**Church of England webinar held on 26th April 2021**

**on Marriage Registration Changes coming into force on Tuesday 4th May 2021**

General Information

All changes referred to within this guide will affect all marriages in England and Wales not just Church of England weddings. All denominations will be affected.

The Faculty Office has stated that this is a new challenge for England and Wales but not in Scotland where this procedure has successfully been in place since approximately 1852.

Legal Preliminaries

The three ecclesiastical legal preliminaries to a Church of England marriage will remain the same: Banns, Bishop’s Common Licences and Archbishop’s Special Licences. There are no changes to these or the procedures in satisfying these. For marriages to be conducted under one of the ecclesiastical preliminaries the couple will require a “Marriage Document”.

The single civil legal preliminary to a Church of England marriage is currently a Superintendent Registrar’s Certificate but this will change on 4th May 2021 to a “Marriage Schedule”.

Marriage Registers

From 4th May 2021 onwards there will be no marriage registers held at churches and all parishes who currently hold marriage registers will be contacted by their local Register Office who will advise on the procedure to send the marriage registers to the local Register Office.

It is recommended that the current church marriage register be copied and the copy kept with the church records for future reference.

Quarterly Returns

There will be no requirement for parishes to send the Register Office their quarterly returns.

The New Procedure

Initial meeting with couple

1. The minister meets the couple and takes their details and checks their identities and addresses as normal.

2. The couple to be asked which parents they wish to have included on the Marriage Register (held electronically by the Register Office). The couple may each now have up to four “parents” recorded which could include their biological parents, step-parents or adoptive parents. Step-parents would need to be or have been married to a biological parent as per previous guidance.

This is a new aspect to the registering of the marriage as mothers’ details can now be inserted as well as or instead of the fathers’ details.

The General Register Office is due to issue further advice on whether foster parents can be recorded. At present they cannot.

A Welcome Form that clergy should complete at the time of the initial meeting can be downloaded from the Church Support Hub website at [WeddingWelcome2021.pdf (churchsupporthub.org)](https://churchsupporthub.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/WeddingWelcome2021.pdf).

Preparation

This remains the same preparation as currently concerning the checking of the couple’s identities, residential address(es) and evidence of their qualifying connection.

In advance of the wedding ceremony

1. The minister must print off and complete the Marriage Document clearly in block capitals in Registrar’s ink if the couple are marrying under one of the ecclesiastical preliminaries. Details on how to access the Marriage Document has now been issued via Diocesan Secretaries and Archdeacons by the General Register Office. If you have not received these details, or have any problems following the instructions, please contact your Archdeacon.

There is no longer a need to insert the ages of the couple that they will be at the time of their wedding as their dates of birth are now required instead.

2. If the couple are to marry with a Marriage Schedule they must produce this to the minister in advance of their wedding day. A Marriage Document is not to be completed if a Marriage Schedule has been issued by the Register Office. If the couple do not produce their Marriage Schedule their wedding ceremony cannot legally go ahead as the minister will not have evidence that they have completed their civil legal preliminary.

Day of the wedding

1. The minister must have the completed Marriage Document or Marriage Schedule ready before the ceremony. There will be only one document per wedding. No copies are to be taken or given to the couple or any other person.

2. The minister, the couple and their witnesses sign the Marriage Document or Marriage Schedule (as appropriate) as usual in Registrar’s ink.

The parish may wish to give the couple a document or something as a memento of their wedding as they will not be issued with a marriage certificate immediately following their ceremony as previously. Church House Publishing can provide pre-printed cards or the General Register Office have documents that can be downloaded for completion. There is no legal significance or obligation to do this. It is each parish’s choice if they wish to do so as a token to the couple and may be useful for the couple in the gap between the registering of the Marriage Document or Marriage Schedule at the Register Office and their marriage certificate being issued.

After the couple have left the church

1. It is the immediate responsibility of the minister to complete the Register of Marriage Services. This is a register book that is to be held in each church where weddings are conducted. If a Bishop’s Direction is in place for a multi-parish benefice each church must still have their own register. These books can be ordered from Church House Publishing however it may be that the parish wish to obtain their own type of formal book to use as the register. This is to keep a record within the parish of weddings that have taken place in the church.

2. Within 21 days of the marriage the completed Marriage Document or Marriage Schedule must be posted or delivered by hand to the local Register Office. It does not need to be the minister but responsibility falls onto the minister for submission of the document so if they do not carry this out themselves it must be delegated to someone that they trust to adhere to this rule.

Marriage Documents and Marriage Schedules cannot be submitted to the Register Office online.

There is no requirement to notify the Register Office of any marriages taking place in advance.

After the Marriage Document or Marriage Schedule has been posted.

1. When the Register Office receives the signed Marriage Document or Marriage Schedule they will enter it onto their system and the marriage is formally registered.

2. It is no longer the responsibility of the church to issue a marriage certificate to the couple. The couple do not receive a marriage certificate until they formally request one from the Register Office and pay the required fee which is set by the Register Office.

FAQs – These questions and more can be found on the Church Support Hub website.

1. *Where do I obtain the Marriage Documents from?*

The Church of England Evangelism and Discipleship Team will be providing a printable marriage document as part of the Live Events Diary.

2. *Can we still charge a fee for a marriage certificate or a copy in the future?*

Not after 4th May 2021 as you will not be issuing the certificates or any copies. All enquiries to obtain copy marriage certificates will need to be made to the couple’s local Register Office. The Ecclesiastical Fees Table will be updated accordingly.

3. *Does the Marriage Schedule replace the Superintendent Registrar’s Certificate?*

Yes and it is the couple’s responsibility to take their Marriage Schedule to their officiating minister prior to the wedding date as without this the marriage cannot legally take place. The Marriage Schedule will also need to be signed immediately following the ceremony before being posted back to the local Register Office.

4. *Does the Marriage Document have to be printed on special paper or are we to use special ink?*

It can be printed on whatever paper the parish wishes as it is not provided to the couple but posted directly to the Register Office so expensive paper is not required. It is recommended that Registrar’s ink is used especially for the signing of the document on the day of the wedding.

5. *Is there an electronic version of the Marriage Document we can complete or do they have to be completed by hand?*

There is currently no facility to complete the Marriage Document online. All Marriage Documents must be printed off, completed by hand, signed by hand and delivered or posted to the local Register Office.

6. *Do we have to have a Register of Services book at the church?*

Each church that holds weddings will need to keep a Register of Services. It is not a legal requirement to have a specific book but it is highly recommended so an accurate record can be kept at parish level of all weddings conducted in the church.

7. *There is a section at the top of the Marriage Document for a number to be inserted. What is this for?*

The General Register Office has recommended that for each Marriage Document completed it is given a number to run sequentially e.g. the first wedding is number 1, the second wedding is number 2, etc. This will be for the benefit of the parish and the Register Office if a query is raised in the future and will also assist the General Register Office to see whether there are any Marriage Documents missing from the sequence.

8. *A couple want to go on their honeymoon soon after their marriage but if I cannot issue them with a certificate how can they prove their marriage?*

The signed Marriage Document or Marriage Schedule has to be sent to the Register Office by the parish and if the postal service is delayed this will be problematic as the couple will not have a certificate to prove their marriage. However if the couple have already booked their wedding and are imminently leaving the UK to go on honeymoon it is possible for them to pre-book an appointment with the Register Office to attend to collect their certificate within approximately seven days.

9. *Why is the Church of England making these changes?*

It is not the Church of England who are implementing these changes but is a statutory change which includes Civil Registrars. The timetable for the implementation of these changes has also not been set by the Church of England but by the General Register Office.

10. *If the Marriage Document is just a Word file and piece of paper how do we protect against marriage fraud?*

The couple’s identities, residency and qualifying connection documents must be checked by the officiating minister prior to giving consent to conduct the couple’s marriage ceremony in the usual manner and if the local Register Office has concerns following receipt of a completed Marriage Document they will liaise with the officiating minister to go through all of the details. The system is not as secure as it could be but this is an issue for the General Register Office.

11. *Because we cannot issue the couple with their marriage certificate we would like to give them a souvenir card instead. Where can we obtain these from?*

Church House Publishing have an attractive selection available to order which are coloured but black and white versions can be downloaded from the Church Support Hub.

12. *Which parents can be inserted on the Marriage Document?*

Previously it was only the father’s name that could be inserted in the marriage register and on the marriage certificate but this has now changed so that the mother’s details can be inserted as well as or instead of the father’s details. It is also still possible for the bride and/or groom to not provide their parents’ details for inclusion.

There could be a mix of different “parents” on the Marriage Document or Marriage Schedule including biological parents, adoptive parents or step-parents as long as step-parents have been or are still married to one of the biological parents of the bride or groom. As long as each parent is identified as what type of parent they are they can be included (up to four per bride and four per groom). This will also include those who are civilly partnered to one of the biological parents.

13. *Can Royal Mail be relied upon when sending the Marriage Document or Marriage Schedule to the local Register Office? Should we send the signed documents to the Register Office by recorded delivery?*

You do not need to notify the Register Office in advance of posting them a completed Marriage Document or Marriage Schedule and you do not need to send them by special or recorded delivery. Normal post will suffice or they can be hand delivered if you wish.

14. *Do we need to keep a copy of the signed Marriage Document before we post it out?*

The Register of Services book should be completed with the main details so it is not necessary to keep a copy.

15. *Are there any other fee changes for weddings?*

No, only the charge for issuing a duplicate marriage certificate or searching marriage registers after 4th May 2021 cannot be charged as you will not be issuing any duplicate certificates even for historic weddings as your marriage registers will have been returned to the local Register Office upon their request. Any enquiries concerning marriage certificates must be referred to the local Register Office.

16. *How long do couples have to wait for their marriage certificate?*

The General Register Office has stated that once the signed Marriage Document or Marriage Schedule is received and lodged by them the certificate will be available within the following 24 hours. The couple must make contact with their local Register Office to obtain this.

17. *Will this change affect Archbishop’s Special Licences?*

An Archbishop’s Special Licence is an ecclesiastical legal preliminary and so any marriage to be conducted under an ASL will be recorded on the Marriage Document the same as a Bishop’s Common Licence or Banns.

18. *I’m confused between a Marriage Document and a Marriage Schedule.*

A Marriage Document is issued by the officiating minister for a marriage under an ecclesiastical preliminary: Banns, Bishop’s Common Licence or Archbishop’s Special Licence.

A Marriage Schedule is issued by the Register Office in for a marriage under the civil preliminary of a Superintendent Registrar’s Certificate which it will replace.

19. *If there are four parents for the bride and four for the groom plus witnesses can the Marriage Document be printed to go onto two sheets of paper or must it remain on one sheet?*

Ideally all information should be contained on one A4 sheet but if the form allows the information to be inserted onto two pages there should not be a problem unless the local Register Office raises it as an issue.

20. *Do I need to download a Marriage Schedule as well as a Marriage Document?*

No. The local Register Office will issue the Marriage Schedules as it replaces the Superintendent Registrar’s Certificate. The couple must provide the Marriage Schedule to the officiating minister once it has been issued by the Register Office and in advance of their proposed wedding date. Without doing so, the marriage cannot legally take place under that preliminary.

21. *Do I need to notify the Register Office in advance of a wedding?*

There is no legal requirement or obligation to do so even if a local Register Office requests it.

Extra information

A recording of the Church of England webinar will be available to view from 29th April 2021 which can be viewed with British Sign Language or subtitles and will include FAQs on the Life Events Hub.

An updated version of The Guidebook to the Clergy will be available shortly which will contain all of the new changes and rules.

All of the information above can be viewed and downloaded from 29th April 2021 from

[www.churchsupporthub.org/marriage-registration-changes](http://www.churchsupporthub.org/marriage-registration-changes) or from [www.lifeeventsdiary.org/tutorials/webinars](http://www.lifeeventsdiary.org/tutorials/webinars)

The Life Events Diary is a useful tool for training and further information but forms cannot be downloaded from this site.