

Module 2 The Marriage Ceremony

Following completion of this module you will be able to achieve the following learning outcomes:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the difference between religious, civil ceremonies and partnerships and the renewal of vows.
 - Describe the elements involved in choosing a ring
 - Offer guidance in peoples' roles at ceremonies
 - Understand the implications of an overseas marriage
 - Show a basis understanding of the effect of marriage on wills or pre-nuptial agreements
 - Be able to offer advice on writing marriage vows
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2.1 The Law of Marriage

A Wedding Planner should have a basic knowledge of the laws surrounding marriage to ensure that, whilst the marriage ceremony is as personal to the couple as possible, the wedding remains legal.

Although the minister or registrar will ensure the legalities are maintained, the outline marriage laws are:

- No one can be forced to marry against their wishes
- Both members of the couple must be aged 16 or over
- You can't already be married (called bigamy)
- You can't be too closely related
- Under 18s must gain their parent's or guardian's written consent, otherwise it is a criminal offence
- You need at least two witnesses to sign register on the day.

You can get married by a civil ceremony or a religious ceremony. In both cases, the following legal requirements must be met:

- the marriage must be conducted by a person, or in the presence of a person authorised to register marriages in the district
- the marriage must be entered in the marriage register and signed by both parties, two witnesses, the person who conducted the ceremony and, if that person is not authorised to register marriages, the person who is registering the marriage.



2.2 Required Documentation

The couple both need to produce proof of identity when they apply for the notice of marriage. A valid passport, driving licence or birth certificate should be used. If either of the partners has been married before then they must produce documents to show how the previous marriage has ended. Divorcees must show the decree absolute (final divorce papers) bearing the courts original stamp. Widows or widowers must show the death certificate of former spouses. Any name change by deed poll, statutory declaration or change of name deed must be accompanied by such papers.

A useful tip for the bride and groom is to remind them to amend the bride's name on her passport if they are going to look at going abroad for their honeymoon.

2.3 The Ceremony

This is the most important part of the whole process. If the law is not followed closely then the whole process may be illegal and invalid.

The different types of ceremonies:

The two main types of ceremonies that a couple may undertake are classed as Religious Ceremonies or Civil Ceremonies.

Religious ceremonies can only be recognised in law if the ceremony is performed by a person who is registered to conduct weddings such as a Church of England vicar or Catholic Priest, and be carried out in a place that is formally registered by the Registrar General for marriages.



Couples can only marry in a church in the parish in which at least one person is resident, unless one of the couple attends a church outside the parish.

Couples wishing to get married in a Church of England or Wales must give public notice that they intend to get married; if the minister is able to perform the ceremony the Banns will be called on three Sundays before the day of the ceremony. If the Banns are not called then the bride and groom will need to give notice of marriage to the Superintendent Registrar in the district in which you live, in lieu of the Banns.

Civil ceremonies can take place in the Registrars Office or in a venue that has been approved by the local council. The law stipulates that there should be no religious content in any of the music or readings. It is recommended that all readings and music is mentioned in detail to the Registrar in advance of the ceremony to avoid complications and disappointment on the day of the ceremony.

The procedure is to first establish which day is the couples preferred day and then contact the Superintendent Registrar in the district where the bride or groom lives.

They must have been resident in that district for at least seven days and then wait a further fifteen days before they are eligible to marry.

One of the benefits of a civil ceremony is that the couple are able to get married in any Registry Office or approved venue throughout England and Wales. If the couple wish to marry in a different place to where they collect the authority of marriage, this can be done by giving the authority to the Superintendent Registrar of the district in which the couples intend to marry in.

2.4 Civil Partnerships

Civil partnerships are a civil union between same sex couples which take place in local Registry Offices or approved venues. This union provides same-sex couples with similar rights to that of heterosexual married couples under the Civil Partnership Act. Although this Act applies throughout the UK there are a number of differences between the implementation in Scotland and the Acts implementation in England and Wales. The Wedding Planner should advise contact with the local registry office.

A civil partnership and a civil marriage differ in the way that they are contracted. A civil partnership is formed when the second partner signs the relevant documents whereas a civil marriage is formed when the couple exchange spoken words.

Same-sex couples should give notice at a registry office of their intention to register for a civil partnership 15 days before they are allowed to sign the civil partnership register. Same-sex couples will be asked to sign an official document at the registry office in the presence of the registrar and two witnesses.

A service of blessing may follow a civil partnership, just as for a civil marriage.

2.5 Marriages Abroad

Many couples view getting married abroad as exciting and romantic. It is essential that detailed planning and the correct procedure is followed in order for the dream to come true. Some countries insist on a minimum length of stay and some ask that a certificate of 'No Impediment' is obtained.

Marriages abroad will be considered legal in the UK provided that the ceremony complied with the laws of the country the couple get married in, and that the couple were both legally free to marry under the laws of that country.

However, registration of these marriages in the UK forms a different procedure as they are unable to be registered at a UK registry office.

If one of the couple is a British citizen and the wedding takes place in one of the countries from which the General Registry Office accepts formal notification, the wedding can be recorded by depositing the marriage certificate at the General Registry Office. The Wedding



Planner should check the details with the Home Office for clarification and the list of countries from which formal notifications can be accepted.

2.6 Wedding Vows

It is important the Wedding Planner understands the traditional wedding ceremony as performed by a Church of England minister. Once this ceremony has been understood the organiser is well placed to offer advice in personalising the ceremony – but should be aware of the legal and religious requirements to ensure that the ceremony, although represents what the client wants, also remains legal.

Couples who wish to, can add their own words to the required statutory vows. Couples marrying in a Church of England ceremony are restricted by law to taking the traditional wedding vows with the flexibility being shown on the words 'love, honour and obey' being altered to 'love, honour and respect.' Personalisation of the wedding can be reached through the use of music and readings.

A Church of England ceremony follows a strict process. The ceremony starts with the Declarations where the couple are asked to promise before God, friends and families *'that they will love, comfort, honour and protect each other and be faithful to them as long as they both shall live'*.

Then the Vows or Contracting words need to be made. The traditional vows are *'to have and to hold; from this day forward; for better, for worse; for richer, for poorer; in sickness and in health; to love and to cherish, till death us do part'*.

After the vows the couples then exchange Rings as a 'sign of their marriage' and a reminder of the vows: *'With my body I honour you, all that I am I give to you, and all that I have I share with you, within the love of God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit.'*

Following the giving of the rings is the Proclamation. The minister will then declare that the couple are now husband and wife. The minister does not consider that he/she have 'married' the couple; the couple marry each other. The minister just directs the ceremony and then tells everyone that it has been done properly.

Then there are Prayers followed by Readings, a talk, or sermon either by invited guests, or by the minister. After the readings the couples undertake the Signing of the register. This is a legal requirement and the minister will give you a copy of the marriage certificate. The Chief Bridesmaid and the Best Man witness the signing of the register.



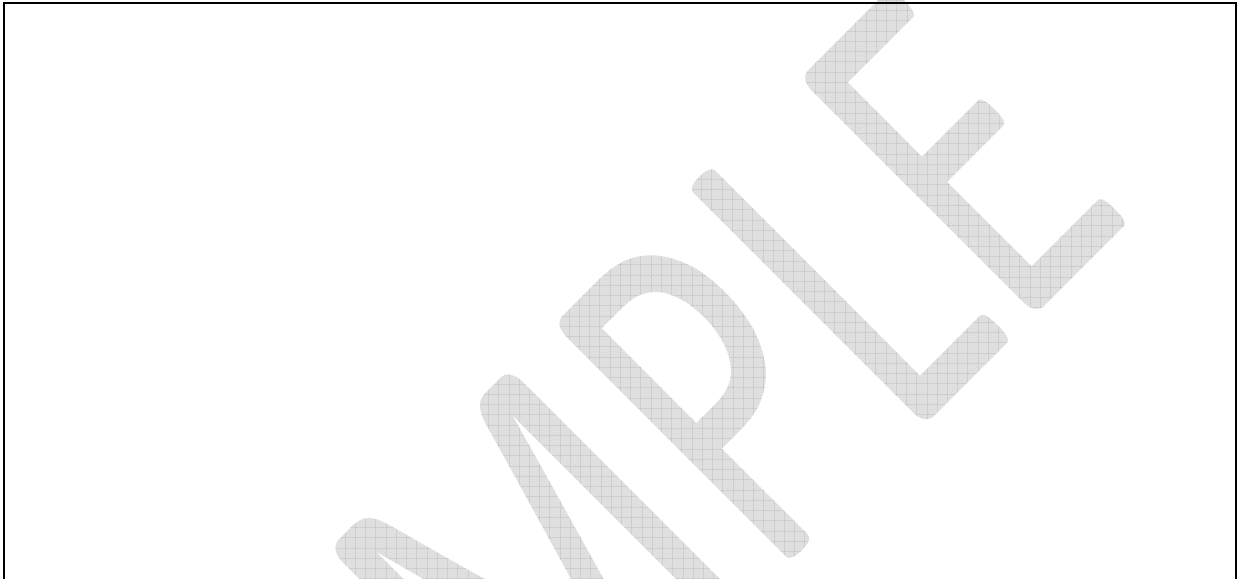
Under a civil ceremony couples may be able to incorporate their own wedding vows into the statutory vows. The Wedding Planner should also ensure that any proposed changes to the vows, the music and any reading are agree with the official before the ceremony to avoid disappointment.

Module 2 Activities and Self-Assessment Exercises

Activity One:

There are many roles which family and friends can perform at weddings. Suggest the different roles and their responsibilities for the following two scenarios:

Scenario One: The bride and groom wish to have a quiet registry office wedding and will invite two of their friends to act as witnesses. What responsibilities and roles would be suitable for the friends?



Scenario Two: Mr and Mrs Smyth-Jones are planning a wedding for 300 guests to celebrate the marriage of their daughter and would like to involve the groom's parents. What roles and responsibilities are available to all the friends and family?



Self-Assessment Two

a) List the six points that outline the marriage laws:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.

b) What are the two requirements for a marriage to be legal?

1.
2.

c) You are ending a meeting with your clients as they are soon due to meet with the registrar to discuss the civil ceremony. They ask you for your advice concerning which documentation they should take with them; what documentation should they take with them?

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d) In your own words, imagining you are presenting to a client, describe the difference between a religious wedding ceremony and a civil ceremony?

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- e) Your services as a Wedding Planner have been secured by a gay couple. They wish to get married in a church. What would your advice to them be and how would you suggest they would get their relationship formalised?

- f) What are the key points to consider if your client is suggesting a marriage abroad?

- g) Your clients are considering a Church of England wedding ceremony and would like to personalise their wedding vows as much as possible. Compare and contrast a suggestion of personalised vows with the traditional vows. Identify areas where change is allowed and where strict rules apply.