

# MEETING YOUR MP ABOUT HUMANIST MARRIAGES



A guide from Humanists UK

**Visiting your MP is one of the most effective ways that you can work to influence the law or Government policy to be more in line with your own views.** It is much more effective than writing to them because when you write, you will often get a response prepared by an MP's staff members and it may only be a party-held stock response. However, if you visit then the MP will have to think about the issue for some time; you can brief them on it more thoroughly than you could by email; and it's easier to get concrete commitments from them to take action.

This guide provides an overview of how to meet your MP, then some FAQs about humanist marriages and the campaign for legal recognition, and finally two briefings you can print out and give to your MP. The first of the two is an overview of humanism, our campaigns work and the work of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group, while the second is specifically on the campaign for legal recognition of humanist marriages in England and Wales.

We strongly recommend reading and trying to memorise this document as much as possible before the meeting. You could have this guide with you to consult with if needs be, but it's best not to simply read it as a set script but to go in and try and engage with your MP in a more bespoke and personal manner.

If you have any questions please email our Humanist Marriage Campaigner Tallulah Gordon at [tallulah@humanists.uk](mailto:tallulah@humanists.uk).

## ABOUT MEETING YOUR MP

Most MPs hold regular 'surgeries' (meetings with constituents) to discuss their concerns. Usually, these were held in their constituency, e.g. a municipal building or their office, but since the pandemic many have shifted to be online. Some MPs may hold open surgeries and some may require you to make an appointment. Therefore, it is best to contact your MP's office beforehand to check. Times and locations of surgeries can be found out either by phoning your MP's office or will be advertised locally, for example through your MP's website. You can also meet your MP in Parliament, but we recommend surgeries as easiest.

### Preparing for the meeting

When meeting your MP, you should prepare what you are going to say to your MP thoroughly before attending your meeting. Here are a few tips before you go:

- Have a concise summary of your issue to give to your MP. We've prepared a three-page briefing on this topic specifically and another that's about humanism and the work of the All Party Parliamentary Humanist Group more generally, both of which you can find at the end of this document
- Go over the arguments you are going to make and make sure you can explain the problem clearly before you go. You could practice with someone who is unfamiliar with the issue
- Make sure that you know what you want your MP to do as a result of the meeting
- Decide on a structure for how you want the meeting to run. It is best to start by introducing yourself and your relevant interests, then moving on to explain the issue, telling the MP what you want them to do about it, and asking for their thoughts on the matter. If more than one person is attending the meeting, decide beforehand who is going to speak and when
- Be prepared to defend your position. Your MP may not agree with you, so it is best to prepare answers beforehand for any questions or counter-arguments they might make



- Make sure you bring a notepad and pen with you.

### At the meeting

- Dress smartly. For your MP to take your issue seriously, they need to take you seriously, so it is best to dress in smart or smart-casual clothes if possible
- Make sure you are punctual. MPs are very busy people, so make sure you leave enough time to get to the meeting venue and to pass through security
- Don't assume your MP will know anything about the issue at hand, even if you've sent over a briefing or briefed their staff in advance!
- Always be polite
- If the meeting goes well, you could ask the MP if you can take a photo with them, you, and materials, to tweet showing their support, and/or get a quote from them to that effect.
- Don't forget to ask for copies of any actions they take on your issue.

### What you can ask your MP to do

There are two principal things you can ask your MP to do: first, you can ask them to ask a [parliamentary question](#) on the matter, whether written or oral. And second, you can ask them to write to the relevant Government minister on your behalf. It's possible for your MP to take more than one of these actions. Broadly speaking, parliamentary questions are better than letters because they are a public commitment by the MP to your issue. We are happy to help MPs' offices in drafting questions and letters.

### After the meeting

- You may wish to send a thank you message to your MP after the meeting – this can also serve as an opportunity to remind them of anything they committed to, and offer to put them in touch with us so we can work with them on those actions
- Carry out any action points you agree with your MP in the meeting
- Give feedback on how it went to Humanists UK staff. You can email our Humanist Marriage Campaigner Tallulah Gordon at [tallulah@humanists.uk](mailto:tallulah@humanists.uk).

## SOME FAQs ABOUT HUMANIST MARRIAGES

**Q: What are humanist weddings?** A: Humanist weddings are non-religious wedding ceremonies which are personal occasions that are fully customised to match the deepest-held values and beliefs of the couple getting married. They are conducted by a humanist celebrant, someone guaranteed to share their beliefs, who in consultation with the couple produces a bespoke script. Although at present not legally recognised in England or Wales, Humanists UK does more non-legal wedding ceremonies than any minority religious group does legal marriages.

**Q: If humanist weddings aren't legally recognised, how do they currently happen at all?** A: At present, couples in England and Wales wishing to have a humanist wedding ceremony and to be legally married also have to go through a separate registry office wedding, often for practical reasons on a different date, in order to gain legal recognition for their marriage. This is an additional expense and administrative burden that religious couples don't have to face, but more than that, couples often complain that the marriage ceremony they see as their real wedding is not the one recognised in law or even by religious friends or relatives as when they become legally married.

**Q: How are humanist ceremonies any different from civil marriages conducted by registrars?** A: When a couple opts for a civil marriage by a registrar, they can't choose to use a celebrant that



shares their beliefs. There are strict limits on how far they can customise the script to fully match who they are as a couple – indeed they can't have any specifically humanist content at all, if that's what they want. For some people that's fine – not everyone wants this level of customisation, and not every non-religious person is a humanist. But for those who do want it, that's where humanist marriages come in – just as religious marriages are not for every religious couple but are legally available for those who want them. Only with a humanist marriage are non-religious couples guaranteed a celebrant who shares their beliefs, in a venue that is special to them (including outdoors), and using a fully customised script that reflects their deepest beliefs and desires.

**Q: Won't any relaxation of the marriage laws open the door for a completely unregulated system?** A: Absolutely not. The law already passed by Parliament only allows the Government to introduce marriage by organisations that promote non-religious beliefs, morality, and ethics. Furthermore, the Government can choose to lay an Order (i.e. put down the secondary legislation required to bring about legal recognition, without needing a new Act of Parliament) that provides just for Humanists UK to gain legal recognition for its marriages.

There is no group other than Humanists UK that wants to be able to perform belief-based marriages, never mind about another one that has the size, good repute, and proper training and accreditation processes that would be required for an Order to be granted. (Indeed, in Scotland, only humanist groups have made use of the legal recognition for belief-based marriages, since the law was changed in 2005.) But the fact that the Secretary of State may make as many orders as s/he likes obviates any objection it may have to such an Order being made, given that it would not fix marriage law in a state that gives Humanists UK any unfair advantage over other belief-based groups that may be able to make a similar case for such an Order.

**Q: Why don't you just go to Scotland if it's so important?** A: Some couples do this. But you shouldn't have to travel to another country to have a legal marriage in line with your worldview. Not only is this burdensome, but for many couples, the venue of the wedding is a deeply important part of the wedding itself.

**Q: At the moment, other forms of marriage generally can't legally take place outdoors. This is something you're demanding. How would that be fair?** A: Actually, the Government legally recognised outdoor civil marriages on a permanent basis in March, and is expected to introduce legislation to do the same for all religious marriages later this year. Further, the Church of England, Church in Wales, the Quakers, and the Jews can already marry people outside – so we're not demanding something unprecedented but rights some groups already have. At any rate, the reality of the matter is that religious groups haven't been asking to marry people outside because for most religions it's important to have the wedding take place in a consecrated building. Outdoor locations in the midst of nature are special for many humanists. Besides, humanists have no 'places of worship' as required in law for religious weddings and so anyway need some different arrangement.

**Q: What's wrong with having to have two ceremonies?** A: Put simply, it's discrimination. It's a significant additional expense (often up to £500) and administrative burden that religious couples don't have to face, but more than that, couples often complain that the wedding ceremony they see as their real marriage ceremony is not the one recognised in law as when they become legally married.



**Q: What about Muslim marriages? They're not legally recognised either.** A: Many Muslim marriages have no legal recognition because in the eyes of sharia law, civil recognition of a marriage is not necessary for the marriage to be valid. This means couples don't then enjoy the same advantages and protections under the law that a legally valid marriage will give them.

But it's not the same as saying that Muslim marriages cannot be legally recognised. Mosques can register as places of worship just like any other, and so perform legal marriages like any other religion. The issue is they often choose not to do so, as opposed to their being unable to.

This is of course a problem that needs addressing, but it is an entirely different problem to that of lack of legal recognition of humanist marriages, and the need to address one should not affect the other.

**Q: What's the state of play in terms of recognition in... England and Wales/Northern Ireland/Scotland/Republic of Ireland/Jersey/Guernsey/Isle of Man?** A: Humanist weddings gained legal recognition as marriages in Scotland in 2005 and the Republic of Ireland in 2012. Northern Ireland and Jersey joined them in 2018, the former following a Court of Appeal case, and Guernsey did so in 2021. In England and Wales, since 2013 legal humanist marriages have been on the statute books, but the UK Government has not enacted that statute (i.e. brought it into force) – something that only requires an Order to do, and which we are working to see change. An Order is also known as a statutory instrument – it's secondary legislation that the Government itself can bring about without needing a new Act of Parliament. In this case, the Secretary of State for Justice is responsible for the Order-making power. There is no legal recognition on the Isle of Man.

**Q: The Law Commission has published its review of marriage law. Can't you just wait for that to solve this?** A: No. On humanist marriages, the Law Commission's report does not 'mak(e) recommendations on whether as a matter of policy new groups [i.e. humanists] should be allowed to conduct legally binding weddings, which is a decision for Government.' So the Government still needs to take a view.

This is an outstanding human rights issue affecting thousands of couples and so the Government should just go ahead and resolve it immediately. Further, humanists have already been waiting for this change for decades on the back of one review or another. In 1999-2005 the Labour Government reviewed marriage venues and humanist marriages were discussed during that review. But nothing came of it. The same is true for 2014 MoJ and 2015 Law Commission consultations on humanist marriages. After four years in the works, the most recent Law Commission review reported in July 2022. But any legislation that follows might only come into effect in 2024 at the most ambitious. But it may not at all – only a third of Law Commission reviews since 2011 have been partly implemented, and only 10% since 2017. In the meantime, thousands of couples will miss out on the chance to have the kind of legally recognised marriage they want.

At the very least, the Government should lay an order to bring about legal recognition, even if the state of law it produces is only an interim one until the implementation of a wider reform of marriage law. That's what they've already done when it comes to outdoor civil marriages. Without the same for humanist marriages, thousands of couples will be prevented from having the type of marriage which they want, and to which human rights law means they should be entitled.



### ABOUT HUMANISTS UK

At **Humanists UK**, we want a tolerant world where rational thinking and kindness prevail. We work to support lasting change for a better society, championing ideas for the one life we have. Since 1896, our work has been helping people be happier and more fulfilled. By bringing non-religious people together we help them develop their own views and an understanding of the world around them. Together with our partners Humanist Society Scotland, we speak for 100,000 members and supporters and over 115 members of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group. Through our ceremonies, pastoral support, education services, and campaigning work, we advance free thinking and freedom of choice so everyone can live in a fair and equal society.

### ABOUT HUMANISTS IN PARLIAMENT

**The All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group (APPHG)** is a cross-party group of over 115 members from both the House of Commons and the House of Lords across all the main parties, and to which Humanists UK provides the secretariat. The APPHG meets around four times a year to hear speakers and discuss relevant issues. Humanists UK supports the APPHG in shaping or responding to parliamentary business including by providing briefings and research, by helping draft parliamentary questions, interventions, and EDMs, and by suggesting topics for debate.

Through our parliamentary work we have worked successfully to repeal blasphemy laws in England and Wales, supported the passages of the Equality Act 2006 and 2010 and the Same-Sex Marriage Act 2013, advocated for compulsory relationships and sex education in the school curriculum in England and Wales, and for the keeping of the so-called '50% cap' on religious selection in free school admissions. In 2018, the APPHG conducted an inquiry into the legal recognition of humanist marriages in England and Wales, recommending that the Government use its existing powers to grant legal recognition.<sup>1</sup> In 2020, it conducted an inquiry into the place of religion in Parliament.<sup>2</sup>

We also have Coordinators working with humanist members of Senedd Cymru and the Northern Ireland Assembly. Our sister charity Humanist Society Scotland works with the Scottish Parliament.

### OUR POLICY

We want everyone to have the fullest possible freedom of choice in the shaping of their own lives, limited only by the rights and freedoms of others in a fair and equitable society and never by the pressures of religion, tradition, or outmoded law. This includes children, who should be actively prepared in schools for a life in society in which they can exercise this freedom and should, while still children, enjoy their human rights with increasing fullness in line with their growing maturity.

We endorse the principles behind the major international human rights treaties and covenants as well as the specific rights guaranteed within them. We also endorse the principles and specific freedoms guaranteed within the World Organisation for Animal Health's Five Freedoms for animals

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<sup>1</sup> APPHG, May 2018, *Any Lawful Impediment. A report of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group's inquiry into the legal recognition of humanists marriages in England and Wales.*

<https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/APPHG-report-on-humanist-marriage.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> APPHG, February 2020. *Time for Reflection: A Report of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group on Religion or Belief in the UK Parliament.*

[https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/APPHG-report\\_religion-in-parliament\\_Jan2020\\_print.pdf](https://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/APPHG-report_religion-in-parliament_Jan2020_print.pdf)



under human control. We want to see all these rights and freedoms implemented and protected in full in law or policy by governments across the UK and the world.

We support the fullest possible freedom of expression compatible with the rights and freedoms of others in a democratic society. We believe free expression is an essential liberty without which societies can easily slide into a culture of oppression, suspicion, and fear.

We support a secular state as the best form of state to achieve freedom, fairness, equal citizenship, and peace in a plural and cohesive society – all things we support. A secular state should: maintain separation between public institutions and institutions of religion or belief, ensuring no domination of one by the other; maintain and advance freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief for all people up to the limits of the rights and freedoms of others in a fair society; and treat all people equally in law and policy regardless of their religious or non-religious beliefs.

We want public policy on all issues to be evidence-based and directed towards enhancing the dignity and wellbeing of people and other sentient animals.

### OUR CAMPAIGNS

Within our policy remit, there are certain campaigns that we proactively work on. These are:

- Legal recognition of humanist marriages in England and Wales
- Balanced approaches to religions and worldviews in schools in the UK
- An end to religious discrimination in UK schools, including admissions
- Increased UK Government support for persecuted humanists abroad
- Legal assisted dying in England and Wales
- Abolishing the blasphemy law in Northern Ireland

### ABOUT HUMANISM

The word humanist means someone who:

- trusts to the scientific method when it comes to understanding how the universe works and rejects the idea of the supernatural (and is therefore an atheist or agnostic);
- makes their ethical decisions based on reason, empathy, and a concern for human beings and other sentient animals; and
- believes that, in the absence of an afterlife and any discernible purpose to the universe, human beings can act to give their own lives meaning by seeking happiness in this life and helping others to do the same.

A humanist is someone who shapes their own life in the here and now, because they believe it's the only life they have. We make sense of the world through logic, reason, and evidence, and always seek to treat those around us with warmth, understanding, and respect.

**For more details, information and evidence, contact Humanists UK:**

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# LEGAL RECOGNITION OF HUMANIST MARRIAGES IN ENGLAND AND WALES



Briefing from Humanists UK, August 2022

## WHAT'S HAPPENING?

On 19 July, the Law Commission published its review of marriage law in England and Wales. This is the latest in nine years of reviews and consultations into humanist marriages. With the release of this report, there are no justifications for any more delays to legal recognition. As per a High Court decision in 2020, the Government must act on humanist marriages now that the Law Commission has reported. It has yet to commit to doing so.

It could prove years before the Government implements the Law Commission's proposals, if it ever does. Luckily, humanist marriages do not have to wait for a wholesale reform of the law, like what the Law Commission's report proposes. The Government can instead legally recognise humanist marriages now by laying an Order under the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act, a power it has held since 2013. It could even do so on an interim basis, pending a wider change to the law.

## ABOUT HUMANIST MARRIAGES

Humanist weddings are non-religious wedding ceremonies that are fully customised to match the deepest-held values and beliefs of the couple getting married. They are conducted by a humanist celebrant, someone guaranteed to share their beliefs. Through an extended period of close collaboration with the couple, the celebrant produces a completely bespoke script. The ceremony also occurs in whatever location is most meaningful for the couple.

Humanists UK has more than 300 trained and accredited wedding celebrants who already conduct over 1,100 weddings (without legal recognition) in England and Wales each year. Humanist marriages gained legal recognition in Scotland in 2005, the Republic of Ireland in 2012, and Northern Ireland in 2018 following a Court of Appeal ruling that concluded that a failure to do so would be a breach of human rights. Jersey also gave legal recognition to humanist marriages in 2018 and in 2021 Guernsey followed suit.

Legal recognition in England and Wales has been under constant Government review since 2013. The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act gave the Government the power to enact legal recognition of humanist marriages by Order. But in the nine years since, the Government has not done this. Instead it has reviewed the matter three times. The third, most recent review was published by the Law Commission in July 2022. This is by far the widest of the three reviews in scope, proposing a wholesale reform to weddings law in England and Wales.

## WHAT COULD HAPPEN NEXT?

As per its Terms of Reference, the Law Commission's project does not recommend whether or not humanist marriages should gain legal recognition. That was agreed to be a decision for the Government alone.



But when six couples took a legal case to the High Court in 2020, the judge ruled that the lack of legal recognition for humanist marriages was discrimination, and that in light of that, the Secretary of State for Justice ‘cannot... simply sit on his hands’ and do nothing about the matter.

However, given the ongoing Law Commission review, the judge accepted the Government’s argument that its refusal to act immediately could be justified ‘at this time’. From this she concluded, ‘Although I may deprecate the delay that has occurred since 2015, I cannot ignore the fact that there is currently an on-going review of the law of marriage in this country’.

Now that this review has concluded, we therefore hope that the Government will recognise that there is no longer any legitimate reason for delaying legal recognition for humanist marriages. But we strongly suggest that this is done by laying a statutory instrument now, as is possible under Section 14 of the Marriage Act 2013. This is because of the length of time before any wholesale reform of marriage law is likely to be made.

By convention, the Government has up to six months to publish an interim response to the Law Commission’s proposals, and then a further six months to issue a full response. If it does decide to bring forward any wholesale legislation, it may choose to consult further on what this should look like. After that, it would have to announce this legislation in a May Queen’s Speech, before finally introducing a new Bill to Parliament. It may then take a year for this Bill to become an Act. This means that any wholesale reform of marriage law is likely to be made in 2024 at soonest, if at all. Only a tenth of all Law Commission projects published between 2017 and 2021 have been implemented by the Government, even in part – and there’s no guarantee that this project on weddings law won’t meet a similar fate.

We think the time the Government has already spent reviewing the matter is long enough. Most of the Law Commission’s recommendations could well require further consultation, but humanist marriages have already been subjected to this for the last nine years. We don’t understand why humanists can’t have legal recognition of their marriages at least on an interim basis, which wouldn’t prevent a wholesale reform to marriage law from being made at a later date. Interim reform was already used by the Government to legally recognise outdoor civil and religious marriages this year, undermining the very argument that saved it from defeat at the High Court.

**We want the UK Government to use its existing powers to enact recognition of humanist marriages, by Order, without delay – under section 14 of the 2013 Marriage Act. A draft has been produced and only needs a positive resolution with up to 90 minutes before each House. It can be done on the same interim basis as the outdoor marriage reforms.**

## THE WIDER CASE FOR HUMANIST MARRIAGE RECOGNITION

- **It is fair:** the 1,100 couples a year who have humanist weddings here already should have the same opportunity to marry in line with their beliefs as their religious counterparts.
- **It strengthens freedom of belief:** The High Court has already ruled that the lack of legal recognition is ‘discrimination’.
- **It is democratic:** 95% of respondents to a 2014 MoJ consultation supported it. A 2019 YouGov poll





found 69% in favour and just 12% opposed, with a majority of every religious group in favour.

- **It is good for marriage:** FOI data from Scotland shows that couples married in a humanist ceremony are almost four times less likely to divorce compared with all other types of marriages.
- **It is popular and will be good for the economy:** The number of humanist weddings in Scotland have risen since legal recognition in 2005 to over 6,000 in 2019 – over 20% of the total, meaning there are now more humanist marriages in Scotland than Christian marriages.
- **It furthers the levelling up agenda:** Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands, and Ireland all already have legally recognised humanist marriages. England and Wales has fallen behind.

## CHRONOLOGY

**1890s:** Humanists UK officiants first perform weddings, shortly after its founding in 1896. Relatively lax interpretations of the law at the time meant that these generally had legal recognition.

**1970s:** Tightening up of use of the marriage law requires government officials to pick up the anomalous position of humanist marriages happening outside of genuine places of worship, and so legal recognition of humanist marriages is taken away.

**1980s:** Court case famously establishes that humanism, though charitable, is not a religion.

**2001:** Government launches wholesale review of marriage law reform, with plans to switch from the present system of control by authorisation of venues to one of recognition of celebrants. Humanists UK makes case for inclusion in new scheme.

**2004:** Wholesale review abandoned. Government instead proposes further investigation and consultation, to look to (in its words) 'change the legal requirement for marriage ceremonies to be either civil or religious.' But this never happens.

**2005:** Scottish Registrar General brings about legal recognition of humanist marriages in Scotland through a reading in of belief marriages into provisions for religious marriages. This is possible because marriage law there is based on recognising organisations and officiants, rather than places of worship, the system in England and Wales. Humanist marriages then begin to grow in popularity.

**2012:** Humanist marriage Private Members' Bill brought forth in the House of Lords for the first time, at the suggestion of the then Marriage Minister. Ireland passes a Humanist Marriage Act.

**2013:** After extensive debate during the passage of the Same-Sex Marriage Act, it becomes clear that there is support for legal recognition of humanist marriages in both Houses. Government introduces and Parliament passes an amendment to the Bill, which becomes section 14 of the Act, giving it the power to extend legal recognition to belief marriages by order, and mandating a Government consultation and decision on the matter by the end of 2014.

**2014:** Ministry of Justice consultation returns over 95% in favour of legally recognised humanist marriages, with the Church of England making it clear it sees the case for reform. But the Government instead decides to refer the matter to the Law Commission, citing inconsistencies in



the law around who can do outdoor marriages and the undesirability of piecemeal reform. Meanwhile, Scottish Marriage Act puts humanist marriages on a statutory footing.

**2015:** Law Commission reports that the lack of recognition for humanist marriages is 'unfair', but also raises the same issues as the MoJ. Instead, it proposes that it conduct a second, 'thorough review of the law as a whole... in order to provide a system that is both more coherent and fair to all'.

**2017:** Two years on, MoJ Minister belatedly writes to Commission: 'After careful consideration, I have concluded that now is not the right time to develop options for reform to marriage law.' Northern Ireland High Court rules that lack of legal recognition of humanist marriages is breach of Human Rights Act, and orders a reading in as in Scotland. Decision is stayed pending appeal.

**2018:** All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group publishes report on humanist marriages, dismantling reasons for delay.<sup>1</sup> Northern Ireland Court of Appeal finds a way to extend legal recognition to humanist marriages, but as a form of civil marriage, not belief marriage. Jersey extends legal recognition to humanist marriages. Couple threatens UK Government with court case over lack of recognition in England and Wales. Government subsequently announces Law Commission review.

**2019:** Government takes nine months to agree terms of reference for review with Law Commission. Final terms specify that Commission should come up with scheme to recognise humanist marriages, but uniquely specify that it should not recommend whether they are not. More humanist than Christian marriages in Scotland, reflecting growth since the law change there.

**2020:** Six couples take humanist marriage case before High Court. Judge rules that lack of legal recognition is 'discrimination', but refuses to give declaration of incompatibility, as 'the Defendant's stated desire to consider any reform on a wholesale, rather than piecemeal, basis' was a legitimate aim. 'Specifically, in relation to the treatment of humanist and other non-religious belief marriages, particular issues were identified relating to the location where the ceremony might take place... these were matters seen to potentially give rise to new species of discrimination if reform was only undertaken on a piecemeal basis.' Couples and Government launch cross-appeals of the judgment. Law Commission consultation subsequently delayed by six months due to pandemic, finally closing in January 2021, but Commission says it is still on track to report by December 2021. Northern Ireland Government recognises that recognising humanist marriages as a form of civil marriage is leading to discriminatory treatment compared to religious marriages, so instead starts recognising them as belief marriages through a reading into the law.

**2021:** Guernsey legally recognises humanist marriages. Northern Ireland launches consultation on putting humanist marriages on a proper statutory footing. Welsh Government calls on UK Government to extend immediate legal recognition. UK Government lays order introducing outdoor civil marriages on an interim basis. Government and couples withdraw their appeals to High Court

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<sup>1</sup> 'Any Lawful Impediment?' A report of the All-Party Parliamentary Humanist Group's inquiry into the legal recognition of humanist marriage in England and Wales:

<https://humanists.uk/wp-content/uploads/APPHG-report-on-humanist-marriage.pdf>



judgment. Three weeks later, Government launches consultation on making this permanent, and on also introducing outdoor religious marriages, all outside and ahead of the Law Commission review. Law Commission announces delay in its final report until July 2022.

**March 2022:** Following the consultation outcome, the Government decides to make its outdoor civil and religious marriage reforms permanent, failing to include reform on humanist marriages.

**July 2022:** The Law Commission publishes its review of marriage law. The Government says it must take the time to review these recommendations before deciding a course of action, declining to take a position on humanist marriages yet. In response to its own marriage law consultation, Northern Ireland decides to put humanist marriages on a proper statutory footing.

**Early 2023:** UK Government likely to respond to Law Commission final report – standard response time is six months. Unclear what next but quite possibly a further consultation on a white or green paper or draft bill, which may not happen immediately but perhaps after further reflection.

**May 2023:** First date at which the Government may be likely to announce a new marriage bill, following on from the Law Commission review.

**July 2023:** Standard deadline for a full response by the Government to the Law Commission review.

**April 2024:** First date at which any marriage bill following on from Law Commission review may complete its legislative passage, perhaps coming into force later that year.

**For more details, information, and evidence, contact Humanists UK:**

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