

**Subject:** Request for information relating to drug deaths statistics.

**FOI reference:** 202100264985

**Date received:** 17 December 2021

**Date responded:** 14 January 2022

**Information requested:**

1. Request for the number of deaths for 2020 that were not recorded as a drug-related death but where the toxic effect of illegal drugs were involved in the death.
2. Please also breakdown by illegal drug(s) involved. So, for example, the number of deaths as described above (highlighted by me in bold text) that involved a) heroin b) cocaine c) "street" benzodiazepines. Please note: the illegal drugs listed here are just some examples as an illustration. However, I would like the full list of illegal drugs that were involved in the deaths that I have described above and how many of the deaths where each of these drugs involved (i.e. similar to the way the data is provided in the current NRS drug-related deaths publication).

**NRS Response:**

Please see the enclosed spreadsheet with the following data included: the number of deaths that were not recorded as drug related deaths but where a substance was found in the body. These have been broken down by cause of death and by substance(s) found.

Further requirement was a breakdown by illegal drugs. The definition we use for drug-related deaths is controlled drugs (under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971) rather than illegal drugs. We have therefore assumed that you require a breakdown of controlled drugs.

The deaths data is not held in a format which easily allows a breakdown by whether substances were controlled. The spreadsheet enclosed shows there are more than 300 different combinations of substances recorded. To identify deaths involving controlled substances would require comparing each of the rows in this table against the list of substances in the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, taking into account whether the substance became controlled before the date of death.

This is a complex and time consuming task. As part of the processing of data to produce the drug-related deaths publication, this task is carried out for deaths which have causes which would classify them as drug-related deaths. It is not carried out

for all other deaths and therefore NRS does not hold the information which is required to answer this part of your question.

This is a formal notice under section 17(1) of FOISA that we do not hold this part of the information requested. The reasons why we do not have the information are explained in the Annex to this letter.

## **Annex - Reasons for not providing information**

### National Records of Scotland (NRS) does not have the information

This is a formal notice under section 17(1) of FOISA that National Records of Scotland does not have part of the information you have requested.

Creating this information is a complex and time consuming task requiring the time and judgement of a skilled professional.

The Scottish Information Commissioner's guidance on applying section 17 of FOISA advises: "Public authorities are not required to create information in order to answer a request. There's a distinction between creating new information, and compiling information. Where a request can be answered by compiling information from readily-available resources held by the public authority, this is not the same as creating new information. However, if collation of the information would require skill and complex judgement, the information is not held."

You can read the Commissioner's guidance here:

<https://www.itspublicknowledge.info/Law/FOISA-EIRsGuidance/Informationnotheld/InformationnotheldFOISA.aspx>