

Booking your legal marriage or civil partnership

Celebrants cannot currently perform legally binding marriages in England & Wales, so couples are required to separate their legal registration of marriage or civil partnership from their celebrant ceremony. This is a similar process to registering a baby's birth and then having a Christening or Naming Ceremony to celebrate them.

The first step is to book a date and venue for your legal marriage or civil partnership to be completed. You can hold a legally binding civil ceremony at:

- a register office
- any venue approved by the local council

For marriages, you will then need to give notice of your intention to marry. You are both required to give notice at your local Register Office, whether or not you wish to have your statutory civil ceremony in that district.

Your notice of marriage must state where your legal ceremony is taking place, so you will need to book this before giving notice. The Government stipulates that couples are required to give notice a minimum of 29 days and a maximum of 12 months before the legal registration of their marriage.

Options and costs for your legal marriage or civil partnership ceremony

You may wish to hold your legal wedding and your celebrant wedding on the same day (if possible), or you may choose to make them two separate occasions.

To be legally married or enter into a civil partnership, a registrar must be present. You will also need at least 2 witnesses. Some registrars are happy to work alongside celebrants and will come to your chosen venue to complete the legalities on the same day. Alternatively, you can hold a separate legally binding civil ceremony.

This can be a simple, statutory ceremony at a cost of around £57, or a larger ceremony attended by guests of your choice. Many couples like to have a small legal ceremony at the register office attended by close family, followed by a larger, more personalised celebrant-led wedding, which they view as their main wedding day.

Costs and procedures differ between registration districts, but if you tell your local register office that you are having a celebrant-led ceremony, they can discuss the options available.

Once you have made contact with your local register office, I would be happy to work alongside your registrar if they are willing, in order to make the process as smooth as possible for you.