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## **BRIEFING: NUMBER OF DIVORCES IN SCOTLAND BY TYPE OF MARRIAGE**

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**Briefing from Humanists UK, 10 March 2019**

### **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. Our work helps people be happier and more fulfilled, and by bringing non-religious people together we help them develop their own views and an understanding of the world around them. Founded in 1896, we are trusted to promote humanism by over 70,000 members and supporters and over 100 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.

We provide ceremonies across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands. In Scotland celebrants are trained by the Humanist Society Scotland.

### **SUMMARY**

Statistics obtained through a freedom of information request reveal that in 2017-18, Scottish couples who had a humanist marriage were, on average, three and a half times less likely to get divorced when compared to other couples. They are around four times less likely to get divorced when compared to couples who had civil marriages, around two and a half times less likely to get divorced than couples who had Church of Scotland marriages, around three times less likely to get divorced than couples who had a Roman Catholic marriage, and around three times less likely to get divorced than couples who had another type of religious marriage.

Couples put a lot more time into planning their humanist wedding ceremony than they do other types of wedding ceremony, spending a long time getting to know their celebrant and crafting a script that's just for them. That leads to a much more personal and meaningful marriage ceremony that really provides a stable bedrock for continued married life.

### **IN MORE DETAIL**

In response to a freedom of information request, the Scottish Courts and Tribunals Service (SCTS) provided us with the following breakdown of divorces, by duration and type of marriage, for the 2017-18 financial year (i.e. April 2017-March 2018 inclusive):<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> They also provided the following notes:

1. The divorce/dissolution action may have been registered in a previous financial year. The figures are based on the date the divorce/dissolution was granted.
2. The date of marriage/civil partnership is entered manually on the civil case management system and therefore is open to human error.
3. Figures are based on both ordinary divorce and simplified divorce actions.

Duration of marriage (years)	Civil	Humanist	Church of Scotland	Roman Catholic	Other religion	Not known	Total
<b>0-5</b>	595	43	129	39	110	0	<b>916</b>
<b>5-10</b>	927	44	210	81	220	0	<b>1,482</b>
<b>10-15</b>	701	3	250	86	171	0	<b>1,211</b>
<b>15-20</b>	450	0	239	56	126	0	<b>871</b>
<b>20-25</b>	333	0	276	71	85	0	<b>765</b>
<b>25-30</b>	237	0	250	71	47	0	<b>605</b>
<b>30+</b>	334	0	311	114	68	0	<b>827</b>
<b>Not known</b>	45	0	50	24	18	1	<b>138</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,622</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>1,715</b>	<b>542</b>	<b>845</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6,815</b>

In addition, National Records of Scotland publishes every calendar year 'marriages by religious forms and other beliefs', broken down into precisely who performed the marriage.<sup>2</sup> In recent years, this aggregates to the following number of marriages:

Year	Civil	Humanist	Church of Scotland	Roman Catholic	Other Religion	Total
<b>2017</b>	14,201	5,702	3,166	1,182	4,179	<b>28,430</b>
<b>2016</b>	15,066	4,912	3,675	1,346	4,230	<b>29,229</b>
<b>2015</b>	15,583	4,580	4,052	1,438	3,997	<b>29,650</b>
<b>2014</b>	15,000	4,104	4,505	1,555	3,872	<b>29,036</b>
<b>2013</b>	14,024	3,185	4,616	1,582	4,140	<b>27,547</b>
<b>2012</b>	15,592	3,052	5,508	1,827	4,555	<b>30,534</b>
<b>2011</b>	15,092	2,486	5,557	1,729	4,271	<b>29,135</b>
<b>2010</b>	14,449	2,092	6,005	1,776	4,157	<b>28,479</b>
<b>2009</b>	14,238	1,544	6,143	1,788	3,810	<b>27,523</b>
<b>2008</b>	15,199	1,026	7,007	1,873	3,796	<b>28,901</b>
<b>2007</b>	15,480	710	7,685	1,953	4,033	<b>29,861</b>
<b>2006</b>	15,188	434	8,021	2,006	4,248	<b>29,897</b>
<b>2005</b>	15,510	82	8,868	2,004	4,394	<b>30,858</b>
<b>2004</b>	15,911	0	9,507	1,951	4,784	<b>32,153</b>
<b>2003</b>	13,861	0	10,016	2,029	4,845	<b>30,751</b>
<b>2002</b>	11,449	0	11,115	2,031	5,225	<b>29,820</b>
<b>2001</b>	11,487	0	11,396	2,050	4,684	<b>29,617</b>
<b>2000</b>	12,079	0	11,267	2,249	4,766	<b>30,361</b>

It is possible therefore to match up these two sets of figures and produce a very precise estimate of the rates of divorce. How this is done is explained in an annex to this briefing.

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Further, a marriage that lasted precisely five years would be recorded in the 5-10 years row and not the 0-5 years row (and similarly for other year ranges).

<sup>2</sup>

<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/vital-events/general-publications/vital-events-reference-tables/2017/section-7-marriages>

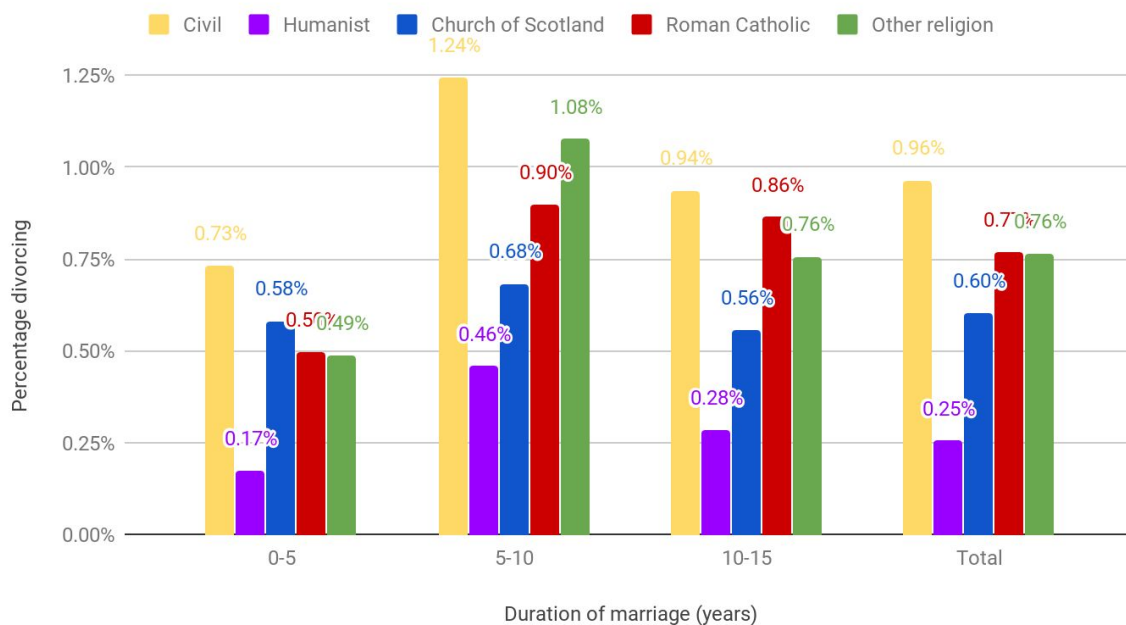
With these caveats, we can therefore calculate the number of marriages that occurred within the same date spans, again broken down by type:

Duration of marriage (years)	Civil	Humanist	Church of Scotland	Roman Catholic	Other religion	Total
<b>0-5</b>	81,371	24,667	22,210	7,863	22,614	<b>158,726</b>
<b>5-10</b>	74,502	9,609	30,758	9,019	20,453	<b>144,340</b>
<b>10-15</b>	74,858	1,058	44,968	9,960	22,606	<b>153,451</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>230,731</b>	<b>35,335</b>	<b>97,936</b>	<b>26,842</b>	<b>65,674</b>	<b>456,517</b>

Which leads to the following divorce rates:

Duration of marriage (years)	Civil	Humanist	Church of Scotland	Roman Catholic	Other religion	Total
<b>0-5</b>	0.73%	0.17%	0.58%	0.50%	0.49%	0.58%
<b>5-10</b>	1.24%	0.46%	0.68%	0.90%	1.08%	1.03%
<b>10-15</b>	0.94%	0.28%	0.56%	0.86%	0.76%	0.79%
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.96%</b>	<b>0.25%</b>	<b>0.60%</b>	<b>0.77%</b>	<b>0.76%</b>	<b>0.79%</b>

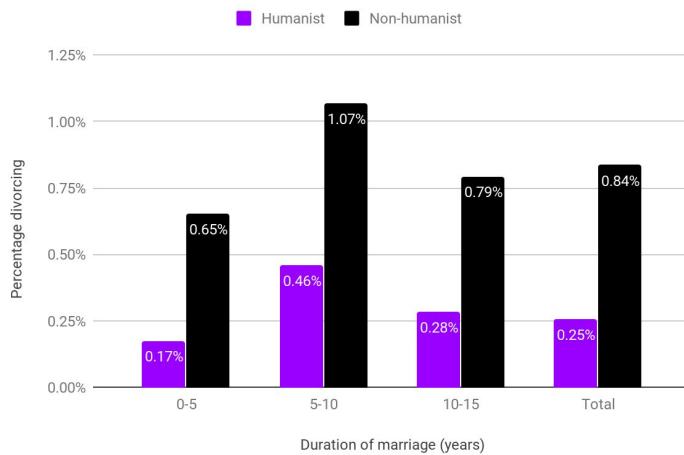
Divorce rates by type of marriage, Scotland, 2017-18



Or, comparing humanist vs non-humanist specifically:

Duration of marriage (years)	Humanist	Non-humanist
<b>0-5</b>	0.17%	0.65%
<b>5-10</b>	0.46%	1.07%
<b>10-15</b>	0.28%	0.79%
<b>Total</b>	<b>0.25%</b>	<b>0.84%</b>

Divorce rates by type of marriage, Scotland, 2017-18



## **ABOUT HUMANIST MARRIAGES**

A humanist wedding is a non-religious ceremony that is deeply personal and conducted by a humanist celebrant. It differs from a civil wedding in that it is entirely hand-crafted and reflective of the humanist beliefs and values of the couple, and conducted by a celebrant who shares their beliefs and values.

Humanist marriages are legally recognised in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Jersey, but not the rest of the UK.

Legal recognition has already had a transformative effect on Scottish and Irish society. In Scotland, humanist marriages gained legal recognition in 2005, and have risen in number from 85 in the first year to almost 7,000 in 2017 – some 20% of the total, meaning Humanist Society Scotland now provides more marriage ceremonies than any other religion or belief group.<sup>3</sup> In the Republic of Ireland, humanist marriages gained legal recognition in 2012. In 2017 around eight percent of legal marriages were humanist,<sup>4</sup> placing the Humanist Association of Ireland only behind the Catholic Church and civil marriages.

More recently humanist marriages became legal in Northern Ireland in August, following a Court of Appeal ruling that concluded that a failure to do so would be a breach of human rights.<sup>5</sup> Jersey also gave legal recognition to humanist marriages in July,<sup>6</sup> with the first ones expected to be performed in due course, and Guernsey is currently consulting on doing the same thing.<sup>7</sup>

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<https://www.humanism.scot/what-we-do/news/humanist-society-scotland-named-biggest-marriage-ceremony-provider-in-scotland/>

4 <https://www.cso.ie/en/releasesandpublications/er/mar/marriages2017/>

5

<https://humanism.org.uk/2018/08/22/first-legal-humanist-marriages-in-northern-ireland-since-court-ruling-to-occur-this-weekend/>

6

<https://humanism.org.uk/2018/07/01/jerseys-humanist-and-same-sex-marriage-law-comes-into-force/>

7

<https://humanism.org.uk/2018/09/11/94-of-people-in-guernsey-support-legal-humanist-marriage/>

In England and Wales, over 1,000 couples a year already have non-legal humanist wedding ceremonies,<sup>8</sup> but such ceremonies cannot at present carry legal recognition, without the couple also going through the time and expense of having a civil marriage as well. We believe this is unfair, and since religious marriages do carry such recognition, discriminatory. Since 2013 the UK Government has had the power to extend legal recognition if it wishes, but hasn't chosen to use this power yet.

## **WHY MIGHT HUMANIST COUPLES BE LESS LIKELY TO GET DIVORCED?**

We asked one of our celebrants, Zena Birch, about the matter. Zena mainly provides ceremonies in the south of England. She told us that 'I've married over 260 couples and I'm still in touch with almost all of them. In eight years, I have learned of three divorces and this may well be because of the reflection and consideration that humanist couples put into preparing their wedding day. Humanist wedding ceremonies look at the reason behind choosing to get married and how to create a solid, thought-through foundation.'

In other words, couples put a lot more time into planning their humanist wedding ceremony than they do other types of wedding ceremony, spending a long time getting to know their celebrant and crafting a script that's just for them. That leads to a much more personal and meaningful marriage ceremony that really provides a stable bedrock for continued married life.

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

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**Richy Thompson**  
**Director of Public Affairs and Policy**  
**0781 5589 636**  
**020 7324 3072**  
[richy@humanists.uk](mailto:richy@humanists.uk)  
[humanists.uk](http://humanists.uk)

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## **ANNEX: HOW THE NUMBER OF MARRIAGES OVER THE RELEVANT YEAR SPANS IS CALCULATED**

From our precise figures of how many couples got married in each calendar year, we estimate the number of couples who got married in the last 0-5, 5-10, and 10-15 financial years as follows. These estimates should be pretty accurate, and any changes to method of calculation wouldn't have much of an effect on the significant overall result:

1. While the divorce statistics cover each financial year, the marriage statistics cover calendar year. In order to make a comparison it is therefore necessary to adjust the marriage statistics to approximate what they would be if they show a financial year. To calculate the number of humanist marriages in 2015-16 (for example) we do this by taking three-quarters of the 2015 number (to approximate April to December) and add on one-quarter of the 2016 number (to approximate January to March). Marriage statistics are not yet available for January to March 2018, so we assume the figures for each type are the same as they were for a quarter of 2017.
2. If someone gets married in 2012-13 (for example), and got divorced in 2017-18, then they might have been married for under five years or they might have been married for over five. For those marriages that occurred in Q1 2013, on average they will occur  $\frac{1}{8}$  of the way through the year, so  $\frac{7}{8}$  of the divorces amongst these couples that occur in the 2017-18 financial year will occur after less than five years and  $\frac{1}{8}$  will occur after more than five years.

For those marriages that occurred in Q2-4 2012, on average they will occur  $\frac{5}{8}$  of the way through the year, so  $\frac{3}{8}$  of the divorces amongst these couples that occur in the 2017-18 financial year will occur after less than five years and  $\frac{5}{8}$  will occur after more than five years. (And similarly for other years.)

3. Therefore, the best way to calculate the number of humanist marriages (say) that occurred in the last 0-5 years (for comparison with the number of divorces over this period of time), we would need to take the number of humanist marriages in 2014-17, inclusive, add on an extra quarter of the 2017 figure, add on  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the 2013 figure (for Q2-4 2013), add on another  $\frac{1}{4} * \frac{7}{8}$  of the 2013 figure (for Q1 2013), and add on  $\frac{3}{4} * \frac{3}{8}$  of the 2012 figure (for Q2-4 2012).

This comes to 2017 figure \*  $\frac{5}{4}$  + 2014-16 figures + 2013 figure \*  $\frac{31}{32}$  + 2012 figure \*  $\frac{9}{32}$ .

4. To calculate the number of humanist marriages (say) that occurred in the last 5-10 years, we would take the number of humanist marriages that occurred in 2009-11, inclusive, add on  $\frac{1}{4} * \frac{7}{8}$  of the 2013 figure (for Q1 2013), add on  $\frac{3}{4} * \frac{5}{8}$  of the 2012 figure (for Q2-4 2012), add on another  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the 2012 figure (for Q1 2012), add on  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the 2008 figure (for Q2-4 2008), add on another  $\frac{1}{4} * \frac{7}{8}$  of the 2008 figure (for Q1 2008), and add on  $\frac{3}{4} * \frac{3}{8}$  of the 2007 figure (for Q2-4 2007).

This comes to 2013 figure \*  $\frac{1}{32}$  + 2012 figure \*  $\frac{23}{32}$  + 2009-11 figures + 2008 figure \*  $\frac{31}{32}$  + 2007 figure \*  $\frac{9}{32}$ .

5. And similarly, for 10-15 years, we get: 2008 figure \*  $\frac{1}{32}$  + 2007 figure \*  $\frac{23}{32}$  + 2004-06 figures + 2003 figure \*  $\frac{31}{32}$  + 2002 figure \*  $\frac{9}{32}$ .