
Director General for Regulation

The Honourable Mrs Justice Keegan DBE QC
Head, The Coroners Service, Northern Ireland
(by email)

24 April 2019

Dear Mrs Justice Keegan

I am writing to highlight the issue of death-registration delays in Northern Ireland and their impact on mortality data and statistics. I am also writing to His Honour Judge Lucraft, Chief Coroner for England and Wales, about this matter.

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

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

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

We have today published the outcome of a [review](#) of NISRA and ONS's efforts to ensure that delayed death registrations do not adversely impact on the trustworthiness, quality or value of their mortality statistics. We are assured that their ongoing work to mitigate the impact of late registrations and help users to understand their implications meet the high standards expected of National Statistics. However, I would welcome your support to reinforce the importance of a timely death registration process in Northern Ireland.

Your sincerely



Ed Humpherson

Director General for Regulation

¹ Table 5.8: <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/registrar-general-annual-report-2017-deaths>