

Parents' Dates of Birth (and ages), and Mother's Number of Previous Births

When a birth is registered, certain details are required under the provisions of the Population (Statistics) Acts 1938 and 1960. Registrars may explain to Informants that this information will be treated as confidential, it will be used only in the preparation of statistics by the Registrar General, and will not be inserted in the register of births.

The details concerned are as follows:

- Mother's date of birth
- Father's date of birth

(NB: where appropriate, 'father' covers the 'other' parent: the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 provides a number of 'parenthood definitions' regarding who is the father or second female parent.)

In addition:

(i) until the end of 2012, the following details were required only in those cases where the parents were married to each other:

- was the mother married before her marriage to the child's father?
- the number of the mother's previous children (excluding the birth or births now being registered) by her present husband and by any former husband:
 - number born alive (including any not now living)
 - number still-born
 - total (a) + (b)

(ii) with effect from the start of January 2013, the following details are collected when all births are registered:

- the number of the mother's previous children (excluding the birth[s] or stillbirth[s] now being registered):
 - number born alive (including any not now living)
 - number still-born
 - total (a) + (b)

and the following question is asked if the parents are married to, or in a civil partnership with, each other:

- was the mother previously married or in a civil partnership (i.e. before her present marriage or civil partnership)?

Two points should be noted about this information.

First, the undertaking that the Registrar may give when a birth is registered restricts greatly what the National Records of Scotland (NRS) can do with these data. The undertaking states that the information will be treated as confidential and used only in the preparation of statistics by the Registrar General. Therefore, NRS can use it to produce statistics of the numbers of birth cross-tabulated by (say) local authority and mother's age. The provision of such statistics is most unlikely to jeopardise the confidentiality of the data for any given individual. However, NRS can not use the information to supply potential users of the data (such as researchers) with individual records which would include, say, the mother's age or date of birth, because (a) that would mean that the information was being used for a purpose other than the preparation of statistics by the Registrar General; and (b) it would put at risk the confidentiality of the data (as it might be possible for a recipient to use some of the other details in the records to identify the

people concerned, and hence deduce information about them that NRS should have kept confidential).

Second, until the end of 2012, information about the mother's numbers of previous live births and stillbirths was collected only in cases where the parents were married to each other - so NRS got this information in respect of only about half the births that were registered in the years from 2007 to 2012 (in marked contrast to when the Acts were passed, when roughly 95% of births were to married parents). This limits greatly the use that might be made of any statistics that NRS might produce from these data for 2012 and earlier years: no-one should confidently use figures about previous births to child-bearing married women to infer anything about the fertility of all child-bearing women, because the previous numbers of births may well differ markedly between married and unmarried women (even after taking account of factors such as their age). However, with effect from the start of 2013, such information has been collected when all births are registered. A separate note, which is available on this website, provides some background about the change and sets out the main points from the first year's results of collecting such information.