
The Weddings Consultation

A Guide for Marriage Supporters

What the Government is really proposing, and how to respond by 24 September

In short

From the headlines, you would think this was about beaches. Couples free to marry in a forest, a garden, a castle, a canal boat – who could object? That is how the Government sold “Tying the Knot: Reforming weddings law in England and Wales”, published on 16 July 2026 and open for responses until 24 September 2026.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/tying-the-knot-reforming-weddings-law-in-england-and-wales>

The venues are the least of it. Read the 171 pages and this is the biggest rewrite of how marriage is made in law since the 1830s – and the first thing it permits is this: a bride married without saying one word, in the secrecy of a private home, on an officiant’s judgement of what her silence meant. The Government proposes to write that into the marriage law of England and Wales. And what the rewrite quietly removes is marriage as we have known it. The couple’s promise: gone from the legal words. The bride’s spoken “I do”: optional. The words husband and wife: optional. The public, witnessed character of the ceremony: abolished. The protections Parliament promised believers in 2013 – that no church and no minister can ever be forced to conduct a same-sex wedding: not mentioned. In their place – a licensed celebrant industry, a state regulator of ministers, and weddings sold from cruise-ship brochures.

Here is the astonishing part. The Government says its “overarching objective in reforming weddings law is to strengthen the institution of marriage” – and calls marriage a “serious and lifelong commitment” thirteen times. Coalition for Marriage (C4M) exists to champion exactly that: marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman, the gold standard for families and society. They have written our test into their own first page. So let’s hold every proposal to it. They say they want to strengthen marriage – then propose, line by line, the opposite.

Anyone may respond, answering as few or as many of the 39 questions as you wish. Responses genuinely shape the Bill. This guide gives you what is proposed, why it matters, and exactly what to say – the question-by-question response guidance starts on page 9, and the twenty-minute route is on page 11.

Six things every marriage supporter should know

1. You could be married without saying a word – in a private home. In religious and belief ceremonies, the paper proposes that legal consent to marry may be given “through actions” – a ritual, a gesture – with no spoken words at all, so long as officiant and witnesses “share an understanding of the meaning and significance of the action”. The paper’s own example of such a ritual is the nikah exchange of ijab (offer) and qubul (acceptance) in Islamic marriage. And nowhere in all four documents does the word “audible” appear – nothing would require either party to utter a single word at their own wedding. What that permits is plain: a Muslim bride, veiled and silent through her nikah – or any bride, in any belief ceremony – could leave it legally married on other people’s account of what her gestures meant, judged by the officiant conducting the marriage and the witnesses her family chose. And none of it need happen in public. The same paper allows weddings in private homes – the bride’s own family home among them while conceding that home weddings “could make it harder to identify forced, predatory, sham marriages or wider abuse”. Wordless consent, behind the family’s front door, before the family’s witnesses: that is the machine these proposals assemble, and each part is on the Government’s own page. The Government will answer that its new registrar interview, held privately in the weeks before, screens for coercion – and we welcome that interview. But the public, spoken word at the ceremony has been the law’s final refusal point for two centuries: the last moment a frightened woman can say no and be heard, after the pressure at home has done its work. For good reason. The Government’s own Forced Marriage Unit reports that 71 per cent of the victims in its cases are women. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2024/forced-marriage-unit-statistics-2024>
This spring a GB News investigation found sharia-based services in Britain teaching that a virgin bride’s silence is “considered as implicit agreement”. <https://www.gbnews.com/news/sharia-britain-marriage-investigation-legal>
Into that Britain, the Government proposes marriage law in which silence at the ceremony can be legally sufficient. If the concern is couples unable to speak, the answer is consent personally signed by the bride herself – never consent read into her by onlookers. Spoken or personally signed consent, before witnesses, must remain the law’s floor for every wedding in the land – Question 5.
2. The marriage contract loses its promise. The proposed legal words of consent – the whole of what the law will ask a couple to say – are: “I [name] accept you [name] as my [husband / wife / spouse]”. No promise to stay. No promise to be faithful. Nothing lifelong, nothing exclusive – across all 171 pages, “forsaking all others” appears nowhere. And “spouse” is offered, in the Government’s own words, “for couples who do not identify with the terms ‘husband’ and ‘wife’”. The same Government proposes a new legal duty on the officiant to uphold marriage as a “lifelong commitment”. So the celebrant will be required by law to proclaim that marriage is for life – while the couple are never asked to promise it. They have put the meaning of marriage in the hired help’s job description and taken it out of the marriage. If marriage is a lifelong commitment

their words - let the couple say so. That is Question 6, and it may be the most important answer you give.

3. Not one word protects those who believe what we believe. The word “conscience” appears nowhere in the four consultation documents. The 2013 locks - Parliament’s promise that no church and no minister could ever be compelled to solemnise or host a same-sex wedding - are legally connected to the system of registered buildings this reform demolishes, and the 100-page consultation document never once says how they carry over. The only trace in the whole pack is a single sentence in the equality assessment which misnames the Act. Meanwhile every non-Anglican nominated officiant would face a state “fit and proper person” test, a legal “dignity” duty, a public complaints regime, a five-yearly licence and the power of being struck off - and not one of those powers carries a safeguard for belief. Protections that are not written into the Act do not exist. We learned that after 2013. They must be on the face of this Bill - that is essential, and it is Questions 23, 30 and 33.

4. It is still not one marriage law for everybody. The reform is sold as “universal rules” then keeps a separate regime for the Church of England, isn’t clear how the Jewish and Quaker exemptions will be integrated with the new system, and walks past the biggest inequality in English marriage law: the unregistered religious-only marriage. Six in ten married Muslim women in Britain have no legal marriage at all - the Government cites the research itself.

<https://www.channel4.com/press/news/new-channel-4-survey-reveals-truth-about-muslim-marriage>

Dame Louise Casey said in 2016 that: “All marriages, regardless of faith, should be registered”. The Home Office’s own independent review said in 2018: amend the Marriage Act so the civil marriage comes with the nikah, with real duties on celebrants.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-sharia-law-in-england-and-wales-independent-review>

Eight years on, no government has done it - and this consultation, 171 pages on weddings law, does not even discuss it. One law for everybody was the one reform excluded before the work began. That is not an oversight. It is the choice at the heart of this exercise.

5. Marriage becomes a licensed industry. The Law Commission’s estimate, printed in the consultation, is that paid commercial celebrants could take 50,000 weddings a year 22.6 per cent of all marriages - with the state registrar’s share falling to 11.8 per cent. Scotland shows where this goes: twenty years after it liberalised, humanist celebrants now conduct more Scottish weddings than every Christian denomination combined 8,142 humanist ceremonies in 2024 against 1,252 for the Church of Scotland.

<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/vital-events-reference-tables-2024/>

Humanists UK celebrated this consultation within hours, predicting one couple in five will take a humanist ceremony. <https://humanists.uk/2026/07/16/government-predicts-one-in-five-couples-will-opt-for-a-humanist-ceremony-after-legal-recognition>

The Government’s own press release carries a boat firm thanking “British Marine for lobbying so hard”. And its impact assessment sells same-sex weddings at sea as a business plan: because Bermuda’s ship register “does not permit same-sex weddings”, a UK register offering them “could provide a comparative advantage” in a

destination-weddings market it values at 36 billion dollars. Let's say it plainly: the Government is marketing the 2013 redefinition of marriage to cruise lines as a flag-of-convenience selling point. Marriage is being repackaged as a regulated consumer product, solemnised by whoever holds the licence.

6. The cost case is a con - by the Government's own numbers. David Lammy, the Deputy Prime Minister and Lord Chancellor, says "the cost of weddings puts this commitment out of reach". <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/castles-cruises-and-coastlines-untangling-the-rules-around-tying-the-knot>

The full demolition is below - four of the Government's own facts carry it. A legal wedding costs about £170 in fees today, and about £105 in a chapel. The £20,000 average it keeps quoting is, in its own consultation's words, "largely driven by optional services chosen by couples" - the party, not the law. Its own impact assessment admits there is "no quantitative evidence" the reforms will produce a single extra wedding. And the £535 million economic prize it announced in October had shrunk to £238.5 million by July, with the "12,000 jobs" and "£100 million to the public purse" vanishing altogether. They are not making weddings cheaper. They are making claims that their own documents refute.

What is really going on

Seen whole, this consultation stops looking like an odd collection of proposals and starts looking like what it is - the fourth act in a programme.

In 2013, Parliament redefined marriage, and cut the law's link between marriage and the union of one man and one woman. In 2022, no-fault divorce removed the last legal weight from the marriage promise - either party may now walk away, unexplained, and the law asks nothing. Last month, the same Ministry of Justice opened its cohabitation consultation, "A fairer end to relationships", to give marriage-like rights to couples who never married - the consultation this weddings paper proudly describes as its stablemate, part of one family-law programme. <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/a-fairer-end-to-relationships> And now the wedding itself: the promise removed from the words, the words removed from the consent, the public removed from the ceremony, the solemnisation handed to a licensed market.

Each step is sold separately - equality, kindness, choice, affordability. Put them together and the direction is unmistakable: marriage stripped of its distinct meaning, its distinct promise and its distinct legal standing, from both ends at once. And the excuse expired years ago: civil partnership already exists, giving any couple who wants them the legal rights without the institution. The rights question is answered. What these reforms wear away is not access to rights - it is marriage itself, and an institution is not strengthened by making it indistinguishable from not entering it.

And the reform that never comes is as telling as the four that did. The one change every serious reviewer has demanded for a decade - Casey in 2016, the Home Office's sharia review in 2018, women's rights campaigners across the spectrum - is one registered marriage law for all, so that no woman in Britain discovers on the day her relationship ends that she was never married. The Law Commission's weddings project was expressly scoped,

from the start, to exclude universal civil marriage. This consultation inherits that exclusion without a word of discussion. Every reform was allowed except the one that would have protected the most vulnerable women in the country.

Why would a government legalise the ceremony and refuse the safeguard? Because the safeguard means enforcement – duties on celebrants, consequences for the councils that leave women unregistered – and enforcement means confronting organised religious interests. The Government’s own commissioned reviewer named that mechanism a decade ago. Dame Louise Casey, 2016: public bodies “have ignored or even condoned regressive, divisive and harmful cultural and religious practices, for fear of being branded racist or Islamophobic”.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf

This consultation is that sentence at work. Every lobby in the room gets what it asked for the humanist campaign its recognition, the wedding industry its market. The Muslim women whose plight supplies the moral cover get a recognised ceremony with wordless consent inside it – and no protection at all. Accommodate the practice, dodge the protection: Casey’s warning, acted out by the very department that commissioned her.

The £20,000 con

Let’s take the Government’s cost case apart, fact by fact – every one from its own documents or its own sources.

- The law is not what costs £20,000. The state’s fees for a fully legal marriage are about £170: £46.50 each to give notice – the national fee since April 2026, see <https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/births-marriages-and-deaths/milton-keynes-registration-service-fees> – a £62 register office ceremony <https://www.gov.uk/marriages-civil-partnerships/plan-your-ceremony> and a £12.50 certificate. <https://www.gov.uk/order-copy-birth-death-marriage-certificate>
- A chapel wedding costs about £105. Where a church has its own authorised person – most do – no registrar attends and no registrar fee is due, a freedom nonconformist chapels have had since 1898. If the minister charges nothing, the couple pays £93 notice and £12.50 certificate. £105.50. That is what the law requires to be married in Britain today.
- The £20,000 is the party. The Government’s own consultation, answering commercialisation concerns, says the average is “largely driven by optional services chosen by couples”. Its own press release prices venue hire at “around £6,000” before catering. Bridebook – the Government’s own source for the £20,000 figure – puts “ceremony fees and admin” at 2 to 3 per cent of what couples spend. No Marriage Act sets the price of a marquee.
- Its own impact assessment gives the game away. Savings to couples from freeing venues: “unknown”, “small, likely to be insignificant”. More weddings: “There is no quantitative evidence to suggest that the number of weddings will be greater following the legal reforms” – and the total “may remain stable or continue to decline”. The savings its tables do book come overwhelmingly from religious couples no longer needing a second

ceremony and from one registrar attending instead of two – real, welcome, and worth nothing to the ordinary couple facing a £6,000 venue bill. The documents are at <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/tying-the-knot-reforming-weddings-law-in-england-and-wales>

- The world has already run this experiment, and it failed. Scotland has allowed weddings anywhere for decades and humanist celebrants since 2005 – Scottish marriage numbers sit at pre-pandemic levels and long-term decline, says National Records of Scotland. <https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/vital-events-reference-tables-2024/>

Australia moved to celebrants in 1973 – more than 80 per cent of weddings are now celebrant-led, the marriage rate kept falling anyway, and industry surveys put the average Australian wedding at 38,000 Australian dollars. New Zealand, celebrant-led for fifty years, has half the marriage rate it had in 2000. Everywhere the officiant system has gone, it changed who performs weddings – and nowhere did it produce more marriages or cheaper ones.

- Even the headline numbers will not stand still. In October the Government announced £535 million for the economy, up to 12,000 jobs and £100 million for the public purse. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-boost-to-economy-through-wedding-law-reform>

Nine months later its impact assessment puts the central figure at £238.5 million – and the jobs and the public purse have disappeared from the arithmetic entirely. No document explains the halving. And the claim that half of unmarried men don't marry because of cost? It traces back to a 2012 survey by a law firm about the perceived cost of the celebration – while the same firm's 2018 survey found just 17 per cent citing affordability at all, well behind “not met the right person”. <https://marriagefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/MF-briefing-note-Cheaper-weddings-bridge-marriage-gap.pdf>

We want more weddings – more than almost anyone. The marriage gap between rich and poor has doubled in thirty years and it is a scandal. But the barrier is a culture that prices commitment at £20,000 and a state that gives couples every legal reason not to bother not a £62 ceremony fee. This reform will not deliver one extra marriage, on the Government's own evidence. It will deliver a celebrant industry. Those are different things, and only one of them strengthens marriage.

The silence on believers

Rebuild the entire machinery of marriage law, and every protection bolted to the old machinery must be bolted to the new – or it is gone.

In 2013, believers were given legal locks: no religious organisation and no minister could be compelled to conduct, host or participate in a same-sex wedding, and refusing could never be treated as unlawful. Nobody proposes repealing those locks. They do not need to. The locks are largely drafted onto registered buildings, opt-in registration and the authorised person the exact architecture this consultation abolishes. Move to officiants, and the locks must be restated for officiants. The 100-page consultation document never attempts it. The Lord Chancellor's statement to Parliament announcing the reform does not contain the word conscience – and nowhere, in any of the four documents, does the Government say that a religious body or minister may decline to solemnise a marriage.

What the new system does contain is leverage over every pulpit in the land. A “fit and proper person” entry test. A legal duty to uphold “dignity” – undefined. A complaints regime open to anyone. Five-yearly re-authorisation for every officiant except Anglican clergy imposed against the Law Commission’s own recommendation. A statutory blacklist of excluded organisations, with a blank box marked “Other”, and an assurance that groups will not be excluded “solely” for minority views – the word doing the work in that sentence is “solely”. Nothing says these powers will be used against those who hold the man-woman definition of marriage. Nothing says they cannot be. We have spent a decade watching undefined standards meet unfashionable beliefs, and the lesson is written in case law: protections not on the face of the Act do not exist.

So this is the essential demand, in every response: an express guarantee, on the face of the Bill, that no officiant and no organisation may be refused authorisation, disciplined, found unfit or deauthorised for their beliefs about marriage – and, in terms, for holding, teaching and acting on the belief that marriage is the union of one man and one woman. The Government has no excuse: it builds its own framework on the Grainger criteria, the very case law under which the courts have held belief in traditional marriage to be a protected philosophical belief. It would be perverse to make that case law the entry ticket and leave the same beliefs exposed to the machinery inside. Let’s say it plainly: locks on the face of the Bill, or no Bill.

One marriage law for everybody

We said it last autumn and events keep proving it right: Britain must stop drifting away from one marriage law for all. <https://www.christiantoday.com/news/calls-for-end-to-parallel-marriage-in-the-uk>

The facts are the Government’s own. Six in ten married Muslim women in Britain are not legally married – and nearly three in ten of them do not know it, until the day the relationship ends and they discover they have no marriage, no financial remedy and no widow’s provision. The Court of Appeal calls such ceremonies “non-qualifying” – the couple were never anything in law, whatever they promised before God and family. The Government’s own impact assessment quotes the Home Office’s 2018 independent review: these women are left “without spousal rights and benefits, forcing them to rely on Sharia councils, which lack legal authority and sometimes exhibit poor practice”.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-sharia-law-in-england-and-wales-independent-review>

Some worse than poor: the GB News investigation this spring named a London centre teaching that a virgin bride’s explicit consent is unnecessary – her silence counts.

<https://www.gbnews.com/news/sharia-britain-marriage-investigation-legal>

And the criminal law itself runs two-tier: since a 1966 case, the Marriage Act’s solemnisation offences have been understood to reach unregistered Christian and Jewish ceremonies but not the nikah. Even our marriage offences are not one law for all.

The remedy has been on the table for a decade, from every direction. Dame Louise Casey, 2016: all marriages, of every faith, should be registered and legally valid. The Home Office’s independent sharia review, 2018: amend the Marriage Act so the civil marriage comes before or with the nikah, and put legal duties on celebrants. Southall Black Sisters demand every

religious marriage be registered by law. The National Secular Society campaigns under the words “one wedding law for all”. Baroness Cox has fought the same fight in Parliament for a decade, telling peers that Muslim women in Britain suffer in ways that “would make the suffragettes turn in their graves”. Secular feminists, Muslim women’s advocates, Christians, peers – the least likely coalition in British public life, all arrived at the same answer. One civil marriage, one route to dissolution, one rule of law – as we told our supporters last autumn.

The consultation does none of it. The officiant system makes it easier for a nikah to be a legal wedding, and we support that plainly. But easier is not required. No duty to register. No consequence for the celebrant who leaves a woman with nothing. Not a word on the up to 100,000 unregistered sharia marriages the Casey Review reported may exist. The Government’s fallback – that its cohabitation reforms will drape a substitute status over religious-only families – concedes everything: rather than bring these marriages into the law, it will build a parallel track around their absence. And meanwhile, the Casey Review found “unregistered polygamy” at home to be “more commonplace than might be expected”.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf

Nothing in these proposals touches any of it. Marriage in law stays a union of two – but with registration voluntary, the second and third nikah remain invisible to the very law that forbids them. Two-tier marriage is not a warning about the future. It is the system we have – and this consultation, given 171 pages to end it, chose not to discuss it. And let’s name the direction of travel, because it is the most serious thing in this entire exercise. Casey and the 2018 review said: raise religious-only marriage to the standard of British law – register it, protect her. These proposals do the reverse: they lower British law to the level of sharia practice – consent without spoken words, marriage without the register. Not the nikah lifted up to the law. The law sunk down to the practice the Government’s own review condemned. Let’s say it in every response: one wedding law, for everybody, with every marriage registered. It is the single greatest service this reform could do the women of Britain, and it is the one the Government left out.

What we welcome

Let’s say it plainly – because it is true, and because it makes the rest impossible to dismiss:

- The Government’s stated objective – strengthening marriage as a lifelong commitment – and its own family test’s finding that “marriage appears to be associated with greater family stability for children”.
- Stronger checks against forced, predatory and sham marriage: the private compulsory interview, the pre-emptive caveat, the 28-day notice period kept. Real improvements. We support them – which is exactly why gutting spoken consent in the same paper is indefensible.
- Making it easier for a religious ceremony to be the legal wedding, through nominated officiants from real congregations. Right mechanism – wrong to leave it voluntary.
- Keeping state registrars out of religious content. The state should not perform religion.

The voices they cannot ignore

The unease is not ours alone, and it started early. The Christian Institute, when the reform was announced last October, said: “Marriage isn’t about the wedding day, it’s about the life together afterwards... The Law Commission proposals also included several troubling suggestions not mentioned in the Government’s press release, such as abolishing the prescribed words and scrapping the requirement for open doors. These provisions go to the very nature of marriage as a public exchange of solemn promises.”

<https://www.christian.org.uk/news/overhaul-aims-to-make-it-simpler-and-cheaper-to-marry>

Marriage Foundation’s research director Harry Benson, on launch day: “Marriage is a serious business, always has been and always will be” – the act of marriage itself, not the venue, is what changes lives. <https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/couples-could-marry-in-pubs-or-fields-under-new-marriage-rules> The Bishop of Southwell and Nottingham warned the Lords in March against “the possible authorisation of this new category of commercial celebrants” without safeguards. And on the other side, Humanists UK is not uneasy at all – it is jubilant, demanding the Government fast-track humanist weddings by Order without waiting for the Bill. A campaign that celebrates and demands acceleration has understood exactly what the reform does. So have we.

How to respond - the questions that matter

Respond online at

<https://consult.justice.gov.uk/family-justice/reforming-weddings-law-in-england-and-wales>

or by email to weddingslawconsultation@justice.gov.uk by 24 September 2026. Answer only the questions you choose. Numbers are counted, but arguments are weighed – and one warning before you start: Whitehall has form for discounting campaigns. A consultation analysis hosted on this very Ministry’s website says it in terms – “If the repeat consultation responses from campaigning are counted as one, we received 58 consultation responses”.

<https://cdn.websitebuilder.service.justice.gov.uk/uploads/sites/54/2025/12/Wildlife-Law-Consultation-Analysis-of-responses.pdf>

Another department once counted 134 campaign responses “as a single response... in accordance with consultation guidance”.

<https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5a7cf82640f0b60a7f1a9794/flood-re-gov-response-201412.pdf>

And just this month the Department for Education flagged “coordinated engagement activity” in a schools consultation and said it had been “taken into account in the analysis”. So do not copy and paste anyone’s words, including ours. Take the points below, pick the ones that concern you most, and write them as yourself. A strong paragraph in your own voice outweighs a page of someone else’s – and it cannot be counted as one.

Question 5 (consent by “actions”): oppose. Spoken consent, before witnesses, must remain the legal minimum for every wedding – or, for a party genuinely unable to speak, consent personally signed by that party. Rituals may accompany the words – never replace them. Consent must never rest on an officiant’s interpretation of a silent bride’s gestures, and silence must never be capable of marrying anyone.

Question 6 (the required words): demand the promise. Husband and wife as the default words of the contract - and words that carry what the Government itself says marriage is: lifelong. Object to “spouse” being offered for those who “do not identify with” husband and wife - marriage law should state what a person is, not audit how they identify.

Questions 8-15 (the “dignity framework”): support the standards, expose the substitution. Yes to solemnity, yes to the bans on stunts and drinking. Then say the obvious: for two centuries dignity was built into the institution - a public ceremony, a recognised place, open doors, the community as witness. Abolish all that, and the state must hire a regulator to adjudicate dignity wedding by wedding. They are replacing an institution with an inspection regime.

Question 16 (religious content in civil ceremonies): oppose. A civil ceremony should be civil. Bible readings folded into commercial ceremonies create imitation church weddings outside any church’s discipline - and the Government’s family test says openly this is “particularly to support mixed-faith and LGBTQ+ couples”. The 2013 settlement made religious solemnisation an opt-in for each denomination. This unpicks it through the back door.

Question 17 (registrars barred from religious content): support.

Question 20 (weddings in private homes): demand real safeguards. The Government concedes in its own paper that home weddings “could make it harder to identify forced, predatory, sham marriages or wider abuse”. If they proceed, require the officiant to see each party alone on the day.

Questions 21-22 and 28-29 (weddings at sea and on cruise ships): oppose. Marriage is not a holiday product, and the impact assessment’s pitch - a same-sex-weddings advantage over Bermuda for the UK ship register - tells you exactly how this reform thinks about marriage: a market to be won.

Question 23 (the officiant’s duty to uphold marriage’s dignity and significance): support and demand its twin. If the officiant must uphold marriage by law, the law must protect the officiant who believes in it. The 2013 locks, restated on the face of the Bill, for every category of officiant and organisation.

Question 25 (raising the congregation threshold from 20 to 100 households): oppose. Twenty households has stood since 1837. A five-fold rise strips the rural chapel and the church plant of the right to appoint an officiant when theirs retires. The big national bodies asked for a higher bar - the price lands on the small congregation with no national body behind it. The state has no business sizing churches.

Question 26 (a statutory list of excluded organisations): oppose open-ended lists. A blacklist with a blank “Other” box, beside an undefined “fit and proper” test, is a lever waiting for a future hand.

Question 27 (commercial independent celebrants): oppose. The Government’s own evidence: celebrant fees “broadly comparable” to registrars’ - no saving. A projected quarter of all marriages. A conflicts-of-interest regime needed precisely because the celebrant is selling something. Solemnising marriage is a public trust, not a trade.

Questions 30-33 (“fit and proper”, five-yearly licences, sanctions): explicitly protect belief. The definition must state on its face that beliefs about marriage - including that it is the

union of one man and one woman - can never make anyone unfit. And oppose five-yearly state re-licensing of ministers of religion: the Law Commission itself recommended against periodic renewal. Licensing every denomination's clergy but one, on rolling permits, against undefined standards, is not regulation of weddings. It is state supervision of religion.

Question 39 (the regulator): whoever regulates, bind them in statute with the belief protections above.

And in every free-text box, the demand the paper never asks about: one wedding law for everybody. Civil registration before or alongside every religious ceremony - the 2018 independent review's recommendation - so no woman in Britain is ever again married in the eyes of everyone except the law.

Respond in twenty minutes

Short of time? Go to

<https://consult.justice.gov.uk/family-justice/reforming-weddings-law-in-england-and-wales> and answer five questions - 5, 6, 23, 27 and 30 - in your own words, using the points above. Add the one-law demand in the final box. Twenty minutes, and your voice is in the official record the Bill must answer.

And one more deadline - and it comes first. The other half of this programme, the same Ministry's cohabitation consultation "A fairer end to relationships" - marriage-like rights for couples who never married - closes on 14 August, six weeks before this one. If you answer only one thing this month, answer that: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/a-fairer-end-to-relationships>

Then come back for this one. Two consultations, one fight: whether marriage remains distinct in law at all.

Then two more steps. Write to your MP - say you have responded to both, what you demanded, and that you expect the 2013 protections on the face of any Bill: two minutes at <https://www.writetothem.com>

And share this guide with your church and your family. The other side is already mobilising Humanists UK called this consultation a triumph within hours. The record must not be theirs alone.

And let's take heart. The Government has written our test into its own first page, and its own documents concede nearly every point we make. Consultations move Bills. This one is winnable.

Key facts and sources

We have shown our working. Check it, and pass it on.

The consultation, all four documents and the online response form:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/tying-the-knot-reforming-weddings-law-in-england-and-wales>

The Lord Chancellor's statement to Parliament, 16 July 2026 (HCWS280):

<https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2026-07-16/hcws280>

The launch press release - the cost claims, the £6,000 venue figure, the British Marine testimonial:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/castles-cruises-and-coastlines-untangling-the-rules-around-tying-the-knot>

The October 2025 announcement - £535 million, 12,000 jobs, £100 million to the public purse:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/major-boost-to-economy-through-wedding-law-reform>

Statutory fees: £62 ceremony and £114.50 registrar attendance at <https://www.gov.uk/marriages-civil-partnerships/plan-your-ceremony>

- £12.50 certificate at <https://www.gov.uk/order-copy-birth-death-marriage-certificate>

- £46.50 notice fee, for example:

<https://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/births-marriages-and-deaths/milton-keynes-registration-service-fees>

The Marriage Foundation briefing behind the Government's cost statistic: <https://marriagefoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/MF-briefing-note-Cheaper-weddings-bridge-marriage-gap.pdf>

Scottish marriage and ceremony figures:

<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/publications/vital-events-reference-tables-2024/>

The Channel 4 survey on religious-only Muslim marriages: <https://www.channel4.com/press/news/new-channel-4-survey-reveals-truth-about-muslim-marriage>

The 2018 independent review into sharia law (Cm 9560):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/applying-sharia-law-in-england-and-wales-independent-review>

The GB News investigation, May 2026:

<https://www.gbnews.com/news/sharia-britain-marriage-investigation-legal>

The Law Commission's 2022 report: <https://lawcom.gov.uk/project/weddings/>

Christian Institute reaction:

<https://www.christian.org.uk/news/overhaul-aims-to-make-it-simpler-and-cheaper-to-marry>

Marriage Foundation on launch day:

<https://premierchristian.news/en/news/article/couples-could-marry-in-pubs-or-fields-under-new-marriage-rules>

Humanists UK's celebration:

<https://humanists.uk/2026/07/16/government-predicts-one-in-five-couples-will-opt-for-a-humanist-ceremony-after-legal-recognition>

What to avoid

Let's make the argument in the starkest terms - and make every word stick:

- Do not say church weddings are being banned. They are not. The danger is a new licensing system with no protection for belief.
- Do not say spoken consent is being abolished. It is being made optional in belief ceremonies. Optional is the scandal - a forced bride's silence becomes legally sufficient. Precision is what makes the point undeniable.

- Do not claim the Marriage Foundation opposes these reforms. It welcomed venue freedom. Its evidence is ours: the cost barrier is the perceived price of the celebration, never the legal fees.
- Do not attack Muslims - defend Muslim wives. Our demand is the one Casey, the sharia review and Muslim women's advocates all made: one law, every marriage registered, for their protection.
- Do not say Britain is "adopting sharia law". Say what is actually happening: the reviews said raise religious-only marriage to the standard of the law, and these proposals instead lower the law's own standards - spoken consent, registration - to the level of the practice those reviews condemned.
- Use their numbers, exactly. The £62 ceremony, the 2 to 3 per cent, "no quantitative evidence", £535 million becoming £238.5 million. Nothing lands harder than the Government's own arithmetic.

About this guide

This guide is published by Coalition for Marriage (C4M), which exists to defend and promote marriage as the lifelong union of one man and one woman, the gold standard for families and society. You are welcome to share it, quote it and use it in your own response. For more, visit <https://www.c4m.org.uk>

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