

Humanist Ceremonies

Becoming a celebrant with Humanist Ceremonies

Background

Humanists UK is the UK's principal charity representing people who hold no religious belief. For over a century, Humanists UK has provided ceremonies for people who are not religious but who wish to mark significant events in their lives. Humanist Ceremonies is Humanists UK's organised network of trained and accredited celebrants in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. (The Humanist Society of Scotland is the equivalent organisation in Scotland.)

Over time the number of people offering non-religious ceremonies has grown, in response to demand. More people recognise that religion is not for them and feel uncomfortable, even hypocritical having a religious ceremony. They recognise that life without religion does not mean a life without morality. They want a ceremony that is distinctive, personal and significant, specifically devised for them.

Many individuals and organisations now offer non-religious ceremonies. However, a humanist ceremony is more than just an event with no religion. A humanist ceremony will reflect humanist principles, namely the value we place on humanity and reason, on our rights and responsibilities, on our individuality, on our personal histories and on our connections with others. In short, Humanist Ceremonies celebrate human lives in all their particularity and variety.

Ceremonies

Celebrants in the Humanist Ceremonies network can train to lead funerals, weddings or partnerships, and namings.

Most Humanist Ceremonies celebrants are trained and accredited to do funerals. Our humanist funerals are the ceremonies most in demand as our reputation for highly personalised and meaningful ceremonies grows.

However, requests for humanist weddings, partnerships and naming ceremonies are

rising. Even though these ceremonies have no legal status in England and Wales, we are finding that couples want a ceremony that celebrates their commitment to each other in terms of their values and perspectives. Likewise, parents from all walks of life want a special celebration for their child (or children) that properly reflects their principles and circumstances.

Being a Celebrant

The celebrant's role is rewarding and demanding. You are immensely privileged to be invited into people's lives, trusted with their stories and emotions and asked to lead a ceremony that enables their friends and family to mourn, or to celebrate, in ways they find moving and appropriate. At the same time, you carry a great responsibility. The ceremony you are being asked to conduct is very important and you must get it right.

As a funerals celebrant, your first ceremonies are likely to be more 'straightforward'. However, you could soon find yourself leading the funerals of young children, suicides, murder victims, or of people who have died in other tragic and traumatic circumstances. You will be dealing with families stunned or ravaged by grief; families whose worst nightmares have come true.

It takes a special kind of person to do this work. The work you will be expected to do will be of an exceptional nature and of exceptionally high quality. You will have to be determined always to give your best, mindful that each ceremony is unique. You need strong personal qualities and a variety of equally important high-level skills and competencies.

As a weddings or partnerships celebrant you will be helping a couple to make their personal commitment to each other public, to express their feelings before families, friends, and the people who matter most to them. All couples who wish their marriage to have legal status in England and Wales have to have a separate legal ceremony at a register office (unlike Scotland, where humanist weddings have legal status). However, the humanist ceremony will have more significance for those couples who have chosen to have one. You will be responsible for creating the atmosphere the couple wants, coordinating contributions from family and friends, and you'll need to be prepared to conduct ceremonies in a variety of locations.

As a naming celebrant you will be helping parents (single, cohabiting or married, straight or gay) celebrate the arrival of a child, or children, into their lives. The children in question may be new babies, newly adopted, or stepchildren joining a new family. You will be responsible for coordinating the involvement of friends and family members and may be expected to have creative ideas that will make each naming ceremony particularly special.

You will have:

Finely-tuned interpersonal skills. You'll be working with people from a wide variety of backgrounds. You'll need to win their confidence and put them at ease. You'll need to be

a constructive and sympathetic listener, able to draw out salient facts with empathy, sensitivity and insight. If you're a funerals celebrant, you'll probably be doing this in highly charged, emotional circumstances.

Diplomacy and communication skills. You'll need to be friendly and assured, even firm sometimes, and always polite. If you're a funerals celebrant you'll be liaising with funeral directors and crematoria staff. If you're a weddings or a namings celebrant you might be communicating with wedding planners, relatives or caterers. As part of the Humanist Ceremonies network, you will support, and be supported by, colleagues. You won't necessarily like or agree with everyone: few groups, families or households are 100% harmonious.

Writing skills. You'll need to be a very competent user of the English language. Your spelling, grammar and punctuation must always be correct. You'll have to construct a ceremony that's dignified and meaningful. You'll need to draw on appropriate music, poetry, or prose readings. You'll also have to include in your ceremony the contributions made by friends and family members. Enjoyment of this creative process will definitely be an advantage!

Presentational skills. You'll need to be well turned out, in an appropriate standard of dress. You'll need to have the presence and authority to take charge of proceedings, to deal calmly and reassuringly with the unexpected and to deliver the ceremony with feeling and sincerity.

Organisational skills. You'll always need to be punctual and reliable. You'll often have to work to tight deadlines (especially for funerals). You'll need to be efficient with your record keeping and accounts.

IT skills and driving licence. You'll need to be capable of using standard word-processing and spreadsheets (Word and Excel), email and the internet. You'll need a PC/laptop, printer, and voicemail. Unless you live in an area with reliable public transport you'll need your own car: ceremonies are often held in out-of-the-way places.

Humanist principles. You will need to be non-religious and committed to humanist principles. You will need to be a member of Humanists UK when you apply, and to remain a member while you work as a celebrant with Humanist Ceremonies.

You will gain:

Excellent training. You will be trained by experienced celebrants, many of whom also have professional backgrounds in training or education. Our standards are rigorous. You will not be accepted for training unless we think you are right for this work and you will not be thrown into the water until your trainers really think you are ready to swim.

Immense satisfaction from your work as a celebrant. With training, the ceremonies you devise will be greatly appreciated by your clients. You will be providing a service that meets emotional needs and which should exceed their expectations. The thanks and compliments our celebrants receive make this work very rewarding.

A new outlook on life. You'll meet people from all kinds of backgrounds, with a wide variety of views, in very different circumstances. Being a celebrant really allows you to see, hear and enjoy the richness of life's extraordinary tapestry.

Personal and professional support. Your Humanist Ceremonies trainers and mentors will help you develop to a standard where you feel equipped and confident to conduct ceremonies on your own. You will be part of a local and national network of colleagues in which you can receive and give support, advice, guidance, a listening ear and robust debate! You will benefit from practical support in the form of the Humanist Ceremonies website and forum, business cards, assistance with local marketing and promotion, regular updates, a programme of continuous professional development training and an annual conference. You will also be covered by Humanists UK's public liability and professional indemnity insurance.

An income. You will charge a fee for each ceremony you do. Some celebrants in the Humanist Ceremonies network work to the extent that they are able to live entirely from their income as celebrants. Others use the fees they earn from ceremonies to supplement other sources of income. **There is no guarantee of any ceremonies after training is completed.**

You will pay:

A training fee. Training courses are not free. Fees cover the costs of trainers, venue hire, overnight accommodation, catering, recruitment, and administration.

An annual fee. From April 2023, Humanist Ceremonies will be operating an annual accreditation fee, paid monthly. This is £20 per month (£25 for wedding celebrants in Northern Ireland). Your Accreditation Fee enables membership to the Humanist Ceremonies network. In return for your fee Humanists UK operates a service-level agreement, represented by our [Commitment to Celebrants](#), and the following benefits:

- membership of Humanists UK
- Public Liability and Professional Indemnity Insurance cover to £5 million
- an SEO rich website and Find a Celebrant feature
- regional and local groups
- branded stationery, including business cards and script presentation folders
- representation with national industry bodies, such as the Society of Allied and Independent Funeral Directors, National Association of Funeral Directors and UK Hospitality
- marketing support
- CPD and other top-up training sessions
- subsidised annual celebrant conference
- Membership card and pin badge

Time. Your training and the ceremonies you prepare and do will take time and commitment. You'll need to be able to make yourself available. You should be prepared for something much more than a hobby.

Stress. You'll be dealing with emotional people and emotional situations. This is why most celebrants love this work. However, it can be exacting and if you are not careful of yourself it can take a toll. You need to know yourself and your limitations well. You'll need support you can call on and should make sure you have time to unwind and enjoy yourself too.

Humanist Ceremonies – the Celebrants' Training Programme

In the Humanist Ceremonies network, the training period for each trainee is considered to extend from the time the applicant is accepted for training until their accreditation.

Throughout this period, trainees are continually assessed and expected to demonstrate the skills and personal qualities as described above. Not everyone who is accepted for training is found to be suitable, and successful completion of each stage of training is necessary before the trainee can progress to the next stage.

Recruitment, applications and interviews

Applications are assessed according to applicants' suitability for work as a celebrant in the Humanist Ceremonies network, their life and work experience, and the time they will make available for their work as a celebrant. (Please note that most funerals take place on weekdays). Applicants will need to show a clear commitment to humanist principles and must be members of Humanists UK. There are specific regions of the country where Humanist Ceremonies is currently under-represented and applicants from these areas will be given priority on courses, if they are suitable. While we welcome applications from all suitably qualified persons, as black, Asian, minority ethnic and disabled candidates are currently under-represented within the Humanist Ceremonies network, we particularly welcome applications from these applicants. We also welcome applications from LGB and trans and non binary candidates.

If your application is accepted, a video conference interview will be arranged. If you pass this successfully, you will be added to our training course waiting list and offered a place on a training course at the earliest opportunity. If we are not able to accept you on the next training course we are running, you will be guaranteed a place on the next course after that.

Funeral courses

Training for funerals takes place in three stages, with intervals of about four weeks between each stage.

Stage 1 (Induction) involves a full day and is currently taught online. Stage 2 (General Skills) and Stage 3 (Technical) each take two consecutive days and involve an overnight stay. Your overnight accommodation and catering are booked by the Humanists UK training team and are included in your training course fee. The first day of the third stage will be held in a hotel near a crematorium. On the second day, training will take place at the crematorium itself.

On the Induction Day (Stage 1) you will discuss Humanism and how to explain it, and carry out an overview of the skills involved – questioning, listening, writing, and speaking. At the second stage, you will consider issues around bereavement, look in more detail at the key skills required in order to become an effective funeral celebrant and discuss the whole process in more detail, from the first contact from the Funeral Director onwards.

The third stage looks principally at speaking skills, and provides you with the opportunity to deliver part of a ceremony in the realistic environment of a crematorium.

About a week before each stage of the course you will be sent by email relevant sections of the manual which you will need to either print, or bring on a device.

Both prior to and during your training you will be required to complete several written assignments and observe as many ceremonies as possible – these can be recordings, if necessary. A mentor, who will be an experienced celebrant, will be assigned to you to offer support and guidance and you should contact him/her when you need help.

At each stage your work and progress will be assessed according to the Humanist Ceremonies competencies framework.

Wedding and partnership courses

Training for weddings and partnerships takes place in three stages, with intervals of about four weeks between each stage.

Stage 1 (Induction) involves a full day and is currently taught online. Stage 2 (General Skills) and Stage 3 (Technical) each take two consecutive days and involve an overnight stay – usually in the hotel where these stages of training takes place. Your overnight accommodation and catering are booked by the Humanists UK training team and are included in your training course fee.

On the Induction Day you will discuss Humanism and how to explain it, and carry out an overview of the skills involved – questioning, listening, writing, and speaking. At the General Skills stage (Stage 2), you will look in more detail at the skills required in order to become an effective weddings celebrant and consider some of the issues around weddings and partnerships.

The technical stage (Stage 3) covers the whole process in more detail, from the first contact from the couple onwards, and enables you to deliver part of a ceremony in a reasonably realistic environment.

About a week before each stage of the course you will be sent by email relevant sections of the manual which you will need to either print, or bring on a device.

Both prior to and during your training you will be required to complete several written assignments and observe as many ceremonies as possible – these can be recordings, if necessary. A mentor, who will be an experienced celebrant, will be assigned to you to offer support and guidance and you should contact him/her when you need help.

At each stage your work and progress will be assessed according to the Humanist Ceremonies competencies framework.

Naming courses

Training for namings takes place in two stages, with an interval of about four weeks between each stage.

Stage 1 (Induction) involves a full day and is currently taught online. Stage 2 (General & Technical skill) is two consecutive days and is residential with an overnight stay. Your overnight accommodation and catering are booked by the Humanists UK training team and are included in your training course fee.

About a week before each stage of the course you will be sent by email relevant sections of the manual which you will need to either print, or bring on a device.

Both prior to and during your training you will be required to complete written assignments and observe as many ceremonies as possible - these can be recordings, if necessary. A mentor, who will be an experienced celebrant, will be assigned to you to offer support and guidance and you should contact him/her when you need help.

At each stage your work and progress will be assessed according to the Humanist Ceremonies competencies framework.

Accreditation

If you successfully complete your training, you become a probationary accredited celebrant of Humanists UK and can promote yourself as such. This means that you will be able to take on ceremonies work, have access to the Humanist Ceremonies online forum, receive regular updates and newsletters, and have your name and contact details included on the website search engine for celebrants. You can have Humanists UK business cards and Humanists UK folders in which to present your scripts, and you will also be covered by Humanist UK's public liability and professional indemnity insurance.

In order to gain full accreditation as a Humanists UK celebrant, you must then be observed taking a ceremony by another experienced celebrant within six months (for new funerals celebrants) or within twelve months (for new weddings and namings celebrants).

All celebrants accredited by Humanists Ceremonies are required to sign the celebrant code of conduct, which includes an undertaking to conduct only non-religious ceremonies for which you are accredited, exclusively in the name of the Humanist Ceremonies network of Humanists UK. The code of conduct governs your performance of ceremonies, and in the event of breach, your accreditation may be withdrawn.

Training for more than one kind of ceremony

Humanist Ceremonies requires new celebrants to be accredited in one kind of ceremony before they may apply to train in a different ceremony type.

If you are already accredited to conduct one ceremony type with Humanist Ceremonies and wish to train to conduct another, you are only required to undertake the final two stages of the weddings or funerals training, or the second stage of the namings training. Fees are adjusted accordingly.

Training for celebrants who are already trained by another provider

Celebrants who are already practising and who wish to join the Humanist Ceremonies network will be offered a tailored training package once they have been accepted for training.

Course schedule and fees

If you have any questions, please email the Humanist Ceremonies training team at ceremonies@humanism.org.uk.

Your application will be acknowledged within two days. If you do not receive an acknowledgement within this time, please call the office on 020 7324 3060 to check that we have received it.

The completed application form will be reviewed and if you are a suitable applicant you will be offered an interview by video call.

If we feel, from your application form responses, that it would help you to find out more about what is involved in the work, then we may then ask you to contact an experienced and accredited celebrant in your area before we invite you to an interview. We may also ask the local celebrant to advise us on your suitability for celebrant work.

We take into consideration current and potential levels of work available in your local area, to be sure that the time, money and commitment in your training proves to be worthwhile.