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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SECURITY

Alexander Fleming House, Elephant & Castle, London SE1 6BY

Telephone 01-407 5522

From the Secretary of State for Social Services

Pre Minute

To note

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2/2/84

Nigel Pantling Esq
Private Secretary to
The Rt Hon Leon Brittan QC MP
Secretary of State for the Home Department
Home Office
50 Queen Anne's Gate
LONDON
SW1H 9AT

27 November 1984

Dear Nigel,

ETHNIC QUESTION IN THE CENSUS

As you know, my Secretary of State proposes to publish the Government Reply to the Second Report of the Home Affairs Committee on Thursday 29 November. I enclose for information the text of the proposed PQ.

I am copying this to Tim Flesher (No 10), Janet Lewis-Jones (Lord President's office), Elizabeth Hodgkinson (Department of Education and Science) and John Ballard (Department of Environment).

W. S. ...

S. H. F. Hickey

S H F Hickey
Private Secretary

GOVERNMENT REPLY TO THE SECOND REPORT FROM THE HOME
AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DRAFT OF ARRANGED PQ FOR ANSWER ON 29 NOVEMBER

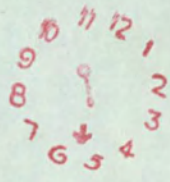
Question

To ask the Secretary of State for Social Services, what response the Government proposes to make to the Home Affairs Committee report on an ethnic question in the census.

Answer

The Government's Reply to the Second Report from the Home Affairs Committee is published today (Cmnd). The Government welcomes this report and accepts that the Committee has made a good case in principle for the inclusion of an ethnic question, but it will necessarily be several years before final decisions can be taken about what questions are to be included in the next census. As I announced in the House of Commons on 14 July 1983 [Official Report Vol 45, No 21, Col 450] census planning will proceed on the assumption that the next census will be held in 1991. In the meantime, valuable information about the numbers and circumstances of the ethnic minorities will continue to be available from other sources. A decision on whether to supplement information derived from these sources with national data from an ethnic question in the census will depend on practical issues and in particular, as the Committee recognises, on the public acceptability of such a question. This will need to be tested well in advance. Accordingly, the Government has decided to invite the Registrars General to carry out whatever tests are necessary to see if a reliable and publicly acceptable census question on ethnic origin can be developed for inclusion in the 1991 Census if that is the wish of the Government of the day.

28 NOV 1984



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DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SECURITY
 Alexander Fleming House, Elephant & Castle, London SE1 6BY
 Telephone 01-407 5522
From the Secretary of State for Social Services

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12/10

The Rt Hon Viscount Whitelaw CHMC MP
 Lord President of the Council
 68 Whitehall
 London SW1

October 20 1974

Dear Willie.

SECOND REPORT OF THE HOME AFFAIRS SELECT COMMITTEE: ETHNIC QUESTION IN THE CENSUS

Will request PPS if required.

Thank you for your letter of 12 June agreeing to the text of the Government reply to the Home Affairs Committee on the ethnic question in the census, with the revision proposed by Leon Brittan in his letter of 18 May. I have seen Leon's letter of 29 August and am content to proceed on the basis he suggests.

I attach for the convenience of colleagues the text of the reply, which I intend to send to the Committee and publish when Parliament returns.

I am copying this letter and enclosure to the Prime Minister, members of H Committee, Sir Robert Armstrong and to Sir John Boreham.

J. ...
Norman Fowler

NORMAN FOWLER

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The Government Reply to the
Second Report from the
Home Affairs Committee
Session 1982 — 83 HC 33-I

Ethnic and Racial Questions in the Census

*Presented to Parliament by the
Secretary of State for Social Services and the Secretary of State for Scotland
by Command of Her Majesty
October 1984*

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GOVERNMENT REPLY TO THE SECOND REPORT FROM THE HOME
AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

(SESSION 1982-83 HC 33-1)

ETHNIC AND RACIAL QUESTIONS IN THE CENSUS

1. The Government recognises that racial discrimination and racial disadvantage are continuing problems in our society. As indicated in its Reply† to the Select Committee's Report on Racial Disadvantage* it is firmly committed to working towards the elimination of these problems and it has accepted that, in order to measure future trends and to assess more accurately the extent of racial disadvantage, there must be further monitoring of the social and economic position of ethnic minority groups. The Government therefore welcomes the Committee's Report, for its helpful analysis of the many problems which are associated with the use of the census of population as one of the sources of information about the numbers and circumstances of the ethnic minorities.
2. The Committee's inquiry was conducted during a period in which no decision had been taken on the date of the next census. At that time therefore the Committee's recommendations could have been immediately relevant to the design of a mid-term Census in 1986. However, on 14 July 1983 the Secretary of State for Social Services announced (Official Report Vol 45 No 21, column 450) that there will be no mid-term Census in 1986 and that planning will proceed on the assumption that the next census will be held in 1991.
3. The Government accepts that the Committee has made a good case in principle for the inclusion of an ethnic question, but it will necessarily be several years before final decisions can be taken about what questions are to be included in the 1991 Census. In the meantime, it is to be expected that valuable information about the numbers and circumstances of ethnic minorities will continue to be available from other sources, for example, the Labour Force Survey, *ad hoc* enquiries (including any held in lieu of a mid-term Census) or local authority surveys. A decision on whether it would make sense to attempt to supplement information derived from these sources with national data from an ethnic question in the Census will probably depend crucially on practical issues and in particular, as the Committee recognises, on the public acceptability of such a question. This will need to be tested well in advance.
4. If, therefore, the inclusion of an ethnic question in the Census is to be a realistic option in 1991, it will be necessary to set the preparatory work in hand well before then: to be effective, census plans have to be laid and tested well in advance. Accordingly, the Government has decided to invite the Registrars

†Cmnd. 8476, paragraph 8.

*Session 1980-81, HC424.

General to carry out whatever tests are necessary to see if a reliable and publicly acceptable census question on ethnic origin can be developed so that one can be included in the 1991 census if that is the wish of the Government of the day.

5. The following paragraphs consider each of the detailed recommendations in turn.

Recommendations

6. Recommendation 1

“Questions on ethnic or racial origin should be asked in future censuses, subject to

- (a) adequate reassurances on confidentiality, the misuse of data, and abuse of data in the future
- (b) the unequivocally-stated objective being to improve existing programmes against racial discrimination and disadvantage and to provide evidence for the development of new ones when policies are shown to be inadequate, ineffective or discriminatory.”

If there is a question on ethnic or racial origin in the next census, the Registrars General consider that the existing provisions to safeguard confidentiality and to prevent the misuse of data will be adequate. The Census Act of 1920 provides penalties for the improper disclosure of census information by persons employed in taking a census. Moreover, it has been made clear by the legal adviser to the Registrar General for England and Wales (Annex 1 to the Committee's report) that it would be illegal for the Registrar General to disclose individual census returns to a Minister even if asked to do so.

7. With regard to proviso (b), the Government has re-iterated in paragraph 1 above that it is its policy to work towards the elimination of racial discrimination and disadvantage and it would see no difficulty in confirming that the inclusion of a question on ethnic origin in the next census would be in support of this policy. However it believes that a further important proviso is that questions on ethnic origin should only be included in a compulsory census if they have been shown to be acceptable to the public who would have to answer them. As indicated in paragraph 4 above, it will be necessary to carry out tests before the next census to assess public reaction to a census form containing an ethnic question for such clearly stated purposes. Participation in such tests would be voluntary, which means that they could not be held under the exact conditions of a full census, but it will be important nevertheless for such tests that the stated objectives for an ethnic question are endorsed by the Government in advance of the tests.

8. Recommendation 2

“This objective should be set on the question form itself.”

It has been accepted in previous censuses that public cooperation in a census is enhanced when the objective of all census questions is fully explained to those

employed as enumerators so that they in turn can explain these purposes to members of the public. In 1981 this was done in a wide range of publications, including a special booklet called "Background to the Census 1981" which was given to each enumerator and which explained in simple language the reasons for each question and the uses to which census information would be put. Further, each householder was given a leaflet explaining the general objectives of the Census. On present plans the same policy will be followed in 1991. Although the Government accepts that there is a case for printing the objectives of questions on the census form itself, and recognises that such explanations may not be so effective if they are provided in separate leaflets, it also believes that it is essential to ensure that the census form is simple to complete and convenient for the census offices to use for preparing the census results. It may not prove practical to implement this recommendation for a question on ethnic origin alone. In any case if there were to be an ethnic origin question in the next census there would have to be publicity well in advance to explain its objective and to allay possible anxieties about it. The Government believes that a final decision on whether the objective of an ethnic question should be stated on the census form itself should be left to be decided nearer the time in the light of other arrangements for the 1991 Census.

9. Recommendation 3

"The Manpower Services Commission should monitor the take-up of all its programmes by ethnic origin."

The Government accepts that the Manpower Services Commission should, as far as possible, monitor the take-up of its programmes by ethnic origin. The Commission monitors by ethnic origin the use made of the Youth Training Scheme; arrangements are in hand for regular statistical monitoring of the Community Programme and the Training Opportunities Scheme. Monitoring coverage and procedures will be kept under review. It will also be possible, from the Labour Force Survey, to produce estimates of the total number of persons on special schemes by a broad grouping of their ethnic origin.

10. Recommendation 4

"There should be a question on school education in the Census."

The Government is aware of the arguments in favour of collecting information in the census on school based qualifications which can then be related to other social and household data. However, there are some doubts about the suitability of the census for this purpose. For the 1981 Census it was decided to limit the question on educational qualifications to those normally obtained after leaving school (eg a degree). This was felt to be the most appropriate procedure, since details about the wide variety of subjects and levels of lower qualifications are more appropriately collected in sample surveys. The Government accepts that this decision will need to be reconsidered before the 1991 Census.

11. Recommendation 5

"DES should incorporate the collection of data on the ethnic origin of all pupils into its annual statistical exercise and should introduce ethnic classifications into its school leavers survey."

The Government accepts that the most effective means of collecting information on ethnic origin for educational purposes is through the education service itself. For example, schools may well need information on ethnic origin, language usage and perhaps even religion; and the schools themselves are best placed to collect this information. Enforcing collection on a national basis, however, needs careful consideration. In view of the sensitivity of the issue it is essential to gain the confidence of the ethnic minorities themselves through wide ranging consultations and to provide adequate safeguards on confidentiality and the use of the information. For this reason a Working Group has been set up to consider what information on pupils' ethnic origin might be collected by schools, how this might be passed on to Local Education Authorities and what statistics might be forwarded to the DES. At each stage regard must be paid to ensuring confidentiality and minimising the administrative burden on those involved. The Government believes that if it proves possible to devise a means of collecting statistics which has the broad support of parents, teachers and Local Education Authorities across the country, this will prove the best source of national information on the educational achievement of ethnic minority children. A decision on the issues raised by Recommendation 5 will be taken after the Working Group has reported later this year.

12. Recommendation 6

"The privacy leaflet distributed to households during the Census should encourage people, if they wish, to use sealed envelopes to return their forms."

The Committee's Report suggests that the wording of the privacy leaflet used in the 1981 Census gave people the impression that sealed returns were available only if a person knew the enumerator. The Government is not convinced that this was the case. It points out that this leaflet also advised householders that if *for any other reason* they did not wish the enumerator to see their census form, they could ask for an envelope, and the envelopes would be passed unopened to the local census headquarters. This advice does not seem to the Government to be very different from that which the Committee seems to have had in mind when it expressed its detailed recommendation in paragraph 69 of the Report. This states: "We therefore recommend that the leaflet be clearer, along the lines of 'If you do not want the enumerator to see your form, you will be given an envelope in which to seal it'." The Government believes that to go further than making it clear that a sealed enveloped procedure was available if required—by actively encouraging people to make use of it—would be to run the risk of substantially increasing the cost of the census. Enumerators have to check census forms for completeness when they collect them in order to minimise the cost of calling again later for missing information. If a householder uses a sealed envelope, this check would have to

be carried out by the Census Officer, as would any subsequent visits to obtain missing details. The Government fully respects the right of people to make a separate census return (and it intends that this option should continue to be available); but it also has responsibility to carry out the census at reasonable cost. It is not yet persuaded that any change needs to be made to the 1981 arrangements.

13. Recommendation 7

"The first time an ethnic question is asked names and addresses, as at present, should not be computerised and all forms should be destroyed."

The practice in respect of recent censuses, including the 1981 Census, is that forms are retained for 100 years. At the end of that time they are made available to the public for inspection. Any proposal to destroy census forms must therefore be considered against their undoubted value as public records for eventual social and historical research. They also have an immediate value to the OPCS in carrying out its responsibilities for medical research. A proposal to destroy census forms was considered by the Government prior to the 1981 Census but it was decided that the forms should continue to be retained.

14. As the Committee recognises, the present procedure for processing the census results is one which excludes names and addresses from the computer record. The Government believes that the same procedure should be followed in 1991 and that steps should be taken to make sure that the point is well understood by the public. In the meantime it is not persuaded that the census forms should be destroyed the first time an ethnic question is included in a census.

15. Recommendation 8

"The next Census should not include

- (a) a specific nationality question
- (b) a parents' country of birth question
- (c) a date of immigration question"

The Government does not at present see a need to include any of these questions in the next census. At present the Government's needs for data on nationality and date of immigration are for broad totals for the country as a whole and are met from the Labour Force Survey. It is most unlikely that the question on parents' countries of birth (which was not used in 1981) will be needed again. It was used in 1971 as a substitute for a question on ethnic origin but by 1991 will be of little value for that purpose.

16. Recommendation 9

"The form of questions should not compel people to define themselves solely by their own or their ancestors' immigrant origin. It should enable them to

identify themselves in a way acceptable to them whilst at the same time meeting the needs of users who need to measure disadvantage and discrimination."

The Government accepts this recommendation in principle and agrees that the form of any ethnic question in a future census should take account of it.

17. Recommendation 10

"The following form of question should be asked."

RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND DISADVANTAGE

The answers to these questions will help Government, local authorities, employers and other organisations to identify racial discrimination and disadvantage, to develop more effective policies against them, and to monitor the progress of these policies.

- a. Are you white?** Yes/no
- b. Are you black?** Yes/no
If you are black, are you British
 West Indian
 African
Tick as many boxes as apply Other
- c. Are you of Asian origin?** Yes/no
If yes, are you British
 Indian
 Pakistani
 Bangladeshi
 West Indian
 Chinese
 Vietnamese
Tick as many boxes as apply Other
- d. Other groups**
Are you Mixed race
 Arab
 Greek Cypriot
 Turkish Cypriot
Tick one box None of these

The Government accepts that this form of question is a useful basis on which to start planning for the next census. It is the Government's intention that OPCS should carry out small scale tests to assess the reliability and acceptability of the wording, starting in the mid 1980s and before any large scale 'dress rehearsal' of the 1991 census form and procedures is undertaken.

18. Recommendation 11

"A religion question for Southern Asian groups only should be included in the Census."

The Government has been advised that it would be necessary to amend the Census Act 1920 before any question on religion could be included in the census. In general however the Government does not think it is appropriate to include questions on religion in a compulsory census, but this is a matter which can be considered further if the tests, referred to in paragraph 17 above, suggest that a question on religion for Southern Asian groups would make an ethnic question more acceptable to members of those communities.

19. Recommendation 12

"Language questions should be included in the Census which cover both Asian language spoken other than English and English-speaking ability."

OPCS is planning to carry out tests of questions on languages, along the lines of those included in the 1980 Census of the USA, in advance of the next census. The Government will decide in the light of the results of such tests whether or not to include such language questions in the 1991 Census.

20. Recommendation 13

"Any test of an ethnic question should not be concentrated in one area but spread over the country as a whole."

The Government accepts that it is desirable for census tests to be carried out in more than one area. The small scale tests held each year from 1975 to 1979, were designed to determine the most appropriate form of words for an ethnic question, and were carried out by sampling in a number of different areas. However, the Government also recognises that, in carrying out tests of the acceptability of the full range of census questions and procedures, it is important to be able to simulate actual census conditions as closely as possible. Otherwise major problems which could jeopardise the main census may not be revealed in time. This was the purpose of the large scale test which was held in Haringey in 1979. Before the 1991 Census it may well be desirable to conduct similar large scale tests of the main procedures in more than one area. However, to conduct such a test in a large number of areas would be expensive.

21. Recommendation 14

"The Commission for Racial Equality should advise OPCS on planning the promotion of an ethnic question in the Census."

The Government welcomes and accepts this recommendation. The Commission for Racial Equality was involved in the design and testing of a question on ethnic origin for the 1981 Census, and collaborated closely with OPCS over plans for involving ethnic minority organisations at national and local level in

this preparatory process. The Government agrees that OPCS should consult the Commission about any similar plans for the next census. Preliminary discussions with representatives of the Commission have already taken place following publication of the Committee's Report.

22. Recommendation 15

"A unit similar to the US National Services Programme should be set up within OPCS."

The Government has reservations about the need for such a unit but it is continuing to study the implications of this recommendation. The US National Service Programme was established six years prior to the 1980 Census as part of a wide ranging programme of consultation with the ethnic minority communities in the United States. The total promotion programme cost over \$13 million or 1.2 per cent of the US Census budget. By contrast OPCS spent the same proportion of its 1981 Census budget (about £660,000) on its entire publicity campaign. The costs and benefits of establishing a similar programme in this country are still being considered.

23. Recommendation 16

"OPCS should appoint people with local experience to identify and advise all people or organisations who could contribute to the success of an ethnic question in the Census."

The Government agrees in principle with this recommendation. As part of the US Census promotion programme, referred to in paragraph 22 above, about 200 such people were appointed on a temporary basis for some two years before and one year after the 1980 Census. The cost of their employment accounted for most of the \$13 million spent on the total programme. For the 1991 Census in this country, the benefits likely to accrue from adopting a similar strategy will need to be weighed carefully against the costs. This is one of the issues that it is intended that the OPCS should discuss with the Commission for Racial Equality well before the 1991 Census.

24. Recommendation 17

"OPCS should consider the ethnic origin of enumerators in allocating them to areas with large ethnic minority populations."

In 1981 OPCS did try to recruit enumerators from ethnic minority backgrounds to work in areas with large ethnic minority populations, but found that there were problems in making an appropriate match in areas containing several ethnic groups. A general precaution taken to safeguard the confidentiality of the census is to avoid appointing enumerators to work in areas where they are likely to be personally known to many of the residents. Thus enumerators are not usually allocated to the immediate area in which they live. However, the Government agrees that efforts should be made in the next census to employ enumerators from ethnic minority groups to a greater extent than was the case in 1981.

25. Recommendation 18

“OPCS should second senior staff to the US Bureau of the Census to study their Census promotion programmes.”

The Government does not believe that secondments of this kind are necessary since other appropriate arrangements are made to draw on the US experience. A senior member of the OPCS staff has recently made a short visit to the US Bureau of the Census and to Statistics Canada to discuss with officials there a wide range of issues relating to census operations including promotional programmes of the kind envisaged in the Committee Report. Other visits to discuss specific aspects of census operations are planned but there seems little to be gained in the intercensal period by seconding senior staff as suggested in the Report. OPCS maintains close relations with the US Bureau of the Census and will be keeping in touch with officials there and considering carefully which aspects of the US census arrangements might be applicable to this country.

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