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**Professor Sir Ian Diamond** | National StatisticianKiri Tunks  
Co-founder, Woman's Place UK

04 November 2020

Dear Kiri Tunks,

Thank you for your email of 20 October regarding the sex question in Census 2021 and A Woman's Place's webinar on the topic. Given that the topic of the webinar was "Sex and Census", it is disappointing that the Office for National Statistics (ONS) was not invited to take part. However, I can assure you that ONS is continuing to engage with users and stakeholders on the guidance for the sex question in Census 2021.

The ONS has engaged with stakeholders and data users on the 2021 Census since it opened its consultation in 2015 on the topics to be included in the Census and published its recommendations in the White Paper 'Help Shape our Future' published in December 2018. Since then ONS has continued to engage on the specific wording for the questions and on the guidance. The questions for Census 2021 in England and Wales are now finalised through secondary legislation (Census Order and Regulations) laid before Parliament and the Senedd earlier this year. This includes retaining the binary sex question asking, "What is your sex?", with the response options female and male.

The guidance for specific questions is yet to be finalised, including for the sex question. The guidance for this question used in the 2019 Census Rehearsal was published in September 2019. This followed a period of engagement and testing of different versions during the summer of 2019 as set out in the publication article.<sup>1</sup> I understand that Deputy National Statistician Iain Bell shared with you the version of the proposed guidance being tested in June 2019, inviting comments. Our experience of using online guidance in our 2019 Rehearsal showed that, similarly to the 2011 Census, the majority of people answer this question without accessing guidance.

ONS continues to engage with stakeholders on the guidance including with signatories to the December 2019 letter you refer to. As well as a roundtable meeting in June 2020 with data users with a range of views on the guidance, officials also met a group of data users critical of the 2019 guidance in July 2020 and have corresponded with a group of interested academics over the summer regarding the ongoing work discussed in those meetings. We continue with this engagement.

ONS has undertaken some further work on the guidance and this along with the learning from the Rehearsal will be part of a review of all evidence undertaken and submitted both before and after the rehearsal to inform a final decision on the wording of the guidance for Census 2021.

Yours sincerely,

**Professor Sir Ian Diamond**

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/census/censustransformationprogramme/questiondevelopment/genderidentity/guidanceforquestionsexgenderidentityandsexualorientationforthe2019censusrehearsalforthe2021census>