Characteristics screening and sampling proposal for qualitative alpha research to develop disability and impairment Government Statistical Service harmonised standards

Purpose

The Government Statistical Service (GSS) Harmonisation team is reviewing the disability and impairment harmonised standards to improve the consistency, coherence and comparability of disability data across the Government Statistical System. This work aims to ensure future standards better reflect disabled people's experiences, meet statistical user needs, and remain suitable across policy, research and statistical contexts.

The team are scheduled to begin alpha testing in October 2026, through repeated rounds of qualitative cognitive interviews with members of the UK public. Findings will be used to refine question prototypes so they better meet respondent and statistical user needs.

This paper outlines our proposed core screening and sampling approach throughout the alpha phase.

Alongside this, the Methodological Research Hub is proposing an additional MARP sub-committee focused on questionnaire development, qualitative research and related methodological issues. This would provide a route for detailed papers from the Harmonisation team and wider ONS, while strategic papers would continue to go directly to MARP.

Key asks of MARP

This paper asks MARP to advise on whether the proposed core screening and sampling design is methodologically sound, proportionate and appropriate for qualitative alpha testing of disability and impairment harmonised standards. Specifically, members of MARP are invited to provide feedback on the:

- Whether the proposed primary, secondary and monitoring characteristics are appropriate, proportionate and sufficient for qualitative alpha testing.
- Whether the proposed data collection measures for screening each characteristic are suitable and sufficiently justified.
- Whether the proposed sample compositions appropriately balance inclusivity, feasibility and methodological rigour.
- Whether the proposed MARP sub-committee would provide an appropriate route for more detailed qualitative research and question-design papers, while strategic methodological papers continue to go directly to MARP.

Executive Summary

The Harmonisation team completed their discovery phase of research to redevelop the disability and impairment harmonised standards in July 2026. This phase of research included extensive research and engagement with stakeholders across government, academia, charities, Disabled People's Organisations, and the public. Through this work, the team identified several issues with the existing harmonised standards for disability and impairment, establishing a robust evidence base to inform the next phase of alpha testing.

Findings from discovery research have identified priority areas for testing and have informed a sampling approach that is designed to include both people for whom their respondent needs are met or unmet in existing disability data collection. User needs identified through stakeholder engagement activities underline a need for harmonised standards that are aligned with UK disability legislation; therefore, we are prioritising work in alpha to develop questions for this purpose, with consideration of further work to develop additional questions, such as those that align to the social model to follow in Summer 2027. Our discovery findings are outlined in our published review of the disability harmonised standards.

The Harmonisation Disability team has developed a core screening approach for qualitative alpha testing. It identifies the characteristics to screen for, the measures used to capture them, and proposed sample compositions. The approach supports purposive recruitment across groups most relevant to developing inclusive disability and impairment standards, rather than producing a statistically representative sample.

We intend to use the proposed sample design for the first research round, then review and update it where findings or research requirements indicate a need. We may also boost sample sizes or conduct targeted research with relevant groups where additional user needs emerge.

The proposed sampling frame is presented with the caveat that achieving the exact composition will depend on recruitment responses and factors outside our control, such as respondent drop-out. Alpha findings will be qualitative and will not provide population prevalence estimates. Sample splits are outlined throughout the paper, with a complete sampling frame in Annex 1.

Research aims

To gather qualitative data that provides feedback on the UK public's interpretation and responses to disability and impairment questions, as well as the acceptability and inclusivity of these questions.

This evidence will be used to refine question design and develop updated disability and impairment harmonised standards that meet respondent and statistical user needs. These standards are intended to improve the quality, consistency, coherence and comparability of disability and impairment data across the GSS.

Methods

We used multiple sources to inform our proposed screening and sample approach. User needs outlined in Discovery phase 1 and Discovery phase 2 of our research to review the disability harmonised standard have been used to inform our approach for screening participant disability in alignment with user needs.

Our proposed data collection measures for alpha screening have been selected based on their evidenced question development history, use in large-scale surveys, and their status as GSS best practice data collection measures. These were identified from several sources, including GSS harmonised standards, and questions used in the England and Wales Census 2021, the Northern Ireland Census 2021, and the Scottish Census 2022.

UK Census statistics, including statistics from the England and Wales Census 2021, the Scottish Census 2022, and the Northern Ireland Census 2021 were reviewed to inform proposed sample composition. Mid-2024 population estimates for the UK, published by the ONS Demography team, were also reviewed to inform proposed sample composition.

The screening approach has been, or will be, reviewed through a staged process involving government stakeholders, academic experts, the National Statistician's Inclusive Data Advisory Committee, MARP and the National Statistician's Data Ethics Advisory Committee. This review process is intended to ensure the approach is user-informed, inclusive, methodologically robust and ethically sound before alpha testing begins.

Discussion

We intend to complete three initial rounds of qualitative cognitive interviews with the public. Each round will include interviews with a minimum of 45 respondents, and the screening approach is based on these numbers.

A 45-participant sample for each round will support meaningful inclusion across the primary and secondary sampling characteristics, while intentionally oversampling disabled people and retaining space for non-disabled participants and groups that would be underrepresented in a smaller or population-proportionate sample. Alpha research participants will be recruited via purposive sampling conducted on behalf of the GSS Harmonisation team by an external recruitment company.

Primary and secondary sampling characteristics, and characteristics to monitor for

Characteristics we intend to screen for have been separated into primary and secondary sampling criteria, as well as characteristics we intend to monitor for.

Primary sampling characteristics are the characteristics the final sample must meet. For alpha testing, these are disability status and impairment type, because they are central to disability harmonised standards: the standards must capture data about disabled people accurately, reflect the diversity of disabled people's conditions, impairments and needs. They must also work appropriately for non-disabled people. Disability status therefore includes disabled people as defined by the Equality Act 2010, non-disabled people, and people who do not identify as being disabled per the Equality Act definition but do report impairments.

Secondary characteristics represent the supplementary characteristics we have identified that are relevant to the topic of disability. These are sex, age, ethnic group, and geographic location. Including them as secondary sampling criteria will support the creation of a sample composition that will generate evidence to validate harmonised standard suitability for UK-wide data collection. Although we will aim to meet all proposed secondary characteristic sampling counts, we may be more flexible with these than our primary criteria.

Characteristics to monitor are those relevant to the development of the disability harmonised standards but not central enough to require fixed sampling targets in alpha testing. We will screen for these characteristics to understand whether they are represented in the sample, but we will not aim to achieve specific sampling

counts. This is because the current evidence does not indicate that separate testing quotas are needed at this stage. After each research round, we will review participation from these groups and any findings specific to them, using this evidence to decide whether future research should include targeted recruitment or additional testing.
The characteristics that we intend to screen for throughout the Alpha phase of research are:

Primary characteristics:

- Disability
  i. as defined by the Equality Act 2010
  ii. Impairment, referring to functions people either cannot perform, or have difficulty performing, because of their health condition

Secondary characteristics:

- Sex
- Age
- Ethnic group
- Geographic location (UK country level)

Characteristics to monitor for:

- Education level
- English language proficiency
- Trans and non-binary status

We will also need to test developing standards with groups not included in the core screening criteria. Some may be represented in the initial rounds, but targeted follow-up research is likely to be needed for groups including:

- People with limited English language proficiency,
- Welsh language speakers, for the purpose of testing questions in the Welsh language,
- Transgender and non-binary people,
- Disabled people for whom their respondent needs are not met in existing disability data collection, including people:
  - with fluctuating or progressive conditions,
  - with disabilities that legally classify them as disabled from day of diagnosis, including cancer, HIV infection, and multiple sclerosis,
  - who are disabled but do not have a formal medical diagnosis,
  - who are disabled but are in receipt of treatment or medication that mitigates the impact of their impairment(s).

Data collection measures proposed for Alpha screening

Proposed alpha screening measures were selected based on their question development history, use in large-scale surveys, and status as GSS best practice. Sources included GSS harmonised standards and questions used in the England and Wales Census 2021, Northern Ireland Census 2021 and Scottish Census 2022.

This approach ensures we are using screening measures of high validity, providing confidence that we are collecting high-quality data about the characteristics we intend to measure during recruitment screening.

With regards to the characteristic of geographic location, we could not identify a harmonised standard or UK Census question designed to capture this data at UK

country level. In the absence of a best practice standard, we are proposing to implement a question designed and used previously by the GSS Harmonisation team during recruitment screening, which has performed well previously.

A full list of our proposed data collection measures, including the question source, is detailed in Annex 1.

Sample composition proposed for Alpha research

Our sampling approach is purposive, not statistically representative. The aim is to generate qualitative insight from key UK subpopulations so final standards are fit for purpose and can support high-quality data collection across the UK.

Our approach to sample composition oversamples certain demographics, relative to the UK population. This is for the purpose of ensuring standards are inclusive and fit for purpose. When considering sample counts, we have used statistics from the UK population, and the UK disabled population, as a guide, before oversampling characteristics based on their relevance to the topic and our research objectives.

A complete proposed sampling frame is outlined in Annex 2.

Disability, as defined by the Equality Act 2010 – Sample composition

In research samples of 45 participants, we are proposing the following splits:

- 30 disabled people, as defined by the Equality Act 2010 (66.7%)
- 8 people who report impairments, but do not report a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010 (17.8%)
- 7 people who are not disabled and do not report any impairments (15.6%)

This sample composition reflects an oversample of disabled people, relative to the UK population. Disabled people are the key population finalised harmonised standards will aim to capture data about. Therefore, we are proposing to prioritise their inclusion in alpha research.

Impairment – Sample composition

In research samples of 45 participants, we are proposing the following splits:

- 38 people reporting impairments (consisting of 30 participants who also report a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010, and 8 participants who do not), of which there would be:
  - 11 people with physical impairments, which includes ‘dexterity’, ‘mobility’, and ‘stamina’ responses (24.4%),
  - 11 people with sensory impairments, which includes ‘hearing’ and ‘vision’ responses (24.4%),
  - 11 people with mental or cognitive impairments, which includes ‘memory’, ‘mental health’, ‘learning or understanding or concentrating’, or ‘socially and behaviourally’ responses (24.4%),
- 5 people with ‘other’ impairments, reported via write-ins (11.1%),
- 7 people with no reported impairments who did not report a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010 (15.6%).
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We acknowledge that individuals may have multiple impairments relating to both physical, sensory, mental or cognitive, or other impairments. Where we have outlined sample counts, we propose to capture a minimum of this many participants with that impairment type. If we receive responses from people that report a disability as

defined by the Equality Act 2010, but no impairments, we will review this data and consider including this as a sample grouping.

This sample composition will ensure we are considering the respondent needs of people with different impairments within our alpha research.

Sex – Sample composition
In research samples of 45 participants, we are proposing the following splits:

- 23 female (51.1%)
- 22 male (48.9%)

This sample composition is representative of the UK population, as outlined in ONS' 2024 mid-year population estimates.

Age – Sample composition
In research samples of 45 participants, we are proposing the following splits:

- 4 people aged 18 to 24 (8.9%),
- 4 people aged 25 to 34 (8.9%),
- 5 people aged 35 to 44 (11.1%),
- 6 people aged 45 to 54 (13.3%),
- 8 people aged 55 to 64 (17.8%),
- 8 people aged 65 to 74 (17.8%),
- 6 people aged 75 to 84 (13.3%),
- 4 people aged 85 and over (8.9%).

This proposed sampling composition includes participants of all ages 18+ and is representative of the England and Wales disabled population.

Ethnic group – Sample composition
In research samples of 45 participants, we are proposing the following splits:

- 25 people identifying as White (55.6%),
- 7 people identifying as Asian or Asian British (15.6%),
- 4 people identifying as Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups (8.9%),
- 5 people identifying as Black, Black British, Caribbean or African (11.1%),
- 4 people identifying under the Other ethnic group (8.9%)

This sample composition does not represent UK population demographics outlined in the England and Wales Census 2021, Northern Ireland Census 2021, or the Scottish Census 2022. The reason for oversampling minority ethnic groups is because the population-representative sample splits would be too small to meaningfully research minority groups. For inclusivity purposes, we are proposing to oversample minority ethnic groups throughout our research.

England and Wales Census 2021 data showed that certain ethnic groups reported higher disability prevalence, relative to the rest of the population. In England and Wales, these were the Gypsy or Irish Traveller (33.2% in England, 39.1% in Wales), White and Black Caribbean (22.4% in England, 26.7% in Wales), Bangladeshi (20.7% in England), Other: Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups (25.3% in Wales). We will monitor these groups throughout our research and consider boosting our samples through additional targeted research with these specific groups later in development, should our findings show it to be necessary.

Geographic location (country level) – Sample composition
In research samples of 45 participants, we are proposing the following splits:

- 16 people from England (35.6%),
- 11 people from Scotland (24.4%),
- 10 people from Wales (22.2%),
- 8 people from Northern Ireland (17.8%).

This sample composition oversamples participants from Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, relative to mid-2024 UK population estimates. The reason for oversampling from Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, is because population-representative sample splits would heavily favour the inclusion of English participants (84.4% of our sample). Harmonised standards are designed for implementation in GSS data collection across the whole UK. Therefore, we need to ensure we are meaningfully including participants from each UK nation in our work to develop them.

Proposal for a new MARP sub-committee

The Methodological Research Hub is proposing an additional MARP sub-committee focused on questionnaire development, qualitative research and related methodological issues. The proposal has emerged from conversations with qualitative teams across the office and reflects the increasing volume of qualitative and question design work, including work linked to Census 2031.

The sub-committee would provide a proportionate route for detailed papers requiring methodological scrutiny but not full MARP discussion, including papers on questionnaire development, qualitative research design, recruitment screening, sample composition and qualitative analysis.

Strategic papers with wider methodological implications would continue to be taken directly to MARP. This would include cross-cutting frameworks, major methodological decisions, and papers where the panel's advice is needed on the overall direction of travel, assurance position or adoption of a method.

This would allow detailed question-development and qualitative-research papers to receive focused review, while preserving MARP's role in strategic assurance of principles, assumptions and direction of travel.

Conclusion

This paper has set out the proposed screening approach for the alpha phase of research to review the GSS Harmonised Standards for disability and impairment, including the characteristics to be screened for, the data collection measures used, and proposed sample compositions. MARP is invited to comment on the principles, assumptions and proportionality of the proposed approach, and to identify any methodological risks that should be addressed before research begins in October 2026.

Annex 1: Characteristics Screening approach for alpha research to develop disability and impairment Harmonised Standards.

Characteristics screening approach for alpha research to develop disability and impairment Harmonised Standards

Contents

Purpose 8
Method 9
Recommendation 10
Primary Characteristics 11
Secondary Characteristics 17
Characteristics to monitor for 22
Annex 1 – Alpha Sampling Matrix 26
Annex 2 – Supplementary UK Demographic Statistics 29

Purpose

This paper sets out the proposed demographic characteristics that will be screened for during recruitment of participants throughout the alpha phase of research to support development of updated disability and impairments harmonised standards. The alpha phase of research will include 3 rounds of iterative cogability testing of proposed question prototypes. This paper outlines proposed primary and secondary sampling criteria to be used for research recruitment, in addition to select characteristics we are proposing to screen for monitoring purposes. The paper also sets out the data collection measures we intend to use during recruitment screening to capture these characteristics.

Our aim is to ensure that our screening and sampling approach is methodologically sound. It is important that we are using robust and reliable data collection measures to recruit appropriate research samples throughout alpha research rounds, so that we can conduct research with participants with diverse and relevant characteristics. This is to achieve our objective of developing standards that collect data to meet statistical data user needs in UK-wide data collection across the Government Statistical Service (GSS), through Respondent Centred Design (RCD) methodology that understands and meets respondent needs.

This screening approach will be reviewed prior to the commencement of alpha research in late 2026 to allow for input from key stakeholders on our approach.

Background

The Harmonisation team follows an Agile approach to question development, comprising a discovery phase, an alpha phase and subsequent quantitative testing. The discovery phase for developing updated disability and impairment harmonised standards concluded in July 2026. Its purpose was to gather evidence on respondent needs and data user needs to inform the subsequent redesign of the questions. Findings from this work have been published in the phase 1 review and phase 2 review of the disability harmonised standards. The forthcoming alpha phase will involve the iterative design, testing, and refinement of question prototypes with respondents. This will help ensure that the developing harmonised standards collect data that meet statistical user needs and are appropriately understood, inclusive and acceptable to the public. Online cognitive interviews will be conducted with members of the public to assess this. Following completion of the alpha phase, quantitative testing of the developing harmonised standards will be undertaken to gather statistical insight on question performance and validate quality. The team is currently scoping which survey will be used for this future testing.

Method

When considering demographic characteristics for screening, we considered multiple sources to inform our approach.

User needs outlined in Discovery phase 1 and Discovery phase 2 of our research to review the disability and impairment harmonised standards have been used to inform our approach for screening participant disability in alignment with user needs. Findings from this work, detailing the limitations of existing disability data collection measures, such as some disabled groups answering the questions in a way that fails to accurately represent their disability, have informed a proposed screening and recruitment approach that mitigates these limitations. This is outlined later in this paper.

Our proposed data collection measures for alpha screening have been selected based on their evidenced question development history, use in large-scale UK data collection, and their status as GSS best practice data collection measures. These were identified from several sources, including GSS harmonised standards, and questions used in the England and Wales Census 2021,the Scottish Census 2022 and the Northern Ireland Census2021.

UK Census statistics, including statistics from the England and Wales Census 2021, the Scottish Census 2022, and the Northern Ireland Census 2021 were reviewed to

inform proposed sample composition. Mid-2024 population estimates for the UK, published by the ONS Demography team, were also reviewed to inform proposed sample composition.

Although we are proposing a core screening approach, consistent across each research round, we will take a reflective approach to our research. For instance, if additional user needs are identified, or if we have research aims that require a different sampling approach, we may recruit an additional targeted sample to test with. We will maintain a log of de-identified demographic data of participants we have conducted research with throughout the Alpha phase, which will serve as an evidence base for who we have conducted testing with, and to allow us to identify any demographic gaps in our recruitment.

Recommendation

We are proposing to consistently screen for 9 demographic characteristics throughout our alpha research. Primary and secondary characteristics will be used to inform sampling matrixes and composition. Primary sampling characteristics are the characteristics the final sample must meet. Secondary characteristics represent relevant characteristics we will aim to achieve in the final sample but may be more flexible with than primary characteristics. We have also outlined additional characteristics that will be monitored for throughout our research; if research evidence provides unique findings within these groups, we may elevate them to primary or secondary sampling criteria in later research rounds or conduct additional targeted research with these groups.

We have proposed sampling splits for each primary and secondary characteristics, to create a sampling frame based on our intended sample size of 45 participants in each research round. A 45-participant sample for each research round will allow us to support meaningful inclusion across the primary and secondary sampling characteristics identified in the paper. The sample size allows the research to intentionally oversample disabled people and include participants with a wide range of disabilities and impairments, whilst still retaining space for non-disabled participants and respondents from groups that would otherwise be underrepresented in a smaller or population-proportionate sample. A sample of this size allows the Harmonisation team to meet these objectives while balancing timeliness of deliverables with team resource.

Our sampling approach is purposive. When considering characteristic counts, we have used the UK population and the UK disabled population as an initial guide, before oversampling characteristics based on their relevance to the topic, and our objectives of ensuring that finalised harmonised standards are inclusive and capture accurate data about all sub-populations in the UK.

Although we intend to use this sample design for the first round of our research, we will review it and may update it for future rounds based on previous findings and research requirements. Where we have a need to conduct further research with

participants outside this core sample design, we intend to do this via boosting our sample size or conducting separate additional research rounds with these groups. This proposed sampling frame is presented with the caveat that achieving this exact sample will depend on recruitment responses and factors that may be outside of our control, such as respondent drop out. Sample splits are outlined throughout the paper. A complete sampling frame is outlined in Annex 1.

Alpha research participants will be recruited via purposive sampling conducted on behalf of the GSS Harmonisation team by an external recruitment company.

Primary characteristics:

- Disability
    - Disabled, as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and Disability Discrimination Act 1995
    - Impairment, referring to functions people either cannot perform, or have difficulty performing, because of their health condition

Secondary characteristics:

- Sex
- Age
- Ethnic group
- Geographic location (UK country level)

Characteristics to monitor for:

- Education level
- English language proficiency
- Trans and non-binary status

Primary Characteristics

Disabled people are the target population that finalised harmonised standards will aim to capture data about. Therefore, we are allocating this as a primary sampling characteristic to ensure finalised harmonised standards meet the needs and reflect the voices of this group. Harmonised standards also need to be fit for purpose when collecting data from non-disabled people. Therefore, non-disabled people will also be included in our sample.

Disability, as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and Disability Discrimination Act 1995

Identified user needs, as set out in our phase 2 review of the disability harmonised standards, outline a need for disability data aligned with UK legislation definitions.

The long lasting health conditions or illness harmonised standard, and the activity restriction harmonised standard, can be used in conjunction to measure disability according to the Equality Act 2010 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, as applied in Northern Ireland. This is the current GSS best practice standard for collecting data about people who meet the UK legal definitions of disability.

Table 1. Disability, as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and Disability Discrimination Act 1995, screening questions.

Question Stem	Response Options	Output Categories
Do you have any physical or mental health conditions or illnesses lasting or expected to last for 12 months or more?	• Yes • No	• Disabled, as defined by UK legislation (If participant selects 'Yes' and either 'Yes, a lot' or 'Yes a little') • Not disabled, as defined by UK legislation (If participant selects either 'No', or 'Yes' and 'Not at all').
Does your condition or illness/do any of your conditions or illnesses reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?	• Yes, a lot • Yes, a little • Not at all	

Using these questions as primary sampling characteristics in our core screening approach will ensure we are recruiting participants who meet the UK legal definitions of disability, in line with existing best practice, and incorporating their perspectives into the development of updated harmonised standards. In addition to recruiting participants who meet the UK legal definitions of disability, we will also recruit participants who are not disabled, or do not answer data collection questions in a way that meets the Equality Act 2010 and **Disability Discrimination Act 1995** definition of disability.

However, as outlined in our phase 2 review of the disability harmonised standards, we are aware of the limitations associated with the long-lasting health conditions and illness, and the activity restriction harmonised standards. Some individuals with disabilities may respond to the questions in a way that fails to accurately represent their disability. Identified groups that may not have their disability accurately represented in data collected via these measures include:

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- People who are neurodivergent
- People with disabilities that legally classify them as disabled from day of diagnosis, including cancer, HIV infection, and multiple sclerosis,
- People who are disabled but do not have a formal medical diagnosis,
- People who are disabled but are in receipt of treatment or medication that mitigates the impact of their impairment.

We are proposing three actions to address this. Firstly, to mitigate the risk of our screening approach failing to include these populations and the subsequent risk of finalised harmonised standards not incorporating the needs of these groups, we may undertake additional targeted research with disabled populations whose respondent needs are not fully captured in existing data collection measures. For some

populations, targeted research may provide a more effective means of identifying participants than the core screening approach, as it would allow the use of tailored recruitment methods, such as engagement with community organisations or relevant gatekeepers. Any decisions regarding additional research will be informed by findings emerging during Alpha, user needs, and broader research priorities. This approach will allow us to reduce respondent burden throughout the rest of our research by reducing the length and complexity of our core screening questionnaire

We also recognise that some people may require support in responding to surveys (e.g. via the use of proxies) and we will do a targeted research round for this group of people answering on behalf of others.

Secondly, we are proposing to ask a subsequent impairments question to all participants in our recruitment screener, including those who do not report a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and **Disability Discrimination Act 1995**. We will include participants in our research who do not report a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and **Disability Discrimination Act 1995** but do report impairments because of a health condition or illness. This sampling approach will mitigate the risk of disabled people being omitted from our research.

Thirdly, we have established a Charity Liaison Group (CLG) comprising of individuals from UK-wide charities that represent disabled people. The group consists of members representing disabled people with a wide range of different health conditions and impairments, including the groups we have identified above that may be underrepresented in existing disability data collection. This group will feed into our work throughout the alpha phase, providing feedback on proposed question design prototypes and the inclusiveness and accessibility of proposed research design. Feedback from this group will help ensure the experiences and voices of people with a wide range of disabilities are represented in harmonised standard design.

We also recognise that people with progressive or fluctuating conditions may respond to the questions in a way that fails to accurately represent their disability. To help ensure these experiences are considered throughout Alpha, we propose collecting information on whether participants report progressive or fluctuating conditions to monitor this population's participation in research. This will allow us to understand whether any distinct respondent needs or findings emerge from this group and whether there are implications for question development to consider.

The data collection measure we are proposing to use during recruitment to monitor for progressive and fluctuating conditions is an adapted version of Statistics Canada's measure on Progressive, Recurrent or Fluctuating Limitations. The measure has been simplified for our purposes to only capture those with progressive and fluctuating conditions. The 'fluctuating' response option wording has also been simplified to reduce respondent burden and improve data quality.

Table 2. Progressive and fluctuating conditions screening question.

Question Stem	Response Options	Output Categories

Is your ability to carry out your day-to-day activities...?	• Getting worse • Fluctuating (for example, there are periods when you can do more and periods when you can do less) • Staying about the same	• Progressive • Fluctuating • Neither progressive nor fluctuating

In research samples of 45 participants, we are proposing the following splits:

- 30 disabled people, as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and **Disability Discrimination Act 1995** (66.7%)
- 8 people who report impairments, but do not report a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and **Disability Discrimination Act 1995**(17.8%)
- 7 people who are not disabled and do not report any impairments (15.6%)

This sample composition reflects an oversample of disabled people, relative to the UK population. Disabled people are the key population finalised harmonised standards will aim to capture data about. Therefore, we are proposing to prioritise their inclusion in alpha research. A complete proposed sampling matrix is detailed in Annex 1.

Impairments

We recognise that disabled people are not a single homogenous group. Disabled people may have a range of different impairments that impact them in different ways. This may also impact their respondent needs within disability and impairment data collection.

We are proposing to use the impairment harmonised standard to screen respondents during our alpha research. We recognise that there are limitations associated with the current impairment response options, as outlined in our phase 2 review of the disability harmonised standards. However, the proposed measure is the current GSS best-practice standard for collecting impairment data and has undergone extensive testing and development. Introducing untested changes could reduce the quality and reliability of the data collected and make it harder to distinguish genuine findings from the effects of using an untested measure. Additionally, the question includes an ‘other’ response option to capture individuals who may not identify with any of the response options. We are therefore not proposing substantial changes to the response options at this stage.

We are proposing to make two minor adaptions to the impairment standard to ensure acceptability. Firstly, we propose to remove the term ‘Asperger’s’ from the ‘socially or behaviourally’ response option. The term ‘Asperger’s’ is recognised as being outdated with problematic connotations. The National Autistic Society state, “it is no longer used as a diagnostic term for autism and is considered controversial due to the history of Hans Asperger”, and, “broadly, it is now agreed that what was referred to as Asperger syndrome is part of the autism spectrum and there is no need for a

separate term." The Harmonisation team have previously received queries and concerns regarding the use of this term in the standard, highlighting that it is potentially offensive and upsetting. Secondly, we propose changing 'autism spectrum disorder (ASD)' to 'autism' in the 'socially or behaviourally' response option. Stakeholder feedback highlighted how the term 'disorder' reflects medical terminology that may be viewed as inappropriate by some autistic people to describe themselves. Whereas 'autism' is considered to be a more acceptable term that is still widely recognised and understood by respondents.

Additionally, we are proposing to administer the impairment question to all potential participants during recruitment, regardless of their response to the disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and **Disability Discrimination Act 1995** questions. This is to mitigate known limitations of those questions, particularly in instances where disabled people may respond in a way that represents them as non-disabled in the data. Asking the impairment question to all participants during recruitment will help ensure we are able to identify all participants with an impairment and avoid the risk of excluding research participation due to known limitations of the disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and **Disability Discrimination Act 1995** questions.

Table 3. Impairments screening question.

Question Stem	Response Options	Output Categories
Do you have any health conditions or illnesses which affect you in any of the following areas?	• Vision (for example blindness or partial sight) • Hearing (for example deafness or partial hearing) • Mobility (for example walking short distances or climbing stairs) • Dexterity (for example lifting and carrying objects, using a keyboard) • Learning or understanding or concentrating • Memory • Mental health • Stamina or breathing or fatigue • Socially or behaviourally (for example autism spectrum disorder (ASD), or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)) • Other (please specify) • None of the above	Physical impairments • Dexterity (for example lifting and carrying objects, using a keyboard) • Mobility (for example walking short distances or climbing stairs) • Stamina or breathing or fatigue Sensory impairments • Hearing (for example deafness or partial hearing) • Vision (for example blindness or partial sight) Mental or cognitive impairments • Memory • Mental health • Learning or understanding or concentrating

		• Socially or behaviourally (for example autism, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD)) Other impairments • Other (please specify) None of the above • None of the above

Using this question as a primary sampling characteristic in our core screening approach will allow us to capture more granular data, to ensure we are recruiting participants who have a range of different impairments. Subsequently, we will be able to research and consider the respondent needs of different types of disabled people and incorporate these into finalised harmonised standards.

In research samples of 45 participants, we are proposing the following splits:

- 38 people reporting impairments (consisting of 30 participants who also report a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and **Disability Discrimination Act 1995**, and 8 participants who do not), of which there would be:
    - 11 people with physical impairments, which includes ‘dexterity’, ‘mobility’, and ‘stamina’ responses (24.4%),
    - 11 people with sensory impairments, which includes ‘hearing’ and ‘vision’ responses (24.4%),
    - 11 people with mental or cognitive impairments, which includes ‘memory’, ‘mental health’, ‘learning or understanding or concentrating’, or ‘socially and behaviourally’ responses (24.4%),
    - 5 people with ‘other’ impairments, reported via write-ins (11.1%),
- 7 people with no reported impairments who did not report a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and **Disability Discrimination Act 1995**(15.6%).

We acknowledge that individuals may have multiple or co-occurring impairments relating to both physical, sensory, mental, or cognitive, or other impairments. Therefore, the three proposed impairment category quotas should be interpreted as overlapping minimum coverage thresholds rather than mutually exclusive sample groups. Participants may contribute to multiple impairment categories simultaneously. For example, a participant reporting both hearing and stamina impairments would contribute towards both the sensory impairment category and the physical impairment category. We will monitor the representation between participants reporting single and multiple impairments, as well as patterns of overlap between impairment categories, to ensure a diversity of experiences are represented. We will also review whether any unique findings emerge among participants with particular combinations of impairments or among participants reporting multiple impairments compared with a single impairment. Where evidence

suggests this is necessary, we may adapt future sample designs or conduct additional targeted research. If we receive responses from people that report a disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010 and **Disability Discrimination Act 1995**, but no impairments, we will review this data and consider including this as a sample grouping.

This sample composition will ensure we are considering the respondent needs of people with different impairments within our alpha research. A complete proposed sampling matrix is detailed in Annex 1.

Secondary Characteristics

Sex

Disability impacts males and females in different ways, including varying disability prevalence rates as outlined in England and Wales Census 2021 publications and Northern Ireland Census 2021 disabilty data Furthermore, males and females may experience different types of disability and impairments, as evidenced in Scottish Census 2022 health conditions data (Annex 2), and it is important our research considers the needs of these groups.

At the time of writing, there is no current established best practice or harmonised standard for the collection of sex data. The GSS Harmonisation sex and gender identity team are currently undertaking work to review and redevelop data collection standards for sex, as outlined in their workplan.

We are proposing to screen for the legal definition of certificated sex. Certificated sex refers to the sex recorded on someone's birth certificate, or as modified by a Gender Recognition Certificate (GRC) under the Gender Recognition Act (2004). This is to align with data produced from the England and Wales Census 2021, where guidance was used that aligns with the legal concept of certificated sex. This will allow us to ensure our research includes a sex-based sample representative of the UK population.

Once updated harmonised standards are published for this topic, we will implement them in our screening questionnaire. For the time being, we have listed the England and Wales Census 2021 sex question as a placeholder.

Table 4. Sex screening question placeholder.

Question Stem	Response Options	Output Categories
What is your sex? If you are considering how to answer, use the sex recorded on your birth certificate or Gender Recognition Certificate.	• Female • Male	• Female • Male

In research samples of 45 participants, we are proposing the following splits:

- 23 female (51.1%)
- 22 male (48.9%)

This sample composition is representative of the UK population, as outlined in ONS' 2024 mid-year population estimates. A complete proposed sampling matrix is detailed in Annex 1.

Age

Age is a core demographic variable. Disability can impact people of all ages, as evidenced in England and Wales Census 2021 data, where disability prevalence ranged between 9.8% to 18.1% between the 20-49 age brackets. However, disability prevalence in the UK increases alongside age, as outlined in official statistics, England and Wales Census 2021 data, Northern Ireland Census 2021 data and Family Resources Survey 2024-25 UK-wide data (Annex 2).

To ensure harmonised standards are fit for purpose, we are proposing to test them with people of all ages, whilst ensuring our sampling composition reflects the UK disabled population.

The data collection measure we are proposing to use during recruitment to screen for age is the age and date of birth harmonised standard. This is the current GSS best practice standard for collecting data about age.

The standard also provides guidance on output age bands. For our purposes, we propose using a slightly adapted version of Output Grouping C.

As we do not plan to conduct research with respondents under the age of 18, two key modifications are proposed for our outputs:

- Removal of the "0 to 15" age band,
- Modifying the "16 to 24" age band output into an "18 to 24" age band output.

Table 5. Age screening question.

Question Stem	Response Options	Output Categories
What is your age?	[write-in box]	• 18 to 24 • 25 to 34 • 35 to 44 • 45 to 54 • 55 to 64 • 65 to 74 • 75 to 84 • 85 and over

In research samples of 45 participants, we are proposing the following splits:

- 4 people aged 18 to 24 (8.9%),

- 4 people aged 25 to 34 (8.9%),
- 5 people aged 35 to 44 (11.1%),
- 6 people aged 45 to 54 (13.3%),
- 8 people aged 55 to 64 (17.8%),
- 8 people aged 65 to 74 (17.8%),
- 6 people aged 75 to 84 (13.3%)
- 4 people aged 85 and over (8.9%),

This proposed sampling composition includes participants of all ages and is representative of the England and Wales disabled population, as outlined in Annex 2.

Ethnic Group

For standards to be inclusive and effective in UK data collection, they need to meet respondent needs across different ethnic groups. This is pertinent for health and disability statistics. The UK Health Security Agency's 2025 Health inequalities in health protection report found several minority ethnic groups consistently experienced worse health outcomes and higher hospital admission rates than White British groups. ONS COVID-19 research found that minority ethnic groups, including Black, Pakistani, and Bangladeshi ethnic groups were at two times greater risk of death involving COVID-19 than White ethnic groups. Although these examples are focused on health outcomes, they evidence the importance of having fit for purpose disability harmonised standards across ethnic groups, to support effective policy.

The data collection measure we are proposing to use to during recruitment to screen for ethnic group is the England Census 2021 ethnicity question. As outlined in the ethnicity harmonised standard, which is based on the 2011 Census questions and currently under review, this is the most up to date way of collecting data about ethnic group.

When updated harmonised standards for the collection of ethnic group data are published, we will consider whether to implement this question in respondent screening for disability research, based on our data requirements and the implications for consistency within our research.

Table 6. Ethnic group screening question.

Question Stem	Response Options	Output Categories
What is your ethnic group? Choose one option to best describe your ethnic group or background.	White • English, Welsh, Scottish, Northern Irish, or British • Irish • Gypsy or Irish Traveller • Roma • Any other White background, write in [write-in box]	• White • Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups • Asian or Asian British

	Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups • White and Black Caribbean • White and Black African • White and Asian • Any other Mixed or Multiple background, write in [write-in box] Asian or Asian British • Indian • Pakistani • Bangladeshi • Chinese • Any other Asian background, write in [write-in box] Black, Black British, Caribbean or African • Caribbean • African background, write in below • Any other Black, Black British or Caribbean background, write in [write-in box] Other ethnic group • Arab • Any other ethnic group, write in [write-in box]	• Black, Black British, Caribbean or African • Other ethnic group

Using this question as a secondary sampling characteristic in our core screening approach will allow us to capture respondent data about ethnic group. This will allow us to ensure we are conducting research with participants of varying ethnic groups, with the goal of designing finalised standards that are fit for purpose with UK respondents of any ethnic group.

In research samples of 45 participants, we are proposing the following splits:

- 25 people identifying as White (55.6%),
- 7 people identifying as Asian or Asian British (15.6%),
- 4 people identifying as Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups (8.9%),
- 5 people identifying as Black, Black British, Caribbean or African (11.1%),
- 4 people identifying under the Other ethnic group (8.9%),

This sample composition does not represent UK population demographics outlined in the England and Wales Census 2021, Northern Ireland Census 2021, or the Scottish Census 2022, as shown in Annex 2. The reason for oversampling minority ethnic groups is because the population-representative sample splits would be too small to

meaningfully research minority groups. For inclusivity purposes, we are proposing to oversample minority ethnic groups throughout our research.

England and Wales Census 2021 data showed that certain ethnic groups reported higher disability prevalence, relative to the rest of the population. In England and Wales, these were the Gypsy or Irish Traveller (33.2% in England, 39.1% in Wales), White and Black Caribbean (22.4% in England, 26.7% in Wales), Bangladeshi (20.7% in England), Other: Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups (25.3% in Wales). We will monitor these groups throughout our research, and consider boosting our samples through additional targeted research with these specific groups later in development, should our findings show it to be necessary

A complete proposed sampling matrix is detailed in Annex 1.

Geographic Location (country level)

GSS harmonised standards are designed and recommended for data collection across each of the UK nations. To ensure finalised standards are fit for purpose in each UK nation, we are proposing to screen for geographic location at country level, with the intention of conducting research with participants from each country and reducing regional effects.

There is no harmonised standard or agreed best practice for the collection of this data. The Harmonisation team have previously used a geographic location question that has performed well for this purpose. Therefore, we are proposing to use this.

Table 7. Geographic location screening question.

Question Stem	Response Options	Output Categories
Where do you usually live?	• England • Northern Ireland • Scotland • Wales	• England • Northern Ireland • Scotland • Wales

Using this question as a secondary sampling characteristic in our core screening approach will allow us to capture country level data about where participants usually live. This will allow us to ensure we are conducting research with participants from each UK nation, with the goal of designing finalised standards that are fit for purpose when implemented in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland.

In research samples of 45 participants, we are proposing the following splits:

- 16 people from England (35.6%),
- 11 people from Scotland (24.4%),
- 10 people from Wales (22.2%),
- 8 people from Northern Ireland (17.8%).

This sample composition oversamples participants from Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, relative to mid-2024 UK population estimates, as outlined in Annex

2. The reason for oversampling from Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland is that population-representative sample splits would heavily favour the inclusion of English participants (84.4% of our sample). Population data was used as the starting point for determining nation-level allocations, with proportions subsequently adjusted to ensure sufficient representation from each UK nation while broadly retaining differences in relative population size. Harmonised standards are designed for implementation in GSS data collection across the whole UK. Therefore, we need to ensure we are meaningfully including participants from each UK nation in our work to develop them. A complete proposed sampling matrix is detailed in Annex 1.

Characteristics to monitor for

These characteristics represent demographic characteristics we are planning to screen for throughout our alpha research but will not be aiming to achieve specific sample compositions. These characteristics have been identified as relevant but lower priority to disability harmonised standard development than the primary and secondary characteristics.

Screening for these characteristics will ensure we have an evidence base of testing harmonised standards with these populations. If we identify unique findings within these characteristics, we may conduct further targeted research to explore this further. If our recruitment approach does not capture participants with variations of these characteristics, we will have an evidence base to propose targeted research with these groups.

Education Level

Screening for education level throughout alpha will help ensure that standards are tested across groups with differing educational experience, supporting the development of questions that are clear, accessible, and appropriate for the whole population. Monitoring for educational level also works as a proxy indicator for reading age, which is important for ensuring comprehension of the language used in developing harmonised standards.

We are proposing to use the educational attainment harmonised standard to screen for education level. This is the current GSS best practice standard for collecting data about education level. Using this measure will ensure we capture data about participants' highest level of qualification. It is suitable for UK-wide data collection, as it does not ask about specific qualifications, which vary across the devolved nations.

Table 8. Education level screening question.

Question Stem	Response Options	Output Categories
Do you have any educational qualifications for which you received a certificate?	• Yes • No	• Degree or degree equivalent, and above • Other qualifications • No qualifications
Do you have any professional, vocational or	• Yes	

other work-related qualifications for which you received a certificate?	• No	
Was your highest qualification …	• At degree level or above • Or another kind of qualification	

Monitoring education level throughout alpha recruitment screening will provide an evidence base of how harmonised standards are testing with participants of different education levels. If unique findings are identified among people with different education levels, we will have the evidence required to conduct further follow-up research with these groups, to help ensure finalised standards are fit for purpose with respondents of any education level. If our recruitment approach does not capture these groups, we will have the evidence required to conduct targeted research focusing on educational level differences.

English Language Proficiency

For comprehension and accessibility purposes, we need to test developing questions with respondents for whom English is not their first language.

We are proposing to use the Northern Ireland Census 2021 and England and Wales Census 2021 main language question and English language proficiency question These measures will allow us to understand participant's main language and their proficiency with the English language.

We are not planning on monitoring Welsh language specifically; however, we hope to test and develop harmonised standards in the Welsh language following development in English.

Table 9. English language proficiency screening question.

Question Stem	Response Options	Output Categories
What is your main language?	• English • Other, write in (including British Sign Language) [write-in box]	• Main language is English • Main language is not English: Can speak English very well or well • Main language is not English: Cannot speak English well or at all • Not stated
How well can you speak English?	• Very well • Well • Not well • Not at all	

Monitoring English language proficiency throughout alpha screening will provide an evidence base of how harmonised standards are testing with participants of varying English language proficiency. If unique findings are identified among people with

particular English language proficiency, we will have the evidence required to conduct further follow-up research with these groups, to help ensure finalised standards are fit for purpose with respondents of varying proficiency levels. If our recruitment approach does not capture these groups, we will have the evidence required to conduct targeted research with this group.

Trans Status or History / Gender Identity

Gender identity is self-identified; it refers to a person's sense of their own gender. It may be the same or different to someone's sex at birth or certificated sex.

Across the statistical sector, respondent needs have been identified for the inclusion of an identity-based question in data collection, in addition to a sex question, to allow people to represent themselves accurately in data. In the England and Wales Census 2021, a question on gender identity was included for the first time. In the Scottish Census 2022, a question on trans status was included for the first time. These measures allow respondents to represent their identity in data and allow statistics producers to measure the transgender population.

We are proposing to include the Scottish Census 2022 trans status question in our core screening approach throughout Alpha research. This is for the purpose of meeting respondent's inclusivity needs to be able to express their identity, and to enable us to identify transgender participants in our research and explore any respondent needs unique to this group. Unlike the England and Wales Census 2021 gender identity question, no uncertainty issues or potential respondent error was identified in data collected via the Scottish trans status question.

Given the small size of the UK transgender population, as outlined in Annex 2, we are not proposing to aim for a specific trans status or history sample composition. We are aware that transgender and non-binary people are more likely to report a long-term disability or health condition that limits them a little or a lot, relative to the non-transgender population; in Scottish Census 2022 data, 43.6% of transgender and non-binary people reported a disability (approximately 8,700 people out of 20,000 people reporting a trans status or history), compared to 26.8% of non-transgender people. England and Wales Census 2021 estimates also showed that transgender and non-binary people are more likely to report having a disability than people with a gender identity the same as their sex registered at birth. We therefore recognise the need to conduct research with this population to ensure disability harmonised standards meet their respondent needs. We will design and conduct specific research with this group in the future.

Table 10. Trans status screening question.

Question Stem	Response Options	Output Categories
Do you consider yourself to be trans, or have a trans history?	• No • Yes, please describe your trans status (for	• No trans status • Trans man • Trans woman • Non-binary

Here we use trans as a term used to describe people whose gender identity is not the same as their sex registered at birth.	example, non-binary, trans man, trans woman) [write-in box] • Prefer not to say	• Trans status or history: not otherwise specified • Other trans status or history

Annex 1 – Alpha Sampling Matrix

Table 11. Proposed sampling matrix to be achieved during recruitment in each alpha research round

Sampling criteria	Primary	Disability			Total
Secondary		Disabled, as defined by the EA 2010	Not disabled (EA 2010), impairments reported	Non-disabled, no impairments	
Impairment	Physical impairments, including dexterity, mobility, and stamina responses	9	2	0	11
	Sensory impairments, including hearing and vision responses	9	2	0	11
	Cognitive impairments, including memory, mental health, learning or understanding or concentrating, and socially and behaviourally responses	9	2	0	11
	Other	3	2	0	5
	None of the above	0	0	7	7
	Total	30	8	7	45
Sex	Female	15	4	4	23
	Male	15	4	3	22
	Total	30	8	7	45
Age	18 to 24	3	1	0	4
	25 to 34	2	1	1	4
	35 to 44	3	1	1	5
	45 to 54	4	1	1	6

	55 to 64	6	1	1	8
	65 to 74	6	1	1	8
	75 to 84	4	1	1	6
	85 and over	2	1	1	4
	Total	30	8	7	45
Geographic location	England	12	2	2	16
	Northern Ireland	5	2	1	8
	Scotland	7	2	2	11
	Wales	6	2	2	10
	Total	30	8	7	45
	Asian, Asian British	5	1	1	7
	Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	3	1	1	5
Ethnic group	Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups	2	1	1	4
	White	18	4	3	25
	Other ethnic group	2	1	1	4
	Total	30	8	7	45
Monitor for					
English language proficiency	Main language is English	Monitor for			
	Main language is not English: Can speak English very well or well				
	Main language is not English: Cannot speak English well or at all				
Educational attainment	Degree or degree equivalent, and above	Monitor for			
	Other qualifications				
	No qualifications				
Trans status	Trans man	Monitor for			
	Trans woman				

	Non-binary
	Trans status or history: not otherwise specified
	Other trans status or history
	No trans status or history

Annex 2 – Supplementary UK Demographic Statistics

2.1 Health Conditions

Table 12. Scottish Census 2022 data on health conditions by sex.

Health conditions	Male	Female
Deaf or partially hearing impaired	198,519	188,896
Percentage of population by sex	7.5%	6.8%
Blind or partially vision impaired	63,927	73,711
Percentage of population by sex	2.4%	2.6%
Full/partial loss of voice or difficulty speaking	9,443	7,664
Percentage of population by sex	0.4%	0.3%
Has one or more of learning disability, learning difficulty or developmental disorder	165,317	115,428
Percentage of population by sex	6.3%	4.1%
Physical disability	221,283	304,068
Percentage of population by sex	8.4%	10.9%
Mental health condition	243,820	373,294
Percentage of population by sex	9.2%	13.3%
Long-term illness, disease or condition	528,172	635,300
Percentage of population by sex	20.0%	22.7%

Source: Scottish Census 2022.

2.2. Gender Identity / Trans Status

Table 13. UK Census data (2021, 2022) on gender identity and trans status.

Gender Identity			
Country	**Population size (aged 16+)**	**Gender identity different to sex registered at birth**	**Percentage of population (aged 16+)**

England	46,006,958	251,844	0.55%
Wales	2,559,416	10,270	0.40%
Trans Status			
Country	**Population size (16+)**	**Trans status or history**	**Percentage of population (aged 16+)**
Scotland	4,538,636	19,970	0.44%
Gender Identity & Trans Status			
Country	**Population size (aged 16+)**	**Gender identity different to sex at birth, or trans status or history**	**Percentage of population (aged 16+)**
England, Wales & Scotland	53,105,010	282,084	0.53%

Sources: England and Wales Census 2021, Scottish Census 2022. **The Northern Ireland Census 2021 did not collect data on gender identity or trans status.**

Representative sample of the UK population for 45 participants (Gender identity / trans status):

- 0/1 person with a trans status or history (0% / 2.2%),
- 45/44 people with no trans status or history (100% / 97.8%).

2.3. Age

Table 14. England and Wales Census data (2021) of age-specific disability prevalence in England.

Age bracket	Age-specific percentage of the English population reporting disability, as defined by the Equality Act 2010	
	Females	**Males**
20 to 24	15.2%	11.2%
25 to 29	13.2%	10.4%
30 to 34	12.7%	9.8%
35 to 39	13.6%	10.3%
40 to 44	15.2%	11.5%
45 to 49	18.1%	13.7%
50 to 54	20.4%	16.2%
55 to 59	22.7%	19.0%
60 to 64	25.7%	23.2%
65 to 69	27.2%	26.0%
70 to 74	29.3%	28.1%
75 to 79	35.8%	33.7%
80 to 84	45.3%	41.5%
85 to 89	56.2%	50.7%
90+	66.5%	59.9%

Source: England and Wales Census 2021.

Table 15. Family Resources Survey (2024-25) UK data of age-specific disability prevalence

Age bracket	Total	Not Disabled	Disabled	Percentage disabled
16 to 24	5,174,088	4,245,350	928,738	17.9%
25 to 34	9,184,913	7,378,016	1,806,897	19.7%
35 to 44	9,063,770	7,343,262	1,720,508	19.0%
45 to 54	8,300,359	6,185,138	2,115,221	25.5%
55 to 64	8,909,267	6,290,000	2,619,267	29.4%
65 to 74	6,700,299	4,151,285	2,549,014	38.0%
75 to 84	4,751,676	2,463,887	2,287,789	48.1%
85 or over	1,476,890	553,011	923,879	62.6%
Total	53,561,262	38,609,949	14,951,313	27.9%

Source: DWP Stat-Xplore Family Resources Survey data 2024-25.

Table 16. England and Wales Census data (2021) of age-specific disabled populations.

Age bracket	Number of disabled people, as defined by the Equality Act 2010	Percentage of England and Wales disabled population
16 to 24	793,763	8.1%
25 to 34	945,156	9.7%
35 to 44	995,851	10.2%
45 to 54	1,376,784	14.1%
55 to 64	1,708,362	17.5%
65 to 74	1,658,287	17.0%
75-84	1,427,260	14.5%
85 and over	843,108	8.6%
Total	9,748,571	100%

Source: ONS Create a custom dataset; England and Wales Census 2021.

Table 17. Northern Ireland Census data (2021) of age-specific disability prevalence

Age band	Disabled people	Non-disabled people	Total population	Percentage disabled
15-19 years	12,497	100,702	113,199	11.0%
20-24 years	13,429	97,946	111,375	12.1%
25-29 years	14,140	102,291	116,431	12.1%
30-34 years	16,556	109,487	126,043	13.1%
35-39 years	19,128	108,196	127,324	15.0%
40-44 years	21,572	100,571	122,143	17.7%

45-49 years	27,332	94,319	121,651	22.5%
50-54 years	36,416	94,540	130,956	27.8%
55-59 years	42,743	86,527	129,270	33.1%
60-64 years	44,868	68,187	113,055	39.7%
65-69 years	40,866	52,609	93,475	43.7%
70-74 years	41,206	42,256	83,462	49.4%
75-79 years	39,075	27,293	66,368	58.9%
80-84 years	30,840	12,923	43,763	70.5%
85-89 years	21,023	4,843	25,866	81.3%
90+ years	12,265	1,266	13,531	90.6%
Total	**462,985**	**1,440,138**	**1,903,123**	**24.3%**

Source: Flexible table builder; Northern Ireland Census 2021

2.4. Ethnic Group

Table 18. UK census data (2021, 2022) of UK population size by ethnic group.

Ethnic group	UK population size	Percentage of UK population
White	55,592,837	83.0%
Asian or Asian British	5,758,104	8.6%
Black, Black British, Caribbean or African	2,485,724	3.7%
Mixed or Multiple	1,793,257	2.7%
Other	1,310,636	2.0%
Total	66,940,563	100%

Sources: England and Wales Census 2021, Scottish Census 2022, Northern Ireland Census 2021.

Representative sample of the UK population for 45 participants (ethnic group):

- 37 people identifying as White (82.2%),
- 4 people identifying as Asian or Asian British (8.9%),
- 1 person identifying as Mixed or Multiple ethnic groups (2.2%),
- 2 people identifying as Black, Black British, Caribbean or African (4.4%),
- 1 person identifying under the Other ethnic group (2.2%),

2.5. Geographic Location (UK country level)

Table 19. Mid-year population estimates (2024) of UK population size by geographic location (country level).

Country	Population size	Percentage of UK population
England	58,620,101	86.05%
Scotland	5,546,900	8.01%
Wales	3,186,581	4.60%

Northern Ireland	1,927,855	2.78%
Total	69,281,437	100%

Source: Population estimates for the UK, England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland: mid-2024, ONS 2025.

Representative sample of the UK population for 45 participants (geographic location):

- 38 people from England (84.4%)
- 4 people from Scotland (8.9%)
- 2 people from Wales (4.4%)
- 1 person from Northern Ireland (2.2%)