

## Vital Events – General Background Information – Births and Deaths: Days until Registration

### **Excluding cases for which there were apparently very long delays in registration, because they may be due to errors in the statistical data or very unusual circumstances**

The tables do not show the maximum number of days between the dates of occurrence and registration of the event because the National Records of Scotland (NRS) data for some years suggest that a few events were not registered until a very long time (sometimes many years) after they had occurred. When NRS looked at the records for such cases, it found that some of them seemed to be the result of errors in the data, and that others appeared to be due to extremely unusual circumstances. Therefore, NRS has excluded from the data that were used to produce the tables cases for which the apparent delay in registration was 250 or more days (so that their values do not affect the calculation of the statistics) and the tables do not show any maximum numbers of days (so that attention is not drawn to any particularly unusual cases). NRS has also excluded any cases for which the number of days appeared to be negative, or could not be calculated for some reason.

Errors in NRS's statistical database were more likely to arise in the earlier years, when the data were keyed into the computer from paper forms which were completed manually by registration office staff (rather than being copied electronically from the official record of the registration of the birth/death) and so might not be as reliable as the information that appears on the birth/death certificate (which should have been checked at the time by both the registrar and the person, usually a family member, who registered the event).

NRS investigated cases with apparently very large numbers of days between the dates of occurrence and registration, manually comparing the relevant details from its statistical database against the information shown in the images of the birth and death certificates that are held in (the NRS staff version of) the [‘Scotland's People’](#) system.

In some cases, the statistical database's records appeared erroneous, due to (e.g.):

- a ‘typo’ when the information from the registration record was transcribed onto the paper form and then keyed into the computer system – for example:
  - for a birth that was registered in 1977, the birth certificate shows that the child was born in 1977, but the statistical database's record of that birth has a ‘date of birth’ in 1971. Perhaps the final ‘7’ in ‘1977’ was written on the form in such a way that the person keying the data thought that it was a ‘1’;
  - for a death that was registered in 1976, the death certificate shows that the person died in 1976, but the statistical database's record of that death has a ‘date of death’ in 1970. Perhaps the ‘6’ in ‘1976’ was written on the form in such a way that the person keying the data thought that it was a ‘0’.
- the wrong information being put onto the paper form – for example:
  - for three births that were registered in 1978, the birth certificates show that the children were born in 1978 but the statistical database's records of those births have ‘dates of birth’ which are several years earlier (they

- turned out to be the dates on which the parents were married, as shown on the children's birth certificates);
- for two deaths which were registered in 1976, the death certificates show that the deaths occurred in 1976 but the statistical database's records of those deaths have 'dates of death' values which are many years earlier (they seem to be those people's dates of birth, as shown on their death certificates).
  - the wrongful inclusion of records in cases where births were re-registered (in 2016 and earlier years). A birth may be re-registered for a number of reasons, such as to add the parents' marriage date or the father's details to the birth certificate (if the parents married after the birth was first registered, or if the father's details were not recorded when the birth was first registered). Therefore, in order to avoid double-counting births, the statistical database should not have records for both the original registration and any later re-registration of a birth. Prior to the introduction of NRS's current Vital Events statistical computer system, the rule was simple: the statistical database should not have any records for the re-registration of births (what happens now is described [in arrangements which apply for 2017 onwards](#)). Despite the rule that applied up to 2016, the statistical database wrongly includes records of the re-registrations of a very small proportion of births that were registered in those years. As a result, when NRS investigated some of the records for what appeared to be births that had been registered after very long delays, it concluded that they must be records of the re-registration of births which had been wrongly included in the statistical database. In some of those cases, NRS found that the parents had married after the children were born, and subsequently re-registered the births so that the children's (new) birth certificates would show that the parents had married; some of the other cases were found to be re-registrations which added the fathers' details, in cases where births had first been registered, years earlier, without naming the fathers.

There were also cases for which investigation suggested that a long delay, between the dates on which an event occurred and on which it was registered, was due to special (possibly tragic) circumstances. Such cases appeared to arise more often for deaths than for births. Examples include:

- the deaths of people who were believed to have been lost at sea, or to be victims of homicide, and whose bodies were never found;
- the deaths of people whose remains were not found for several years, perhaps because they lived alone, with few/no friends or relatives, or perhaps because they died in remote places that are very rarely frequented;
- births which were registered, without any parental details, apparently a year or two later, by police officers - perhaps because the child had been abandoned by the mother, who might never have been identified;
- births which were registered, with some information about one or both parents, apparently a year or two later, by hospital staff - perhaps after it was found (following cross-checks between NHS and registration data) that they had not been registered at the time, and it was not possible to contact the parents, to get them to register the birth as they should have done;
- births and deaths which were registered on the authority of the Registrar General, because of other unusual circumstances.

Finally, there were some statistical records of births for which NRS could not determine (from the limited range of information available) why it appeared that there had been a very long delay between the baby being born and the birth being registered. It may be that such cases were re-registrations of births that had been registered many years earlier, but NRS could not be sure about that because it could not find any records of the original registrations of those births, when it used the names and dates from the registration record in the statistical database. That does not mean that those births had not been registered at the time, of course: perhaps different names had been given when they were originally registered, many years before. Or those births might indeed be very late registrations: perhaps the parents failed to register them at the time, and this had not caused any problems until many years later, when (say) the children's birth certificates were needed for some reason, it was found that those certificates did not exist, and the children's births then had to be registered many years after that should have been done.