

Subject: Request for information in relation to online feature ‘Scotland’s People and the First World War’

FOI reference: 202000033321

Date received: 29 April 2020

Date responded: 20 May 2020

Information requested:

Request for information in relation to online feature, ‘Scotland’s People and the First World War’. In particular:

Who is responsible for publishing information as an educational source that is not fit for purpose?

Why a factual source was not used (1921 census as a good example)?

Why the integrity and use of source as 'being fit for purpose' was not checked?

What steps will be taken to rectify published information?

NRS Response:

The answer to the question is:

The feature on ‘Scotland’s People and the First World War’ was written by National Records of Scotland’s Outreach and Learning Department with input from colleagues in Statistics.

The census records provide a snapshot of the people at a particular address on a given night. They are likely to include the address of the house or institution; surname and forename of each person; relationship to the head of the household; whether single, married or widowed; age; occupation; birthplace; whether they speak Gaelic; rooms with one window or more; whether they suffer a disability; and fertility of marriage. They do not record deaths and the 1921 census has not yet been released to the public because an exemption applies under section 38(1)(c) (personal census information) of FOISA. The exemption applies for 100 years and is absolute – this means that it is not subject to the public interest test so we are not required to consider if the public interest in disclosing the information outweighs the public interest in applying the exemption.

The 74,000 estimate included in the report on the 1921 Census is an estimate of deaths of soldiers and sailors outwith Scotland and excludes military deaths within. We understand this figure was calculated by working out the differences in available demographic statistics, but it is not an accurate total of Scottish war dead.

The 74,000 stated is likely an underestimate of Scottish war dead. Apart from the reliability of the calculations made at the time, we understand this estimate is of Scots domiciled in Scotland, and does not cover Scots who had emigrated before

the war, but who returned to join the colours, and Scots domiciled in England, Wales and Ireland who also served and died. When using this estimate it needs to be qualified by the definitions being used.

During the First World War registrars were not responsible for keeping track of military casualties, this was the duty of the War Office. Although the registrars worked with the legal authorities to identify bodies of all nations, this was limited to victims of naval war who were washed ashore on the Scottish coast. Unfortunately, identification was not always possible.

The rolls of the Scottish National War Memorial uses more inclusive definitions, such as men who served in Scottish regiments and expatriate Scots in Dominion regiments. On their website <https://www.snwm.org/about-history/> you can see the definitions used:

"A member of the Armed Forces of the Crown or of the Merchant Navy who was either a Scotsman (i.e. born in Scotland or who had a Scottish born father or Mother) or served in a Scottish Regiment and was killed or died (except as a result of suicide) as a result of a wound, injury or disease sustained (a) in a theatre of operations for which a medal has been or is awarded; or (b) whilst on duty in aid of the Civil Power."

The original Rolls were compiled from War Office lists, from the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and from lists supplied from the Commonwealth countries and elsewhere. Even today names from the First World War and other conflicts are still being added."

It is likely that the figure of Scottish war dead lies somewhere between the estimated figures but to our knowledge there is still no accepted total. Hence the estimate and clarification in the National Records of Scotland's feature - "Estimates vary between 100,000 and 148,000. The higher figure is the total of the names inscribed on the rolls of honour of the Scottish National War Memorial, which includes Scots who had left Scotland before the war, but returned to serve."

After reviewing the information available, there is still no exact number of Scottish war dead available but the Scottish National War Memorial does appear to have revised the number of Scottish casualties to 135,000. The feature (link to: <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/learning/first-world-war/scotlands-people-and-the-first-world-war>) has been amended to reflect this.