when considering comparability between different admin data sources, where the consistency of data recorded in health-related administrative settings is lowest for all Other ethnic groups.

By improving the format of the question and increasing the availability of response options, respondents should be able to record their ethnicity as they see fit. Further, whilst this approach keeps 'improving the inclusivity of the question' core and forefront to the question development, it also aims to overcome issues faced by survey owners, data users, and interviewers alike.

Therefore, to improve inclusivity, the harmonisation team are working to update the ethnicity harmonised standard by question redesign and reviewing the potential of adding new response options. The 'write-in review' will inform our recommendations for the responses options we could add to the ethnicity harmonised standard and take forward for question testing.