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Dear Ed,

### **Guidance for the sex question in Scotland's Census**

Thank you for your letter dated 16 September 2021 regarding Scotland's Census sex question guidance.

During scrutiny of the census legislation, NRS indicated to the previous Culture, Tourism, Europe and External Affairs Committee of the Scottish Parliament the intention to provide guidance for the sex question which would allow for a self-identified basis of response. This guidance will support and maximise inclusion and participation in Scotland's Census 2022. Our [evidence](#) on need for and use of guidance confirms that over 99% of respondents won't refer to guidance when answering a binary sex question. The guidance is for the proportionately small number of people who identified a need for clarification. The guidance published by NRS on 31st August confirms that NRS will retain this guidance. Prior to March 2021 all three UK census organisations were using similar guidance<sup>1</sup> which confirms that from a statistical perspective there is confidence that the NRS guidance is suitable for Scotland's Census.

Our [research and testing](#) confirmed the suitability of our guidance in supporting participation and delivering Census Outputs. Both NISRA and ONS changed guidance mid-census collection and are content that these variations still enable high quality statistics to be produced. Recent guidance from Scotland's Chief Statistician indicates that NRS guidance and rest of the UK guidance will deliver data which will not skew statistical outputs and analysis. NRS will continue to work with ONS and NISRA to ensure that users of UK data are supported, not least in regard to the gap of one year in census dates.

NRS has published the guidance for the sex question in good time, more than 6 months in advance of census day. As stated above, this guidance is the same as that discussed with the Parliament when the census legislation was agreed. The research, stakeholder events and Parliamentary debate in respect of this issue are all in the public domain. The interim conclusion of the High Court of England and Wales was in respect of the census in England and Wales only, and was not binding on Scotland.

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<sup>1</sup> [Census 2021 sex question guidance - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

In response to your other recommendations NRS will:

- Update materials where appropriate and deliver the public good by enabling all people across Scotland to participate in Scotland's Census. This will support NRS to deliver high quality Census Outputs which provide significant public benefit and value.
- Focus on the successful running of Scotland's Census and will have in place suitable arrangements to manage risks during Census live.
- Assure users of data quality, by providing Confidence Intervals and estimates of statistical bias alongside Census Outputs. In addition we will continue to peer review our statistical methodology regarding imputation of missing responses, estimation for missing returns, and disclosure control to protect individual returns. This will help to create the final Census database from which our statistical analysis is produced. Information on these techniques continue to be made available on our website.

As always I welcome OSR's advice and support. NRS will continue to engage with stakeholders to drive participation in Scotland's Census and to ensure that users are supported in their use of and understanding of the Census data.

I hope that you have found this letter to be helpful.

Yours sincerely,



**PAUL LOWE**  
Chief Executive