

Population And Migration Statistics (PAMS) Committee (Scotland)

Consultation on timing of Vital Events publications

Vital Events Statistics Branch are considering changing the timing of certain publications relating to births, deaths and marriages, and are looking for users' views on the implications of these changes.

Our current practice is to publish statistics for quarter 4 of the previous calendar year and preliminary annual results for the previous calendar year in early March. We then publish the final annual reference tables and statistics on deaths from specific causes (e.g. alcohol-related, probable suicides etc.) in August, alongside the Registrar General's Annual Review. Drug-related deaths follows a couple of weeks later because of the extra work involved.

One of the problems with our current arrangements is that when we publish the preliminary results in March, the population estimates for the year in question are not yet published. This means we have to calculate crude rates based on the previous year's population figures and are not able to calculate age-standardised rates at the time we publish the preliminary figures.

As the trends in number of deaths and age-standardised death rates are diverging (as discussed in the 2016 RGAR), we feel it is important to publish both statistics together to fully inform users on the emerging mortality trends.

Options

We are therefore considering two alternative options:

1 Delay publication of preliminary annual statistics till end April

The quarter 4 statistics would still be issued in March as usual, but the preliminary annual publication would be published at the end of April once the population estimates for that year are available. We would also include age-standardised death rates in the preliminary annual publication. These would be less detailed than those we currently publish in August each year and would not include any breakdowns by cause of death because our cause of death data would not be finalised by then.

The annual reference tables and associated tables on deaths from specific causes would still be published in August.

2 Bring forward publication of the vital events reference tables and deaths from specific causes to end June

We are considering separating the reference tables (and deaths from specific causes) from the Registrar General's Annual Review. They have traditionally been published on the same day, but we are concerned that with the volume of statistics being published on one day, some of the key statistics get overlooked and there could be information overload for users.

Publishing the reference tables before the RGAR allows us to focus more on the range of statistics being published and to highlight these to users in the news release.

However, this would require us to freeze the statistical data for the year around 4 weeks earlier than we do at present, which might mean we would be unable to take account of information about some deaths that we'd receive in that period (e.g. belated response to enquiries about the causes of certain deaths). We believe this would have relatively little effect on most of our figures, and we would chase up outstanding information before the cut-off date.

If publication of the final annual tables was brought forward to the end of June with drug-related deaths following a couple of weeks later, this would throw into question the usefulness of publishing preliminary estimates only two months earlier at the end of April. If users agree, we would like to consider dropping the preliminary annual publication on the basis that the final annual figures are being published earlier.

Questions for Users

Which options do you prefer?

- Status Quo – publish preliminary estimates in early March and final annual tables in August
- Option 1 – publish preliminary estimates at end April and final annual tables in August
- Option 2 – drop preliminary estimates publication and publish final annual tables at end June (mid-July for drug-related deaths)
- Options 1 and 2 together – publish preliminary estimates at end April and final annual tables at end June (mid-July for drug-related deaths)
- Other (please specify)

Please give reasons for your preferences. We are particularly keen to find out whether you need these figures within a specific time frame, e.g. to feed into a report or another statistical publication.

Please respond with your preferences by emailing Julie.ramsay@nrscotland.gov.uk by 7 December 2017.