

# Divorce Tables: Metadata

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**Office for National Statistics**

## A National Statistics publication

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The Government Statistical Service (GSS) is a network of professional statisticians and their staff operating both within the Office for National Statistics and across more than 30 other government departments and agencies.

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## Introduction

This document accompanies the published divorce tables and provides information on the data used. The latest data tables can be found at [www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-210936](http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/publications/re-reference-tables.html?edition=tcm%3A77-210936). The tables provide statistics on divorces which took place in England and Wales during the latest available data year. Some tables also provide data for the last 10 years and others give figures back to 1887.

The tables are produced by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and are published under the National Statistics logo, the designation guaranteeing that those outputs have been produced to high professional standards set out in a code of practice, and have been produced free from any political interference.

The divorce tables are published as a set of packages:

- Number of divorces, age at divorce and marital status before marriage
- Age at marriage, duration of marriage and cohort analyses, and
- Children of divorced couples.

For information relating to these specific packages, see the metadata tab at the front of the relevant set of tables.

## Terminology

A marriage may be either

- dissolved, following a petition for divorce and the granting of a decree absolute, or
- annulled, following a petition for nullity and the awarding of a decree of nullity

The first group of decrees are known as dissolutions of marriage, and the second as annulments of marriage. The term divorce in the tables includes both types of decrees.

## Legislation

The Divorce Reform Act 1969 came into effect in England and Wales on 1 January 1971. The Act introduced a solitary ground for divorce – that of the irretrievable breakdown of marriage. The Act, subsequently consolidated in the Matrimonial Causes Act 1973, made it possible for the first time for divorce to be petitioned for on the couple's separation.

The Act attempted to remove the concepts of the guilty party and the matrimonial offence by introducing a single ground for divorce which was the irretrievable breakdown of marriage. Such a breakdown can be established by the petitioner proving one or more of five facts; the first three of which – adultery, unreasonable behaviour, and desertion – are the former matrimonial offences. On the other hand, the two separation criteria – which allow divorce either by mutual consent or on the

application of the petitioner alone – were introduced for the first time by the Act, and so have no analogues among the grounds for divorce under former legislation.

The Matrimonial and Family Proceedings Act 1984 came into effect in England and Wales on 12 October 1984. The Act made two changes, the first replaced the discretionary time bar (minimum time interval between the date of marriage and being able to file a petition for divorce) of three years by an absolute time bar of one year. No petition can now be filed within the first year of marriage. The second change meant the Act no longer required courts to try to place the divorced spouses in the financial position they would have enjoyed, had the marriage not broken down.

## Information collected

A copy of part of the form used to record a decree absolute, D105, which provides statistical information, is reproduced in Appendix 1. These forms are supplied to ONS by the courts for processing and the production and analysis of statistics.

While most information is supplied by the petitioner, some is also provided by the respondent to the Court. Information on the original marriage is usually derived from a copy of the marriage entry.

The data analysed in the tables are summarised below:

Supplied by petitioner and respondent:

- Date of marriage
- Age at marriage (in years)
- Marital status at marriage
- Date(s) of birth of any children aged under 18
- Number of children aged 18 or over

The length or duration of the marriage and the age at divorce are derived from the date of marriage, age at marriage, and date of decree absolute. The age of child at petition is derived from date of birth of child and date of petition.

Supplied by the Court:

- Date petition filed and date of decree absolute
- Facts proven and class(es) of decree

Her Majesty's Court Service (HMCS) became an agency of the Department of Constitutional Affairs (DCA) in June 2003 when the DCA replaced the Lord Chancellor's Department. It has administrative responsibility for the Supreme Court, the Crown Court and the County Courts of England and Wales. In May 2007, the responsibilities of the DCA transferred to the newly created Ministry of Justice (MoJ). MoJ has responsibility for policy and legislation, but demographic information collected as part of that procedure is analysed and published by ONS.

## Accuracy of information

Much of the information is as supplied by the petitioner and respondent in fulfilling the legal requirements for filing a petition. Certain items of information are usually taken from the marriage certificate, but others are as stated by the petitioner. Since the information is required for a legal process it may be presumed that the quality of the data is good, especially as the petitioner has to swear an affidavit that the information supplied is correct. There is no routine independent statistical verification of the data, but editing checks are carried out to detect clerical, coding and keying errors.

Each year a certain number of divorces are not included in the published figures because the decree absolute forms have been received at ONS later than the date on which the annual dataset is taken. Table 1 shows the differences between the number of divorces stored on our database and the number included in our publications each year. The differences reflect the divorce records which are received by ONS after the date that the annual dataset is taken. Although this means some divorces are not included in the statistics, it is a compromise which must be taken in order to publish timely data.

**Table 1: Divorce decrees made absolute not included in the published data, 1999–2009**

Year of decree absolute	Database <sup>1</sup>	Published tables	Differences
1999	144,604	144,556	48
2000	141,220	141,135	85
2001	143,851	143,818	33
2002	147,788	147,735	53
2003	153,067	153,065	2
2004	152,923	152,923	0
2005	141,323	141,322	1
2006	132,140	132,140	0
2007	128,132	128,131	1
2008	121,710	121,708	2
2009	113,949	113,949	0

<sup>1</sup> Counts taken on 28 January 2011

The MoJ also publish a summary of divorce figures as part of their [Judicial and Court Statistics publication](#).

The number of divorces, as indicated by ONS and MoJ statistics, while similar do not match exactly. The two sets of figures do not count precisely the same cases. For example:

- ONS divorce figures include annulments while MoJ figures do not
- Since 2007 divorce figures published by MoJ have included dissolutions of civil partnerships, these are not included in ONS figures

There are some other differences arising from the way the data are collected and processed.

These include:

- differences in the number of late divorce records excluded from ONS and MoJ annual datasets
- differences in the process to remove duplicate records
- differences between the number of records entered onto the FamilyMan system and the number of paper records received by ONS from courts

ONS, MoJ and HMCS are working together to reconcile these figures as closely as possible.

## Derived information

Some information used in the tables is not part of the basic data supplied, but is derived as follows:

- Age at divorce – is derived from age at marriage as given in the marriage entry. As this is the age last birthday, six months is added to obtain an estimate of the age at marriage. This is then added to the duration of marriage, which is calculated as the difference between the date of divorce and the date of marriage (in months and years). From this an estimated age last birthday at the date of divorce is derived
- Dependent children – in the tables an upper age limit of 16 has been used
- Age of child at petition – is derived from date of birth of child and date of petition
- Duration of marriage to decree absolute is derived from date of marriage and date of decree absolute
- Length of time between petition and decree absolute – is derived from date of petition and date of decree absolute

## Missing information and corrections

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

- Age at marriage – the figure is imputed using a series of look-up tables, depending on whether the age of one or both parties is missing
- Marital status at marriage – bridegrooms are assumed to be single men who have never been married, and brides are assumed to be single women who have never been married
- Date of decree absolute – assumed to be the same as on the previous decree absolute form processed
- Date petition filed – assumed to be exactly one year prior to the year of decree absolute
- Date of marriage – is very rarely missing. However where it is, the form will always be referred back to the court, because if it is missing fields derived from it cannot be calculated. Table 2 in the Number of divorces, age at divorce and marital status before marriage package shows the number of not stated age at divorce due to missing information about date of marriage

Other items – referred back to the divorce court in question.

**Table 2: Level of imputation required for certain variables, 2001–2009**

Year of decree absolute	Age of husband and/or wife	Marital status of husband	Marital status of wife
2001	3.4% of records	4.2% of records	4.1% of records
2002	3.6% of records	4.2% of records	4.0% of records
2003	4.0% of records	4.4% of records	4.0% of records
2004	4.2% of records	4.6% of records	4.2% of records
2005	4.0% of records	5.1% of records	4.4% of records
2006	4.0% of records	5.3% of records	4.7% of records
2007	4.3% of records	5.7% of records	5.1% of records
2008	5.1% of records	6.6% of records	5.9% of records
2009	5.7% of records	7.1% of records	6.3% of records

ONS and HMCS are working together to reduce the number of records with missing information.

## General notes

### Coverage

The divorces analysed are decrees of dissolutions and annulments of marriage granted in England and Wales in each calendar year. Late notifications of divorces are not included in annual tables, but are retained on the ONS database.

### Base populations

The population figures used to calculate rates are mid-year estimates of the resident population by marital status of England and Wales based on the 2001 Census of Population. These estimates include members of Her Majesty's and non-UK armed forces stationed in England and Wales, but exclude those stationed outside. ONS mid-year population estimates use the most recent census, allowing for births, deaths, changed marital status, net migration, and ageing of the population.

The population estimates used are the most up-to-date when rates are published. The population estimates used to calculate rates are detailed alongside the published tables.

### Areal analyses

Divorce data cannot be analysed by area of residence of the parties. Information is provided by the court granting the divorce. As courts are not evenly spread around England and Wales, and couples may choose the court they wish to use, the location of the court is not necessarily a good indicator as to where the parties lived either before or after separation.

Details of the residence of the parties concerned are not available. This is because much of the information is collected at the petition to divorce stage of the process, and the parties' addresses are not recorded on the D105 forms.

## Rates

Rates have been calculated using the most appropriate estimates of the population – see Table 3 which shows the denominator used.

**Table 3: Denominators used in calculating rates**

Table number	Rate	Denominator
Number of divorces and age at divorce – tables 3a and 3b	Males/females divorcing per 1,000 married population, by age	Males/females married, age groups

## Further information

### Associated publications and the ONS website

The ONS website ([www.ons.gov.uk](http://www.ons.gov.uk)) provides a comprehensive source of freely available vital statistics and ONS products. More information on the ONS website can be obtained from the contact addresses in the further information section.

Comparable statistics for earlier years, and separate statistics for Scotland and Northern Ireland, are published as follows:

England and Wales: from 1974 to 1994 in the annual reference volume *Marriage and divorce statistics*, and from 1995 to 2007 in [Marriage, divorce and adoption statistics](#) (both series FM2); for earlier years in the Registrar General's Statistical Review of England and Wales.

Historical statistics have also been published in the volume *Marriage and divorce statistics* (Series FM2 No. 16). This covers divorce statistics from 1858 – the first year during which a decree of divorce could be petitioned for and granted in a civil court within England and Wales – up to 1983.

Scotland: in the [Annual Report of the Registrar General](#).

Northern Ireland: in the [Annual Report of the Registrar General for Northern Ireland](#).

Up to 1998, annual reports were first published in monitors, summarising marriages and divorces in England and Wales. However, these have now been discontinued, and replaced with statistical bulletins.

More up-to-date but less detailed statistics for the United Kingdom and its constituent countries are also published quarterly in the Vital Statistics: Population and Health Reference Tables.



Other sources include:

- General Household Survey - news releases, annual reports and more recently web based tables – containing analyses on topics such as marriage, separation, divorce, remarriage, cohabitation; family statistics (including those on one-parent families).
- [Judicial and Court Statistics](#) (Ministry of Justice) – which gives details of judicial aspects of divorce.

Statistics for the United Kingdom and Great Britain also appear in the Annual Abstract of Statistics and Regional Trends, while Social Trends includes occasional comment on particular aspects of trends in marriage, divorce, and remarriage. In addition, the *Focus On* series brings together relevant information on different groups of the population, with the editions on Families (2007), Gender (2008), and the 2001 edition on Men, of particular interest here.

International publications of interest include Eurostat's *European Social Conditions - Population* (Luxembourg), the Council of Europe's [Recent Demographic Developments in Europe](#) (Strasbourg), the United Nation's [Demographic Yearbook](#) (New York), and [Population](#) - issued four times a year by INED (Institut National d'Etudes Demographiques, Paris).

## Other publications

Some other background information on divorces and other relevant articles and publications are listed below. Most are from the journal *Population Trends*.

- Wilson, B and Smallwood, S. Age differences at marriage and divorce. *Population Trends* 132, pp 17–25, Summer 2008.
- Wilson, B and Smallwood, S. The proportion of marriages ending in divorce. *Population Trends* 131, pp 28–36, Spring 2008.
- Haskey, J. Divorce and remarriage in England and Wales. *Population Trends* 95, pp 18–22, Spring 1999.
- Haskey, J. Children who experience divorce in their family. *Population Trends* 87, pp 5–10, Spring 1997.
- Haskey, J. Divorce and children: fact proven and interval between petition and divorce. *Population Trends* 84, pp 28–32, Summer 1996.
- Haskey, J. The proportion of married couples who divorce: past patterns and current prospects. *Population Trends* 83, pp 25–36, Spring 1996.
- Haskey, J. First marriage, divorce and remarriage: birth cohort analyses. *Population Trends* 72, pp 24–33, Summer 1993.
- Haskey, J. Patterns of marriage, divorce and cohabitation in the different countries of Europe. *Population Trends* 69, pp 27–36, Autumn 1992.
- Haskey, J. Children in families broken by divorce. *Population Trends* 61, pp 34–42, Autumn 1990.

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## Glossary

<b>Annulment</b>	An annulment of marriage occurs following a successful petition for nullity. It declares that the marriage itself is void and that no valid marriage ever existed or voidable (was legal at time of registration but is no longer legal).
<b>Decree Absolute</b>	Granted upon a dissolution of marriage, following a petition for divorce, a decree absolute ends a valid marriage. See Dissolution.
<b>Decree Nisi</b>	Following the grounds for divorce being proven, the district judge grants a decree nisi as a provisional measure. Six weeks later the petitioner can apply for a decree absolute.
<b>Decree of Nullity</b>	Granted upon an annulment of marriage following a petition for nullity, a decree of nullity declares that the marriage itself is void and that no valid marriage ever existed. See Annulment.
<b>Department of Constitutional Affairs (DCA)</b>	Prior to 9 May 2007, the DCA was responsible, among other things, for the administration of the court system in England and Wales through the Court Service. See Her Majesty's Court service.
<b>Dissolution</b>	A dissolution of marriage occurs following a successful petition for divorce and ends a valid marriage. Dissolution of marriage covers nullity and divorce. See Decree Absolute.
<b>Facts Proven</b>	A petitioner must prove one or more of five facts (adultery, unreasonable behaviour, desertion, and separation, either with or without consent of the respondent), in order to establish the irretrievable breakdown of the marriage.
<b>Her Majesty's Court Service (HMCS)</b>	Her Majesty's Court Service is an executive agency of the Ministry of Justice and is responsible for the running of most of the courts and tribunals in England and Wales. Her Majesty's Court Service supplies information on divorces and adoptions to ONS.
<b>Judicial Separation</b>	This is an alternative to divorce and does not dissolve the marriage, but absolves the parties from the obligation to live

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	together. This procedure might, for example, be used if religious beliefs forbid or discourage divorce.
<b>Lord Chancellor's Department (LCD)</b>	Prior to 12 June 2003 and constitutional reforms, the LCD was responsible for the administration of the court system in England and Wales through the Court Service.
<b>Ministry of Justice (MoJ)</b>	Following constitutional reforms, the Ministry of Justice was created on 9 May 2007 replacing the DCA. It is responsible, among other things, for the administration of the court system in England and Wales through the Court Service.
<b>UK Statistics Authority Code of Practice for Official Statistics</b>	The principles and protocols followed and upheld by all those involved in producing National Statistics.
<b>ONS</b>	Since 1 April 2008, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) is the executive office of the UK Statistics Authority.
<b>OPCS</b>	Office of Population Censuses and Surveys – joined with Central Statistical Office in 1996 to become ONS.
<b>Petitioner</b>	The person seeking a dissolution or annulment.
<b>Population Trends</b>	A quarterly ONS publication which covers population and demographic information, including articles and reports on marriages, divorces and adoptions.
<b>Respondent</b>	The person to whom a petition for divorce has been served.
<b>Single Men/Women</b>	Persons who have never been married or been in a civil partnership.
<b>VSOB</b>	Vital Statistics Outputs Branch (at ONS).

**Appendix 1****Form used by the courts to record a divorce decree absolute (Form D105)****FORM 105 DECREE  
ABSOLUTE**8  
OPCS CODE:

OPCS NUMBER

Court Name

11

Surname of Marriage

35

Forename(s) of Spouse obtaining Decree

59

Forename(s) of other Spouse

89

Number of Matter

119

Date Petition Filed

(insert full date: DD/MM/YY)

126

Date of Decree Absolute

(insert full date: DD/MM/YY)

DD

MM

YY

131

Class(es) of Decree

(insert A,B,C,D,E or combinations as appropriate if nullity enter "N")

Husband

136

Wife

140

On Answer

144

Cross Decrees

145

Section 3 Proceedings

146

Date of Marriage

(insert full date: DD/MM/YY)

147

Age at Marriage in years

Husband

152

Wife

154

Status at Marriage

(insert B,S,D, or W as appropriate)

Husband

156

Wife

157

Date of Birth of Children under 18

(eldest first)

158

178

Number of Children aged 18 or over

198

Alternative or present Surname of Spouse obtaining Decree

199

Alternative Forename(s) of Spouse obtaining Decree

233

Alternative or present Surname of other Spouse

253

Alternative Forename(s) of other Spouse

277

Husband's occupation

Wife's occupation

ONS USE (H)

ONS USE (W)

**SPECIMEN**