

**Subject:** Request for information on marriage arrangements during lockdown

**FOI reference:** 202000044927

**Date received:** 6 June 2020

**Date responded:** 23 June 2020

**Information requested:**

“Information on the number of marriages (the number of civil partnerships too would be good) that were authorised during this time and the reason for authorisation (e.g. party gravely ill; overseas posting of a member of the armed forces; imminent birth of a child)? Is that information publicly available? How did you handle the lodging of the marriage notices and production of accompanying documents (birth certificates, divorce decrees, etc)?”

**NRS Response:**

Marriage in Scotland was suspended under the emergency legislation introduced by the Scottish Ministers for the pandemic period following the announcement on 23 March that the country was to enter a period of lockdown.

The suspension was put in place to allow registrars to focus on death and still-birth only registration.

Although registration offices were closed to the public for face to face contact many were staffed for the purpose of registering deaths and the issue of death certificates. Some local authorities chose to minimise the number of operational offices by centralising their office based registration staff. Contact details for urgent registration enquiries remained available through local authority websites although for the most part this would have been restricted to contact by email initially.

To facilitate marriages where there was considered to be a pressing need registrars were asked, where possible, to initially accept notices and supporting documents electronically. Arrangements to view the original documents are the responsibility of the registrars and this would have been agreed between themselves and the parties to the marriage. The registrar would also make arrangements directly with couples regarding the marriage schedule where the marriage was being conducted by a religious or belief celebrant.

In cases where a party is receiving end of life care registrars can, with permission from us, issue the schedule to the celebrant or a witness to the marriage.

For religious or belief marriages celebrants were asked to retain the signed schedule following the marriage and submit a scanned or photographed copy to the registrar until such time as the schedule can be returned in person. For civil marriage the registrar is responsible for the schedule. We do not have a breakdown of which

marriages were civil and which were religious or belief as there is no distinction between them for the purpose of dispensation.

Where possible marriages were encouraged to take place outdoors. Those which took place in hospitals or hospices required the celebrant to be provided with PPE by the relevant health board. Marriages during the Lockdown and Phase 1 periods were restricted to the couple, their two witnesses and celebrant only.

During the Lockdown and Phase 1 period a pressing need for marriage was considered to be those who are terminally ill or members of the armed forces posting overseas or where they must be married for their partner to be accommodated in married quarters.

We also exceptionally considered cases where an immediate family member (parent, child or sibling) is terminally ill, those facing surgery which carries a high risk of death or cognitive impairment, cancer patients and those with illnesses which carry a high risk of death should they contract coronavirus and those with chronic, degenerative or life-limiting conditions whose health has begun to deteriorate.

Additionally from the end of May we could consider requests for those in Scotland who hold the relevant visa for marriage which is due to expire imminently and who face difficulty in extending their visa period to allow them to remain in the UK until their marriage can be solemnised. However, it should be noted that all the marriages approved for visa holders at this point were marriages cancelled during the lockdown period and for whom the parties to the marriages had already provided the full 28 days' clear notice period commencing prior to 23 March.

During the period and up to 11 June 2020 dispensations to waive the 28 days' notice period for marriage were granted for 43 marriages. The reasons for dispensations being granted were as follows;

- Terminal illness of a party to the marriage
- Health/surgery of a party to the marriage
- Members of the armed forces
- Terminal illness of immediate family member
- Compassionate grounds