

---

**Director General for Regulation**

His Honour Judge Mark Lucraft QC  
Chief Coroner for England and Wales  
(by email)

24 April 2019

Dear Judge Lucraft

I am writing to highlight the issue of death-registration delays in England and Wales and their impact on mortality data and statistics. I am also writing to The Hon Mrs Justice Keegan, head of the Coroners Service in Northern Ireland, about this matter.

I would welcome any support you can offer via your guidance to Coroners to help raise awareness of the importance of timely death registration once an inquest has concluded. Any steps that could help reduce the amount of time before an inquest takes place would also be very welcome.

The investigation of cause of death is a vitally important process that will, sometimes, require a lengthy inquiry. Without a mechanism for Coroners to register the fact of death before an investigation is complete, delays to registration will have an impact on statistics reporting mortality patterns within specific time periods. Most (95-96%) deaths in England and Wales occur in their registration year.<sup>1</sup> However, for some specific causes, as many as half of the deaths registered in a calendar year will have occurred in the previous year, or longer ago. This can make it harder to identify emerging trends or concerning patterns, for example with drug-related deaths.

As the UK's independent regulator of official statistics we are responsible for monitoring adherence to the [Code of Practice for Statistics](#). The mortality statistics produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) based on death registration data in England and Wales have been designated as National Statistics, as have their counterparts in Northern Ireland produced by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). This means they have undergone an assessment by us and have been judged to meet the Code of Practice's highest standards.

We have today published the outcome of a [review](#) of ONS and NISRA's efforts to ensure that delayed death registrations do not adversely impact on the trustworthiness, quality or value of their mortality statistics. We are assured that their ongoing work to mitigate the impact of late registrations and help users to understand their implications meet the high standards expected of National Statistics. However, we note that the number of registrations in England and Wales delayed by a year or longer has increased in recent years. I hope you are able to support us in reinforcing the importance of a timely death registration process.

Your sincerely



Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation

---

<sup>1</sup> Table 1:

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/methodologies/userguidetomortalitystatisticsjuly2017>