

Outdoor civil wedding and partnership registrations to be legalised

Press release

Outdoor civil wedding and partnership ceremonies in England and Wales are set to be legalised for the first time – offering greater choice to couples in a boost to the wedding sector.



- Civil ceremonies can take place outside for the first time
- Will support wedding sector and provide greater flexibility to couples
- Comes into force on 1 July

Under current laws for approved premises such as a hotel, the legal wedding or civil partnership ceremony must take place in an approved room or permanent structure. It will now be possible for a couple to have the whole ceremony outside at such a venue.

This change will give more options to couples and the sector in terms of how they celebrate and host the big day by allowing all aspects of weddings to take place outdoors – providing greater flexibility especially during the pandemic when there are important public health considerations to take into account.

On 30 June, a statutory instrument (SI) will be laid to amend the regulations with the change taking effect on 1 July. This follows a commitment made in 2019 to legalise outdoor ceremonies.

Lord Chancellor Robert Buckland QC MP said:

A couple's wedding day is one of the most special times in their lives and this change will allow them to celebrate it the way that they want.

At the same time, this step will support the marriage sector by providing greater choice and helping venues to meet demand for larger ceremonies.

The change will benefit almost 75% of all weddings in England and Wales that are non-religious and which take place on approved premises, along with civil partnerships.

A Law Commission report later this year will present options for further reforms which will then be considered carefully by the Government. Options they are considering include offering couples greater flexibility to form their own ceremonies, allowing the ceremony to take place in a much broader range of locations, and powers to hold weddings remotely in a national emergency.

Notes to editors:

- These changes are being introduced via amendments to the Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005 to allow legal outdoor civil weddings and civil partnership registrations to take place within the grounds of Approved Premises.
- The Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) (Amendment) Regulations 2021 will come into force on 1st July 2021
- The regulations apply only to Approved Premises – the changes cannot enable outdoor weddings to take place on religious premises. However, those religious premises which are Approved Premises for civil partnership registrations will be allowed to hold civil partnership registrations outdoors, should they wish to do so.
- The legal requirements for approved premises are set out in regulations. For ceremonies in other types of building, there are complex legal requirements dating back more than a century which are fixed by primary legislation.
- In order to hold legal outdoor weddings and civil partnership registrations, a venue must be Approved Premises or must become Approved Premises under the Marriages and Civil Partnerships (Approved Premises) Regulations 2005, as amended.
- Currently, premises which seek approval must comprise a permanent built structure (or permanently moored vessel) with at least one room which is to be approved for civil weddings and civil partnership registration. Under the amended regulations, such premises, if approved, can also use any outdoor areas in the same venue to hold civil weddings and civil partnership registrations.
- Existing Approved Premises will be permitted to use any outdoor areas in the venue for civil wedding and civil partnership registrations without having to re-apply for approval, subject to certain conditions.
- Ceremonies will now be able to take place fully outdoors or under a partially covered structure if this has at least a 50% open area (the same definition used for the smoking ban and Covid 19 regulations in England and Wales). The location for the ceremony must be assessed to be seemly and dignified. Other requirements for public access and signage must also be met.

- These are time-limited amendments to the regulations to come into force 1 July 2021 until April 2022. A consultation will be undertaken in the Autumn 2021 to consider the practical impacts of this policy in detail and to enable a later amending Statutory Instrument which is not time limited.
- With the exception of Jewish and Quaker weddings, which for historical reasons can already take place outdoors, legal religious weddings will continue to take place in certified places of worship which are also registered for marriage, or churches and chapels of the Church of England or Church in Wales. The Government will legislate to allow religious marriages to take place outdoors when parliamentary time allows.

Published 20 June 2021