Recommended wording for sex and gender monitoring questions
a:gender - 31 July 2020

Purpose

This paper sets out our recommended monitoring questions for sex and gender. We also explain why our approach is fully inclusive compared to other proposals.

Our recommendation

To enable accurate data to be recorded by monitoring surveys within the Civil Service (CS), we recommend the following two-question approach;

First question:

'*What sex were you registered at birth?*'

Response options: *Male, Female* ('*prefer not to say*' might also be an option; although we would prefer to minimise use of this)

Second question:

'*Regarding your sex and gender now; please tick all that apply;*'

Response options: *Male, Female, Non-binary, Intersex, Other (*free text entry*), Prefer not to say.*

Background

We have reviewed the proposal for a 'gender identity' question recently circulated by Civil Service HR (CSHR), see Annexe 1 below. In practice this question couples with a preceding 'sex' question, which is not shown here.

We have also considered Stonewall's current 'best practice', Annex 2, which shows their two questions together.

We find that both of these approaches have significant shortcomings in both scope and language used. Our recommendation fully addresses these shortcomings:

(1) Inclusivity and Representation

Both the Stonewall and CSHR versions currently ignore intersex people altogether.

Our questions would allow the civil service to gather data on intersex employees simply and effectively. This would be pioneering.

(2) Comparability of data

We recognise that the CSHR approach is tethered to the ONS Census monitoring question. The Census needs to maintain continuity in its questions so that historical data can be compared to newly acquired data, and there is only very limited option for including additional questions in the Census.

Our questions enable continuity in comparison of historical data, adding only one additional question (the same as the ONS proposal for the Census).

(3) Accuracy

The Census is intended to be completed by the 'head of the household', and as such is widely acknowledged as unlikely to yield accurate data on either sexual orientation or gender. Using a sex and gender question which has been developed under such constraints is unsatisfactory, particularly in the context of proposing survey questions for an individual to complete in confidence.

Our questions facilitate greater accuracy in the context of confidential completion by individual employees.

(4) Language

The use of phrasing that consistently couples the words 'gender' and 'identity' ('gender identity', 'the gender you identify with' and 'how do you identify your gender') in the questions suggested by both CSHR and Stonewall can have a negative impact for transgender and non-binary people;

- In everyday discussion hardly anyone ever talks about identifying with their gender. In day-to-day language most people simply state their gender, as in 'I'm a woman', rarely, 'I identify as a woman'. To use the latter can imply, incorrectly, that gender is a choice, and this is the root of abusive ridicule such as 'I identify as a stick of celery' as seen on high profile social media accounts.

- 'How do you identify' is never used in questions about any of the other protected characteristics such as age or ethnicity, i.e. 'what age do you identify as?' or 'what ethnicity do you identify as?'. Moreover, when discussing topics of gender equality, such as the gender pay gap, this is always simply stated as matters of gender, not gender identity.

To use 'identify' solely in relation to the gender of trans or intersex people therefore promotes unconscious bias.

Our questions help to reduce the unconscious bias caused by the words 'identity' and 'identify' and introduce parity of language with questions on other protected characteristics.

The recommendation to include a definition of transgender to accompany the question (as in the Stonewall version) can also cause unconscious bias. No other protected characteristic is over-explained in such a way on monitoring forms. We know that 'message fatigue' is a cause resentment and we also know that trans people will be more than aware of what it is to be trans, so for them a definition is unnecessary.

Our questions remove the word 'trans' which eliminates the need for a definition. This reduces 'message fatigue' and subsequent resentment and unconscious bias.

Annexe 1 (CSHR Standardised Wording)

Gender Identity:

Is the gender you identify with the same as your sex registered at birth?

	Yes
	No **Enter gender identity**
	Prefer not to say

Note: respondents have the option to tick 'No' but not write anything in the text box

Annexe 2 (Stonewall)

BEST PRACTICE MONITORING QUESTIONS

Use the following questions when asking employees and job applicants about their gender identity and sexual orientation.

Asking about gender identity:

1. WHAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR GENDER?

a. **Female**

b. **Male**

c. **I use another term (for example, non-binary):**

_____

d. **Prefer not to say**

2. DO YOU CONSIDER YOURSELF TO BE TRANS?

a. **Yes**

b. **No**

c. **Prefer not to say**

Here you should consider including a short definition of trans: *'Trans is an umbrella term to describe people whose gender is not the same as, or does not sit comfortably with, the sex they were assigned at birth.'*

Giving employees the space to define their own identity for all questions is important – including an open text box will allow you to collect the most accurate information. This option will capture the experiences of employees who don't identify as female or male. These employees may use a range of terms including, but not limited to, non-binary. To ensure you're considering the experiences of all employees who identify outside of binary genders, you should report on the experiences of all employees who select this option. This analysis can be reported as 'responses of employees using another term' or it can be explained that, for example, 'respondents used a variety of terms, we will refer in our reporting to 'non-binary respondents' as an umbrella term for these respondents'.