

Information paper

Quality and Methodology Information

General details

Title of output: Marriages in England and Wales
Designation: National Statistics
Geographic Coverage: England and Wales
Date of last SQR or QMI*: June 2013
Contact details: vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk

Executive summary

[Marriage statistics](#)¹ provide data on marriages which took place in England and Wales. The statistics are produced by sex, age, period of occurrence, previous marital status, type of ceremony (civil or religious), religious denomination and area of occurrence.

The registration of marriages taking place in England and Wales is a service carried out by the Local Registration Service in partnership with the General Register Office (GRO). Legally, a marriage is solemnised in either a civil or religious ceremony and is recorded in a register.

The annual marriage output covers England and Wales, however, annual marriage statistics for the UK and its constituent countries are published in the [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference Tables](#)².

A large number of data tables are published annually (approximately 14-18 months after the end of the data year) accompanied by a statistical bulletin. The tables released show the latest year's figures with some tables also showing historical data for comparison. Data on marriages are available on the ONS website. The ONS [marriages metadata](#)³ provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to marriages.

ONS are proposing to change the way in which marriages data are published from 2015 onwards. A consultation: [understanding user requirements for marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics given the introduction of same sex marriage](#)⁴ was published on the ONS website in October 2013. The [response to this consultation](#)⁴ was published in April 2014. ONS plans to publish a selection of summary tables for each topic. These tables will provide a significant time series for comparison. Alongside these summary tables, ONS plans to publish explorable datasets and anonymised microdata, both of which can be used to obtain more detailed statistics for a particular calendar year.

This document contains the following sections:

- Output quality;
- About the output;
- How the output is created;
- Validation and quality assurance;
- Concepts and definitions;
- Other information, relating to quality trade-offs and user needs; and
- Sources for further information or advice.

* Quality and Methodology Information' (QMI) replaced 'Summary Quality Reports' (SQR) from 04/11

Output quality

This document provides a range of information that describes the quality of the data and details any points that should be noted when using the output.

ONS has developed [Guidelines for Measuring Statistical Quality](#)⁵; these are based upon the five European Statistical System (ESS) Quality Dimensions. This document addresses these quality dimensions and other important quality characteristics, which are:

- Relevance;
- Timeliness and punctuality;
- Coherence and comparability;
- Accuracy;
- Output quality trade-offs;
- Assessment of user needs and perceptions; and
- Accessibility and clarity.

More information is provided about these quality dimensions in the sections below.

About the output

Relevance

(The degree to which statistical outputs meet users' needs.)

ONS uses marriage statistics to:

- report on social and demographic trends;
- perform further analyses, for example determining the [proportion of marriages that end in divorce](#)⁶, and comparisons with civil partnership formations ([Civil Partnerships five years on](#)⁷).
- produce [population estimates by marital status for England and Wales](#)⁸ (currently under review); and
- produce [population projections by marital status for England and Wales](#)⁹ (currently under review).

The distinction between cohabitation and marriage is of importance to policy makers too, as well as to social and political commentators. Issues of policy interest include legal rights and responsibilities of cohabiting partners, the welfare of children of unmarried parents, the stability of families, housing demand, and the numbers of lone parent families.

Organisations such as Eurostat and the Council of Europe use ONS marriage statistics. Also, organisations in the voluntary sector use ONS marriage statistics for comparison purposes and to support campaigns. These organisations often pass on ONS's marriage statistics to their own users.

Lawyers, solicitors and those involved in family law, as well as academics and researchers in demography and social sciences, are often interested in marriage statistics.

Those involved in the 'marriage business' for example hotels and catering businesses, bridal shops and wedding planners often wish to see marriage statistics. Such customers therefore generally have more interest in marriages within England and Wales, than marriages abroad. The clergy and in particular the Church of England are also interested in marriage statistics by area, and the number of religious marriages taking place each year.

Timeliness and punctuality

(Timeliness refers to the lapse of time between publication and the period to which the data refer. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.)

The annual release of marriage statistics is announced on the [Publication Hub](#)¹⁰ at least four weeks in advance.

Provisional figures are published in the spring/summer each year (just over a year after the end of the reference period). Final figures are also published in the spring/summer each year (just over two years after the end of the reference period). For example, final marriage statistics for 2011 and provisional marriage statistics for 2012 were published in June 2014. Final summary marriage statistics which are required to be laid before Parliament are published at the same time.

Prior to the 2008 data year, final marriage statistics for England and Wales were laid before parliament and published in March in the Annual Reference Volume [FM2: Marriage, divorce and adoption statistics](#)¹¹. The first release of summary data occurred during National Marriages Week in February. On this day provisional marriage statistics for England and Wales for the calendar year which ended just over a year before were released. Following a review of marriage statistics, FM2 was discontinued from 2011 and instead final detailed marriage statistics (with an improved content and layout), as well as provisional summary marriage statistics for the following calendar year, have been published at the same time.

Users are happy with the data available on the website given their high quality, however, the release of data is not considered to be timely. This is not something that ONS has control over as ONS is reliant on data sent in from the clergy to GRO. The clergy must send quarterly copies of their registers to Superintendent Registrars who then forward them to GRO. This process can take many months and is the main factor in the timeliness of the publication of marriage statistics. Section five of the [marriages metadata](#)³ shows the differences between the number of marriages stored on our database and the number included in our publications each year.

The release of ONS marriage statistics has been delayed four times. Quality checks carried out on the marriage database during 2002 had suggested that the 2001 data were incomplete. Further investigation by GRO confirmed that there were missing entries from a number of registration districts. Following the receipt of late returns, the first release for 2001 marriage data took place in March 2003 rather than January 2003 as originally planned.

Again in 2004, the publication of the Annual Reference Volume FM2 2002 was postponed to allow for known late notifications of entries in the marriage register by a small number of registration districts and to take account of revised marital status estimates. In March 2005, the FM2 providing 2002 data was finally published. The decision was taken to implement the new time of year for future publications because the completeness of the data would be improved by delaying the publication date.

From January 2011, marriage entries were recorded using the Registration Online system (RON). In 2013, the publication of Marriages in England and Wales (provisional) 2011 was postponed to allow for delays in recording marriage entries on the new system. The delay was also necessary to allow time for detailed quality assurance given the changes in data collection methodology.

In 2014, the publication of Marriages in England and Wales (provisional) 2012 was postponed to allow for a more detailed quality assurance process on final 2011 marriage statistics given the move to RON.

For more details on related releases, the [UK National Statistics Publication Hub](#)¹⁰ is available online and provides 12 months' advance notice of release dates. In the unlikely event of a change to the pre-announced release schedule, public attention will be drawn to the change and the reasons for the change will be explained fully at the same time, as set out in the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#)¹².

How the output is created

ONS is responsible for publishing statistics on marriages taking place in England and Wales. There are two distinct procedures for marriage in England and Wales. Marriage may be solemnised according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England or the Church in Wales. All other marriages must be preceded by civil preliminaries.

All religious marriages, with the exception of marriages solemnised according to the rites of the Society of Friends, those professing the Jewish religion, marriages of the housebound and detained and marriages by Registrar General's licence, must be solemnised in buildings registered for the purpose.

In most cases the marriage is registered immediately after the ceremony. In churches and other buildings of the Church of England or the Church in Wales, it will be registered by a member of the clergy in duplicate registers. In registered buildings, the marriage is registered either by a Registrar in their own register, or by an 'Authorised Person' in duplicate registers supplied for the registered building. An Authorised Person is not necessarily the person who conducts the ceremony. In register offices and approved premises, the marriage is solemnised in the presence of a Superintendent Registrar and a Registrar who carries out the registration. Jewish marriages are registered by the secretary (for marriages) of the man's synagogue. Marriages according to the

rites and ceremonies of the Society of Friends are registered by the registering officer of the monthly meeting in which the marriage took place.

The information collected when a marriage is solemnised comes from the entry in the marriage register. The majority of the details entered into the marriage registers are supplied by the bride and bridegroom although some information is also provided by the person(s) solemnising and registering the marriage.

Prior to 2011, marriage entries were collated by Registrars in the registration district where they occurred. The entries were then sent to GRO for the compilation of central records and indexes. Certified copies of each completed marriage entry appearing in the marriage register (both civil and religious) were also sent to ONS by GRO on a regular basis. Once received, the forms were entered onto ONS systems and verified.

From January 2011, all marriages registered within England and Wales have been recorded on RON. Civil marriages are entered onto RON by registrars, while religious marriages are collated by registrars before being sent to GRO where they are entered onto RON. Marriage data recorded on RON are then passed onto ONS for statistical purposes. Regular receipt and diagnostic tests are performed by ONS, resulting in contact with GRO to resolve any issues identified.

Extracts of the latest year's data are taken approximately two months before the annual publication dates. Quality assurance including frequency checks are carried out on the dataset and anomalies are queried with GRO. Counts between years are compared to look for large changes and once all queries have been resolved and any necessary amendments made, the dataset is used to create the data tables for publication.

Marriages taking place in Scotland and Northern Ireland are recorded by Registrars in Scotland and Northern Ireland. National Records of Scotland (NRS) and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) quality assure and produce regular statistics for their own countries. ONS quality assures marriage data for England and Wales and also coordinates and publishes statistics for the whole of the UK with breakdowns for each constituent country. Annual marriage numbers and rates for the UK and constituent countries are published in [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference Tables](#)².

Annual marriage statistics for England and Wales are released on the ONS website in a number of detailed tables. The majority of figures released in the marriage tables are counts and are easily taken from the datasets, but some information used in the tables is not part of the basic data supplied, but is derived as follows:

- type of religious ceremony is derived from the place of marriage;
- civil marriage location type (approved premise/register office) is derived from the marriage venue;
- an indicator is also derived to show whether or not the bride and bridegroom gave the same address at marriage. Up until 2011, the indicator was based on whether the bride and bridegroom gave the same address at marriage as this information was keyed by ONS. From 2011 the indicator is created using both the bride and bridegrooms postcodes. Where the postcodes match, it is assumed that the bride and bridegroom were cohabiting prior to marriage. Around 10% of marriage records are missing either one or both postcodes, consequently it is only possible to provide estimates of the percentage of couples cohabiting prior to marriage.

In very few cases, one or more of the items of information collected is found to be missing. The procedure adopted in such cases prior to the 2011 data year was as follows:

- age at marriage - if the age of one of the parties was not given in the marriage record, a value for that age based upon the other party's stated age was assigned, taking into account the combined previous marital status of the parties. Where the ages of both parties were missing, the values assigned were those of the previous couple having the same pair of previous marital statuses;
- any other relevant item of information which appeared to be omitted was queried, and corrected where appropriate.

From the 2011 data year onwards, missing values for age at marriage have not been assigned to a valid age. The small numbers of missing values over recent years mean that imputation adds no significant value to the dataset. Some records also contain missing values for area of occurrence.

Published tables now include information on the small number of records for which information is missing.

From 2011 ONS have used a lookup function to code records where previous marital status or denomination recorded on the marriage entry is equal to 'other' when received at ONS. Where text fields providing further information show that the previous marital status or denomination should actually be coded to one of the existing values, the marital status code is amended.

The mean and median age at marriage are calculated for England and Wales. As the age recorded at marriage registration is the age at last birthday rather than the exact age, it is assumed that the exact ages are evenly spread between successive single years of age. The mean ages produced are not standardised and are therefore affected by changes in structure of the male/female population by age and marital status.

Marriage rates are published for England and Wales (combined). The rate is the number of people marrying per 1,000 unmarried male and female population aged 16 and over (unmarried means single, widowed and divorced).

[Marital status estimates](#)⁸ used in the rates are the latest available when the statistics are published and from 2002 onwards they include an adjustment for marriages abroad. The [ONS Quality and Methodology Information for population estimates by marital status](#)¹³ provides overview notes which pull together key qualitative information on the various dimensions of quality as well as providing a summary of methods used to compile the output.

Marital status estimates for 2011 and 2012 are not currently scheduled for publication. ONS has undertaken an internal review to ascertain whether the current output and methods used to produce the output are fit for purpose. A [consultation](#)¹⁴ proposing changes to both the published tables and methods used to produce them is available on the ONS website. The consultation closes on 11 July 2014.

Marriage rates for 2011 and 2012 are therefore based on estimated 2011 marital status population estimates. These use the mid-2011 population estimates based on the 2011 Census and the marital status distribution from the 2008-based marital status population projections for 2011. Analyses comparing the marital status distribution in the marital status estimates for mid-2008-2010 and the 2008-based marital status projections for 2008-2011 have shown that these estimates provide:

- a plausible marital status distribution for 2011 and 2012; and
- a more plausible 2011 marital status distribution than the 2010 marital status estimates.

Validation and quality assurance

Accuracy

(The degree of closeness between an estimate and the true value.)

The marriage statistics ONS publishes use data taken directly from the copy of the entry in the marriage register sent in by GRO and are based on details collected when a marriage is performed. The information in the marriage entry is largely supplied by the persons being married, who are responsible for its accuracy. Supplying false information may render them liable to prosecution for perjury, hence the information supplied is generally believed to be correct. There is no routine statistical verification of the data, although editing checks are carried out to detect clerical, coding and keying errors. However, certain corrections subsequently come to light and are notified and recorded by GRO.

Each year, a certain number of marriages are not included in the published figures because the entries have been received at ONS later than the date on which the annual dataset is taken. The majority of the shortfall is due to a delay in register offices submitting quarterly certified copies. Some of this delay is attributable to the clergy or authorised persons because register offices require the return of copies of the entries in the marriage register on a quarterly basis. A table is published in the [marriages metadata](#)³ which shows the difference between the number of marriages stored on the ONS database and the number included in our publications each year. Although this means some marriages are not included in the statistics, it is a compromise which must be taken in order to publish timely data.

During the annual quality assurance work, further checks are carried out on the data, including frequency checks and comparisons with previous years' data. Checks are also carried out to look

for inconsistencies within the dataset to ensure there are minimal internal errors. Checks are carried out on the number of marriages by area to ensure that there are no obvious differences from the previous year or quarter which could indicate missing records. Any anomaly is queried with GRO and amended where necessary.

Marriage statistics by manner of solemnisation can be misleading as some religious marriages (such as Muslim and Sikh) can take place at unregistered premises. To be registered as a legal marriage the couple have a further marriage ceremony in a registry office or approved building. Such weddings are coded as civil marriages because only the civil marriage certificate is received. Given that marriage statistics can be misleading for some religions, since 2011 ONS has been publishing religious denominations under broad groupings.

Revisions of marriage statistics occur infrequently, and have only taken place following revisions to the population estimates by marital status resulting in revised marriage rates.

Some couples choose to get married abroad. There is no legal requirement for those marriages of persons usually resident in England and Wales, but solemnised outside England and Wales, to be registered by the GRO. However, some overseas marriages are recorded with the overseas section at GRO. These fall into two main types: marriages of armed forces personnel and marriages that take place in certain UK consuls (only 15 out of 121 consuls have this facility).

It is possible to estimate the number of UK residents marrying abroad and the number of overseas residents marrying in the UK using data from the International Passenger Survey (IPS). These estimates are based on visits of less than 12 months and are derived from interviews conducted at the end of visits, where reason for visit was marriage. These estimates are based on a very small number of IPS interviews and so the standard errors on the estimates are correspondingly high. Further information on Marriages taking place abroad can be found in the [Population Trends Report Marriages abroad, 2002-2007](#)¹⁵.

In 2012, an estimated 89,000 UK residents went abroad to get married and an estimated 9,000 overseas residents married in the UK. This represents an increase compared with 2011 when 55,000 UK residents were estimated to have married abroad and 4,000 overseas residents were estimated to have married in the UK. Further estimates suggest that the vast majority (around 90%) of the marriages to UK residents estimated as taking place abroad are to residents of England and Wales, while only about half of people coming to the UK to get married do so in England and Wales.

Although the estimated number of marriages abroad is high, many users are interested in marriages taking place in England and Wales, for example, those involved in the 'marriage business' such as wedding planners. However, users with an interest in social change may consider the numbers of marriages both abroad and in England and Wales.

Coherence and comparability

(Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain for example, geographic level.)

ONS marriage statistics have always been produced using data collated by GRO from entries in marriage registers. Methods and classifications for marriage statistics remained similar for many years and time series data are available on a comparable basis back to 1837 in some tables.

The format and content of the data tables were reviewed for the 2009 data outputs. A document summarising the [outcome of the review](#)¹⁶ is available on the ONS website. This led to an improved layout of tables in easily accessible workbooks with all tables showing historical data where appropriate.

Marriage rates were revised as a result of revisions to marital status population estimates for England and Wales. On 30 April 2009, marital status estimates for England and Wales for 2002-2007 were revised to include marriages taking place abroad. Estimates of the number of marriages taking place abroad are derived from the IPS. As a result of these revisions, marriage rates in England and Wales 2002–2007 were revised and published on 11 February 2010.

Following further revisions to marital status population estimates for England and Wales 2002-2008 published on 30 November 2010, marriage rates in England and Wales were revised and published on 30 March 2011.

Internationally, ONS provides marriage data to the Council of Europe and Eurostat each year to allow them to compare marriage figures across different European countries.

Comparability between countries within the UK is very easy for marriages as they are recognised across the UK and the World. ONS quality assures marriages data for England and Wales and also coordinates and publishes statistics for the whole of the UK with breakdowns for each constituent country. Although both the National Records of Scotland (NRS) and Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) publish regular statistics for their own countries, collating all UK data together allows our users to compare data easily for each country.

Comparability is maximised by the following:

- marriage statistics published by ONS, NRS and NISRA are all produced using date of marriage;
- marriage statistics published by ONS, NRS and NISRA, cover all marriages which were registered as having taken place in England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively, regardless of the usual residence of the parties involved; and
- a number of couples who are resident in England and Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland now go abroad to be married. These marriages are not included in the marriage statistics published by ONS, NRS and NISRA. Only some of these marriages abroad come to the attention of the Registrar General through notification to Consular authorities.

ONS publish marriage rates using the unmarried population aged 16 and over as the denominator (single, widowed and divorced persons obtained from the marital status population estimates published by the respective Statistics office). Similar marriage rates for Scotland are available up to 2008. After consulting users of its demographic statistics in December 2010, NRS decided to postpone, for at least a few years, updating estimates of the population by marital status because other work has higher priority. NISRA do not produce marital status population estimates hence marriage rates for Northern Ireland are generally calculated using the population aged 16 and over as the denominator.

There are no other marriage outputs produced based on administrative data. Comparisons of marriage data with census and survey data containing estimates of the number of people married in England and Wales are possible. However, it must be noted that these figures are not directly comparable as they are estimates of the number of people married at a certain point in time rather than the number of marriages which took place during a particular year.

Concepts and definitions

(Concepts and definitions describe the legislation governing the output and a description of the classifications used in the output.)

The existing provisions for the preliminaries to, and registration of, marriages and civil partnerships and the processing, reporting and analysis of relevant data appear in different legislation. This reflects the distinct and separate roles of the Registrar General for England and Wales and the UK Statistics Authority (the preferred name for the Statistics Board). The Registrar General is guided by the legislation set out below:

The Marriage Acts

Marriage legislation is complex and is governed by the Ecclesiastical Licences Act 1533, the Marriage Act 1949 and the Marriage (Registrar General's Licence) Act 1970. The major amendments to the Marriage Act 1949 that widened the places in which marriages may be solemnised are:

- The Marriage Act 1983 (with effect from 1 May 1984) enabled marriages of house-bound and detained persons to be solemnised at the place where they reside; and
- The Marriage Act 1994 (with effect from 1 April 1995) made provision for civil marriages to be solemnised in any register office and in approved premises. Local authorities have responsibility for approving applications for premises to be used for solemnising civil marriages, and for ensuring that the premises meet strict conditions. Premises which have been approved include hotels, stately homes and historic houses. There is also an increasing tendency for local authorities to make some accommodation in register offices available for civil marriage. The effect of the Act is discussed in detail in the Population Trends article [Marriages in Approved Premises in England and Wales: the impact of the 1994 Marriage Act](#)¹⁷ (Haskey, J. 2002).

Although the Marriage Act 1994 allowed civil marriages to be solemnised in any registration district, it did not affect the restrictions on religious marriages in registered buildings. They may only take place outside the registration district(s) of residence if the registered building is the usual place of worship of one or both parties, or it is the nearest registered building to the registration district(s) of residence in which they can marry, according to their desired rites and ceremonies. A change in law in 2008 made it easier for couples to get married in a church away from where they live if they can show one of seven connections to the parish.

The [Marriage \(Same Sex Couples\) Act 2013](#)¹⁸ makes provision for the marriage of same sex couples in England and Wales, either in a civil ceremony (in a register office or approved premise for example hotel) or on religious premises (provided that the religious organisation concerned is in agreement with the marriage being solemnised through a religious ceremony). The first same sex weddings took place from Saturday 29 March 2014. Where one of the couple was seriously ill and not expected to recover, or was being deployed overseas in the armed forces to a war zone, marriages were allowed to take place without the 15 day notice period. Such marriages of same sex couples were therefore possible from Thursday 13 March 2014. The Government are proposing that couples wanting to convert their civil partnerships into marriages will be able to do so before the end of 2014.

The Act does not remove the availability of civil partnerships for same sex couples. The operation and future of the [Civil Partnership Act 2004](#)¹⁹ in England and Wales is being reviewed by the Government Equalities Office. A [full public consultation](#)²⁰ was launched on 23 January 2014 and it is anticipated that a report on the outcome will be published by winter 2014.

The Immigration Acts

The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, which came into effect on 1 January 2001, amended the Marriage Act 1949. It required that notice of marriage had to be given in person by each of the parties to the marriage, where formerly it had been possible for notice of marriage to be given by one person on behalf of both. It abolished marriage by superintendent registrar's certificate and license and, with marriage by superintendent registrar's certificate, introduced a 15-day waiting period (instead of 21 days) before the marriage can take place. Finally, it amended the Marriage Act 1949 to give registration officers the power to require documentary evidence of name, age, marital status and nationality from the person giving notice. Additionally, Section 24 of the Act placed a statutory duty on registration officers to report to the Home Office any marriage they suspect is being contracted for the purpose of evading immigration control.

Under the Asylum and Immigration (Treatment of Claimants, Etc) Act 2004, from 1 February 2005, if either or both parties were subject to immigration control and they were marrying by superintendent registrar's certificate, they had to satisfy certain qualifying conditions and could only give their notices of marriage at a specially designated register office, which they had to attend together. This scheme was abolished in May 2011. The Home Office continues to investigate suspected sham marriages with assistance from Registrars and members of the clergy, disrupting marriages where possible before they take place.

Under the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007, where a forced marriage has or is about to take place, courts will be able to make orders to protect the victim or the potential victim and help remove them from that situation. ONS do not produce any statistics on forced marriages. From April 2011, where one of the people marrying is a non-EEA national, the Church's guidance states that the clergy should not offer to publish banns and should instead direct the couple to apply for a Common Licence.

The UK Statistics Authority is guided by the following:

- Registration Service Act 1953: section 19 requires the UK Statistics Authority to produce annual abstracts of the number of live births, stillbirths, deaths, and marriages; and
- Statistics and Registration Service Act 2007: (the 2007 Act) transfers some of the statistical functions of the Registrar General, including the production of an annual abstract, to the UK Statistics Authority and the Office for National Statistics becomes the executive office of the UK Statistics Authority. The 2007 Act also provides the Registrar General with the power to allow him to disclose any information entered in a marriage register or recorded about a civil partnership to the UK Statistics Authority for statistical purposes. It also enables the UK Statistics Authority to produce and publish statistics relating to any matter.

Other information

Output quality trade-offs

(Trade-offs are the extent to which different dimensions of quality are balanced against each other.)

Each year a certain number of marriages are not included in the published figures because the entries have been received at ONS later than the date on which the annual dataset is taken. See Accuracy section for more information. Although this means some marriages are not included in the statistics, it is a compromise which must be taken in order to publish timely data.

Prior to the 2011 data year, if the age of one of the parties was not given, a value for that age based upon the other party's stated age was imputed, see the section on How the output is created for more information. Few records required such imputation each year. The [marriages metadata](#)³ includes the level of imputation applied to each annual dataset. This process meant that all records could be published by age, but also that time was not spent trying to obtain the missing information.

From the 2011 data year onwards, missing values for age at marriage have not been imputed. The small numbers of missing values over recent years mean that imputation adds no significant value to the dataset. Some records also contain missing values for area of occurrence. Published tables now include information on the small number of records for which information is missing.

Assessment of user needs and perceptions

(The processes for finding out about use and users, and their views on the statistical products.)

Statistical bulletins on marriages seek feedback from users with the inclusion of a standard statement within the background notes, 'We would welcome feedback on the content, format and relevance of this release'.

Feedback is requested at the bottom of all emails sent by customer service teams within Vital Statistics Output Branch. The standard wording is outlined below:

'We welcome feedback on the content, format and relevance of the data provided. Please provide any feedback and state whether you would like your contact details to be added to our list of users. All known users will be invited to participate in any consultations that are run.'

Feedback is also received through ONS' regular attendance at user group meetings and conferences.

Vital Statistics Outputs Branch maintains a list of known users, including which statistical outputs they use and the use made of them.

The Marriages (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 enables same sex couples to get married in England and Wales either in a civil ceremony or on religious premises. A consultation: [understanding user requirements for marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics given the introduction of same sex marriage](#)⁴ was published on the ONS website in October 2013. Information provided is being used to help ONS review marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics to ensure published statistics which meet user needs as far as possible.

A [response](#)⁴ to this consultation was published in April 2014, outlining a proposal to change the way in which marriages data are published from 2015 onwards. ONS plans to publish a selection of summary tables for each topic. These tables will provide a significant time series for comparison. Alongside these summary tables, ONS plans to publish explorable datasets and anonymised microdata, both of which can be used to obtain more detailed statistics for a particular calendar year.

Sources for further information or advice

Accessibility and clarity

(Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the release details, illustrations and accompanying advice.)

ONS's recommended format for accessible content is a combination of HTML webpages for narrative, charts and graphs, with data being provided in usable formats such as CSV and Excel. The ONS website also offers users the option to download the narrative in PDF format. In some instances other software may be used, or may be available on request. Available formats for content published on the ONS website but not produced by the ONS, or referenced on the ONS

website but stored elsewhere, may vary. For further information please refer to the contact details at the beginning of this document.

For information regarding conditions of access to data, please refer to the links below:

- [Terms and conditions \(for data on the website\)](#)²¹;
- [Copyright and reuse of published data](#)²²;
- [Pre-release access \(including conditions of access\)](#)²³;
- [Accessibility](#)²⁴.

Special extracts and tabulations of marriage data for England and Wales are available to order (subject to legal frameworks, disclosure control, resources and agreements of costs, where appropriate). Such enquiries should be made to:

Vital Statistics Outputs Branch
Office for National Statistics
Segensworth Road
Titchfield
Fareham
Hampshire
PO15 5RR
Tel: +44 (0)1329 444 110
Email: vsob@ons.gsi.gov.uk

The [ONS charging policy](#)²⁵ is available on the ONS website.

Useful links

More data on [marriages in England and Wales](#)¹ are available on the ONS website.

[ONS marriages metadata](#)³ provides further information on data quality, legislation and procedures relating to marriages.

Annual marriage figures for the UK and constituent countries can be found in the [Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference tables](#)².

[National Records of Scotland](#)²⁶ provide marriage statistics for Scotland.

[Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency](#)²⁷ provides marriage statistics for Northern Ireland.

Further statistics on [divorces](#)²⁸, [civil partnership formations and civil partnership dissolutions](#)²⁹ are available on the ONS website. As are data on [families and households](#)³⁰, including [cohabitation estimates](#)³¹.

[Population estimates by marital status](#)⁸ provide the estimated resident population by single year of age, sex and marital status (single, married, divorced, and widowed) for England and Wales.

References

Reference no.	Title of reference	Website location
1	Marriage Statistics for England and Wales	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/marriages-in-england-and-wales--provisional-/index.html
2	Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference Tables	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/vital-statistics--population-and-health-reference-tables/index.html
3	Marriages metadata	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/marriages-in-england-and-wales--provisional-/2011/index.html
4	Guidelines for Measuring Statistical Quality	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/quality/guidelines-for-measuring-statistical-quality/index.html
5	Proportion of marriages ending in divorce	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/divorces-in-england-and-wales/2011/stry-what-percentage-of-marriages-end-in-divorce.html
6	Civil partnerships five years on	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/population-trends-rd/population-trends/no--145--autumn-2011/ard-pt145-civil-partnerships.pdf
7	ONS Population estimates by marital status	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/pop-estimate/population-estimates-by-marital-status/index.html
8	ONS Population projections by marital status	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/npp/marital-status-population-projections-for-england--wales/index.html
9	UK National Statistics Publication Hub	www.statistics.gov.uk/hub/index.html
10	FM2: Marriage, Divorce and Adoptions statistics	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/marriage--divorce-and-adoption-statistics--england-and-wales--series-fm2-/index.html
11	Code of Practice for Official Statistics	www.statisticsauthority.gov.uk/assessment/code-of-practice/index.html
12	ONS Quality and Methodology Information for population estimates by marital status	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/method-quality/quality-information/social-statistics/summary-quality-report-for-population-estimates-by-marital-status.pdf
13	Population trends report marriages abroad	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/population-trends-rd/population-trends/no--133--autumn-2008/population-trends-pt-2.pdf
14	Consultation on Population Estimates by Marital Status and Living Arrangements	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/get-involved/consultations/open-consultations/2014/consultation-on-population-estimates-by-marital-status-and-living-arrangements/index.html
15	Outcome of marriage, divorce and adoption statistics review (2010)	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/guide-method/user-guidance/health-and-life-events/outcome-of-marriage--divorce-and-adoption-statistics-review-and-lookup-file-for-new-tables.pdf

16	Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013	http://services.parliament.uk/bills/2012-13/marriagesamesexcouplesbill/documents.html
17	Populations Trends Spring 2002	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/population-trends-rd/population-trends/no--107--spring-2002/marriages-in-approved-premises-and-register-offices-in-england-and-wales.pdf
18	User requirements for marriage, divorce and civil partnership statistics given the introduction of marriage of same sex couples.	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/get-involved/consultations/consultations/user-requirements-for-marriage--divorce-and-civil-partnership-statistics/index.html
19	Civil Partnership Act 2004	www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/33/contents
20	Civil partnerships review	www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-future-of-civil-partnership-in-england-and-wales
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24	Accessibility	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/site-information/information/accessibility/index.html
25	ONS Charging Policy	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/about-ons/business-transparency/freedom-of-information/ons-charging-policy/index.html
26	National Records of Scotland Divorce Statistics	www.gro-scotland.gov.uk/statistics/theme/vital-events/marriages-and-civil-partnerships/index.html
27	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency Divorce Statistics	www.nisra.gov.uk/demography/default.asp25.htm
28	ONS Divorces in England and Wales	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob1/divorces-in-england-and-wales/index.html
29	ONS Civil partnership Formation and Dissolution Statistics	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/vsob2/civil-partnership-statistics--united-kingdom/index.html
30	ONS Families and Households Statistics	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/families-and-households/index.html
31	ONS Cohabitation Estimates	www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/family-demography/cohabitation-estimates--england-and-wales/index.html