

## Enquiries

Many statistics of Births, Stillbirths, Adoptions, Marriages, Civil Partnerships and Deaths are available from other parts of this website, along with some associate documentation (e.g., definitions of the basis of the figures and some of the terms used). However, what appears on our website will not meet everybody's needs, so we welcome enquiries from people who want to use our statistics.

Subject to the points which appear below, enquiries about statistics should be directed to our Customer Services, e-mail: [customer@gro-scotland.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:customer@gro-scotland.gsi.gov.uk)

Scottish Government Justice Analytical Services is now the main provider of statistics of Divorces and Dissolutions of Civil Partnerships, so enquiries for figures on those topics, with effect from the statistics for April 2009 onwards, should be made using the contact details which are available on the [Crime and Justice – Contacts](#) page of the Scottish Government website.

The kinds of information held in the Vital Events statistical datasets, can be found in the following database Excel spreadsheets for [Births](#), [Stillbirths](#), [Marriages](#) and [Deaths](#).

When opening the spreadsheet files your browser, depending on how it's been configured, will prompt to either open the file or save it to disk.  
Maximum file size is 42 Kb.

You may also wish to refer to the pages about statistics of [Births](#) and [Deaths](#) that are available from other Web sites.

The remaining sections on this page cover briefly the kinds of additional information that the National Records of Scotland (NRS) may be able to provide (subject to e.g., the need to protect personal privacy, and possible charges for the work) in response to ad-hoc enquiries seeking:

- new tabulations;
- bulk data matching;
- files of anonymised individual records produced from NRS's databases;
- data for identifiable individuals taken from NRS's publicly-available records of registrations.

### **New tabulations**

It may be that the figures that you would like are not available from any of our existing outputs (such as the Vital Events Reference Tables). If so, we may be able to produce for you, from our databases, one or more new tabulations which would provide the figures that you are seeking - but please note that:

- (a) what, if anything, we can do will be determined by the staff time that we have available to do the work;
- (b) depending upon the nature of the enquiry, we may make a charge for the information. Further details regarding our charging policy can be found within the [customer service](#) section.
- (c) the need to protect personal privacy and confidentiality means that it might not be possible to supply some, or even all, of the information which is sought.

## Vital Events – General – Background Information

### **Bulk data matching**

For a fee, NRS provides a bulk data matching service for customers, such as medical researchers and insurance companies. Such customers send NRS details of persons who are known to them (e.g., participants in a research study or people who are covered by insurance policies), which NRS compares with the information held in its Deaths database. NRS then informs the customers which (if any) of the people known to them there appeared to be a match with the information held by NRS.

Customers provide NRS with their own unique reference for each person, plus four pieces of information about the person (surname, sex, date of birth and the postcode of his/her address), which NRS uses to match the records against the information in its database.

NRS then sends the customer separate files containing records for:

- (a) the cases which appeared to match, distinguishing between good matches (all four pieces of information agree) and possible matches (three pieces of information agree: surname, sex and either date of birth or postcode); and
- (b) the cases which did not appear to match.  
If appropriate, file (a) also includes some of the information that is held in the publicly-available part of NRS's record of the death. For example, a medical researcher may need to know a person's cause of death, in order to establish whether it was relevant to the purpose of the study; an insurance company may need to know the forenames, date of birth and full address of someone who died, in order to establish whether he/she was the person who was covered by its policy).

**Please Note:** Information about the cause of death is not supplied to commercial companies.

Customers should contact NRS, as indicated above, to find out about the cost of this service, the format in which they should supply details of the people known to them, and the information from NRS records that can be provided for those cases which match.

### **Files of anonymised individual records produced from NRS's databases**

NRS can provide a small number of customers (such as approved academic researchers) with files of anonymised individual records which contain information extracted from its databases (e.g., a separate record for each death, with codes for the person's age-group, sex and cause of death). As with new tabulations (see above), what (if anything) NRS can do will depend upon the staff time available to do the work and the need to protect personal privacy and confidentiality, and a charge may be made for the data.

Privacy / confidentiality concerns are particularly important when NRS provides individual records. NRS will anonymise the records by omitting obvious identifiers such as name, address and postcode, and by limiting in other ways the amount of detail that it provides, in order to reduce the risk of a user of the data deducing potentially-sensitive information, which was not previously known, about identifiable individuals. For example, if NRS were to provide one record per death, with the age, sex, cause of death and postcode, there would be a much greater risk of information

## Vital Events – General – Background Information

about any given individual being deduced than if the postcode were not supplied. Therefore, NRS prefers not to provide information about where the person lived or died.

However, NRS appreciates that geographical data are needed in some cases (e.g., if one of the purposes of the study is to compare the position in different parts of Scotland): if so, NRS will limit the other details that it supplies in order to reduce the risks stated above, e.g., if NRS supplies records which identify the local authority of residence, it may provide only broad groupings of, say, age and cause of death. There is a balance to be struck between the value of the data for the purposes of the research (and, hence, possible resulting benefits to the public) and the protection of personal privacy and confidentiality. NRS aims to provide as much as it can of the information that the researchers need, provided that there is only a slight risk of a user of the data deducing potentially-sensitive information, which was not previously known, about identifiable individuals.

Researchers who request files of individual records must complete a [Declaration on Confidentiality and Privacy](#). The precise details of how NRS will respond to each such request will be subject to discussion between NRS and the researcher - for example, what information NRS can provide, the purposes for which the data may be used, what (if any) charge will be made for the data, the format in which the data will be supplied, etc.

### **Data for identifiable individuals taken from NRS's publicly-available records of registrations**

NRS can also produce, for a small number of customers (such as approved academic researchers), files of data which contain information about identifiable individuals. For example, if there were a need to survey women who had recently given birth to twins, NRS could provide their names and addresses, as recorded when they registered their children's births. Similarly, if there were a need to survey people who had recently married or entered into a civil partnership, NRS could provide their names and addresses, as recorded when their marriages and civil partnerships were registered. (NRS's databases do not hold information about any subsequent changes.)

As well as names and addresses, NRS can also supply other details, provided that they are included in the publicly-available [main registers](#) or can be derived from such items (e.g., in the case of births, the Health Board in which the mother lives - but NRS could not provide her age or date of birth because they are not among the items included in the publicly-available main registers).

It is not NRS's normal practice to send questionnaires etc to the subjects of a study: this is the responsibility of the researchers. However, occasionally, a topic might be of such potential sensitivity that NRS would decide that it should make initial contact with the people concerned itself (e.g. by issuing the questionnaires, or by writing to ask the people concerned if they would wish to take part in the survey).

A charge would be made for the data, and for any additional work done by NRS.

## Vital Events – General – Background Information

Requests should be made by writing to:

Registrar General  
National Records of Scotland  
New Register House  
3 West Register Street  
Edinburgh  
EH1 3YT

Please include in more detail the research project, the NRS data that are required, why they are needed, how they would be used, and how they would be stored and eventually deleted.

Depending what data are requested, the application might require the approval of the Public Benefit and Privacy Panel for Health and Social Care [HSC-PBPP](#), which advises NRS on the correct balance between protecting personal data and making data available for e.g., research and medical audit, and ensures that the release of information about identifiable individuals is controlled carefully.

Any data supplied would be for use solely for the specified research project, and subject to the conditions set out in the [Declaration on Confidentiality and Privacy](#), which the researchers must complete before any data can be provided. Any survey company employed by the researchers would also have to agree to these conditions.

Researchers seeking such data may wish to contact NRS before writing to the Registrar General, in order to discuss e.g.: whether NRS has, and could provide, the kinds of information that they seek; what the data would be used for; whether anonymised individual records might be sufficient for the purposes of the research; and the likely timescale and charge, for the supply of the records, should their request be approved. The appropriate contact at NRS will depend upon the purpose for which the records would be used:

- researchers wishing to use such records for statistical purposes (e.g., to survey women who have recently given birth to twins, or couples who had recently married or entered into a civil partnership; or for statistical analysis in conjunction with information which the researchers have obtained from other sources) should get in touch with NRS Statistics Customer Services, e-mail: [statisticscustomerservices@nrscotland.gov.uk](mailto:statisticscustomerservices@nrscotland.gov.uk)
- anyone wanting such records for any other purpose (e.g., genealogical, commercial) should contact use the [contact form](#) on the Scotlands People website.