

House of Commons: Written Statement (HCWS280)

Ministry of Justice

Written Statement made by: **Deputy Prime Minister, Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr David Lammy)** on 16 Jul 2026.

Tying the Knot: Reforming weddings law in England and Wales

Marriage is one of our most enduring and important institutions. For many couples, their wedding day is one of the most significant moments of their lives: a public expression of enduring love and commitment, through which two people enter into a legal relationship with the expectation that it will last a lifetime. The Government is committed to supporting and protecting marriage.

The current law governing weddings in England and Wales is rooted in legislation from the 18th and 19th centuries. It has not kept pace with the social and cultural changes that have shaped modern Britain. The result is a framework that is complex, inconsistent and restrictive, limiting where and how some couples can marry. As a result, many couples are unable to marry in a way which reflects their beliefs or are unable to afford the ceremony they want.

In response to the Law Commission's report on marriage reform, the Government announced its intention to modernise weddings law in England and Wales. I am today publishing the consultation, *Tying the Knot: Reforming weddings law in England and Wales*, which seeks views on how these reforms should operate in practice.

The Government's proposals are guided by four principles.

First, reforms will introduce a simple, fair and inclusive framework for all weddings. The consultation seeks views on a clearer and more consistent legal structure, with common rules applying to different types of ceremony. The proposals would also enable non-religious belief organisations, including Humanists, to conduct legally binding weddings.

Second, the reforms will expand choice about how and where couples may marry. The consultation proposes moving away from a system based primarily on the building in which a wedding takes place, towards one focused on the officiant responsible for the ceremony. This would allow greater flexibility both over the location and the form of weddings, so that ceremonies can better reflect the couple's beliefs and backgrounds, allowing them to marry in settings that are more meaningful to them. For instance, couples will be able to marry in areas of natural beauty such as forests or beaches.

The third principle is the importance of upholding the dignity and significance of marriage. As greater freedoms are introduced, the Government is clear that a wedding day must always reflect the serious and life-long commitment that is marriage. The consultation therefore proposes a "dignity framework" which would set clear and consistent standards both for wedding ceremonies and locations and place a legal duty on officiants to ensure that weddings meet these standards.

The fourth and final principle is that reforms will strengthen the protections against forced, predatory and sham marriages. The consultation proposes modernising the preliminaries process

that takes place before the wedding day, by introducing a digital system with more effective checks and greater visibility and transparency. These proposals seek to ensure that marriages are always entered into freely, with informed consent, and are not used to exploit vulnerable people or gain unfair advantage.

The consultation also seeks views on the role and regulation of officiants, including nominated officiants from religious and non-religious belief organisations, independent officiants and maritime officiants. It asks how officiants should be authorised, trained, monitored and held accountable and what role should be played by a central regulator.

Together, these proposals will make weddings cheaper, more inclusive and more accessible. This will allow more people who want to get married to do so in a way that is meaningful to them.

Next Steps

The consultation will be open for 10 weeks and will close on 24 September. We welcome views from parliamentarians, religious and non-religious belief organisations, academics, charities, interest groups, independent celebrants, support organisations, local registration services and members of the public with an interest in the weddings law of England and Wales.

The Government will consider the findings of the consultation carefully before finalising our policy positions. Any finalised reforms would then be brought forward when parliamentary time allows.

Copies of the consultation will be available here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/tying-the-knot-reforming-weddings-law-in-england-and-wales>. A Welsh language version and accessible versions will also be made available.