

CONCORDAT BETWEEN OFFICE FOR NATIONAL STATISTICS AND GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE FOR SCOTLAND

Introduction

1. This Concordat is an agreement between the Director of the Office for National Statistics (ONS), who is Registrar General for England and Wales, and the Registrar General for Scotland, as head of the General Register Office for Scotland (GROS). It sets out an agreed framework for co-operation between the two Departments. The Concordat has been drawn up in recognition that the Registrar General for Scotland and his staff are part of the Scottish Administration under the Scotland Act 1998. It is not intended to constitute a legally enforceable contract or to create any rights or obligations which are legally enforceable. It is intended to be binding in honour only.

Purpose

2. The purpose of this Concordat is to describe the basis on which ONS and GROS will consult each other, exchange information and work together across a range of matters of mutual interest.

Arrangements for Review

3. The Concordat will be formally reviewed every 5 years. A review can be held at any time at the request of either party.

Implementation of the Concordat

4. The operation of the Concordat will be monitored by both Registrars General and they will put in place procedures to secure effective working arrangements for dealing with the business within the scope of the Concordat. The implementation of the terms of the Concordat is the responsibility of officers of both Departments who have responsibility for managing relevant areas of work. If disputes arise which cannot be resolved by them these will be discussed between the Registrars General. If necessary, the Joint Ministerial committee procedures will be invoked.

Other Related Concordats

5. In relation to statistical matters each Department has a common interest in promoting the integrity of official statistics and the professionalism of the Government Statistical Service. A Concordat on Statistics has been made between ONS and the Office of the Scottish Executive. The Registrar General for Scotland is a statutory officer of the Scottish Administration with close links with the Office of the Scottish Executive. The Registrar General for Scotland intends to comply with the terms of the Concordat on Statistics.

Functions, Aims and Objectives of the Office for National Statistics

6. ONS has responsibilities in the following areas which are relevant to the operation of this Concordat:
 - To secure the provision of an efficient system for the registration of vital events in England and Wales – births, deaths, adoptions and marriages – through the General Register Office and for administering the marriage laws;
 - To make available certified copies of public records about individuals to customers (for example, genealogists);
 - To carry out periodic censuses of the population in England and Wales, and to work in partnership with the relevant organisations in Scotland and Northern Ireland to ensure that results across the UK are comparable where they relate to data needed to fulfil international obligations or to administer reserved functions;
 - To prepare and publish demographic and other statistics for the UK and for England and Wales;
 - To maintain and administer the National Health Service Central Register (NHSCR) of patients for England and Wales.

In meeting these responsibilities, ONS strives to meet its overall aim to provide world class statistical and registration services and its objective to ensure the registration of key life events in order to protect and help individuals. In particular, it seeks to:

- Promote the provision of coherent and consistent statistics across the UK;
- Improve the quality, relevance and accessibility of its services to all customers;
- Improve public confidence in the integrity of its outputs;
- Minimise the burden on those who supply it with data, subject to the needs of government and society for high quality information;
- Improve value for money and operate efficiently and effectively;
- Develop and maintain a well motivated workforce.

Functions, Aims and Objectives of the General Register Office for Scotland

7. The functions of GROS, stemming in the main from the Registrar General for Scotland's statutory responsibilities, are as follows:-
 - To administer civil registration of vital events – births, deaths, plus marriages, divorces, and adoptions – and the statutes relating to the formalities of marriage and the conduct of civil marriage in Scotland;
 - To make arrangements for taking periodic censuses of Scotland's population and to prepare and publish demographic and other statistics;
 - To maintain the National Health Service Central Register (NHSCR) of patients in Scotland.

8. The fundamental aim of GROS is to contribute to the effective administration of Scotland by recording individual registration information and statistical aggregates for the population and by making them available in accordance with its statutory and other functions. In pursuit of the GROS strategic objectives are:-
 - To ensure that all information collected is relevant, accurate, complete and updated as required, in such a way as to maintain public confidence;

- To produce, and publish timeously, accurate statistics relevant to the needs of government, other public-sector organisations and the private sector;
- To preserve certain public records permanently and to store them securely;
- To give ready access to open public records to customers; and
- To continue to improve the efficiency and effectiveness with which these objectives are delivered and the quality of service provided by the Department.

Scope of the Concordat

9. ONS and GROS consult, exchange information and work jointly as appropriate over a wide range of the responsibilities. Each needs the help of the other in order to carry out its functions and pursue its aims and objectives properly. Both parties recognise the importance of their relationship. They wish, and will seek to maintain, close links across relevant areas of work.
10. In addition to working closely together on demographic statistical matters in the way described in the separate Concordat on Statistics, both Departments will work closely together in the following areas:-

The Census

Under the Census Act 1920 both Registrars General have responsibilities for conducting Censuses of Population. Legislative competence over the Census is devolved in Scotland.

The agreed methods of working together on statistics contained in the Concordat on Statistics apply also to statistics derived from the Census. In addition, there is a long tradition of co-operation and joint working between the Registrars General in the planning and conduct of Censuses and the release of statistical information from them. Both Departments acknowledge the many benefits derived from joint working in this area. Accordingly they plan this should continue, and that both Departments should seek to plan and undertake Census work together as far as possible, taking account of the functions and

requirements of the UK Parliament and the Scottish Parliament, and the wishes of the users of Census statistics. To this end both Departments intend that current close liaison should continue, and, in particular that the series of inter-departmental committees set up to co-ordinate Census arrangements in the different parts of the UK will be maintained under the umbrella of the United Kingdom Census Committee with full participation by both Departments.

Civil Registration

In addition to, and complementary with, both Departments' statistical responsibilities, civil registration of vital events is a core function both of ONS and of GROS. Effective supervision of the systems of civil registration and fulfilment of the statutory duties of the Registrars General is regarded by both Departments as fundamental to their aims. The systems of civil registration in England and Wales and in Scotland have evolved separately, and are the subject of separate legislation. Legislative competence over civil registration is devolved in Scotland. Nonetheless both Departments benefit from, and wish to maintain, co-operative relationships in dealing with registration matters. This is necessary both to deal with "cross Border" issues concerning the registration of individual events which may be laid down in statute, and also to encourage cross-fertilisation of ideas for development of the registration systems, services and procedures. To this end ONS and GROS will:-

- Inform each other of new developments, procedures or difficulties that may assist or inhibit the more effective and efficient running of the system of civil registration either in England and Wales or in Scotland;
- Consult about plans for legislation and changes to policy and administrative arrangements in one jurisdiction where these could impact on the civil registration system in the other.

National Health Service Central Register

GROS maintains on behalf of the Health Department for Scotland, and ONS maintains on behalf of the Health Departments for England and Wales, large registers comprising all patients on lists of NHS General Medical Practitioners north and south of the Border respectively. These arrangements with the Health Departments are non-statutory but of long standing. Given the sizeable

cross-Border flows of people, the practical usefulness of the two separate NHSCR databases, for healthcare administration and for epidemiological and demographic research, is greatly enhanced by their continuing to be operated co-operatively and in parallel, using common definitions and similar methods.

GROS and ONS will therefore continue to keep each other fully informed about new developments, procedural changes or problems arising and will exchange data on patient movements, with a view to the smooth running of healthcare administration in England and Wales and in Scotland; and subject to the views of the Health Departments, will aim to continue to supply NHSCR information to epidemiological research customers in a seamless way across Great Britain.