

**census 2021**

**Consultation response**

**Census 2021 Output Geography  
Policy, Products and Services**

March 2021

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## 1. Contact information

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### Quality assurance

We carried out this consultation according to the government's consultation principles. You can read the principles at [www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/consultation-principles-guidance)

If you have any complaints about the way we've conducted this consultation, please email us.

## 2. Executive summary

At the Office for National Statistics (ONS), we invited views on our proposed Census 2021 Output Geography Policy and our plans for geography products and services. This consultation took place from 5 November 2020 to 18 December 2020. This report summarises our key findings and response to the user feedback received in that public consultation.

The policy largely focuses on our maintenance plans for small area geographies – Output Areas (OAs), Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs) and Middle Layer Super Output Areas (MSOAs). We provided detail for each of the proposed publicly available geography products and services, including digital boundaries, look-up files and statistical products.

Building on the success of the policy for 2011, the 2021 proposed policy is largely consistent with the 2011 policy, but with the addition of targeted realignment of some OA boundaries. This is to overcome some of the degradation between OA boundaries and ward or parish boundaries over time. The consultation set out several options for producing outputs for wards and parishes with a view to introducing quality improvements to census statistics for wards and parishes. We also detailed our recommendation from these options for a refinement to the OA best-fit approach. This recommendation is reflected in the current policy for producing ward and parish census statistics.

Overall, 84% of users supported our recommendation set out in the consultation. We recommend continuing to publish ward and parish outputs using an OA best-fit approach, with additional alignment of some OA boundaries to ward and parish boundaries. However, some users raised concerns that instability of ward boundaries meant any realignment may quickly become obsolete at the loss of comparability with previous census results. When we investigated ward changes, we found that since 2003 on average fewer than 4% of wards annually have had boundary changes. Therefore, we do not believe that this is a sufficiently strong justification for not proceeding with our targeted OA realignment plans.

We shall proceed with the maintenance plans as set out in the consultation. For statistical geographies (OAs, LSOAs, MSOAs), this will mean striking a balance between two things. One is the need for comparability over time, by minimising changes, and the other is updating geography boundaries to reflect population and household changes.

For wards and parishes, these plans will allow for the continuation of census outputs for these important geographies. The targeted realignment of some OA boundaries to them will mean that OA census statistics can be more accurately assigned to the ward and/or parish within which they fall.

When commenting on the proposed policy, some users questioned whether the ONS would consider the ward and local authority boundary changes coming into effect after Census Day. There were also requests for clear supporting information highlighting any boundary changes. Our intention is that census outputs will reflect the geographies in place at the time of their release. We are also considering producing a listing of the wards which comprise one or more OAs which have received targeted realignment so users can see if there are any comparability issues to consider.

Although generally satisfied with the proposed products and services set out in the consultation document, respondents suggested a range of additional products and services. These included:

- the publication of OA/LSOA/MSOA population-weighted centroids
- additional lookup files
- the availability of digital boundaries through shapefiles

These products already exist and are available on the ONS Open Geography portal. We shall be looking to update these products following the census.

Nearly half of users responded positively to the idea of a comparable UK small area geography. Those that said no, typically stated this was because it would not impact on their work. Users left varying thoughts on how comparable UK small area geographies could be achieved, but consistently said that they should be based on an existing geography.

The consultation confirmed demand for a comparable small area UK geography. Given this, we shall discuss this further with colleagues in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

The consultation endorsed our proposed policy. This includes a refinement to the previous OA best-fit approach to specifically deal with outputs for wards and parishes. We will now proceed with our statistical geography maintenance work to reflect this refined approach.

In the consultation paper, we stated that we also intend to release some census outputs for 1 km grid squares across the whole of England and Wales and for smaller nested grids for more heavily populated areas. Following interest from some users amongst the consultation responses, we will continue work on exploring census outputs for grid squares.

### **3. Introduction**

For the 2011 Census, outputs for wards and parishes were produced by aggregating statistics for component Output Areas (OAs). In some situations where there had been ward and/or parish boundary changes since the 2001 Census, OAs no longer neatly aligned with the ward and/or parish boundary. In such cases, whole OAs were assigned to wards and parishes based on the location of the OA population-weighted centroid. This reflects the current OA best-fit approach, which we followed when producing 2011 Census outputs.

We intend to keep the 2021 policy relatively unchanged from 2011. One planned change for the policy is a targeted realignment of some OA boundaries. This is to overcome some of the degradation between OA boundaries and ward or parish boundaries over time. Degradation occurs from the frequent boundary changes for wards and parishes. We have also considered other options for improving the quality of ward and parish outputs.

We consulted with users to:

- obtain feedback on all aspects of the Census 2021 Output Geography Policy
- specifically understand if they supported our recommendation for a refinement to the OA best-fit approach for producing ward and parish census statistics
- provide a detailed list of the geography products we intend to make available
- understand any user interest in a comparable UK small area geography

We received 132 responses to the consultation. Of these, 69 respondents (52%) answered on behalf of an organisation and 63 respondents (48%) answered as an individual. Overall, users agreed with our proposed policy and our maintenance plans for small area geographies.

### **3.1 Census 2021 Output Geography Policy**

**1. The ONS will maintain the principle of stability of OAs and SOAs between 2001, 2011 and 2021 to allow comparability of census information and to support the GSS Geography Policy.**

**OAs/SOAs will be redesigned only where:**

**1.1 they have undergone significant population or household change following the 2011 Census (when OA changes were last made)**

**1.2 improvements to census outputs for wards and/or parishes have been identified that can be achieved through targeted OA boundary realignment**

**2. The total number of changes allowed under any of the circumstances above will be limited to less than 5% of the England and Wales OA/SOA hierarchy.**

**Where OAs/SOAs are redesigned they will:**

**2.1 not normally align to ward and parish boundaries that have changed since 2003, unless they are also further redesigned**

**2.2 not necessarily align to real-world features**

**2.3 not contain only a single, large communal establishment**

**2.4 not contain fewer than 100 persons or 40 households**

**2.5 not contain more than 625 persons or 250 households except in a small number of cases**

**3. OAs/SOAs split by local authority boundary changes since the 2011 Census will be aligned to the changed local authority boundaries.**

**4. Digital boundaries for geographies, suitable for use within a geographic information system (GIS), will be freely available, subject to agreement with third parties.**

**5. OAs/SOAs will be coded to bring them in line with the coding and naming policy that forms part of the GSS Geography Policy.**

**6. Geography boundaries, products and services will be updated following Census 2021.**

**7. Census 2021 statistical outputs will be produced in line with the GSS Geography Policy.**

**8. We will continue to provide lookup products between postcodes and the OA hierarchy.**

## 4. Summary of responses

We received 132 responses to the consultation. Of these, 69 respondents (52%) answered on behalf of an organisation and 63 respondents (48%) answered as an individual.

All respondents stated the sector in which they worked, with a small number stating two or more sectors (which accounts for the differences in totals). There were 20 respondents (14%) who did not work in a sector listed, who were most typically retired.

**Table 1: Number of responses to the consultation by type**

Individual	63	48%
Organisation	69	52%
<b>Total</b>	<b>132</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 2: Number of responses to the consultation by sector**

Local authority	72	50%
Academic/research	14	10%
Commercial	11	8%
Charity and voluntary	8	6%
Genealogist/family historian	6	4%
Public body	6	4%
Government department	5	3%
Housing	2	1%
Journalist/media	1	1%
Other	20	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>145</b>	<b>100%</b>

A list of the respondents can be found in **Appendix A**.

## 5. Detailed responses

### 5.1 Question 1: Do you have any comments on the proposed maintenance plans for OAs and SOAs?

**Users were generally in support of the proposed maintenance plans and understood the importance of accounting for changing geographies and populations.**

For example:

**A county council:** *“[We recognise] the value in maintaining the principle of stability of OAs and SOAs, to allow comparability of census information between 2001, 2011 and 2021. However, we understand that OAs and SOAs need to be redesigned where they have undergone significant population or household change, or where improvements to census outputs for wards and parishes have been identified that can be achieved through targeted OA boundary realignment (...)”*

#### **Our response**

We shall proceed with the maintenance plans as set out in the consultation document and as summarised in this response document. This reflects the continued endorsement from census users of using statistical geographies (OAs, LSOAs and MSOAs) and maintaining these over time to reflect population and household change.

**Several users highlighted the importance of balance between having accurate, up-to-date boundaries and comparability over time.**

For example:

**A government department:** *“The proposed maintenance plans for OAs and SOAs seem to strike the right balance in providing comparability and stability with previous censuses, while also reflecting changes at the small area level since the 2011 Census (...)”*

#### **Our response**

The user comments largely recognised that there is a balance between:

1. updating geography boundaries to reflect population and household change
2. ensuring comparability over time with census outputs for statistical geographies going back to 2001

The ONS will attempt to do this through our plans, largely unchanged from the previous census, for maintaining the statistical small area geographies.

**Several respondents raised the question of whether upcoming boundary changes (for April 2022) would be incorporated into the first census outputs.**

For example:

**An individual:** *“For Local Authorities where their Ward boundaries are under review and due to be incorporated by the time of the release of the first Census outputs*



*(approx April 2022) then the OAs & LSOAs should be designed to match the new wards (...)*

### **Our response**

We intend our outputs to reflect the geographies in place at the time of their release, rather than at the time of Census 2021 (21 March 2021). Therefore, we expect that census outputs will reflect any ward changes that will become effective in April 2022. Where information about these ward changes is known in advance of their introduction, we shall consider the new boundaries when undertaking any selective OA targeted realignment to ward boundaries.

**A concern raised was that the instability of ward boundaries would mean any changes to realign would quickly be undone. This concern was raised by other users in question 2.**

For example:

**A community foundation:** *“(...) It is also less important to change OA and LSOA geographies to align with wards given again these are likely to change post 2021 so will be quickly obsolete also (...)*”

### **Our response**

We recognise that OAs realigned to wards will not necessarily remain aligned in the future due to future ward changes. Over the 15-year period 2003 to 2018, of those wards in existence in 2003, 40% were unchanged in 2018. The remaining 60% of 2003 wards were subject in some cases to minor boundary changes, and others to major reorganisation within local authorities. We anticipate that many current wards will remain unchanged for some considerable time. Since 2003, on average fewer than 4% of wards annually have had boundary changes.

**The proposed Census 2021 Output Geography policy outlined a maximum of 5% change to OA boundaries. Several users raised questions as to how we reached this number and how changes would be prioritised if this limit is reached.**

For example:

**A city council:** *“Overall, I support the principles of the geography policy and the proposed maintenance plans. However, the 5% cap on changes to areas, whilst I understand the reasoning, does seem to be a little arbitrary and its not clear how that judgement is arrived at. Presumably it means that at least 95% of all areas will remain unchanged, but is that just all OAs or the other areas/boundaries also? I'm also not clear how is that 5% of changes would be prioritised in terms of criteria - is it just visual judgement or something more scientific? If when analysing the new Census data it would make sense for (say) 8-10% of areas to change, why cap at 5%?”*

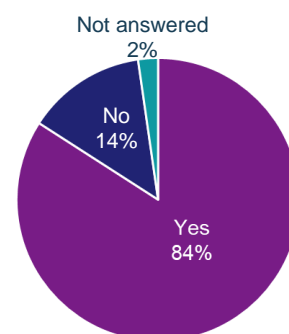
### **Our response**

The main reason that the cap for changing OAs nationally was 5% was to ensure consistency with the approach for the 2011 Census when 2.6% of the 2001 Census OAs were changed. The 5% cap is intended to provide a sensible target that balances the need for some change and improvement, against the overriding need for enabling stable geographies for comparing data over time.

## 5.2 Question 2: Do you support our recommendation to continue to publish ward and parish outputs using an OA best-fit approach, but additionally aligning some OA boundaries to wards and/or parish boundaries?

**Table 3: Response to Question 2 by type**

	Yes		No		Not answered	
Individual	54	86%	7	11%	2	3%
Organisation	57	83%	11	16%	1	1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>84%</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2%</b>



**Table 4: Response to Question 2 by sector**

	Yes		No		Not answered		Total	Total %
Housing	2	100%	0	0%	0	0%	2	100%
Journalist/media	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Local authority	59	83%	11	15%	1	1%	71	100%
Public body	5	83%	1	17%	0	0%	6	100%
Genealogist/family historian	5	83%	1	17%	0	0%	6	100%
Commercial	9	82%	1	9%	1	9%	11	100%
Charity and voluntary	6	75%	2	25%	0	0%	8	100%
Academic/research	10	71%	2	14%	2	14%	14	100%
Government department	2	40%	3	60%	0	0%	5	100%
Other	16	80%	4	20%	0	0%	20	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>80%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3%</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>100%</b>

Totals do not match due to respondents entering multiple occupation sectors

Here’s a summary of the four reviewed options set out in the consultation document:

- Option 1 – OA best-fit approach (as used following the 2001 and 2011 Census)
- Option 2 – OA best-fit approach with targeted OA realignment (recommended option)
- Option 3 – “Exact-fit” counts
- Option 4 – OA apportionment

**Although users were asked to comment if they disagreed with the proposed approach, several users responded in support of the proposed approach. This included reasons why they believed the proposed approach (Option 2 - OA best-fit approach with targeted OA realignment) is more appropriate than the others.**

For example:

**A city council:** “(...)The overriding advantage of this method [Option 2 - OA best-fit with targeted realignment] over exact fit and apportionment is the ease with which

*users are able to calculate their own statistics using the same best-fit method for locally defined geographies. It also means that when ward/parishes change in future it will be possible for users to rework 2021 Census outputs for the new boundaries. The other main advantages are that all geographical outputs will be based on the same best-fit aggregations of OAs which ensures consistency and the lessening of issues in relation to slivers and disclosive data which may result in the suppression of some census outputs.*

*If users wish to apply their own apportionment method locally then that would be based on local knowledge and considerations of how often to make changes to the proportions based on change in local circumstances.”*

### **Our response**

We welcome that users generally supported our recommendation for a modified OA best-fit approach for producing ward and parish outputs (Option 2 - OA best-fit approach with targeted OA realignment).

**The users in favour of Option 1 (OA best-fit approach) had some concerns. These were that the instability of ward boundaries would mean any work to realign OAs with ward boundaries would, at the loss of continuity, quickly be undone. Several users also emphasised that continuity was of greater value to them than updated boundaries.**

For example:

**An individual:** *“Any "good" work to align OAs with wards will be quickly undone - at the cost of compromising the 2001 - 2011 - 2011 consistency in the OA, LSOA, MSOA geography”*

**A university:** *“alignment should not be the sole reason for substantial change from those 2011 boundaries which would otherwise not need to be changed; the fact that the basic strategy is to best-fit, and therefore precise boundary matching is not generally possible, improving the match in a few cases is not valuable enough to decrease comparability over time of the OAs where this is still possible”*

### **Our response**

As mentioned in a previous response, we recognise that OAs realigned to wards will not in all cases remain aligned in the future due to further ward changes. The main goal with this approach is twofold. Firstly, it's to improve the accuracy of selected ward census outputs, which without this intervention would otherwise be of poorer quality. Secondly, it's to attempt at the same time to minimise the number of OA changes nationally required to achieve this. The ONS shall be very selective in making OA boundary changes to align to wards.

**Option 3 and 4 - One of the main stated reasons respondents preferred an exact-fit or OA apportionment approach was to overcome population under or overestimation in wards and parishes. The best-fit approach can often result in this.**

For example:

**A local authority:** *“The 'best fit' approach is problematic. This approach while it works in many cases can also be significantly in error in a small number of wards.*

*Our preference is for an OA apportionment approach, based on the actual property positions. The widespread use of the Local Land and Property Gazetteer (LLPG) and AddressBase plus the work by ONS to collect Council Tax records from local authorities should mean that it is now relatively straightforward to calculate the proportion of properties in each Output Area that fall within each ward and parish (...)*

### **Our response**

There were a number of disadvantages identified with all four options, as outlined in the consultation document.

The main reason we did not favour option 3 was because of statistical disclosure control concerns that may reduce the scope of available outputs.

The main reasons we did not favour option 4 were implementation difficulties for statistical table production and potential statistical disclosure control concerns. There was also an associated risk that the technical complexities associated with adopting option 4 could delay the planned dissemination of census outputs.

**A few users raised concerns that the best-fit approach (options 1 and 2) can lead to some smaller parishes having no data available. Noting that an exact-fit census count data for wards and parishes could overcome this (option 3).**

For example:

**A district council:** *“In general, I agree with this approach as this strikes a good balance between comparability of OA outputs over time and the need for quality estimates at ward or parish level.*

*However, some exact-fit census count data for wards and parishes would be useful for some of our smaller areas where results published based on OA match fit are not a good estimate and where there are no results published for a parish. While there is a need to avoid statistical disclosure through differencing, would publishing exact-fit census count data for the whole population and household counts be likely to cause issues? If these two variables are the only ones published then the only information that may be disclosed about individual households or small numbers of households would be household size.”*

### **Our response**

We recognise there are issues with the dissemination of census statistics for small-populated parishes under each of the four options outlined in the consultation. If we produced exact-fit census counts, it's likely that only a limited range of statistics or tables would be available. This would be because of the need to protect against disclosure of individuals. Some smaller parishes will have census outputs available for them as a result of the work with targeted OA alignment. This will result in an increase to the number of parishes for which census outputs are available.

There will be an opportunity for users to have a further say about census outputs for parishes as part of an Outputs Consultation exercise in spring/summer 2021.

**There were concerns that users may misinterpret changes in ward population size from OA realignment as population change. Therefore, respondents expressed a need for appropriate supporting information outlining the boundary changes.**

For example:

**A borough council:** *“From the options available, exact fit or OA apportionment would be our preferred option. However, if a best-fit approach is used, it will need to be made clear to users. They will also need to be made aware that an OA could be best-fitted to a different ward or parish to the one in 2011, if the distribution of the population has changed. This, and the introduction of targeted OA boundary realignment, could lead to populations of some wards and parishes showing increases/decreases that are solely due to the differences in aggregation rather than actual changes, and lead inexperienced users to make inaccurate conclusions.”*

#### **Our response**

To address this concern, we are considering producing a listing of the wards that comprise one or more OAs that have received targeted realignment. This is so users can be made aware if there are any comparability issues when comparing 2011 and 2021 census outputs for the same ward.

### **5.3 Question 3: Do you have any other comments on the proposed policy?**

**Users highlighted the importance of clear supporting information to see what these changes will be and how they will impact them. There were also requests for some advance notice on the boundary changes.**

For example:

**A county council:** *“It would be useful to have some advance notice of the proposed changes to the OA in Warwickshire, to see the impact of the targeted OA re-alignment at the earliest opportunity. If any of our designated geographies have no data allocated to them because of this best fit methodology it would be useful to have prior knowledge and for it to be made transparent in any subsequent data downloads that follow. This is easier for end users to know they’ve still got a complete data set say for all wards in a local authority area if they are all listed.”*

#### **Our response**

We intend to make digital boundaries and name and code files for OAs, LSOAs and MSOAs available prior to the dissemination of census outputs. This is so that users can familiarise themselves with the updated statistical geographies.

**Several respondents asked if they would have the opportunity to review and provide input into proposed changes before results are published, given their local knowledge and to ensure user needs were met.**

For example:

**A county council:** *“I would appreciate some local QA process so that we can flag up any issues we have. it can be something like incompatibility between past versions of the maps and this time (where you cannot build areas using blocks from the other). and it may be the case that if there are mergers due to falling population, we could make suggestions on what we think (so as to best fit our local needs) rather than just accepting what is being handed down.”*

### **Our response**

While we generally welcome user views on geography changes, there are practical considerations that makes this an unlikely outcome. There’s a need for the ONS to produce updated geographies based on the census population and household counts. There’s also a need for the ONS to publish census outputs for the updated geographies in a timely manner without any undue delay. Unfortunately, having a consultation period over geography changes would inevitably lead to delays publishing census outputs. There’s an automated tool for generating new geographies and the resultant changes made will be subject to quality control checks.

**Although generally accepting of the proposed plans, many users stressed the importance of backward comparability and how this could be managed.**

For example:

**A borough council:** *“(…) It would greatly aid our comparisons over time that, if practical to do so, any updates to 2021 SOAs took into account the 2001 SOAs as well as the 2011 SOAs. So that if possible they reverted back to the same 4 LSOA boundaries used in 2001 rather than creating any new LSOAs for 2021 (meaning we would have 3 different sets of LSOA layers to consider in this part of the borough).”*

### **Our response**

We plan to produce 2011 OA to 2021 OA, LSOA and MSOA lookups to help users identify where current geographies are comparable over time. We will also investigate to see if 2001 OA information can be additionally reflected. Some 2001 LSOAs were changed for the 2011 Census. They now need maintenance. Using our methodology for splitting or merging LSOAs, it’s unlikely that this would result in a new LSOA that covered the same geographical area as a new LSOA. It is against our policy to reintroduce old codes and names for geographies that have subsequently changed.

**Users highlighted a need for recognisable local areas to improve the understanding and communication of local census data. Suggestions included new geographical areas and a naming convention for LSOA's and MSOA's.**

For example:

**A county council:** *“(...) We believe that more granular statistical boundaries based on Place Names would be of great benefit. The proposal is to define more granular statistical boundaries to bridge a gap between how non-statisticians might define a ‘Place’ for review; while ensuring the boundary remains relevant to other ONS indicator data joins.*

*The OS (Ordnance Survey) provide a number of Place and Urban Extent datasets which when overlaid with Output Areas can potentially be used to group Output Areas into a Place (...)”*

**A city council:** *“(...) For LSOAs and higher, we do use names in our analysis and for area identification purposes, e.g. deprivation index, other local data, targeted policy areas. It might be useful to develop the policy to recognise that users (I feel) need this identification; for LSOAs we use the original 2001 area names (i.e. ward then number, amended for the changed areas - splits and mergers - in 2011) and we have started to use the House of Commons Library names recently identified for our MSOAs. Just using the codes is rarely sufficient (although for OAs I accept this isn't required).”*

### **Our response**

We've previously consulted users over whether a naming convention for LSOAs and MSOAs would be useful for them. The ONS could perhaps maintain it based on naming proposals put forward by users, using their local knowledge, rather than by the ONS. This did not proceed at the time due to a number of associated difficulties. These were that:

- not all areas of the country would have proposed names
- names would not necessarily be unique (as is recommended and set out in a [Coding and Naming Policy for UK Statistical Geographies](#)), and therefore identifiable from their name alone
- there may not be a consensus as to what the 'best' names may be

Our view is that introducing local names for LSOAs and MSOAs may lead to confusion rather than add value. Consequently, we've no plans for moving away from the current naming conventions for LSOAs and MSOAs that incorporate the local authority name. However, there's one alternative name listing produced by the House of Commons Library for MSOAs.

## 5.4 Question 4: Are there any additional products or services that you would find useful to those listed in the attached consultation document?

There were a range of additional products and services that users said would be useful to their work.

**Users noted that they would like us to publish the OA/MSOA population-weighted centroids. One user also requested annual updates to the population-weighted centroids.**

For example:

**An individual:** *“OA/LSOA/MSOA population-weighted centroids - while these are mentioned a lot in the document, they aren't actually included in the list of products and services to be published. Please continue to publish these as they are very useful.”*

### **Our response**

We will publish these population-weighted centroids following Census 2021 (as also [published](#) following the 2011 Census). However, we do not currently have any plans for producing an annual update for these population-weighted centroids. This is because this could lead to inconsistencies in statistical production across the Government Statistical Service depending on which OA population-weighted centroids were used.

**The consultation document outlined several lookup files being made available (See section 3.2 Lookups). Some respondents also requested OA lookups for other geographies such as Built Up Area's (BUA) and Parishes.**

For example:

**A borough council:** *“It is important to have parishes included in the lookups (2021 OA to 2022 Parish) and also to have population weighted centroids of OAs and LSOAs so we can use a best fit method to assign these to other geographical areas for example Parish council areas or our localities.”*

### **Our response**

We've noted these requirements and shall look to provide these lookups in 2022 – as were also made available following the 2011 Census.

**A few users requested that boundaries be available through a shapefile. There was also a specific request for a shapefile that combined 2011 and 2021 geographies and for a postcode area shapefile.**

For example:

**An individual:** *“Make available a shapefile that shows combinations of 2011 and 2021 geographies so changes can most easily be seen,”*



### Our response

We will make digital boundaries for the updated OAs, LSOAs and MSOAs available in due course through the [ONS Geography Open Portal](#). To view 2011 and 2021 geographies together we recommend overlaying the shapefiles for both years. As we do not have the intellectual property rights to postcode boundaries, we cannot offer a postcode area shapefile. However, there are suppliers of postcode digital boundaries, including Ordnance Survey with their [Code-Point](#) product.

**We plan to publish census outputs on a range of different topics. There were a couple of requests from users for information on ethnicity and religion at OA and other low-level geographies.**

For example:

**A charity or voluntary organisation:** *“We would very like not just the population count or percentage at OA and lower geographies but population count or percentage sub-divided by major ethnic groups and religions provided you are satisfied that they will not be disclosive.”*

### Our response

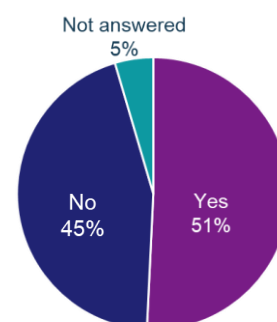
We’ve noted these requests. It will be possible through the flexible table builder, which is the census dissemination tool, to request census outputs for different geographies, including outputs for OAs. However, statistical disclosure control considerations may restrict the information that can be made available. A Census Outputs Consultation is planned for spring/summer 2021, which will set out proposals for the data to be made available for different geographies.

## 5.5 Question 6 and 7: Would the creation of a comparable UK small area geography be of interest to you? If so, do you have any thoughts on how this could be best achieved?

Around half of respondents were interested in the creation of a comparable UK small area geography. Of those that were not, it was typically because it would not impact on their work.

**Table 5: Response to Question 6 by type**

	Yes		No		Not answered	
Individual	39	62%	21	33%	3	5%
Organisation	28	41%	38	55%	3	4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>51%</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>5%</b>



**Table 6: Response to Question 6 by sector**

	Yes		No		Not answered		Totals	Totals %
Journalist/media	1	100%	0	0%	0	0%	1	100%
Commercial	10	91%	0	0%	1	9%	11	100%
Public body	5	83%	1	17%	0	0%	6	100%
Academic/research	10	71%	2	14%	2	14%	14	100%
Charity and voluntary	5	63%	3	38%	0	0%	8	100%
Government department	3	60%	2	40%	0	0%	5	100%
Genealogist/family historian	3	50%	3	50%	0	0%	6	100%
Housing	1	50%	1	50%	0	0%	2	100%
Local authority	24	34%	44	62%	3	4%	71	100%
Other	13	65%	6	30%	1	5%	20	100%
<b>Total</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>52%</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>144</b>	<b>100%</b>

Totals do not match due to respondents entering multiple occupation sectors

Although 51% of respondents said that a comparable UK small area geography was of interest to them, far fewer gave thoughts on how this could best be achieved. Some stated that they'd find the geography level most useful, while others provided more general feedback.

**Table 7: Response to Question 7 by type**

	Yes		No	
Individual	16	25%	47	75%
Organisation	20	29%	49	71%
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>73%</b>

**Of those stating specific geography levels, most preferred OA or MSOA as a common geography (and deriving equivalent geographies for elsewhere in the UK). Some respondents also suggested this could be achieved using the LSOA geography (and deriving an equivalent geography for elsewhere in the UK). Users generally noted a preference for the creation of a comparable small area geography to be based on an existing geography.**

For example:

**An academic/research organisation:** “A UK-wide comparable geography would likely be of interest to [our] users, given our explicit UK-wide remit. Many researchers are concerned to undertake whole-UK analysis and find the variation in UK geographies to be an obstacle. The option of an additional Scottish level which was comparable in size with ONS OAs and NISRA small areas would be of value, assuming it were possible to obtain a good range of comparable census outputs at this level. Given that Scotland's OAs are smaller than elsewhere in the UK, this approach would seem to provide the maximum flexibility for users to undertake their own analysis and provide for subsequent aggregation where necessary.”

**A statistics agency:** “Ideally, the basis for the new geography would be the existing small area geographies across the UK, be it individual areas or groupings to achieve population and household counts within the required thresholds (...)”

### **Our response**

Now that we're aware of demand among some census users for a comparable small area UK geography, we will discuss this further with colleagues in Northern Ireland and Scotland.

### **Other geographies highlighted included 1 km grid squares and built-up areas.**

For example:

**An individual:** *"(...) Alternatively, consistent counts of an agreed subset of common variables at a UK wide 1Km grid product would go a long way to providing some much needed inter-country comparisons."*

**A government department:** *"Currently we use BUA data from ONS which covers England and Wales (geometry updated on a 10-yearly basis) and Scottish Settlement data (geometry updated on a 3-yearly basis). Currently we have to merge both of these datasets in order to use it for our Departmental statistics outputs (e.g. Road Length Statistics, Road Traffic Statistics, Road Accident Statistics, Road Congestion Statistics). However, if ONS were able to produce an equivalent BUA data which covers Great Britain or UK as a single data set that would save our organisation a lot of time (...)"*

### **Our response**

It is the current intention that census statistics for the whole of the UK will be produced at 1 km grid square, and we are in discussion with colleagues in Northern Ireland and Scotland over this. Generating a comparable built-up area geography across the whole of the UK is unlikely to be easily achievable as traditionally the devolved administrations of Northern Ireland and Scotland have taken their own approach to defining settlements and urban areas.

**A few users felt that a comparable UK small area geography was theoretically of interest. However, they raised concerns as to its value or considered it low priority due to different nations carrying out their census at different times.**

For example:

**A local authority:** *"If the Scotland Census was due to take place at the same time as the Census in England and Wales then I think this would have been a good idea. As the Scottish Census has now been moved to 2022 I think the interest level for this is now lower. Our analysis of the Census results is most likely now to focus on just areas in England and Wales."*

### **Our response**

We've noted the concerns that users raised and will communicate these to the devolved administrations, together with the expressions of support for a comparable small area geography.

## 6. Next steps

We'd like to thank everyone who gave us their views by responding to the consultation. The evidence and comments you've provided has given us an endorsement over the Census 2021 Output Geography Policy. It endorses a refinement to the previous OA best-fit approach to specifically deal with outputs for wards and parishes.

Your responses have provided support for producing census outputs for grid squares. They also indicated an interest among some census users in creating a comparable UK small area geography based on existing geographies. On this issue, we will work closely with our colleagues in Northern Ireland and Scotland to progress this work.

We've also received a clear steer that our planned geography products and services to support Census 2021 will be needed again in the future. These include digital boundaries and lookup files. We've also received suggestions for some new products that we will investigate further.

There will also be an opportunity to comment on output and dissemination plans for Census 2021 results as part of a further consultation exercise. This exercise is planned for spring/summer 2021. More information about this will be available in due course.

## Appendix A - List of respondents

We received 132 responses to the consultation. Of these, 56 organisations and individuals chose not to be named.

B.Line Housing Information Ltd  
Julian Beach  
Beacon Dodsworth Ltd  
Blaby District Council  
Jennifer Boag  
Anne Brierley  
Peter Brierley  
Bristol City Council  
Malcolm Brown  
Tony Champion  
Cheshire East Council  
Cheshire West and Chester Council  
City of London Corporation  
Michael Cleaves  
Professor Mike Coombes  
Michael Cox  
Department for Transport  
Durham County Council  
East Sussex County Council  
East Hampshire District Council and Havant Borough Council  
Eugene Egan  
Piers Elias  
Eleanor [blank]  
Esri UK  
Jon Fairburn  
Gender Identity Research and Education Society  
Assad Thomas Ghazi  
John Gray  
Greater London Authority  
Gwynedd Council  
Gareth Henry (1)  
Gareth Henry (2)  
Hertfordshire County Council  
Nick Holmes  
Hull City Council  
Institute for Jewish Policy Research  
David Jones  
James Kirkbride  
Simon La Roche  
Leicestershire County Council  
London Borough of Camden  
London Borough of Hounslow  
London Borough of Tower Hamlets  
Maira Macdonald  
Manchester City Council  
Market Research Society  
Amanda Martin  
Lorraine McNally  
Janet Monks

Lesley Newman  
Norfolk County Council  
Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency  
Northumberland National Park Authority  
Oxford Consultants for Social Inclusion  
Adam Peacock  
John Penfold  
Peterborough City Council  
Richard Potter  
James Reid  
Trilby Roberts  
Emily Robinson  
Rob Shaw  
Laura Stevenson  
Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council  
Roger Stone  
Swansea Council  
Thaxted Parish Council  
UK Data Service  
Uttlesford District Council  
Warwickshire County Council  
Wendy Webb  
Josh Welby  
Welsh Government  
Welsh Revenue Authority  
West Stockwith Parish Council  
Wyre Council