

Correspondence between ONS and Professor Alice Sullivan (UCL) (4 - 25 June 2020)

Email from ONS to Professor Sullivan, 4 June 2020 at 12:02

From: [REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk> on behalf of Bell, Iain [REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Sent: 04 June 2020 12:02
To: [REDACTED]@ucl.ac.uk>
Subject: Round table Invitation 24 June 10.00am

Dear [REDACTED]

I would like to take the opportunity to invite you to a roundtable discussion on the guidance to accompany the 2021 Census sex question. As you will be aware, there are varied views across stakeholders on guidance to accompany the sex question. The aim of the roundtable is for the Office for National Statistics to hear the differing views of attendees and to hold discussions around next steps.

We have scheduled an online discussion to take place on Wednesday 24 June 2020 10.00am – 11.30am .

Please extend this invitation to join the discussion to no more than five of the other signatories within the letter you issued to ONS on 12 December 2019 (Social statisticians and users of population level data to the directors of UK census authorities').

Please can you indicate your wish to attend by responding to this invitation no later than COP 12 June 2020 including the names of the signatories as above.

Instructions on how to join the event will be issued to confirmed attendees closer to the discussion date.

Kind regards

Iain

Email from Professor Sullivan to ONS, 4 June 2020 at 14:27

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ucl.ac.uk>
Sent: 04 June 2020 14:27
To: Bell, Iain <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: Round table Invitation 24 June 10.00am

Dear Iain,

Thanks for your message. I confirm I will attend and will let you know about other attendees.

Just to check, is this meeting purely for data users, or will there be other invitees?

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

Email from ONS to Professor Sullivan, 4 June 2020 at 15:35

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk> On Behalf Of Bell, Iain
Sent: 04 June 2020 15:35
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ucl.ac.uk>
Subject: RE: Round table Invitation 24 June 10.00am

Hi [REDACTED]

I would like on Iain's behalf express his gratitude for accepting the invitation.

There are a wide range of invitees across the fields and I will take great pleasure in updating you next week - once we have the full cast list in place.

I hope that this provides you with a little background ahead of the follow up email with joining details for the session.

We look forward to receiving your attendee cast.

Kindest regards

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Office for National Statistics | Swyddfa Ystadegau Gwladol

Email from Professor Sullivan to ONS, 4 June 2020 at 17:02

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ucl.ac.uk>
Sent: 04 June 2020 17:02
To: Bell, Iain <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Round table Invitation 24 June 10.00am

Dear [REDACTED],

Can you clarify what you mean by "across the fields"? It is my view and that of the signatories that the voices that have been overlooked in the discussions and engagement to date are data users, specifically those who work with population level data. If you are intending to invite activist groups or other non data users, my concern is that the voices of data users will be swamped.

I would also appreciate a rough idea of numbers. Online meetings are rarely useful if they are too large.

So, while I appreciate you can't confirm the attendance list as yet, I would like to know which groups you anticipate including, and how many attendees you expect. I think the signatories would appreciate this information when I invite them.

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

Email from ONS to Professor Sullivan, 5 June 2020 at 12:41

From: Mangles, Susan <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Sent: 05 June 2020 12:41
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ucl.ac.uk>
Cc: Bell, Iain <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Round table Invitation 24 June 10.00am

Dear [REDACTED]

Iain asked me to respond in [REDACTED]'s absence – not sure if you recall but I also attended the meeting we had back in January with Iain on the sex question guidance.

The roundtable will hopefully include both data users and other stakeholders with an interest in the guidance. As I think Iain set out in our meeting, we're keen to hear from all those with an interest. We don't have confirmed numbers yet, but other invitees have raised similar questions to yours and we will share the invitee list once everyone has responded. We share your concerns about the usefulness of the meeting if it is too large, but equally want to ensure we have a sensible balance of views.

I hope that helps, and look forward to the discussion on the 24th.

Best wishes

Susan

Susan Mangles | Deputy Director Census and Transformation Policy, Population and Public Policy

Email from Professor Sullivan to ONS, 9 June 2020 at 17:38

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ucl.ac.uk>
Sent: 09 June 2020 17:38
To: Mangles, Susan <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Cc: Bell, Iain <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: Round table Invitation 24 June 10.00am

Dear Iain, [REDACTED] and Susan,

I have some concerns and would appreciate clarification on the following points.

Can you give me a clear yes/no response on whether the ONS is willing to meet me and other co-signatories separately from other groups to discuss our specific concerns as specialist expert data users?

2. Will you tell me ahead of the meeting whether any of the other participants or the organisations they represent have already had meetings with ONS in which the sex question and its guidance were discussed?

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

Email from ONS to Professor Sullivan, 12 June 2020 at 13:25

From: Mangles, Susan <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Sent: 12 June 2020 13:25
To: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ucl.ac.uk>
Cc: Bell, Iain <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Subject: RE: Round table Invitation 24 June 10.00am

Dear [REDACTED]

Thanks for your reply – we are happy to meet with all stakeholders on this issue, and indeed we met with [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] in January separately to understand your concerns further. As we discussed during the meeting, we felt it would be useful to hold a further discussion with a wide range of stakeholders on this issue, and so that is why we are setting up the roundtable.

We are waiting on a couple more responses but once we have those, we will share the invitee list and details on how to join the meeting.

Best wishes

Susan

Susan Mangles | Deputy Director Census and Transformation Policy, Population and Public Policy
Office for National Statistics | Swyddfa Ystadegau Gwladol

Email from Professor Sullivan to ONS, 12 June 2020 at 16:01

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ucl.ac.uk>
Sent: 12 June 2020 16:01
To: Mangles, Susan
Cc: Bell, Iain; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]; [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Round table Invitation 24 June 10.00am

Dear Susan,

I am copying in the other co-signatories who will be attending: [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] will attend if [REDACTED]
cannot [REDACTED] availability is uncertain).

[REDACTED]

Email from Professor Sullivan to ONS, 17 June 2020 at 17:36

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ucl.ac.uk>
Sent: 17 June 2020 17:36
To: Bell, Iain <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Cc: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ed.ac.uk>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@kent.ac.uk>;
[REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@essex.ac.uk>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@manchester.ac.uk>; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ed.ac.uk>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@sociology.ox.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: ONS Round Table Discussion - Wednesday 24 June 2020 (10:00 to 11:30)

Dear Iain,

Please can you confirm that the meeting will be minuted? And that an agenda will be circulated in advance?

We note with disappointment your refusal to meet with population data users separately from other groups in order to discuss our concerns in detail.

We also note with concern that the meeting will include 19 people. The three minutes allocated for each person to outline their point of view will take up roughly the first hour. Little time will be left for discussion given the size of the group.

It appears that, with perhaps only one exception, the other delegates have been selected to represent the self-id position. We would query the intent behind stacking the meeting in this way.

We would appreciate it if you can tell us which of the individuals and groups represented at this meeting have already been consulted by ONS on the sex question.

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

Email from ONS to Professor Sullivan and others, 19 June 2020 at 09:25

From: [REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk> on behalf of Bell, Iain [REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Sent: 19 June 2020 09:25
To: [REDACTED]@ucl.ac.uk>; Bell, Iain <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Cc: [REDACTED]@ed.ac.uk>; [REDACTED]@kent.ac.uk>;
[REDACTED]@essex.ac.uk>; [REDACTED]@manchester.ac.uk>; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@ed.ac.uk>; [REDACTED]@sociology.ox.ac.uk>
Subject: RE: ONS Round Table Discussion - Wednesday 24 June 2020 (10:00 to 11:30)

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your email and for accepting the invitation to the round table next week.

In answer to your questions, yes we will take notes and we will circulate the agenda in advance of the meeting. I am glad you raised your concerns. As we agreed when we met previously with Heather, a meeting only of signatories of the letter, a roundtable discussion of this kind will be helpful to hear a range of the different views, and to aim to build some consensus and shared understanding of the issues. We regularly talk with all our stakeholders on the census questions and guidance, and this roundtable doesn't preclude future meetings under different arrangements with yourself and signatories, other academics interested in data quality and interested stakeholders.

I very much look forward to your contribution next week, and all those who are joining the discussion.

Iain

Email from Professor Sullivan to ONS, 23 June 2020 at 09:38

From: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ucl.ac.uk>
Sent: 23 June 2020 09:38
To: Bell, Iain <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Cc: [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ed.ac.uk>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@kent.ac.uk>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@essex.ac.uk>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@manchester.ac.uk>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@ed.ac.uk>; [REDACTED] <[REDACTED]@sociology.ox.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: ONS Round Table Discussion - Wednesday 24 June 2020 (10:00 to 11:30)

Dear Iain,

In order to use the limited time most efficiently, and given that we will be greatly outnumbered in the meeting, we suggest that my five colleagues should present as a block, giving them 15 minutes collectively. We suggest that I should then summarise our position after all the other individuals attending at your invitation have had their allocated speaking slot. I think this would help to avoid misinterpretations of our position and keep the discussion focussed.

On a practical point, we will need you to allow us to share the screen so that we can use visual aids, I assume that will be OK.

I asked whether minutes will be taken, and you replied that "we will take notes". That is not quite the same thing. Please can you confirm that the meeting will be minuted, and that we will be shown the draft minutes before they are finalised.

I have asked more than once which of the individuals and groups represented at this meeting have already been consulted by ONS on the sex question. I should be grateful if you would now clarify this point, so that we do not need to use the meeting itself to establish the position.

Your email mentioned the meeting which [REDACTED] and I attended. For the avoidance of doubt, I and my co-signatories regard that as having been no more than a preliminary meeting about how to take forward further discussions in which the concerns we raised could be properly discussed. Should I interpret your mention of future meetings as offering a further, separate meeting with data users where we can really drill down into the scientific issues? Assuming this is the case, thank-you, and we will certainly take you up on that unless we feel it is unnecessary following Wednesday's meeting.

Finally, [REDACTED] will not be able to attend, [REDACTED] will attend in [REDACTED] place.

Best wishes,

[REDACTED]

Email from ONS to Professor Sullivan and others, 23 June 2020 at 16:58

From: [REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk> on behalf of Bell, Iain [REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Sent: 23 June 2020 16:58
To: [REDACTED]@ucl.ac.uk>; Bell, Iain [REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>
Cc: [REDACTED]@ed.ac.uk>; [REDACTED]@kent.ac.uk>;
[REDACTED]@essex.ac.uk>; [REDACTED]@manchester.ac.uk>; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@ed.ac.uk>; [REDACTED]@sociology.ox.ac.uk>
Subject: RE: ONS Round Table Discussion - Wednesday 24 June 2020 (10:00 to 11:30)

Good evening

Thank you for your suggestions, our intention for the round table has been to seek individual views, and we have not asked any stakeholders to prepare a collective presentation. We appreciate that yourself and your colleagues hold similar views, equally there are other attendees who hold similar views, and others still who hold opposing views. That is the purpose of the roundtable, to hear all of those different voices and hold a respectful conversation and try to see where there is common ground. As you will have seen from the agenda that we sent around earlier, our intention is to go around alphabetically and then we will facilitate a discussion at the end before summing up.

In order to ensure everyone feels comfortable sharing their views, I don't intend to attribute views to named individuals in the notes of the meeting. I'm happy to share a draft note with all attendees for comments before finalising.

And finally yes, ONS is happy to continue further conversations with data users following the round table.

Iain

Email from Professor Sullivan to ONS, 25 June 2020 at 17:24

From: [REDACTED]@ucl.ac.uk>
Sent: 25 June 2020 17:24
To: Bell, Iain <[REDACTED]@ons.gov.uk>; [REDACTED]@statistics.gov.uk'
[REDACTED]@statistics.gov.uk>
Cc: [REDACTED]@ed.ac.uk>; [REDACTED]@kent.ac.uk>;
[REDACTED]@essex.ac.uk>; [REDACTED]@manchester.ac.uk>; [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]@ed.ac.uk>; [REDACTED]@sociology.ox.ac.uk>
Subject: Re: ONS Round Table Discussion - Wednesday 24 June 2020 (10:00 to 11:30)

Dear Iain (cc Ian Diamond),

Thank you for setting up the meeting yesterday, we found it very informative and it was good to clarify the points of difference and convergence.

The meeting was a large one, reflecting different perspectives, and inevitably there was not time for much in the way of an exchange of views. We would therefore still value the opportunity to discuss with you the questions regarding measurement, data accuracy and bias that particularly concern data users. A meeting purely for data users would also provide an opportunity to discuss the technicalities of the sampling to test draft guidance. We suggest that we should plan to meet as soon as possible, given the timeline that ONS will be working to.

I'd like to take the opportunity to reiterate the key points that our group raised regarding the need for accurate data on sex, alongside a separate question on gender identity.

Sex is a fundamental demographic variable, powerfully associated with a range of important outcomes. It is vital for analysis and evidence-based policy.

Sex is distinct from 'gender identity', it is unhelpful to muddle the two concepts.

The usefulness of the gender identity question will be maximized if the integrity of the sex question is maintained.

There is no basis to assume that opposite-sex identification is so uncommon that it will not materially affect the results of statistical analyses. (see for example <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0204606>)

Bias due to misclassification is likely to be more severe at the subgroup level, taking into account the non-random distribution of trans identification (e.g. by sex, age, geography).

The census sets a precedent for other data collection exercises to follow, therefore we risk losing data on sex more widely. (See <https://murrayblackburnmackenzie.org/2020/06/20/domino-effects-the-implications-of-the-framing-the-sex-question-in-the-2021-census/>)

Maintaining a high total response rate to the census is of course very important, but not to the exclusion of data accuracy. There is currently no evidence that self-id guidance will improve response rates. We agree that guidance must be tested on a population representative sample to assess the risks to the response rate.

We look forward to hearing from you regarding a further meeting.

Best wishes, [REDACTED]