



General Register Office for Scotland
information about Scotland's people

Paper NHSCR GB 3/09

NHSCR And Scottish Longitudinal Study
Testing the Feasibility of Incorporating Information from
the 1939 Register

June 2009

1. Introduction

1.1 The Scottish Longitudinal Study (SLS) is a research resource comprising a 5.3% sample of the population of Scotland selected on the basis of 20 birthdates. It was begun in 2001 with an extract from the 1991 Scottish Census. Records from the 2001 Census were subsequently added and information on vital events occurring to sample members is continuously being incorporated. These events include births of new SLS members, births and stillbirths to sample members, infant mortality of children of SLS members, deaths of sample members, widow(er)hoods occurring to sample members, marriages and migrations. Data extracted from the different sources which belong to the same person are linked together to form a longitudinal record. The NHSCR is used as a spine in order to implement this linkage. To achieve proper confidentiality, names of persons included in the sample are only held on the NHSCR and are not part of the SLS database.

1.2. The database was created to support research on social change in Scotland and is a joint project between GROS and the University of St Andrews. The study is operated from the GROS offices in Ladywell House by a team employed by St Andrews University and a GROS technical manager. Access to the data is provided under strictly controlled conditions to bona-fide academic, government and other researchers. Since the release of the database in March 2007, 27 SLS projects have been approved. Further details of the SLS are available on the University of St Andrews website at www.lscs.ac.uk/sls. Similar studies exist for England and Wales (starting with the 1971 Census) and Northern Ireland (since the 2001 Census).

1.3. Permission was granted by the Privacy Advisory Committee (PAC) to access NHS cancer data, hospital discharge data and maternity data on a study-by-study basis. A system has been set up to access these data for particular studies: NHS data is not being held as part of the SLS database.

2. Incorporating historical data

2.1 In 2007 the SLS Project Director, Prof Paul Boyle, secured an ESRC grant to explore the feasibility of incorporating historical information from the 1939 National Register (the recent digitisation of the 1939 Register having created this opportunity) and vital event registrations prior to 1974 (when the vital events system in Scotland was computerised). The specific objectives were to test the feasibility of:

- Linking information from the 1939 National Register to the records of SLS members who were born before the register was created
- Adding information from the birth and marriage records to the records of SLS members who were born or married before 1974
- Adding information from the birth, marriage and death records of the SLS members' parents to the SLS member's data

2.2 The proposal to undertake this work was agreed by the SLS Steering Group and the Privacy Advisory Committee (PAC). Work began in September 2008. The study involved NHSCR staff creating a linkage between the SLS database and the 1939 computerised index file for all SLS members born prior to 1939 and therefore potentially present on the 1939 register. Of all 83,000 persons of that age

in the SLS database, around 60,000 were found to have records on the 1939 register. A sample of 2000 of them and their household members was taken and information on their marital status, occupation and household relationships is currently being transcribed from their 1939 digital image.

2.3 A further subsample of 500 of the linked records is being used to trace the birth, death and marriage certificates held on the DIGROS system (GROS's digitised images of past birth etc registrations) for SLS members and their parents. This allows the addition of information on occupational status, causes of death and timing of demographic events such as marriage, birth and death to be added to the records. A parallel strand is exploring the feasibility of using DIGROS to add information from vital events records for SLS members born after the 1939 Register was started and before 1974 (when the vital events registration system was computerised).

2.4 The progress of the feasibility study has so far been encouraging and it is expected that, following successful completion, a bid to incorporate the historical information as part of the SLS database will be pursued. The SLS database eventually extended in this way promises to provide an even richer resource to support the analysis of inter-generational change and life-course research.

3. Conclusion

3.1 The Board is invited to note this emerging use of the NHSCR.

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