

Dr Tony Wright, MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

March 2010

Dear Dr Wright

As the Director General for the Office for National Statistics (ONS) I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking what recent consideration has been given to including a separate category for Sikhs in the ethnic categories to be included in the 2011 Census. (321205)

ONS consulted widely in establishing the proposed content of the 2011 Census, which included a public consultation and consultation with Sikh representatives. Following consultation, and in accordance with the Census Act 1920, the proposed content was laid before Parliament in *"The Census (England and Wales) Order 2009"* (S.I. 2009 3210) in October 2009.

Parliament approved the Order, which came into force on 10 December. As the question content of the 2011 Census is now set in law, no new work has been undertaken on the categories to be used in the ethnic group question since this time.

ONS remains of the view that the best quality and most comprehensive data on the Sikh population will be gained using the questions and tick boxes approved by Parliament.

The proposed questions are the culmination of an extensive programme of research, consultation and testing. ONS considered, very carefully, the case for a specific 'Sikh' tick-box in the 2011 Census ethnic group question alongside requests for 20 or so other new categories – many more than could possibly be included on the census questionnaire. With space for only two new tick-boxes, a set of principles was developed by which requirements for new tick-box categories for ethnic groups could be assessed and prioritised. These covered:

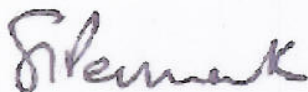
- strength of need for information;
- lack of alternative sources of information;
- clarity and quality of the information collected and acceptability to respondents; and
- comparability with the 2001 Census data.

A key principle when considering a 'Sikh' tick-box was whether or not alternative sources could provide sufficient information. The census needs to be as clear and efficient as possible, so should avoid having two or more ways of capturing very similar information. ONS believes that the religious affiliation question is the best way to capture information on the Sikh population. This question captures people's identification with a religion, irrespective of their religious belief or religious practice.

A 'Sikh' tick-box repeated in the ethnic group question would not be mutually exclusive to 'Indian'. Although some people would consider 'Sikh' to be their primary identity, there may be confusion about which box to tick, resulting in responses being split between an 'Indian' and a 'Sikh' tick-box (giving a misleadingly low count for both groups).

In cognitive testing, a 'Sikh' tick-box was tested in the ethnic group question, but most Sikh respondents ticked the 'Indian' response option and felt that the 'Sikh' response option should be removed. A 'Sikh' tick-box was also tested in the ethnic group question in the 2006 Scotland Census Test, and although many of 'religious' Sikhs also identified their ethnic group as 'Sikh', many did not, indicating some lack of clarity over how religious Sikhs would identify their ethnic group.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'Stephen Penneck', written in a cursive style.

Stephen Penneck
Director General