

# Fatherhood Institute submission to Census 2031 Topic Consultation

---

February 2026

## Contents

<i>Section</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Page</i>
Section A	Summary of our requirements	2
Section B	Previous uses of Census data about co-resident fathers	5
Section C	Future use of Census data about fathers to inform design and delivery of Family Hubs and other local initiatives	8
Section D	A NEW question in 'Household and Family Relationships' to identify INVOLVED 'non-resident' parents (potentially a NEW CENSUS TOPIC)	9
Section E	Specific requirements for existing Census questions about household relationships and second parental addresses	12
Section F	Other sources of data about fathers are inadequate for intended uses	14
Section G	Brief comments on the Economic Activity and Place of Work questions	16

Contact: [R.Goldman@fatherhoodinstitute.org](mailto:R.Goldman@fatherhoodinstitute.org)

## Section A. Summary of our requirements

1) Our requirements are within the **'Household and family relationships'** sub-topic. They are for:

**(a) Household relationships to continue to be collected**, for identification and analysis of co-resident fathers/mothers of dependent and adult children. We would like better differentiation of biological/birth/adoptive fathers/mothers from stepfathers/stepmothers/cohabiting partners of parents.

**(b) Second addresses (in particular 'another parent or guardian's address') to continue to be collected**, for identification and analysis of dependent children staying in a second parental household for more than 30 nights a year. This also enables identification and analysis of the fathers /mothers (part-time resident with their child/ren living mainly elsewhere) whose address is the second parental address of these children, via Census record linkage as done by ONS for 2021 Census data.

**(c) a NEW question identifying INVOLVED 'non-resident' fathers/mothers who live separately from their dependent child/ren for all or most of the time (around 90% of whom are fathers)**

These involved fathers/mothers are in contact with, regularly spend time with, and/or regularly look after their children living mainly elsewhere. Otherwise these involved parents are not identifiable as parents (of dependent children) unless they live fully or mainly with other co-resident children at their Census address.

2) The [Fatherhood Institute](#) and others (for example the Centre for Longitudinal Studies at UCL) describes so-called 'non-resident' parents with **the new term 'own household parents'** because they can be part-time resident with their child/ren at their own address, through regular overnight stays by those children at that address (such as those identified through the 2021 Census second parental address question). A substantial proportion of 'non-resident' fathers are involved parents, co-parenting (to differing extents) with their children's mother.

- Around half of children by the age of 18 have birth parents living apart, so this is a very common feature of family life. DWP Separated Families Statistics for 2022-23 give almost 4 million dependent children whose parents live separately (DWP, 2025).
- Yet 85% of 17-year-olds are either living with (fully/mainly) **or in contact with** their birth father (Burgess and Goldman, 2024 – analysis of Millenium Cohort Study).
- The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has estimated that there are nearly 1 million

parents who have their children to stay overnight for some of the time but live without children in their household for most of the time (JRF, 2024).

- Others see their children regularly: 56% of all children with a 'non-resident' parent saw them at least fortnightly in 2021-22 data (Parental Conflict Indicator, DWP, 2025 – Understanding Society data).

3) Points (b) and (c) above address the issue noted by ONS in Families and Households statistics which define family relationships solely by co-residence for most or all of the time: the definition of a 'lone parent' "...cannot make any distinction between situations where a child has regular contact and/or partly resides with their other parent and a child who solely resides with and is cared for by one parent".

4) To enable adequate policies, funding decisions and services for children and families, it is crucial that the picture of families in England and Wales derived from the 2031 Census reflects diverse family forms, living arrangements and family relationships in England and Wales. This key point is summed up well in the title of ONS's launch of the 2031 Census consultation "Making Sure 2031 Census 2031 reflects modern society". We recognise and welcome recent developments such as Census data on parental second addresses. Yet the Census can go further in keeping pace with family change over recent decades.

5) Key national organisations, including Nesta, the Nuffield Foundation, the IFS Deaton Review and the Children's Commissioner, have described the inadequacies of current national statistics on families, especially the lack of national data about 'separated families' and 'non-resident' parents.

- For example, the Nuffield Foundation stated *"We have only a partial picture of non-traditional families – the data on separated families, non-resident fathers, adoptive and step-parents is limited...Our principal sources of data no longer reflect the reality of modern family life in the UK"* (Nuffield Foundation, 2020, p19).
- And the Children's Commissioner that *"Statistics on family often construct families as 'households', positioning individuals in one-dimensional terms"* (Children's Commissioner, 2022, p7).

6) These are gendered data gaps in identifying involved parents (a key demographic) because the following parental roles for dependent children predominantly comprise fathers: co-resident step-parents; parents living part-time with their children in the child's main household or in their own household; and involved 'non-resident' parents living separately from their dependent children for most or all of the time (whom we call involved 'own household parents').

7) Our requirements above also relate to the need to fully identify provision of unpaid care, building on existing Census questions about co-residence with dependent children (which assumes care is provided) and care for children or adults due to their illness, disability or old age.

8) We and others may need to combine Census findings about fathers in England and Wales with findings about fathers from the Censuses in Scotland and Northern Ireland to give findings for all fathers in the UK. Therefore harmonisation across the UK Censuses is optimal for our needs.

9) Our thinking stems from a Nuffield Foundation-funded 'dad-data' review of sixteen large-scale quantitative datasets (including the Census) we published in 2018 called '*Where's the Daddy?*' (Goldman and Burgess, 2018) at [Contemporary Fathers in the UK research review | Fatherhood Institute](#).

### **Consequences if the 2031 Census does not collect this data about co-resident and involved 'non-resident' fathers**

If the 2031 Census does not identify and collect data about different categories and subsets of fathers (including involved 'non-resident' fathers), this precludes adequate evidence production, policy development, funding allocation and service delivery for children, fathers and mothers by academics/researchers and a range of local and national stakeholders (including local and national government) as described in our responses above.

## Section B. Previous uses of Census data about co-resident fathers

1) The Fatherhood Institute is a small third sector organisation which (among other objectives) promotes the collection and use of data about fathers at national and local levels. We ourselves use research and statistical findings in our published research outputs; responses to Government/Parliamentary consultations; and training programme for local commissioners and service providers. We have a track record in influencing media discourse, policy and practice with statistics and research evidence.

2) We have found the 2021 Census publications and datasets about families, children, step-parents, blended families, second addresses and living arrangements very helpful in our work – and hope that similar publications will be created using 2031 Census data. In particular, we have found 2021 Census publications and datasets (e.g. *Families in England and Wales*) very useful in giving the characteristics of second parental addresses for dependent children, including 'non-resident' fathers living at these second addresses. We hope that similar Census record linkage and analysis can be carried out for 2031 second parental addresses.

3) However our purpose in responding to this consultation is not primarily so that we can directly use Census data ourselves, but so that our many academic, policy and practice partners and stakeholders (including central and local government) can use Census data about fathers for their own research, policy development, funding allocations and service delivery.

4) The intended benefits are for increased quality and relevance of family policy and services, employment policy, services for fathers, families and children (including Family Hubs), and ultimately children's wellbeing and adult outcomes. We also seek to enhance gender equality via reduced gender employment, care and pay gaps, and ultimately improve family and parental wellbeing.

### Academic use

5) Academics and other researchers have used Census data about co-resident fathers and about children living across parental households (second-address data) to give a contextual national picture of fathers to precede focused work using smaller-scale datasets. Census data about co-resident fathers has also been used to weight social survey and market research datasets derived from sample surveys, for example to correct for response bias.

6) Examples of academic use of data about co-resident fathers from the ONS Longitudinal Study – and therefore use of Census data - include examination of family change (Clarke et al, 2000); the health of children of immigrant fathers/mothers (Hardelid et al, 2025); intergenerational social mobility for children in different ethnic groups (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2005); lifetime child-rearing and fertility histories of men (Rendall et al, 2021); fatherhood, health and mortality (Grundy and Tomassini, 2010); and long-term trends in male co-residence with dependent children (Henz, 2014).

7) Additionally, Census data about co-resident fathers are integrated into large-scale and whole-population linked administrative datasets such as Growing Up in England (if the father is the household reference person) and the SAIL dataset in Wales. These powerful datasets enable research into statistical relationships between co-resident father education and other characteristics - and children's educational, social care and other outcomes. The SAIL record linkage databank in Wales, which includes Census data about fathers, is being used for a project researching health and social risk factors and outcomes among mothers, fathers and children with family court involvement.

### Local use

8) Local father-inclusion initiatives have used Census data to understand the local population of co-resident fathers, raise the profile of fathers to influence resource allocation, and plan and deliver local father-inclusive and father-specific services. Documented examples include the following ones.

- Local area Census data has been used in Peterborough, Barnet and other areas to work out the number of father single-parent households ('lone fathers') for campaigning for increased funding through local media articles.
- The Peterborough Family Hubs Fathers Project (commissioned by Peterborough Council) used local area data about the local population (including the ages of co-resident fathers with a baby) to plan perinatal mental health services for fathers.
- Although not in England and Wales, the charity Dads Rock in Edinburgh used Census data about languages spoken in the local population to help plan services and information for fathers – *"Breaking the language barrier has resulted in our diversity being higher and we couldn't have done this without the use of census information"* and *"We have translated and displayed posters in other common languages used in Edinburgh,*

*such as Spanish, Polish and Chinese” (Scottish Census case study, 2025).*

## **The gap**

9) The big gap for academics, policymakers and local services is that there is no data from the Census about involved ‘non-resident’ fathers (whom we call involved ‘own household fathers’). We cover these points below.

## **Section C. Future use of Census data about fathers to inform design and delivery of Family Hubs and other local initiatives**

1) Our future needs are for the Fatherhood Institute's research, policy and practice partners and other stakeholders (including national and local government) to be able to use Census data to inform the delivery of father-inclusive Family Hubs, a growing government initiative for services and information for families (see our response above about use of local data for service delivery)

2) For Family Hubs, having comprehensive father-data in the Census can be used to inform the design and commissioning of targeted interventions for those fathers and families not generally reached by generic services, particularly around engagement approaches. In a family Better Start programme running for ten years in Southend to find out what works in maternity and early years services, the main dataset used to commission early years and children's services was Fingertips Public Health outcomes which contains no father-specific data at all, although it was key in developing a strategy around prevention & early intervention for issues like childhood obesity & tooth decay.

3) Combining national and local administrative datasets such as Fingertips with Census data about fathers would be the best way forward for effective service design and delivery. And Family Hubs could calculate their reach to fathers in a specific category by comparing their uptake with the total population of fathers locally in that category, using Census data. There could be benchmarking tables with indicators such as the percentage of fathers of newborns attending the 6-week check-up, by local authority area.

4) The Fatherhood Institute would be able to incorporate use of local data about fathers into our extensive father-inclusion training for local authorities, other commissioners and local services.

5) As well as giving population totals for co-resident fathers, part-time resident fathers and involved 'non-resident' fathers (whom we call involved 'own household fathers'), it is helpful to our local partners and stakeholders to describe the profile of populations of fathers, including demographics, economic activity, employment, health, housing and living arrangements.

## Section D. A NEW question in 'Household and Family Relationships' to identify INVOLVED 'non-resident' parents (potentially a NEW CENSUS TOPIC)

1) These INVOLVED 'non-resident' fathers and mothers (whom we call involved 'own household fathers/mothers') - 90% of whom are fathers - live separately from their dependent children for all or most of the time. They are in contact with, regularly spend time with and/or regularly look after their children, depending on the question asked.

2) These involved parents are "statistically invisible" and cannot be identified in previous Censuses as parents of dependent children unless they live fully or mainly with other co-resident children at their Census address. ONS wrote in 2015 in response to a User Request for a population count of fathers and mothers of young children - *"Only parents who have their child resident with them at the time of the survey are included in the data... a non-resident parent would not be included in the data as a mother or father."* A father whose child/ren stay with him for three nights a week is classified as a single man or, when he co-resides with a partner, a cohabiting couple (no children).

3) This big statistical gap about involved 'non-resident' parents needs to be filled to enable appropriate policies, funding allocations and services to support a new generation of children for whom parents commonly live apart for some or all of their childhood.

### How we and others would use NEW Census data about involved 'non-resident' fathers

4) If involved 'non-resident' parents are identified in the 2031 Census, we and our partners and stakeholders (including local and national government) will be able to use the data for the same purposes we outline above for co-resident fathers who can already be identified in previous Census data. For academics and researchers, these include integration into large-scale or whole-population linked administrative datasets such as the ONS Longitudinal Study, Growing Up in England and the SAIL dataset in Wales; giving a contextual national picture of these fathers to precede focused work using smaller-scale datasets; and weighting of social survey and market research datasets derived from sample surveys, for example to correct for response bias.

5) Importantly, local authorities, Family Hubs, parenting and family services, and local father-inclusion initiatives will be able to use this data to plan and deliver local father-inclusive and father-specific services for

these involved 'non-resident' fathers. The Fatherhood Institute would be able to incorporate use of local data about involved 'non-resident' fathers into our extensive father-inclusion training for local authorities, other commissioners and local services.

6) As well as giving population totals for involved 'non-resident' fathers, it will be helpful to us and our partners and stakeholders to describe their profile, including demographics, economic activity, employment, health, housing and living arrangements. Therefore we anticipate using the following Census questions (from the 2021 Census) alongside a new question identifying 'non-resident' fathers of dependent children - Household Relationships (e.g. whether has co-resident partner), Demographics, Housing, Health, Economic activity, SES (occupation-based), Work Hours, Place of Work - and a comparison with (fully/mainly) co-resident fathers. And we and others would also analyse separately small subsets of involved 'non-resident' fathers - e.g. specific ethnic minority groups and religious identities, LGBTQ+ fathers; young fathers.

7) As examples, Census data on the home/hybrid-working and working hours of these involved fathers are important because research has shown that sharing of parental care with a 'non-resident' father enables mothers in single-parent households to work or increase their hours (e.g. Bonnet et al, 2018). And data on the housing of these involved 'non-resident' fathers are important because it is much more difficult for them to have children to stay overnight when they live in shared households of unrelated adults or do not have a spare bedroom (Clarke and Muir, 2017, p2 - "*The number of non-resident parents living in shared housing is not known*").

8) The intended benefits are for increased quality and relevance of family policy, employment policy, services for children and their mothers with an involved father primarily living elsewhere, services for these involved fathers, and ultimately for children's wellbeing and adult outcomes. The collection of data about involved 'non-resident' fathers is especially relevant to children from lower socio-economic and/or Caribbean ethnic backgrounds and/or with a young mother, who are much more likely to have a 'non-resident' father.

### **Feasibility of identifying involved 'non-resident' parents with a SINGLE question**

9) Adding a single question to the 2031 Census to identify INVOLVED non-resident' parents of dependent children is feasible, has precedents in previous sample surveys, and can be cognitively tested. There were single questions to identify INVOLVED 'non-resident' parents or their children in the 2014-15 UK Time Use Survey; in the 2018 ad hoc LFS Eurostat

Module on 'reconciliation between work and family life'; and in the Family Resources Survey (but asked only of the parent who lives with the child/ren for all or most of the time).

10) Under-reporting by 'non-resident' parents asked whether they have dependent children living elsewhere (DWP, 2025; Bryson and McKay, 2018) – and the sensitivity of such a question - is likely to be substantially reduced by asking a question restricted to children with whom the respondent is in contact or spends time regularly.

**2014-15 UK Time Use Survey (asked to all adults)** - *"Do you have any children under 18 who do not live here with you and with whom you have contact?"*

**2018 LFS ad hoc Eurostat module (asked to all adults)** - *"[And] Outside your household, do you or partner have children younger than 15 years you take care of?"* – however this concept of 'take care of' (or parental 'childcare') might not be perceived as applying to teenagers.

**Family Resources Survey (asked only to the mainly/fully co-resident parent when co-resident dependent children have a 'non-resident' parent)** - *"Can I just check, does your child/do any of your children ever spend time with or under the supervision of their other parent?"*

## Section E. Specific requirements for existing Census questions about household relationships and second parental addresses

1) Continuing (as in the 2021 Census) with the instruction on the Census form for children co-residing with both parents living apart to be counted as usually resident at the address at which the child spends the majority of their overnights. If the child lives equally between parental households then they are counted as usually resident at the address where they stayed overnight on Census night. This helps to avoid double counting or missingness of children who live across two parental households. There is an international literature on 'residential ambiguity' and we have sent references to the ONS.

2) In the Census form instruction for 'visitors', this should explicitly include a child living mainly elsewhere who is staying overnight in the Census household, for example if they are staying with their parent in the Census household. It would be good to have an additional question for visitors asking about each visitor's relationship to Person 1 and Person 2 in the household (if these are adults).

3) Better differentiate biological/birth/adoptive (legal) parents from 'step-parents' by changing the household relationship codes as follows.

- **Son/Daughter and Stepchild** changed to **Biological/birth/adopted child** (if possible with a separate code for adopted child) **and Stepchild/Child of parent's partner**, as is done in the UK's national child cohort studies and Understanding Society.
- **Mother/Father and Stepmother/Stepfather** changed to **Biological/birth/adoptive father/mother** (if possible with a separate code for adoptive father/mother) **and Stepmother/Stepfather/Partner of Parent**, as is done in the UK's national child cohort studies and Understanding Society.

This will enable analysis of better differentiated step-parents, step-children and blended families. These proposed changes are because some longstanding step-parents think of themselves just as 'fathers' or 'mothers', and some cohabiting partners of legal parents do not think of themselves as 'step-parents' (Hadfield and Nixon, 2013).

4) The above comments apply also to the Definition of a Household and Household Relationships Harmonised Standards for social surveys, which for some reason have slightly different household relationship codes to those in the 2021 Census. We would like consistency between the Household Relationships Harmonised Standard for social surveys and the household relationship codes in the 2031 Census. And similarly we would

like consistency between the household inclusion criteria in the Definition of a Household Harmonised Standard and the 2031 Census criteria.

5) We suggest carrying out new cognitive testing of the household relationship codes (which we think has not been done for some time) and further testing of the second address code '**another parent's or guardian's address**'. The latter code includes holiday/weekend 'second homes'. It would be better to have wording which limits the code to the address of a 'different' parent or guardian who is not included in this Census household because they live elsewhere for all or most of the time.

## Section F. Other sources of data about fathers are inadequate for intended uses

1) Existing data sources do not meet our requirements for data about (i) co-resident fathers of dependent and adult children (ii) second addresses for dependent children living across two parental households, and identification of 'non-resident fathers' whose address links to these children (iii) involved 'non-resident' fathers (whom we call involved 'own household fathers').

2) The advantages of the Census for collecting the above data for use in research, policy development and service delivery are as follows:

**(a) comprehensiveness/lower response bias** (c.f. the Family Resources Survey, Labour Force Survey and Annual Population Survey with currently low response rates, and potentially more non-participation and response bias for men who are involved 'non-resident' fathers)

**(b) huge size for local area data and small-subgroup analyses** – Small categories of fathers which are of interest to us and our partners and stakeholders include specific ethnic minority groups and religious identities, father one-parent-households (sometimes called 'lone fathers'); LGBTQ+ fathers; young fathers (teenage or under 25 years); unemployed fathers; economically inactive fathers (e.g. due to disability or ill-health) and fathers working in specific occupations and industries. User-requests to the ONS for Census data about fathers have included the number of fathers by the age of their youngest child for single-ages (e.g. 1 or 2-year-olds) which can inform perinatal services for fathers.

**(c) because it covers almost everyone, it can be integrated into large-scale and whole-population administrative datasets** – see our response above

**(d) it includes a range of variables across topics** (c.f. topic-specific surveys) which can give a comprehensive socioeconomic and demographic profile of fathers in different categories. We anticipate use of the following Census questions from the 2021 Census alongside the questions identifying fathers of dependent children -Household Relationships (eg whether has co-resident partner), Demographics, Housing, Health, Economic activity, SES (occupation-based), Work Hours, Place of Work.

3) **Specifically in relation to identifying involved 'non-resident' fathers**, existing data sources are insufficient.

**(a) The Family Resources Survey (FRS) and Understanding Society** do include questions which identify 'non-resident' parents of dependent children.

(b) However **the FRS (used for DWP Separated Families Statistics)** asks questions about the 'non-resident' parent's extent of involvement (with the child) only of the 'Parent With Care' - who is generally the mother who lives for all or most of the time with her child/ren - and NOT of the 'Non-Resident Parent' who is generally the father. Therefore the FRS does not identify INVOLVED 'non-resident' parents among its sample; but instead children with an involved 'non-resident' parent who is not in the FRS sample. It is also subject to response bias due to low response rates (DWP, 2025).

(c) **Understanding Society** does ask questions which identify INVOLVED 'non-resident' parents in its sample. But it is a panel study, with greater drop-out of participants (especially fathers) after relationship break-ups within households. Therefore, whilst valuable for longitudinal analyses of causal factors and relationships, the achieved Understanding Society sample of involved 'non-resident' parents' in recent and current waves is not representative of the national population of involved 'non-resident' parents of dependent children.

(d) Additionally, **the FRS and Understanding Society** are not sufficiently large to give data for small subsets of involved 'non-resident' parents (eg ethnic groups), nor robust local area data.

(e) There is **no administrative data covering all involved 'non-resident' parents** because the Child Maintenance Service no longer covers the whole population group, with most separated parents using non-statutory and informally agreed arrangements.

## Section G. Brief comments on the Economic Activity and Place of Work questions

### Economic Activity

- 1) The economic activity question in the 2021 Census included the code "**on maternity or paternity leave**". However, there are other forms of leave for parenting such as statutory and employer-given parental leave, and Shared Parental Leave. Therefore the code needs to be expanded to "**on maternity, paternity or parental leave**".
- 2) This also allows for changes which may result from the Government's current review of parental leave, with the names of any new forms of leave for parenting (introduced as a result of the review) being currently unknown.
- 3) We and others require data about the uptake of parental leave and paternity leave, and to build a profile of different subsets of fathers taking and not taking leave, such as those in different socio-economic and ethnic groups - see our responses above to the Demographics topic. This analysis will be especially relevant if the Government introduces changes as a result of its current review of parental leave.

### Places of work

- 4) The 2021 Census question asks only where the person **MAINLY** works (and then collects the work address only if main place of work) which is outdated in this era of hybrid working, hugely increased since the 2021 Census. If a person regularly works for the minority of time in a workplace, and for the majority of the time at home, it would be useful to collect the workplace address. And if the person works for the majority of the time in the workplace, and the minority of the time at home. then their hybrid working pattern will not be captured at all.
- 5) We suggest that the Census asks about ALL the places where the person works for at least one day per week on average, and then where they **MAINLY** work, and collects a workplace address wherever the person works at their workplace at least once a week on average.
- 6) We and others require data about hybrid working to build a profile of the working pattern of different categories and subsets of fathers - see our responses above to the Demographics topic. Hybrid and home working relate to parental childcare by fathers and mothers. We and others may need to combine results for England and Wales with those in Scotland and Northern Ireland to give findings for the UK, so it is best if the questions are harmonised across the UK Censuses.