
Professor Sir Ian Diamond | National Statistician

Preet Kaur Gill MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

03 March 2021

Dear Ms Gill,

As National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority, I am responding to your Parliamentary Questions relating to Census 2021 in England and Wales asking whether the Office for National Statistics (ONS) contact centre will have staff on the telephone who can speak Punjabi when they open on 1 March 2021 (**159349**); what support the Government plans to provide for people who need help filling in their questionnaire for the 2021 Census (**159350**); whether Census Support Centres are planned to be open in time for the Census 2021 (**159351**); and what the target response rate is for Census 2021; and what assessment has been made of the effect of the (a) digital first policy and (b) covid-19 restrictions affecting visits to households on that target (**159352**).

The response rate targets for Census 2021 are 94% for England and Wales as a whole and no less than 80% for each local authority. As you note, this will be a digital-first census and we will be encouraging people to respond online if they can. Each household will receive a letter inviting them to take part online and explaining how they can access support if they need it. Around 10% of households, where the take-up of the online option is likely to be relatively low, will receive a paper questionnaire. They can either fill it in or use the code it includes to complete online. We have seen that through the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic many households have successfully switched to access services online. This, and the success of our approach during our 2019 Census Rehearsal, gives us confidence that most respondents will be able to respond without needing a follow-up visit from ONS field staff or a reminder letter.

The health of both census field staff and the public with whom they interact to deliver the census is of the utmost importance to us. The ONS has planned and built a flexible census operation that can adapt to the changing circumstances of the pandemic. Details of how census preparations have been adapted and the contingency measures put in place are set out in the article '*Operational planning response to the coronavirus (COVID-19) for Census 2021*', published in October.¹ As set out in our statement on 22 January,² the main census field operation will begin only after Census Day. Field staff will never need to enter people's houses; they will always be socially distanced, wear PPE and work in line with all government guidance. The role of field officers is to give help and encouragement to those who have not yet filled in their census questionnaire online or on paper after Census Day and direct them to the support services they need. They will be operating in the same way as a postal or food delivery visit.

A wide range of support is available online and by phone for those who need help to complete the census, including providing paper questionnaires for those who request them. This support includes help via our contact centre (the freephone number for which appears on the letters and paper questionnaires sent to households), email, social media, text messaging and webchat.

¹<https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/censusdesign/operationalplanningresponsetothecoronaviruscovid19forcensus2021englandandwales>

² <https://www.ons.gov.uk/news/statementsandletters/census2021andcoronavirus>

There will be a range of language support available for Census 2021. The Census 2021 website has pages in each of 48 languages, including Punjabi (Gurmurkhi), providing information about how to complete the census online or on paper; this includes translation booklets that contain a copy of the paper questionnaire translated into each language.³ Callers to our Contact Centre or our language helpline will be able to access support in over 150 languages, including Punjabi”

We aim to provide in-person support to complete the census online at Census Support Centres but will do this only where it is safe to do so and in line with government guidelines. We can't yet provide in-person support because of the national lockdowns, but telephone support will be available from most centres. We are working closely with the UK and Welsh Governments to ensure that the planned in-person Assisted Digital support can be delivered through local Census Support Centres as coronavirus restrictions are eased.

We appreciate your continued interest and support to make Census 2021 a success.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian Diamond', written in a cursive style.

Professor Sir Ian Diamond

³<https://census.gov.uk/help/languages-and-accessibility/languages>