



## Civil Registration: Vital Change



**Birth, Marriage and Death Registration  
in the 21st Century**



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Presented to Parliament by  
the Economic Secretary to the Treasury  
by Command of Her Majesty  
January 2002

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*This document is also available in Welsh*

*Mae'r ddogfen hon ar gael hefyd yn yr iaith Gymraeg*

## Foreword

This Government has been re-elected on a promise to deliver significant improvements to public services. Whilst the registration of births, marriages and deaths rarely hits the headlines, it is a vital service that touches everyone during their lives. The system in England and Wales has its roots in the nineteenth century. The needs of society, families and individuals have altered in many ways since then. Modernisation is required to reflect and support these changes. The Government's proposals provide for more choice, improved service delivery and innovation.



*Ruth Kelly  
Economic Secretary*

Central government has a role in defining and establishing the legal and service framework. This includes national standards and a new system of accountability, inspection and intervention to maintain and develop these standards. Change is at the heart of this Government's modernisation programme. It is its job to provide the leadership and direction to deliver real, measurable and sustainable improvement in service delivery. It will also be responsible for the technology and for integrating the registration service within public services focussed on the needs of the citizen. The responsibility for the management and delivery of local service provision will move to Local Government. This will enable them to innovate and develop the face to face services best suited to the needs of their communities.

The service depends on the diligence and professionalism of frontline staff. The change will involve equipping them to deliver the new services. Roles will change as new services develop and different skills are required.

I am confident that the new civil registration framework described in this White Paper will underpin the modernisation of this important service. It will enable a shift from records being used as purely personal information to being key elements of a trusted source of information needed to support a range of public services. It will provide for more and better registration services and make full use of modern technology.

Above all, what matters is that the public will receive a better service at important moments of their lives.



Ruth Kelly

Minister for the Office for National Statistics  
January 2002

## Executive Summary

Civil Registration plays a vital role in modern society. It underpins the civil status of each person giving them protection as well as protecting society as a whole. However, since civil registration started in England and Wales in 1837, society has changed dramatically. The registration service has adapted to reflect these changes but further change is essential. *Civil Registration: Vital Change* outlines the Government's policy for the civil registration service in England and Wales. It provides for more and better registration services with more choice and making full use of modern technology.





In future, individuals will be able to register births and deaths on-line, by phone or in person. If they wish to register in person then they will be able to do it at any register office. Register offices will provide services such as baby naming and reaffirmation of marriage vows and have information relating to the birth of a baby, marriage and bereavement. Couples will have more choice on where to marry and in the ceremony. Local authorities will be responsible for the local service and will be expected to innovate and provide these registration services in ways which meet their local communities' needs.

Respondents to the consultation paper *Registration: Modernising a vital service* (published in September 1999) supported a more responsive service with more choice in ways to register (provided the necessary checks are in place), the provision of additional services and with increased availability and use of electronic information.

Civil Registration records date back to 1837. The older ones are of interest to genealogists and more recent ones are widely used by Government and other organisations (eg financial services industry). In time, all these records will be computerised. The Government has considered access to civil registration records, balancing the need for privacy and openness. The full historic records (those relating to people over 100 years of age) will be available. For records relating to younger people, the majority of the record will be available, as at present, but access to information

on addresses, occupations and cause of death will be restricted.

When this computerisation is complete, it will streamline the use of civil registration information. Instead of producing a paper certificate when applying for a passport, driving licence or other Government service, the individual will agree to his/her birth registration information being checked and the service provider will do so electronically as part of processing the application. Similarly the next of kin could agree to an insurance company or bank viewing death information electronically, thus removing the need to provide a paper death certificate.

The information collected and recorded will reflect our society. So, for example, there will be information on both mothers and fathers in the record of marriage and facilities for Welsh language registration for births and deaths in England.

Delivering these changes will be challenging as it involves significant legislative, organisational and IT development. Success in doing so will provide a civil registration service fit for the 21st century, which is integrated in wider Government services. The changes will not compromise on the accuracy and integrity of the service, but through innovation and effective application will maintain standards and be responsive to future needs.

## Chapter 1 Introduction and way forward

Drawing on public consultation, *Civil Registration: Vital Change* sets out the agenda for a modern, effective and high quality registration service in keeping with the principles of 'Modernising Government' including greater use of technology.





## Introduction

1.1. Drawing on public consultation, *Civil Registration: Vital Change* sets out the agenda for a modern, effective and high quality registration service in keeping with the principles of ‘Modernising Government’ including greater use of technology. It also recognises and promotes the development of the wider role of the registration service proposed by Supporting Families. Civil registration started in England and Wales in 1837. Since then society has changed in many ways and the service has adapted to try to reflect these changes. However, the needs of society, individuals and families continue to change. The registration system needs reform if it is to respond to these needs and to make use of opportunities given by technology.

1.2. Civil registration plays a vital role in securing and protecting basic human rights. In the United Kingdom it provides individuals with:

- a name and status within society,
- a facility for marriage,
- evidence of parentage,
- evidence of entitlement to inheritance and insurance.

1.3. It is essential that civil registration continues to record high quality information and to play its part in protecting human life and in upholding the rights of individuals on access to information. The statistical information derived from civil

registration is important in policy making and in allocating national and local resources. Information from death registration is essential in monitoring the health of the nation.

## Consultation

1.4. In September 1999, the Registrar General for England and Wales published a consultation paper *Registration: Modernising a vital service*. It sought views on defining and providing a civil registration service which would respond to the needs of individuals, continue to secure individuals basic rights and be capable of adapting and evolving to meet changing needs. It painted a vision based on the wider agenda for the modernisation of public services. Specifically, it sought views on:

- improvements in service delivery for the registration of births, marriages and deaths,
- potential new services and
- responding better to individual’s, government’s and society’s needs.

Delivering potentially radical changes highlighted the need for better organisational arrangements, wider use of information technology and consideration of funding issues. The consultation paper asked for responses to twenty-eight questions under these themes.

1.5. Over 3,500 copies of the full document went to central government, local authorities, registration officers and relevant health,

genealogical and professional organisations, MPs, religious and family support groups. Over 25,000 summary leaflets were distributed through register offices, local authority information and library services and enclosed with correspondence to the public from The Office for National Statistics. The full document was also made available on the ONS website.

1.6. There were almost 1,000 responses to the consultation. The majority were from individual members of the public, notably genealogists or from Registration Officers. The remainder came from a wide range of organisations.

### Responses to Registration: Modernising a vital service by type of respondent

	Number
Local Authorities	87
General Public	544
Registrars	239
Medical	22
Family History Groups/Archivists	32
Religious	10
Statistical	10
Voluntary/Community Groups	28
Central Government	14
<b>Total</b>	<b>986</b>

1.7. A summary of the responses is shown in Annex A. Key messages from the responses were:

- Broad support for allowing the citizen to register births and deaths in a variety of ways including by telephone or via the Internet provided necessary verification checks and quality control are in place.
- Strong support for the provision of additional services such as baby naming and reaffirmation of marriage vows ceremonies.
- Better integration with other public services in order to facilitate the electronic transfer of information.
- Almost unanimous support for national standards of local service provision and for these to be monitored by a separate agency/inspectorate.
- Strong support for further relaxation of the law on place of marriage.
- Full support for improved access to older registration records, for some record linkage and for a system that simplifies the means of updating or correcting information.
- Support for limiting availability of information from current registration records.

- Support for enabling the system to be more responsive and flexible in order to reflect changes in society (eg different types of families)

- No support for splitting local provision of births, deaths and marriage services.

- Support for removing the need to register events in the area where they occur.

- Support for the use of electronic civil registration information in authenticating applications for other government services.

- Virtually unanimous view that registering births and deaths should remain free of charge.

### Way forward

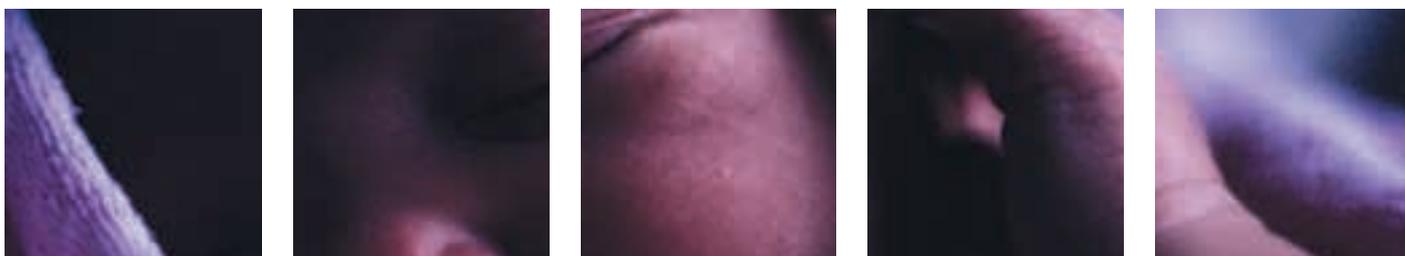
1.8. Now that the policy for civil registration is published, making the changes can start. The first step is updating the legislation. This should be completed in 2004. Then implementation of the changes can start. Changes will be phased and many should be in place by the end of 2005.



## Chapter 2 Births, deaths and stillbirths

Birth registration fulfils the rights of the individual to a name and a place in society with the benefits and protection that this brings. The legal responsibility to register a birth rests primarily with the parents. The registration of deaths plays an important role in the protection of human life. It also helps the family settle legal and administrative matters and provides vital information to the Government and for research.





## Registering a birth

### Background

2.1. Birth registration fulfils the rights of the individual to a name and a place in society with the benefits and protection that this brings. The legal responsibility to register a birth rests primarily with the parents. In recognition of the importance of birth registration, the Government will maintain the legal obligation to register. As birth registration benefits the Government and society as well as the individual, there must be no disincentive to register or disadvantage to those upon whom the duty falls. The Government fully supports the view expressed by almost all respondents to the consultation paper *Registration: Modernising a vital service* that birth registration should continue to be provided free of charge.

2.2. A registrar is seen as a person who can provide advice and information to new parents. The Government recognises the importance of this personal service and will maintain it through a network of local offices. However, there is wide support for giving people choice in ways to register a birth and using information technology to achieve this. Enabling individuals to register a birth in person, via the Internet or by phone accords with the Government's commitment to improved access to public sector services.

2.3. Choice of service delivery brings benefits for various sections of the community –

- improving accessibility and reducing travelling costs for those in rural communities where currently a registrar may be some distance away and offer a part-time service.

- improving accessibility for those with mobility problems or parents with pushchairs. There will be a choice of local offices or the option to access registration services from home or a locally placed kiosk

- better help for individuals for whom English is a second language or who speak no English. Providers will be expected to provide appropriate translation services for those wishing to give information in person or over the phone. Guidance for informants using the Internet will be provided in a variety of languages.

2.4. More choice of service delivery, including self-completion of the record, does have risks for the quality of the information being recorded. To manage the effect of these changes on the quality of the data, improvements to the processes will be identified through rigorous testing and piloting of the options. Lessons learnt will be incorporated in the system. Implementation in stages and regular monitoring of new systems will help guarantee that the change does not put the quality of the information at risk.

### Making this a reality

2.5. Key to the change is a central database for recording vital life events. It enables a birth record to be created from information provided by the

informant, whether in person, via the Internet or by telephone to a call centre. Registration via the Internet will be interactive including via personal computer, digital television, WAP telephone or kiosk. Internet access will include the use of portals such as the government's UK Online gateway. Help and advice will be available in person from local service providers, via telephone help-lines and through help databases on the Internet. It will be possible to access information about birth registration services twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, and to use those services remotely for much of that time.

2.6. A vital component of birth registration is the notification of the event from the National Health Service. The notification provides the evidence that a birth has taken place and helps in verifying that all births are registered, thus guarding against fraudulent registrations and avoiding duplicate registrations. To deliver electronic registration of births, these notifications will need to be provided electronically by the Health Authority where the birth occurred. Information contained in a notification, including the child's NHS number, will form a 'marker' record and be matched against the information given by the parent(s) when registering the birth and naming the child. A key strand of the NHS Information Strategy is the development of a single administrative register for NHS patients. The civil registration system will be designed to enable it to take the notifications from this NHS administrative register.

2.7. The centralised receipt of NHS birth notifications will enable a birth to be registered from any part of the country and hence allow the public to use any local office if they wish to register in person. Information will be entered directly onto the central database and will be matched onto the 'marker' record. Parents using the service remotely will have to provide evidence of their identity in accordance with the Government's Authentication Framework. To help ensure all births are registered and to help prevent the registrations of fictitious births, there will be follow-up of births which are notified by the NHS and not registered or vice versa.

2.8. Parents who register by phone or over the Internet will want confirmation of the centrally held record to check its accuracy. The Government will provide this free of charge once the birth registration has been entered on the database. Parents will also be able to buy a commemorative certificate either from the centre or from any local service provider. This document will not be acceptable for legal or official purposes. Increasingly Government will verify registration information electronically and hence not ask for certificates. Initially parents will be

able to buy a certificate for legal and administrative purposes both centrally and locally. However once the demand for paper certificates reduces significantly, certificates will only be available from the centre.

## **2.9. Children born to parents who are not married**

Each year almost a quarter of a million children (40 per cent of births) are born in England and Wales to parents who are not married to each other. Fifty thousand of these children are registered without their father's details. The law assumes, unless someone says otherwise, that a child born to parents who are married to one another is a child of the marriage. Conversely, where a child's parents are not married to each other, the father's particulars may only be recorded provided both he and the child's mother or a court acknowledge his paternity. The Government accepts that this framework should continue. As it wants to encourage parents to take responsibility for their children, the Adoption and Children Bill currently before Parliament will give parental responsibility to unmarried fathers who register the birth of their child with the mother.

2.10. However, given the increasing numbers of birth registrations which involve both parents, it is important to provide more flexibility for the parents. It will be possible for a mother and father to give information independently if they want to, and this will be subject to checks. If they do this and the parents cannot agree about naming the child or other aspects, then they may have to go to the local service provider.

## **Being responsive to the needs of individuals**

### **2.11. Making it easier to register births belatedly**

The Government intends to remove unnecessary barriers to enable a person whose birth was not registered in his/her infancy to do so more easily. Provided satisfactory evidence is produced, such births would be registered, subject to the approval of the Registrar General.

### **2.12. Registration in Welsh**

The Government will extend the facility for bi-lingual (English/Welsh) birth registration to include events occurring in England to Welsh speaking parents. Presently, only births that occur in Wales can be registered bi-lingually in English and Welsh. This can cause a problem, for example, if a Welsh mother gives birth in a hospital over the border in England and cannot then obtain a birth registration in bi-lingual format. After the registration it will be possible for documents to be

issued in Welsh only, English only or both languages.

### 2.13. Equal treatment of men and women

The same information will continue to be recorded in the register for both parents.

## Registering a death

### Background

2.14. The registration of deaths plays an important role in the protection of human life. It also helps the family settle legal and administrative matters and provides vital information to the Government and for research. The registration of a death is primarily the duty of a close relative. The Government will preserve the current legal obligation to register. As with birth registration, there must be no disincentive to register or disadvantage to those upon whom the duty falls. The registration of a death will therefore remain a free service.

2.15. For many bereaved people, the giving of information to a registrar about a death is much more than a legal duty. It forms an integral part of the grieving process. A registrar is perceived as the person who can provide advice, reassurance and information at a time of great stress and sadness. The Government recognises the importance of this personal service which will be maintained through a network of local offices.

2.16. Responses to the consultation saw benefits in the registration service also providing advice on where to obtain help and information on such matters as probate, counselling and financial assistance. This service is already given by many registrars. As for births registrations, the Government will incorporate this element of service delivery as a feature of the national standards for civil registration.

2.17. Currently, a vital component of death certification is the independent verification of the event by a doctor or coroner. When a death is due to natural causes, it is certified by a doctor issuing a medical certificate of cause of death. This is delivered to the registrar. Any death suspected of being unnatural or which cannot be certified has to be reported to the coroner for him to investigate. The death cannot be registered until the coroner has completed his enquiries and issued his notification to the registrar.

2.18. One of the fundamental purposes of death registration is the protection of human life. Society needs to be confident that no burial or cremation can take place without there having been an opportunity to investigate the death and that there are full and proper procedures for its certification. Following the trial and conviction of

Harold Shipman for murder, the Home Office led an interdepartmental working party reviewing the procedures involved in certification and the authorisation of burials and cremations. A report on the findings was published on 28 September 2001. In January 2001, in response to the report of the Inquiry into the Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust (the Alder Hey report), the Chief Medical Officer recommended further consideration to be given to one of the emerging findings of the death certification review. This was the creation of a new post of 'medical examiner' whose duties might subsume some of those currently the responsibility of registrars of deaths such as checking the medical certificate of cause of death and the statutory responsibility to refer deaths to the coroner in certain circumstances. Subsequently, the Home Office announced a fundamental review of coroner arrangements, including examination of the proposed medical examiner system. The Government will consider the results of these Reviews, together with the findings and recommendations of the public inquiry into the circumstances of the case of Harold Shipman. Whatever the outcome, it will be important for the legislative framework for the registration of deaths to be flexible enough to accommodate any changes which may emerge.

2.19. Responses to the consultation strongly supported the application of up to date information technology to this paper based system. The central database of deaths, with electronic data exchange between doctors, coroners and registrars will provide a streamlined service that will ease the burden on the bereaved. When all this is in place, the Government will introduce the option of registering a death by telephone or using the Internet. Until then, the proposed central database would allow relatives to register the death at any local office, though the informant must have the medical certificate of cause of death. Some deaths will need to be referred to the coroner of the area where the death occurred and there will need to be co-ordinated IT systems to do this electronically.

2.20. Relatives who register the death by phone or over the Internet will want confirmation of the centrally held record. The Government will provide this free of charge once the death has been entered on the database and will provide authority for burial or cremation to the funeral provider. Initially relatives registering a death will continue to need a certificate suitable for legal and administrative purposes and this will be available both locally and from the centre. Once the demand for paper certificates has reduced significantly, certificates will only be available from the centre.

## Being responsive to the needs of individuals

### 2.21. Who can register a death

The Government accepts the need to update and extend the list of people who are eligible to register a death. The current list of persons qualified to register deaths will incorporate the 'life partner' of the deceased and the executor. Such a change will reflect the changing shape of society and the variety of forms that the family unit now takes.

### 2.22. Registration in Welsh

In line with birth registration, the Government will extend the facility to register a death in English and Welsh to include deaths which take place in England. After the registration it will be possible for documents to be issued in Welsh only, English only or both languages.

### 2.23. Equal treatment of men and women

The same information in the register will be recorded for men and women. This will include, for example, the inclusion of marital status and the name and occupation of the deceased's spouse for all persons.

### 2.24. Deaths at sea

The Government recognises the distress caused to families because some deaths at sea cannot currently be registered. There will be a new provision for the registration of certain deaths that occur at sea but are not connected with a ship or offshore installation. Currently such deaths, although few in number, cannot be registered.

### 2.25. Short death certificate

The revised arrangements for access to registration information (Chapter 6) means that there will be a certificate that omits the cause of death.

## Registering a still-birth

2.26. The present procedures for registering a still-birth combine features of both birth and death registration. These procedures have long been acknowledged (by a variety of organisations including the British Medical Association, the Coroners Society and SANDS) to have deficiencies and to hinder the grieving process for parents. The Government intends to make the registration of a still-birth similar to that for a death so that, in particular, medical investigations can be carried out in appropriate cases and records are maintained of the burial or cremation of the bodies of still-born children.

2.27. At present a still-birth cannot be registered later than three months from the date it occurred. The Government will change this restriction so

that a still-birth may be registered up to one year after it occurred. After that time, registration will be subject to the authority of the Registrar General in line with death registrations.

2.28. The list of those qualified to give information for a still-birth is at present the same as that for those qualified to give information for a birth. This will be replaced by the list of those persons eligible to give information for the registration of a death. As a result the law will permit a still-birth to be registered by the father on his own, if he is not married to the mother, in the same way as such a father may now register the death of an infant.

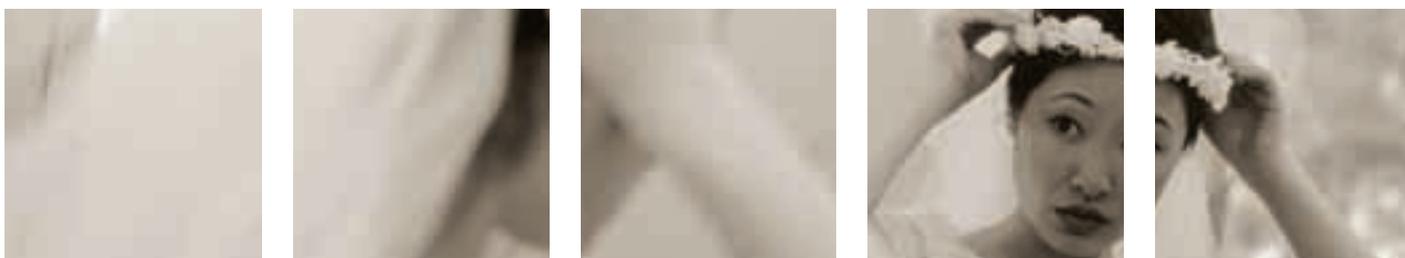
2.29. In 1999, 5,700 babies were stillborn or died in the four weeks after birth. Some parents have a multiple birth where one or more children are stillborn and others may die shortly after birth. The new arrangements for registering births, stillbirths and deaths will enable parents registering more than one type of event to do so more easily and consistently.



## Chapter 3 Marriage

Any modernisation of the law relating to marriage must continue to protect the rights of the individuals involved. It is also important that the seemly and dignified nature of the marriage ceremony is not compromised.





3.1. Any modernisation of the law relating to marriage must continue to protect the rights of the individuals involved. It is also important that the seemingly and dignified nature of the marriage ceremony is not compromised.

#### **Civil Preliminaries to marriage**

3.2. The changes to the civil preliminaries to marriage, introduced last year by the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999, have reaffirmed the Government's policy that couples should give notice of marriage in person. Currently individuals have to give formal notice of their intention to marry at the register office where they live. Couples will have a choice of where to give notice provided that they have had a usual residence in England or Wales for the preceding seven days. Local registration service providers will be expected to ensure that individuals have a choice of times for giving notice of marriage and will receive a statutory fee from the individual. They will also have information on marriage preparation and support services which will be made available to the couple. Greater use of technology will improve administration and reduce the burden on the public.

3.3. Staff working for a local registration service provider will enter the information required for the notice of marriage onto the central database that contains records of vital events. When this includes records for people born in England and Wales in the last 70 years, information on the database will be used to confirm and help to

ensure that the information given is correct. For most people, this will remove the need to produce documentary evidence of name, age or marital status. The couple will still need to provide evidence of their nationality.

3.4. Once all the necessary checks have been completed and the required 15 days waiting period has passed, the couple will be given a document (schedule) to confirm that the marriage ceremony can proceed. This will also be used later when verifying that the marriage ceremony has taken place. The person who conducted the ceremony and the bride and groom as well as the witnesses will sign this schedule immediately after the ceremony. It will then be returned to the local registration service provider who will add the details to the notices of marriage already held on the database. This will confirm that the marriage has taken place.

#### **Banns and common licence (Ecclesiastical preliminaries to marriage)**

3.5. Currently marriages according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England and the Church in Wales can take place following ecclesiastical preliminaries such as banns and common licence without the need for civil preliminaries. The Archbishop's Council of the Church of England has established a Working Group to review aspects of marriage law. The terms of reference of the Working Group include consideration of the preliminaries to marriage, including the possibility of civil preliminaries for

all couples and the residential requirements for getting married in church. The Church in Wales contributed to the Church of England working group. The Church of England working group presented its initial recommendations to the General Synod in November 2001.

3.6. If the outcome of the Church of England review is that there should be no change to the current system of ecclesiastical preliminaries, it may not be possible for this 'schedule' system to extend to those marriages which take place according to the rites and ceremonies of the Church of England or the Church in Wales. It would therefore be necessary to subsequently capture these marriages electronically to add to the national database.

3.7. If the outcome is the adoption of a system where everyone uses the civil system of preliminaries, the intention is that the couple must still first make contact with the minister in order to make the arrangements for the ceremony. This would maintain the Church's pastoral role and provide an opportunity for religious guidance and support. The couple would then give notice of their intention to marry to the local registration service provider. Any greater use of technology in relation to the preliminaries to, or to the registration of, marriage would be extended to all marriages which take place in England or Wales.

### **3.8. Publicising marriage**

The arrangements for publicising marriages will be updated. At present, a notice of marriage is displayed in the Register Office of the district where the bride or groom usually lives. Whilst this could continue, it is arguable that in today's more mobile society, couples are often not known to the local community. The Government's view is that use of the Internet could be more appropriate to ensure public knowledge of the event, though it is important information is available locally. This could be via a notice board or Internet link.

### **3.9. Improving the range of information required in the registration of a marriage**

This will include the birth dates (rather than the ages) of the bride and groom, their places of birth, the names and occupations of their fathers and mothers and the name and occupation of a step-parent where applicable. Respondents to the consultation indicated that they would like to see fuller information in a marriage registration. People are often distressed to discover that they cannot include the name of a step-parent in the record of one of the most important events of their lives.

3.10. Central and local government departments and Agencies will be able to access the central database to verify the particulars of a marriage for

specified purposes. Other public and private sector agencies and organisations may also be able to verify information provided the couple have given their informed consent. This will mean that there will be a significant reduction in the use of paper certificates. The Government accepts that for certain purposes, specifically provision to overseas authorities and during the transitional period, there will continue to be a need for certificates.

3.11. As with births and deaths, it is envisaged that the couple will want a document that will act as a personal record of the event. Every couple will be able to buy a commemorative certificate. A certificate suitable for legal purposes will be available both locally and centrally, but once the demand for paper certificates reduces significantly, certificates will only be available from the centre.

## **The marriage ceremony**

### **3.12. Religious and civil ceremonies**

Civil marriage was introduced in 1837 to provide a marriage facility for couples who did not want a religious ceremony. The Government recognises this distinction is important and will maintain it.

### **3.13. Civil Marriage in special circumstances**

There will continue to be civil marriage services for the housebound or detained to give notice of marriage and to be married where they live. The Registrar General will be able to waive the 15 day waiting period where he considers there are compelling reasons to do so. The provision for marriages of the terminally ill that are currently solemnised under the Marriage (Registrar General's Licence) Act 1970 will continue.

### **3.14. More choice on place of marriage**

There is wide support for relaxation of the current restrictions on the places where people may get married in England and Wales. There is also support for removal of the legal restrictions on residence for religious marriage to bring them in line with those for civil ceremonies, where couples can choose to marry in any part of England and Wales.

### **3.15. More choice in marriage ceremony**

Public expectation for enhancements to and involvement in the planning of civil wedding ceremonies has increased considerably over the last ten years. The introduction of civil marriage in approved premises in 1995 acted as a further catalyst to improvements in the service. Additions to civil weddings such as music and poetry readings are now available to many couples thereby personalising the event and giving it

greater meaning. The Government supports the provision of such enhancements and proposes that this should form one element of the national standards for civil marriage.

3.16. The Government intends to introduce a system based on the appointment of celebrants who would be responsible for the solemnisation of either religious or civil marriages. Such a system already works in other parts of the world including Scotland, New Zealand and parts of Australia (see Annex B for more information). As well as widening the choice of marriage venue, the Government will remove the restriction on the time of marriage and allow ceremonies to take place at any time. These restrictions have been in place since the inception of civil registration but are no longer necessary in today's society.

3.17. The place and time of marriage will become a matter for negotiation between the celebrant and the parties to the marriage. This is already an option for those professing the Jewish religion or those belonging to the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), who, for historical reasons, have always been exempt from the restrictions on place and time of marriage. National standards for civil ceremonies will set out the criteria to be met in order to ensure that the solemnity and dignity of the occasion are not compromised.

3.18. Religious celebrants will be appointed by the religious groups to which they belong and notified to the Registrar General. The local registration service provider will appoint civil celebrants, who initially will be employees of the local service provider. The local service provider will be expected to offer a choice of venues and time. There will be no restriction in registration legislation on where civil or religious celebrants can celebrate marriages, provided the distinction between civil and religious ceremonies remains. This will give more choice for couples and introduce an element of competition that does not currently exist. The Government believes this will encourage an improvement in standards across the country.

3.19. There will be no fee for the appointment of a civil or religious celebrant. There will be a statutory fee for the attendance of a civil celebrant at a marriage ceremony. Local registration service providers and religious organisations will be able to set additional fees where, for example, the celebrant travels from their normal office or outside their parish to perform a ceremony or provide an enhanced ceremony.

3.20. The Church of England, Church in Wales and the other main religious denominations will regulate themselves in terms of appointing religious celebrants. The Registrar General will require to be notified of their appointment. For

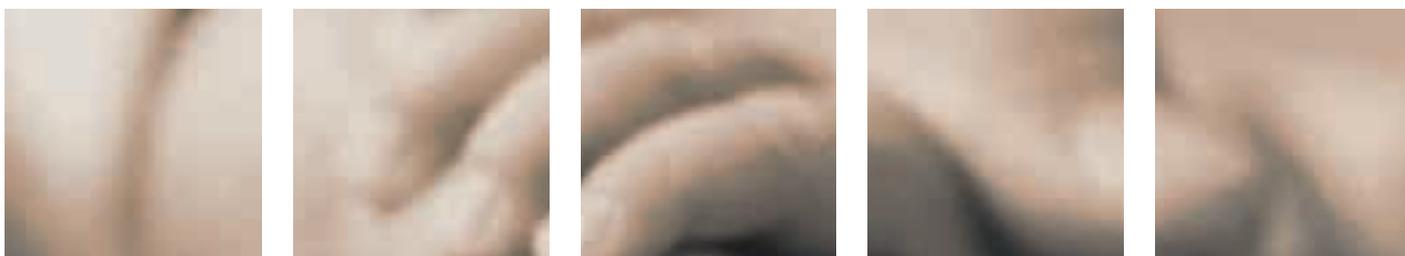
other less known or new denominations, the Registrar General will wish first to establish whether the criteria for recognition as a religious body are met before approving the appointment of religious celebrants.

3.21. The Government believes that the celebrant-based system is more flexible and responsive to the couples needs and circumstances. It also brings considerable administrative simplicity in line with the Government's commitment to deregulation and modernisation, but provides appropriate safeguards for this important change in individuals legal status.

## Chapter 4 New services

In its consultation document *Supporting Families*, the Government recognised the potential for, and the benefits of, the registration service adopting a wider role through the provision of information on support and advisory services relating to key life events and in providing celebratory services.





4.1. In its consultation document *Supporting Families*, the Government recognised the potential for, and the benefits of, the registration service adopting a wider role through the provision of information on support and advisory services relating to key life events and in providing celebratory services.

4.2. The registration service is ideally placed to act as a focal point for information on services associated with births, deaths and marriage, for example on social security, marriage preparation and probate. Currently information on relevant public and private sector services is made available in the form of leaflets available from registrars. The present fragmented structure of the registration service has contributed to a piecemeal approach to providing these related services. The Government will ensure that local service providers include the development of this aspect of the service in their business strategies by making it a feature of the proposed national standards. Customers using telephone or Internet services will also have access to this information.

#### **4.3. Baby naming**

Baby naming ceremonies can provide an alternative to christening or other forms of religious dedication, which celebrate the birth of a child. It gives parents who prefer a secular ceremony the opportunity to celebrate the birth of their child publicly and show their commitment to its upbringing. The Government will expect

local providers to ensure a baby naming service is available.

#### **4.4. Marriage reaffirmation**

Some couples wish to celebrate key wedding anniversaries by reaffirming their marriage vows. The Government supports the provision of secular marriage reaffirmation ceremonies and will expect local providers to ensure such ceremonies are available. These will provide couples with an alternative to equivalent religious ceremonies and form a natural and appropriate extension to the role of the registration service.

#### **4.5. Civic funerals and other celebratory services**

The Government recognises that there may be other celebratory services which it would be appropriate for the local registration service to offer, such as civil funerals. The law will be designed to be responsive to emerging public demand and enable local service providers to meet the needs of their local community.

4.6. The Government proposes to include the availability of celebratory services as an element of national standards of service provision. It will be at the discretion of each local service provider as to whether they make any or all of these services available themselves or, alternatively, direct enquiries to existing agencies providing these services. All services will be self financing.

## Chapter 5 A through life record

The creation of a central database of registration records provides the opportunity to make improvements in line with developments in other countries.





5.1. The creation of a central database of registration records provides the opportunity to make improvements in line with developments in other countries. Civil registration systems in Scotland, Northern Ireland and parts of Canada and Australia, for example, allow names to be updated. While continuing to hold the initial information, the Government intends to move away from holding the traditional ‘snapshot’ of life events towards the concept of a ‘living record’. In time, updating the information in a birth record will mean that changes to a person’s names, and, potentially, sex will be able to be recorded. It will not be mandatory for changes to be notified but it is envisaged that an up-to-date ‘living record’ will be valuable to both individuals and Government. Applications will be accepted from the person who is the subject of the record. If the person is under 18 years of age, then their parents or guardian will be able to act on their behalf.

5.2. Over time, the birth, marriage, divorce, and death records of events occurring in England and Wales and relating to a person will be linked to create a single ‘through life’ record. Details of naturalised citizens could also be included. This information will provide assistance in checking that people are free to marry and that a dead person’s identity cannot be abused.

5.3. The Government is considering establishing a system for record linkage of existing registration records. For some of the population, birth, marriage, death and possibly divorce records

would be linked as part of the creation and on-going maintenance of the ‘through life record’. This would enhance the quality of individual records for the users of registration information more quickly. The creation of a ‘through life record’ would play a role in assisting citizens to prove their identity as these records should contain more checkpoints, and hence be more useful to users for verification purposes.

#### **5.4. Maintaining the quality**

The registration service in England and Wales has a good reputation for completeness, accuracy and integrity of the records it creates and maintains. These are qualities that the now antiquated paper-based system achieves through rigorous checks, tightly drawn legislation and good administration. The move to an electronic system for the recording and storage of information brings new opportunities to provide a simpler and more flexible system for gathering, managing, correcting and updating integrated registration information. The processes and evidence upon which amendments may be made to the records will be sufficiently robust to maintain their integrity and accuracy.

#### **5.5. Making changes**

There is strong support for some relaxation to the rules that govern corrections to the records. Currently, once a record has been created, the only corrections that can be made are where it can be shown that an error was made at the time of registration and that this can be established.

Correcting even the simplest spelling error requires formal procedures and the examination of appropriate evidence. The final record contains the full original and corrected information which is shown on subsequently issued certificates. The Government recognises this can act as a disincentive. In future, changes (to reflect developments after the original record was made) will be made and formally recorded. Documents issued from the records will contain only the information as amended, though all the information will be retained. The level of evidence, other than that based upon legal proceedings, on which changes to the records will be authorised will continue to be at the discretion of the Registrar General.



## Chapter 6 Privacy and access to registration records

Data security, confidentiality and privacy are key factors in any future system. It is crucial that citizens maintain their faith in the civil registration process and that information continues to be complete and accurate.





## The balance between privacy and openness

6.1. Data security, confidentiality and privacy are key factors in any future system. It is crucial that citizens maintain their faith in the civil registration process and that information continues to be complete and accurate. It is also important that citizens gain the benefits of streamlined Government services that the use of technology can bring. When an individual registers a birth, marriage or death, it will be made clear how the information will be used.

6.2. The most popular response to balancing an individual's privacy with public interest was to restrict access to the recent records – those relating to people born less than 100 years ago. Some respondents also felt that there should be no commercial exploitation of registration records, that access to records should be for official purposes only and that the public should have full knowledge about who has access and why. Respondents acknowledged that there would need to be well controlled access by 'approved users' eg banks, building societies, insurance companies etc.

6.3. Currently, the law allows anyone to purchase a birth, death or marriage certificate of any event provided that it has been identified in an index. While enabling public scrutiny of the records, it has meant that information about individuals is potentially widely available and records can be used for fraudulent purposes. For people under

100 years old, the Government believes that it is essential for some information to remain in the public domain. However some of the information (notably addresses, occupation, and cause of death) will be treated as confidential. The confidential information will be available only to the individual and their families, those who are given access by the individual/family and those agencies having legally prescribed access. The Government believes this is the right balance between an individual and their family's right to privacy and the need for openness to protect other people's and society's interests. Annex C contains details of the information that is currently and will be collected at the registration of a birth, marriage or death and the associated access and confidentiality arrangements.

6.4. Legislation will provide statutory cover for direct notification to other Government Departments of certain events and the data they should receive eg DWP, DH and the Benefits Agency. In other cases eg UK Passport Services and the DVLA, the agency or department will inform the citizen that the data they have supplied in their application may be checked against centrally held registration records. In other circumstances the consent of the informant will be required to be given to the body making the enquiry, eg notifications of a death to an insurance company. Some information will be collected for statistical or research purposes. There will be no exploitation of registration records for purely commercial purposes.

## Historic records

6.5. There is wide support for open access to all historic records of births, marriages and deaths and the full record being made available by electronic means. Respondents to the consultation felt that giving access to the historic records and removing the necessity to purchase a certified copy of an entry should reduce the ongoing costs and hence fees.

6.6. The Government has concluded that historic records should be defined as those relating to people born over 100 years ago and that these should be made fully available to the public. In line with the census, this could include information collected for statistical purposes. As records move to the over 100 year old category they would be classed as historic and as such become open records.

6.7. The Government has no view on the extent to which historic records should be electronically captured. It recognises that this would be of great value particularly to the genealogical community as the current system only allows access to indexes that are not widely available. Such a system would secure improvements in service delivery and, in time, cost for the customers and has the potential for substantial increases in the use of the records. The Government would support not-for-profit organisation(s) investing in introducing electronic access to these records. Statistical information would be lodged in a Data Archive under appropriate E-preservation standards.

6.8. Once records are available electronically, the only requirement for certificates will be for legal use, which will be small. The original registers currently held at Register Offices are important historic documents and will be transferred to the local Record Office for preservation. The local Record Office will be able to offer access to the public, to assist social inclusion.

### Records relating to people born in the last 100 years – the ‘active population’

6.9. Electronic registration of life events and the availability of electronic birth, marriage and death records is essential to delivering fully computerised Government transactions as without it paper birth, marriage and death certificates will continue. The Government has set stretching targets for electronic delivery of services in the public sector. Fully automating processes in the UK Passport Services, DVLA and DWP assumes electronic access to civil registration information.

6.10. Central and local government departments and agencies will be able to access the central database to verify the particulars of a birth or death, for example in connection with an

application for child benefit, a passport or pension or removing names from the electoral register. Other public and private sector agencies and organisations will also be able to verify information provided a parent, the individual or the relative has given consent. This will reduce the use of paper certificates and simplify the dealings families and individuals have with Government. It will help in the Government’s work on ensuring the identity of applicants for passports and other services and reduce the potential for fraud. The Government accepts that for certain purposes, specifically provision to overseas authorities and during the transitional period, there will be a continuing need for certificates.

6.11. The new system will remove the need for birth, marriage and death certificates for most official purposes. Users of civil registration certificates include UK Passport Services, NHS, DWP, DVLA, the Court Service, Local Authorities, Banks, Building Societies, Insurance companies and other organisations. Thus, for example, as part of the process of applying for a passport, an individual would give permission for UK Passport Services to access their records on the registration database.

6.12. There will be electronic notification of civil registration events to users. New civil registrations will be held centrally on the same database as computerised birth, death and marriages records relating initially to the previous 70 years. This database will enable all users of birth, marriage and death certificates to access the source information electronically. Records will transfer to the historic record system and become fully open when the person reaches 100 years of age.

6.13. Individuals who register by telephone or over the Internet will want confirmation of the content of the centrally held record. The Government will provide this free of charge once an event has been entered onto the central database. This document will have no legal status or evidential value. A commemorative certificate will be available for births and marriages. When the reduction in the use of paper certificates for official purposes occurs, certificates for legal purposes will only be available from the centre.

### Transitional Arrangements

6.14. The Government acknowledges that it is unrealistic to expect that all records will be electronically available initially. New events will be fully computerised and those records less than 70 years old will be computerised as soon as possible. The length of this transitional period is hard to estimate. The Government believes that it should not be longer than 5 years and, hopefully, shorter. The computerisation of registration records has significant financial consequences, notably for

local service providers. A clear implementation strategy with well published mile stones will greatly assist them in planning for the loss of certificate revenue.

## Chapter 7 Overseas and other records

Having considered the creation, retention and access to records of key life events in England and Wales, it is appropriate to include those other records for which the Registrar General has responsibility.





7.1. Having considered the creation, retention and access to records of key life events in England and Wales, it is appropriate to include those other records for which the Registrar General has responsibility. These consist primarily of records deposited under various Acts in respect of events occurring overseas, on board ships at sea, on oil rigs and on board aircraft registered in the United Kingdom. Also in the custody of the Registrar General are records of war deaths of servicemen during the First and Second World Wars and the Boer War.

7.2. Regular returns of births, marriages and deaths are made to the Registrar General by British Consulates and High Commissions, HM Forces overseas, the Registrar General of Shipping and Seamen and the Civil Aviation Authority. Certified copies of the records are available to the public upon application on payment of a prescribed fee.

7.3. The Government does not propose to disturb the current arrangements whereby these events are recorded and deposited. They will however be included within the proposal to convert birth, marriage and death records into computer readable form. This will not only improve access for the public but assist in preserving these historic and often unique records.

7.4. The registration of events abroad involving British Citizens with British registering authorities is not compulsory and as such the records are incomplete. However, where such a record does

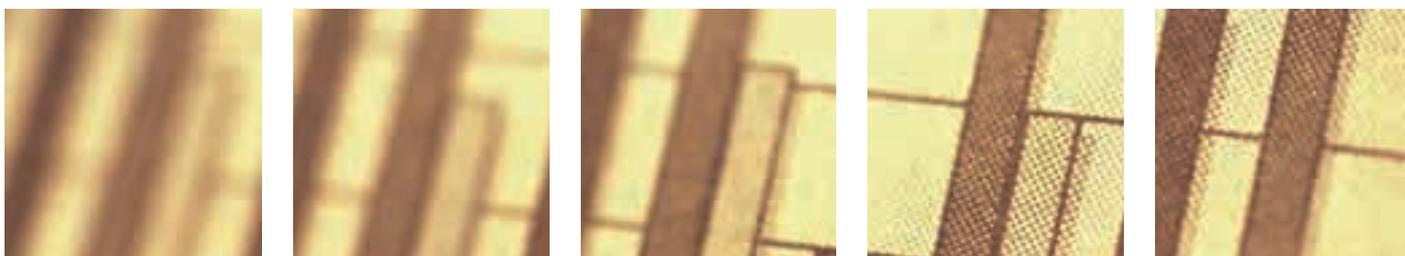
exist it will provide one means of ensuring that the 'through life record' (See Chapter 5) is maintained.

7.5. Other records created and maintained by the Registrar General are those relating to children given into the care of the Foundling Hospital between 1853 and 1948 and the birth records of children found abandoned since 1977. The transfer to and future creation of these records in electronic format will also be included within the scope of the programme of computerisation of registration records.

## Chapter 8 Statistics

Civil registration provides high quality information on births, deaths and marriages. This information is used extensively for monitoring the size and composition of the population and in making projections of the health and circumstances of people's lives.





8.1. Civil registration provides high quality information on births, deaths and marriages. This information is used extensively for monitoring the size and composition of the population and in making projections of the health and circumstances of people's lives. It enables a picture of the changing patterns and trends at local and national level to be painted in National Statistics. It contributes to the development and monitoring of policies across Government and is vital in allocating resources to central and local government and to the National Health Service.

8.2. Because of the importance of the civil registration system in providing information on society, it must be possible to make changes to the information collected more quickly and to have more flexibility in what is collected. In future, the primary legislation will provide the power to collect statistical information, with the details set out in subordinate legislation. This will allow the law governing what is collected to be updated to meet changing needs whilst retaining the protection offered by a statutory framework.

8.3. Registration of births and deaths provides a good opportunity to collect valuable information from all parents and about those who have died. At a time which can be stressful, there is, however, concern from the public about the overall burden and the collection of information which does not seem relevant to the actual registration itself. Civil registration must ensure the civil status of the individual is safeguarded, so the questions asked and the overall process must be sufficiently

acceptable to the public to ensure all births and deaths are registered and contain high quality information. Respondents to the consultation recognised the need for this balance.

8.4. The Government's view is that the legislation should enable full testing of potential questions. This should ensure sufficient public acceptability both of individual questions and the overall package, and that the results are of sufficient quality. Users of the information will be consulted on potential changes, the ultimate overall package and whether answering the questions is (in legal terms) voluntary or compulsory. Consultation will take a similar approach to that for the census, which also has to balance these issues with public acceptability and reliability of the information.

8.5. The Government is keen to reduce the overall burden on the public of providing information, at what is often a stressful time particularly for the bereaved. Enabling individuals to agree to the re-use of information provided already or to provide it at a more convenient time, would reduce this burden. This could mean, for example, using information provided to or available from the Health Service (eg ethnic origin, birth weight and gestational age of the baby). It could also mean that information for particular groups (eg about the industry in which the deceased worked when (s)he died of a particular illness, or from mothers about breastfeeding) being collected by a follow-up enquiry. This approach could meet the needs for very detailed information about a small

proportion of registrations as well as for validation, sample surveys and research.

8.6. Civil registration records will continue to be used in medical and social research within a framework that maintains undertakings on confidentiality given to the public at registration.



## Chapter 9 Structure of the service

The registration service must be organised in a way which makes civil registration easy, highly effective and complete.





9.1. The registration service must be organised in a way which makes civil registration easy, highly effective and complete. There must be ways of dealing with poor service providers. The local registration service must be able to meet local needs. It is important that the restrictions imposed by current legislation, particularly in respect of the employment status of Registration Officers, the different types of Registration Officers and the management of the local service, are addressed.

9.2. The changes in registration services that the Government proposes involve a fundamental change to its provision. While all aspects of marriages will remain a local service, some births and deaths will be registered centrally and the numbers are likely to grow over time. As the mechanics of record keeping are made easier by technology, the emphasis for local providers will continue to shift to celebratory and other services which help the public at times of the birth of a baby, marriage and bereavement.

9.3. The Registrar General will maintain his responsibility for ensuring that the service maintains its high quality and evolves to meet changing needs. He will be responsible for policy making, administering the central database, Internet and phone registration, and ensuring that all births, marriages and deaths are registered in England and Wales. Telephone and Internet based registration will be a responsibility of Central Government.

#### **Local Service role and standards**

9.4. Among those consulted, there was universal agreement that fundamental change is necessary to provide the flexibility to enhance existing and provide additional services both now and in the future, but no consensus on the nature of the change. The Government believes that the local service has to be underpinned by a structure that can deliver accuracy, completeness and timeliness whilst at the same time facilitating the radical changes to service delivery enabled by information technology.

9.5. The Government acknowledges that some members of the public will want to register births and deaths locally for some time. This person-to-person service will be complemented by a range of alternative service options including telephone and Internet. Marriage services will continue to be delivered in person. Thus local service providers will continue to manage the day to day provision of a range of person to person services to meet local needs. Developing the local service will be important in ensuring the local provider continues to be able to provide responsive local services as increasing use of online and telephone registration will change the emphasis of the work currently done locally.

9.6. The Government believes that the public should be free to choose any local service provider or use telephone/Internet services to meet their needs. As birth and death registration will continue to be free, funding for the overall

provision of registration services will provide appropriate recompense to the service providers. The cost of providing the remaining services will be covered by the fees paid by the public.

9.7. Local service providers will be expected to provide both birth and death registration services in the same office, but with separate areas for people waiting to register births and deaths. The Government will establish national standards for accommodation used for registration services. The benefits – more choice, improved accessibility and better physical access – will apply to all those who prefer a local personal service.

9.8. Services must reach minimum standards across the country. The Government will expect local service providers to be innovative and to meet the particular needs of their community. The introduction of national minimum standards will be underpinned by a statutory code of practice and statutory intervention powers, analogous to section 15 of the Local Government Act 1999. There will be an Inspectorate to monitor, share good practice, report on standards and to trigger action where they are not being met.

#### **Who should provide the local service?**

9.9. The Government has concluded that it is not practicable or efficient to create a national agency that would undertake both the central and local provision of services. Locally based providers are in the best position to ensure responsive personal services for their communities which can build on the many examples of current good practice.

9.10. The registration service is one of the longest standing central/local government partnerships and has worked well. Over the last decade we have seen major local government reorganisation, the introduction of the Marriage Act 1994 then the launch of the Government's Modernising Government programme as well as significant measures to modernise local government itself, including in particular the introduction of Best Value. All act as catalysts for change in the local registration service. There has been considerable investment by many local authorities to improve standards and services. The Government has considered a number of ways in which this arrangement could continue. These included no change to the existing structure and system, provision of local registration services becoming a duty of each local authority or, the provision of local registration service becoming the duty of a Group of local authorities.

9.11. The Government acknowledges that whilst the staff delivering the current service make it function well, it does not provide a platform for change. It offers no choice in the way or where life

events are registered. Improvements to the overall services are difficult to introduce. The current statutory officer status of registration officers means they do not have an employer. The employers normal responsibilities are split between the local authority and the Registrar General which is an anachronism. The service does not lend itself to modern day management techniques with no direct management hierarchy. There is inflexibility in the duties of registration officers, eg staffing duplication of resource in some marriage duties. Under current legislation there is no provision to introduce new services eg reaffirmation of marriage vows or baby naming. Thus the Government rejects the status quo as a viable option.

9.12. Making the provision of local registration services a duty of local authorities has the advantage of using existing staff expertise within the authority and for maintaining service delivery. Existing high quality accommodation could continue to be used. The Local Government Association has proposed that self-regulation would be a useful tool in further driving up standards and has suggested the creation of a similar body to the Local Authority Co-ordinating Body on Food and Trading Standards (LACOTS).

9.13. The Government believes that making local person to person registration services a duty of existing local authorities and making registration officers local authority officers provides the best option from which the service can evolve. Technology and customer choice means local service delivery in year one will be very different to what is required in year five and beyond. In view of the experience, investment and local added value that local authorities can bring to the service, their continued involvement is seen as an advantage. Although the current 172 providers leads to a divergence of standards, Best Value principles, national standards and an Inspectorate will provide an appropriate framework for local authorities to judge how best to meet the local requirement for person to person registration services and for central government to ensure they are delivered. Where they are better able to achieve efficiency and effectiveness by entering partnerships with other Local Authorities or sub-contracting part or all of the services whilst retaining overall responsibility, this will be encouraged. In some cases the Government expects that these registration services will be provided in conjunction with other local authority services at local access points ie. one-stop shops.

9.14. More commercial and competitive options reduce the number of providers, but carry significant overheads for administration both centrally and locally for the initial set up and

running costs. The Government believes that it is unlikely that in the longer term these initial benefits will be sustained. The use of statutory powers together with Best Value principles and a separate inspectorate is more likely to raise standards in those areas not currently meeting minimum standards. This framework will encourage innovation and enable Local Authorities currently providing high quality registration services to share their expertise with others. There can be no risk of failure in the registration service.

## Chapter 10 Financial issues

The fundamental changes to service delivery and the organisational changes needed to deliver them require a reappraisal of the financial arrangements that underpin the civil registration service. This requires examination of both the local and central elements of the service and the relationship between them.





10.1. The fundamental changes to service delivery and the organisational changes needed to deliver them require a reappraisal of the financial arrangements that underpin the civil registration service. This requires examination of both the local and central elements of the service and the relationship between them. In broad terms, the changes will require 'start up' investment, primarily in information technology, involve a shift in ongoing costs and, in the longer term, reduction in the cost to the public purse.

#### **Local Service Provision**

10.2. Chapter 9 explains that the Government's preferred organisational structure for provision of the local service is for the continuing involvement of local authorities. There are three options for financing the registration of births and deaths locally. All have funding from local taxation and retention of locally generated fees. In addition the first option has a flat rate element, the second one based on numbers of birth and deaths registered and the third is a hybrid. The celebration and registration of marriage will continue to be funded by the customer as will the new celebratory services.

10.3. Currently, local provision for birth and death registrations is tied to where the event occurred and there is significant income from certificates. The shift to centrally provided telephone/Internet services plus the customer having the choice of local offices in other areas will cause a significant shift in work. Electronic availability of registration

information will cause a major reduction in certificate purchases. In the first option, the flat rate for each Local Authority would need to be correspondingly re-evaluated each year and reduced overall. This would then be used to pay for those services provided centrally (which will be cheaper per registration). In the second option, the budget for births and deaths provision would be viewed as a whole with providers being paid on an agreed basis for the number of births and deaths they registered.

10.4. The Government believes that the third option – a hybrid approach – is the best approach. This would mean that each local service provider would receive a base payment to ensure the delivery of a locally-based service and an additional payment per event to encourage competition and investment.

#### **Central element, new Registrations and 'Active Population' database**

10.5. Setting up the database of the active population and ensuring new registrations can be added to it requires start-up investment. Expertise from the private sector will be essential in developing the system and running the technical infrastructure. Users of the service will pay an access charge, which will be less than the current cost of a certificate.

#### **Historic Records**

10.6. For the historic records, a condition on any consortia that provides the finance and resource

to computerise the records will be the requirement to provide the infrastructure to enable the public to access the records. General Register Office and the local registration service will continue to provide the certificate service for these records until it is available from the consortia. As it is likely it would be made available in a phased approach, the use of the local service, and therefore the income, would correspondingly diminish over time.

10.7. Work on financial and charging arrangements is being taken forward with the Treasury, Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions and Local Authorities.



## **Annex A Registration: Modernising a Vital Service**

Summary of the views expressed by respondents.

Individuals, groups and representative bodies submitted almost 1000 responses to the public consultation exercise with over 9000 replies to individual questions. The following is a summary of their views.

**Q1. Should it be possible to register births and deaths in a range of ways? (2.2)**

There were 450 responses to this question. Of these 300 (67 per cent) were in favour of making it possible to register births and deaths in a range of ways.

The general feeling was that, although alternative methods should be made available, personal attendance should still be an option for those who prefer it. Suggestions included a registration system without geographical boundaries, hospitals and coroners entering data for registration onto a central database (without the need for an informant). Also, basing registrars in hospitals and having multi-functional officers whose duties were not solely registration duties were suggested. Those not in favour of the idea cited loss of quality of data as the main reason.

**Q2. Should electronic links be developed with hospitals, coroners, undertakers, crematoria and government departments? How should they be used? (2.3)**

Of the 359 responses to this question, 335 (93 per cent) expressed support for the development of electronic links. The general feeling was that such links would speed up and improve service delivery

for the customer. It was stressed that there would need to be appropriate safeguards in the system to prevent fraud. Suggested links included UKPA and DSS.

**Q3. Should the registration service offer people a facility to notify the birth/death or marriage to public and private sector organisations? (2.3)**

Of the 244 responses 220 expressed the view that the registration service should offer people a facility to notify events to public and private sector organisations. The consensus was that the private sector should be charged for such notifications.

A number of those in favour felt that the passing on of information to other agencies should be on the basis of informed consent while a few thought it should be mandatory.

**Q4. Should the registration service become a focal point for services linked to birth and bereavement? (2.3)**

This question elicited 237 responses of which 218 were in favour of the registration service becoming a focal point for services linked to birth and bereavement. The most popular view was that the registration service should become a one-stop shop for such services. Also, that the service need not provide counselling but could provide leaflets or direct the public to the relevant services or experts.

**Q5. Should there be national standards for birth and death registration services and if so what should these be? How should they be enforced? (2.4)**

Of the 252 responses, 241 (96 per cent) supported the idea of national standards. Ideas on standards included privacy, confidentiality, staff accessibility and availability, provision of equipment, accommodation, quality of training, customer care, technical knowledge and accuracy.

Suggestions for enforcement included a system of inspection/audit, severe fines, regional inspectorate, 'Ofreg' or independent inspectorate, inspection agency drawn from practitioners and GRO.

**Q6. Would quality of information be affected by changing the system? (2.4)**

There were 201 responses to this question. The majority of respondents (72 per cent) expressed concern that the quality of information would be affected. The remainder thought that quality could be maintained if proper controls were put in place.

**Q7. Should people be able to marry anywhere? (3.1)**

There were 373 responses to this question. The majority of respondents (83 per cent) thought that people should either be able to get married anywhere or, more popularly, that a greater choice of venues should be provided.

The main arguments against marriage anywhere were the need to consider health and safety, accessibility for the public and the need to maintain the solemnity of the ceremony. The most popular suggestions for retaining some control were for the introduction of one-off licences or introducing approved celebrants in line with the Scottish system.

There was strong support from registration officers for the introduction of universal civil preliminaries and the removal of the residential requirement for marriages in registered buildings.

**Q8. Should there be national standards for civil marriage ceremonies and what should these be? (3.1)**

Of the 240 responses to this question, 227 (94 per cent) expressed the view that there should be national standards. Suggestions for the national standards included standards set by the couple, accommodation, length of ceremony, enhancements offered routinely and a reasonable service at a reasonable price. Several respondents suggested that the hours between which a marriage could take place should either be extended or the restriction removed altogether.

**Q9. Should it be possible for the preliminaries to marriage to be undertaken in a range of ways? (3.2)**

Sixty four per cent of respondents thought that it should be possible for marriage preliminaries to be undertaken in a range of ways. The remainder preferred the retention of the need for notice to be given in person. Among the responses to this question there was a call for universal civil preliminaries and the removal of the residential qualification for church marriages. There was also support for the adoption of the Scottish schedule system.

Those against offering a range of ways for giving notice felt that this would not sit well with the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999. The Act requires both parties to give notice in person to the superintendent registrar. They also felt that personal attendance meant that there would be greater commitment on the part of the couple.

**Q10. Should the registration service provide supportive services eg baby-naming, reaffirmation of vows, information on coping with bereavement or bringing up children or the legal status of unmarried parents?**

Of the 396 responses to this question 348 (88 per cent) supported the idea of a wider role for registrars. Those against seemed to be worried about lack of time and resources or simply that such services should be left to the professionals.

Although there was an overwhelming majority for the provision of supportive services there was no consensus as to what these services might be. Some respondents felt that baby-naming ceremonies were acceptable but not secular funerals and vice versa. Many felt that the registration service should not provide counselling but should direct customers to existing counselling services. The issues of proper training and funding for these services were also raised.

**Q11. Is there scope for a more integrated approach for marriages? (3.5)**

Of the 192 responses to this question 92 per cent favoured links being created with divorce and birth and death databases to help verify details in marriage notices. The electronic notification to other public and private agencies following the marriage was also mentioned subject to proper safeguards being in place. Those against felt that the onus should remain with the couple.

**Q12. What level of access should be available to registration records of varying ages? What uses are acceptable? How should historic records be defined? (4.3)**

There was overwhelming support for greater access to historic records. Suggestions included using the Internet or copies on CD-ROM, microfilm or microfiche being made available at county record offices or register offices. Respondents opined that giving access to the historic records and removing the need to purchase a certified copy of an entry should greatly reduce costs and hence fee.

Respondents to this question were fairly evenly divided on how historic records should be defined. Fifty per cent thought that it should be records over 75 years with forty six per cent opting for 100 years. The remainder suggested different definitions depending on the type of event eg 100 years for births, 50 years for marriages and deaths. Those in favour of the 100 years cut-off reasoned on the basis of peoples increased life expectancy and the parallel with census data.

**Q13. Should paper certificates, other than for personal commemorative use, be replaced by electronic transfer of information to approved users on request? (4.3)**

Seventy-six per cent of those who responded to this question did not wish to see paper certificates disappear altogether. They felt that there would continue to be a need for certificates for official purposes eg for use abroad. Many of those respondents acknowledged that electronic transfer of registration was inevitable but felt that customers should be able to choose.

**Q14. Should birth registration records be updated and if so with what information? (4.4)**

Of the 396 responses 357 (90 per cent) favoured some form of updating or linking of registration records. Suggestions for updates included linking deaths with births, marriages with divorces and change of sex. The adoption of the birth entry as the basis for a life record, showing any changes of name or status, was the most popular suggestion put forward.

**Q15. What contribution should civil registration make to proving identity and how? (4.4)**

Eighty per cent of the respondents to this question said that registration could have a vital role to play in providing proof of identity. The most popular suggestion was to use the 'life record' suggested at Q14. Others included issuing a unique identifier to each individual at birth, issuing an ID card at birth or issuing the NI number at birth.

The remaining twenty per cent felt that the matter of identity was either outside the scope of this review or that the registration service should have no part in it. A few expressed the fear that the

review could founder if it was linked to the question of identity.

**Q16. How should the balance be struck between an individual's privacy and public interest in registration records?**

The most popular suggestion (40 per cent) for balancing privacy with public interest was to restrict access to the recent records. Many respondents also said that there should be no exploitation of registration records for commercial purposes. They felt that access to records should be for official purposes with the public fully informed about who had access and why. Access by approved users or with the consent of the individual was also suggested by a small number of respondents. A few respondents expressed the view that full access to the records should be allowed unless a good reason could be given as to why privacy should be maintained.

**Q17. What should the arrangements be for historic registers? (4.6)**

This question attracted 539 responses. The overwhelming view was that the historic registers were part of our national heritage and should be open to the public in microfilm, microfiche or digital format. There was almost unanimous agreement that the original records should be stored locally at county record offices, local register offices or in other local archives. A number of respondents said that the records should be accorded public record status and become the responsibility of the Public Record Office.

**Q18. Should birth registration cater for a wider variety of circumstances. If so, what should they be? (5.2)**

Ninety per cent of respondents supported a more flexible system for registering births.

The most popular suggestions for change included simplifying late birth registration, making it possible for a registration officer to attest a declaration equivalent to the present form 16, providing better access to the service by offering different ways of registering (referring back to question 1) and extending or offering more flexible opening hours.

**Q19. Should death registration cater for a wider variety of circumstances? If so, what should they be? (5.3)**

Ninety per cent of respondents supported the idea of a service able to cater for a wider variety of circumstances. The most popular idea was for a life partner to be accepted as a qualification for a death informant. Several responses included reference to same-sex partners and also executors being allowed to register. Other popular

suggestions were for an out of hours (on-call) service to be made standard, extension of opening hours generally and facility to register certain deaths at sea. Over 50 respondents said that a deceased man's wife's details should be included in the death entry (see question 20).

**Q20. What information should be recorded in the register and on certificates? (5.5)**

The most popular ideas elicited by this question related to marriage entries. Over 30 per cent wanted to see the mother's details as well as the father's being included in the entry and 25 per cent suggested including stepparents where applicable. The inclusion of the date and place of birth of the parties and the addresses of witnesses were also mentioned.

Suggestions for additions to the birth register included time and day of birth, date and place of marriage of parents (if applicable), NHS no of parents, parents' dates of birth, donor information (where applicable) and subsequent changes to parents (eg step-parents).

Suggestions for inclusion in the death register included the NI and NHS number of the deceased, time and day of death, details of the deceased's parents and the intended place of disposal. Other suggestions for inclusion were the marital status of the deceased, details of a deceased man's wife and the last known address of the deceased. The option of a shortened form of death certificate with the cause of death excluded was a particularly popular idea.

**Q21. Should there be greater flexibility to correct errors in registration records? (5.6)**

Of the 249 responses to this question over 95 per cent contained the view that there should be greater flexibility to correct errors in entries particularly by way of local discretion/authority. Several respondents mentioned specifically minor spelling errors copied from medical certificates of

cause of death. Other suggestions were that marriage corrections should be treated the same as birth and death corrections, that certificates should be free from correctional notes and that a fresh registration should be offered where the error was embarrassing or sensitive.

**Q22. Should there be a more flexible and integrated approach to the collecting and sharing of information within government? (6.2)**

155 of the 164 respondents to this question were in favour of a more flexible and integrated approach. The majority view was that the collecting and sharing of information in this way was a legitimate use of the registration system particularly as it would help detect and prevent fraud. Other views expressed were that questions should not become too intrusive or place a burden on the individual as this might deter people from providing information. Also, there would need to be safeguards in place to protect people's privacy.

**Q23. Who should provide birth and death registration services? (7.2)**

Forty per cent of respondents recommended that local authorities should run the registration service. They argued that it was a local service with varying needs in different parts of the country to which local authorities were sensitive. Thirty-five per cent opted for a centrally run service or said only that registration officers should continue to provide the service. The remainder gave no specific preference or suggested alternatives such as the health service.

Many respondents referred to the need for national standards for a national service. The consensus was that this could only be achieved through administration and inspection by a central body. Many also referred to the need to remove the current demarcations created by the statutory status of officers. The need for a proper management structure was widely recognised.

**Responses to the consultation document by type of respondent**

Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Registrar	201	163	148	141	145	135	177	151	154	190	130	144	142	170
L.As	68	57	51	53	57	41	55	56	51	59	43	45	46	53
Public	140	103	22	21	25	11	124	19	16	123	10	459	384	145
Govt.	5	6	4	1	1	2	1	2	2	1	4	4	4	2
Religious	6	2	2	3	3	2	7	2	4	2	1	2	3	2
Medical	11	11	5	6	6	4	2	3	2	6	2	4	4	5
Statistical	4	4	2	2	5	4	1	1	0	2	0	4	3	4
Other	12	12	9	9	8	6	4	5	3	10	1	7	10	11
Genealogist	3	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	1	3	1	27	18	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>450</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>244</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>252</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>373</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>233</b>	<b>396</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>696</b>	<b>614</b>	<b>396</b>

**Q24. Who should provide marriage, baby naming, reaffirmation of vows? (7.2)**

Many respondents combined questions 23 and 24 resulting in a similar split in opinion as to who should run the service. However, there was almost total agreement that birth and death registration should not be split from the more ceremonial duties involved with marriage and any new services such as baby naming ceremonies.

**Q25. How should the registration service adopt wider use of technology in service delivery? (7.4)**

The responses to this question concentrated mainly on how wider use of technology could improve recording, storage and retrieval of records. Many of the public responses highlighted better access to the historic records. The most popular view was that of creating a central database of births, marriages and deaths with local and Internet access. The view of many was that the original records should be computerised and copied onto microfilm. Any partnership to achieve this should be with the ‘not for profit’ sector in order to keep the cost to the user down. Compiling computerised indexes that could contain more information and that could be made widely available, providing links with other records such as the Census and viewing entries on-line were also suggested.

Ideas for the more recent records included introducing a swipe ID card, the ability to issue certificates from any register office regardless of where the event took place, transferring data between government departments, remote ordering facility for certificates and record linkage.

**Q26. What are acceptable uses of civil registration records? (7.4)**

The overwhelming response was that registration records should not be made available in bulk to

private sector organisations and that they should not be used for commercial gain in any way.

Suggestions for their use included providing other government departments with information, a means of identification, medical and academic research, genealogy, social and economic research. Respondents were mindful of the need to protect the privacy of the individual. It was suggested that individuals or their descendants should give permission for the information to be used.

**Q27. Should the registration of key life events, remain free of charge? If so, should other fees be set at a level to ensure full cost recovery across registration services as a whole?**

Of the 360 responses to this question only 10 thought that the registration of births and deaths should attract a fee to offset the cost. Of the 350 who thought that this service should remain free, the majority felt that charges should be levied for any additional services provided by the registration service. A number also considered that fees from other services should be used to offset the cost of birth and death registration to enable the whole service to become self-financing.

**Q28. Should there be a standard marriage fee? If so how should it be set? (8.2)**

Over 90 per cent of respondents supported the view that there should be a standard fee for a standard marriage ceremony. Many respondents added that there should be a sliding scale of fees above the minimum to meet the cost of any enhancements and that these fees should be set locally. A few thought that the basic fee should be set locally as circumstances and costs varied across the country.

15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	TOTAL
131	103	142	122	130	140	144	101	178	145	120	83	159	130	4,019
47	38	50	39	44	39	44	38	84	79	58	30	68	63	1,456
108	40	306	17	15	55	31	9	25	6	351	284	108	21	2,978
2	1	3	3	3	3	4	2	0	6	0	2	0	0	68
1	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	4	3	1	2	5	4	66
5	3	2	3	5	8	9	5	7	2	1	1	10	2	134
3	1	4	4	6	3	5	3	0	6	2	6	1	0	200
6	5	5	4	2	5	6	5	7	2	6	4	8	3	175
3	1	26	2	1	7	5	1	3	0	14	8	1	0	138
<b>306</b>	<b>192</b>	<b>539</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>207</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>164</b>	<b>308</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>553</b>	<b>420</b>	<b>360</b>	<b>223</b>	<b>9,114</b>

## Annex B International comparisons

Many countries have introduced the changes proposed in *Civil Registration: Vital Change*. This table shows the proposed changes and the countries where they are in place in other countries. These countries are examples, there may well be others.

Country Key =

NSW	= New South Wales
NZ	= New Zealand
BC	= British Columbia
US States	= Some States identified

SERVICE DELIVERY	
Facility for birth and death registrations to be registered in a variety of ways eg via the Internet, telephone or in person	Canada/New York/Western Australia/NSW/NZ
Removing the need to register events in the area they occur	BC/NZ/NSW
Registration of births and deaths to remain free of charge	Japan/Canada/NSW/NZ
Additional services eg baby naming, reaffirmation of vows, civic funerals	Australia

MARRIAGES	
Remain a local service but records held centrally	Norway/Sweden/BC/NZ
Celebrants perform marriage ceremonies	Scotland/NSW/Canada/US States
Public given a wider choice of venue and time of marriage	US States/NZ

CIVIL RECORDS	
Records to be created and held centrally	BC/NZ/Norway/Sweden/NSW
Varying degrees of access to non-historic records/ information contained within records	US States/Canada/NSW
Records available centrally and locally	Australia/Scotland/Canada/US States
Certain registration data to be shared across other Government depts/agencies	Holland/Sweden/New Zealand
'Through life' record for individuals created (over time)	Norway/Finland/France/Germany NSW & NZ - death & divorces
Facility for 'through life' records to be updated and corrected	As above
Some record linkage of birth, death and marriage records (and possibly divorce)	As above
To maintain 'through life' records include, where possible, registration of events to citizens occurring abroad	France/Spain/Nordic countries
Restrict access to some data in the modern records ie those events occurring within 100 years	US States/Canada/NSW

ISSUE OF CERTIFICATES	
Commemorative certificates available	NSW/Oregon/Western Australia/Ontario (M)/Georgia

SERVICE STRUCTURE	
Registrar General to maintain responsibility for quality, policy making etc	Norway/Sweden
Local Service Provider to manage day-to-day provision of range of services to meet local needs	Most countries provide local service
Local Authorities best placed to act as Local Service Providers	France/Germany/Holland/Scotland
Change of employment status for registration officers	Sweden/Norway/Scotland/NSW/NZ
National Inspectorate/agency to oversee standards	Universal

## **Annex C Access to birth, marriage and death registration records and their contents**

There will be no restrictions on accessing registration information relating to individuals over 100 years of age. For registration information relating to individuals under 100 years old, each item of registration data in the register will be defined as being public or restricted.

There will be no restrictions on accessing registration information relating to individuals over 100 years of age. For registration information relating to individuals under 100 years old, each item of registration data in the register will be defined as being public or restricted. The restricted items are a small sub-set which is considered to be too personal or which could put the persons concerned at risk or open to unwarranted contact from commercial companies.

**Table A** shows the data items held on the **current** register entry which will remain publicly available.

**Table B** shows the data items **currently** included in the register which will be restricted. They are addresses, occupations and cause of death.

**Table C** shows the **proposed** data items which will be in the new electronic register entry which will remain publicly available.

**Table D** shows the **proposed** data items which will be in the new electronic register which will be restricted – addresses, occupations and cause of death.

**Table A****Contents of current register entry which will remain publicly available**

<b>Births</b>	Registration district/ entry No.	Date of birth	Place of birth	Name and surname	Sex	Name and surname of father	Place of birth of father	Name and surname of mother
<b>Death</b>	Registration district/ entry No.	Date of death	Place of death	Name and surname	Sex	Maiden name of woman who has married	Date of birth	Place of birth
<b>Marriages</b>	Registration district/entry No. Place of marriage	Date of marriage	Name and surname of the groom	Age of the groom	Marital status of the groom	Name and surname of father of the groom plus whether deceased	Name and surname of the bride	Age of the bride

**Table B****Information currently in the register where access will be restricted where the individual is under 100 years of age**

<b>Births</b>	Occupation of father	Occupation of mother	Usual address of mother	Informant's usual address				
<b>Deaths</b>	Occupation	Usual address	Informant's usual address	Cause of death				
<b>Marriages</b>	Rank or profession of the groom	Address at time of marriage for the groom	Rank or profession of the father of the groom	Rank or profession of the bride	Address at time of marriage for the bride	Rank or profession of father of the bride		

**Table C****Proposed contents of new register entry which will remain publicly available**

<b>Births</b>	local authority area/ entry No.	Date of birth	Place of birth	Name and surname	Sex	Name and surname of father	Place of birth of father	Name and surname of mother
<b>Death</b>	local authority area/ entry No.	Date of death	Place of death	Name and surname	Sex	Maiden name of woman who has married	Date of birth	Place of birth
<b>Marriages</b>	local authority area/ entry No. Place of marriage	Date of marriage	Name and surname of the groom	Date of birth of the groom	Marital status of the groom	Name and surname of father and mother and step-parent of the groom plus whether deceased	Name and surname of the bride	Date of birth of the bride

**Table D****Proposed information in the new register where access will be restricted for persons under 100 years of age**

<b>Births</b>	Occupation of father	Occupation of mother	Usual address of mother	Informant's usual address				
<b>Deaths</b>	Occupation	Usual address	Informant's usual address	Cause of death				
<b>Marriages</b>	Rank or profession of the groom	Address at time of marriage for the groom	Rank or profession of the father and mother and step-parent of the groom	Rank or profession of the bride	Address at time of marriage for the bride	Rank or profession of father and mother and step-parent of the bride		

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Place of birth of mother	Maiden surname of mother	Surname of mother at marriage if different from maiden surname	Informants name if not mother/father	Informants qualification	Date of registration	Name of registrar	Name given after registration and surname
If female & married/widowed name & occupation of husband	If <16, names & occupations of father and mother	Name and surname of informant	Informant's qualification	Name of person who certified death	Date of registration	Name of registrar	
Marital status of the bride	Name and surname of father of the bride plus whether deceased	Where married	Under what marriage conditions	Name and surname of 1st witness	Name and surname of 2nd witness	Name of celebrant	Name of registrar

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Place of birth of mother	Maiden surname of mother	Surname of mother at marriage if different from maiden surname	Informant's name if not mother/father	Informant's qualification	Date of registration	Name of registrar	Name given after registration and surname
married/widowed name & occupation of husband/wife	If <16, names & occupations of father and mother	Name and surname of informant	Informants qualification	Name of person who certified death	Date of registration	Name of registrar	
Marital status of the bride	Name and surname of father and mother and step-parent of the bride plus whether deceased	Where married	Under what marriage conditions	Name and surname of 1st witness	Name and surname of 2nd witness	Name of celebrant	Name of registrar

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## Glossary

## **GLOSSARY TERM**

## **DEFINITION**

**Active Population**

Persons born less than 100 years ago

**Authentication framework**

Means of providing identity for electronic communication

**Baby naming**

Secular alternative to baptism for celebrating the naming of an individual

**BMA**

British Medical Association

**Best Value**

Government initiative to improve standard of services within public sector

**Celebrant**

Person licensed to perform wedding ceremonies

**Civil Registration**

The timely registration with government of birth, death and marriage events that take place within its boundaries.

**DVLA**

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

**DWP**

Department of Work and Pensions

**General Synod**

Governing body of the Church of England

**Historic records**

Records relating to persons born over 100 years ago

**Kiosk**

Booth from which access to Local and Central Government Services can be accessed via the Internet

**Local Service Provider**

Potential provider of the service at the local level

TBC

**Local Authority Co-ordinating Body on Food and Trading Standards**

National non statutory body which promotes best practice within Local Authority food trading standard directorates

**Modernising Government/ e-government**

The Government's policy or improving sharing of information and greater use of Information Technology

**National Agency**

Central Government Agency responsible for total delivery of registration services

**NHS Information Strategy**

Sharing of information efficiently and effectively within the NHS family

**One Stop Shop**

Point at which a range of Local Authority services can be accessed.

**Rate Support Grant**

Government grant paid to Local Authorities based on a range of criteria eg population

**Registration Authority**

Body overseeing local delivery of registration services provided by a group of Local Authorities

**Registrar General**

Head of Registration Service in England and Wales also Head of ONS

**Registration Officers (Registrar)**

Officials currently providing civil registration services at a local level

**SANDS**

Stillbirth and Neonatal Deaths Society – support organisation

**Schedule**

Authority to marry

**Subordinate legislation**

Regulations

**Supporting families**

Government green paper proposing its policies for supporting families

**The Centre**

The Central Government Agency which will be responsible for maintaining and access to the central database

**Through-Life Record**

Database holding linked key life records relating to individuals (eg Birth, marriage, change of name)

**UK Online**

Government Internet Portal to Local and Central Government Services that will improve access (via local service points) to a range of services affecting the citizen.



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