

June 2019

Changes to Marriage Registration – The way in which marriages are registered is set to change following the passing into law of the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Act 2019 which, as well as providing for opposite-sex couples to be able to enter into civil partnerships, will allow for mother's names to be included in Marriage Registers as well as/in place of father's names. It also makes provision for significant changes in the way that marriages are registered.

Representatives of the Faculty Office and the Legal Offices of the Church of England and Church in Wales have been in discussion with the General Register Office about the proposed changes which the Government are keen to bring into effect as soon as possible – but no implementation date has yet been confirmed. A number of issues remain to be resolved including the provision of a workable secure system to produce the new documentation and time to train the 20,000+ clergy who are able to conduct weddings in both Churches.

In essence, the proposals will replace Marriage Registers and Marriage Certificates (issued at the time of the wedding) with a Marriage Document which will be prepared by the officiating priest before the wedding. At the ceremony, the Marriage Document will be signed by the couple, their witnesses and the officiating priest (in much the same way as the Registers are currently). The significant difference is that the couple will then need to ensure that the Marriage Document is deposited at the local Register Office within 7 days of the date of the wedding and the local Superintendent Registrar will then record the details and issue the couple with a Marriage Certificate. The couple can ask someone to lodge the Marriage Document on their behalf (as in many cases they will, of course, be on honeymoon!) but it is their responsibility (not the officiating minister's responsibility) to ensure that it is done.

How the Marriage Document is produced remains one of the significant areas under discussion. The Regulations envisage that this will be some form of secure online portal to which clergy will need access as there is provision for couples to be reminded by email from the General Register Office if they have not lodged the Document within the required period. In the shorter term, it is likely that clergy will be issued with a stock of Marriage Documents (similar to the books of Marriage Certificates which are currently provided by the GRO).

For marriages that currently take place by Superintendent Registrar's Certificates, the SRC will be replaced by a "Marriage Schedule" which will be produced by the Register Office taking Notice of the Marriage and that Schedule will then be signed by all the parties including the officiating priest once the marriage has taken place and, again, will have to be lodged with the Register Office within 7 days.

Before the new system goes live, training will be provided by the GRO (probably in conjunction with clergy training offered through Dioceses/Diocesan Registries). Please keep an eye out for the training as the changes are significant and it essential that all clergy who conduct marriages are aware of them to ensure that the law is complied with and that couples' marriages are validly conducted and properly registered. Once a timetable for implementation of the new registration regime and training provisions are known, we will post details on our website and Church House, Westminster and The Representative Body of the Church in Wales will do their best to communicate the details through the dioceses and any relevant national networks.