

Marriage Registers

We are beginning to receive enquiries from clergy and administrators about this proposed legislation that makes new provisions for the registration of marriages (amongst other things). I am passing on what we know so far in case it is of help to you.

The legislation provides for the Secretary of State to make regulations to amend the Marriage Act 1949 whereby details for the registration of marriages will be held on a central register. There will be a change to the way marriages are registered and this will affect ecclesiastical marriages. Legal preliminaries are to remain the same but it is understood that a 'marriage document' will be used as part of the service which will then be provided, by the couple, to the civil authorities for registration and production of the marriage certificate. This will then allow for a central register of marriages, held in an electronic form. There will be provision for mothers to be added to the documentation.

It will be the 'marriage document' signed at the service – not the registers currently held in church. The minister solemnizing the wedding will not have to produce marriage certificates as these will be produced when the marriage is registered by the civil authorities.

There appears to be a time limit of 3 years on the Secretary of State to provide the regulations. However, it is important to note the wording in the Act states 'may provide' rather than 'must provide' so it is possible, of course, that no such regulations will be forthcoming at all; it will almost certainly be a while before things change and the advice for now is to carry on as before. I believe some local civil registrars have written to clergy – hence the confusion and calls to the Registry.

If new regulations come into effect this will mean quite a significant change and I am sure that central Church House will be working closely with clergy to provide guidance and a standardised 'marriage document' well in advance of the changes becoming a requirement.

The legislation is fairly self-explanatory and the notes provided are good.

Explanatory notes have been provided and can be read here:

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/bills/cbill/2017-2019/0353/en/19353en.pdf>

and a link to the actual legislation

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2019/12/contents/enacted/data.htm>

With best wishes

Anita

For the Diocesan Registry
(01722) 432390

Sue de Candole: Registrar
Sarah Hart, Anita Jeans and Alix Austen: Registry Clerks