



Ministry  
of Justice

The Right Honourable  
**David Gauke MP**  
Lord Chancellor & Secretary of  
State for Justice

**Robert Neill MP**  
Chair of the Justice Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
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Dear Bob

### MARRIAGE CEREMONIES LAW REVIEW

I am writing to inform you that I have invited the Law Commission to complete a two-year review of the law on how and where couples can marry in England and Wales, and have published the Terms of Reference for this review. It will deliver recommendations for a simpler, fairer, and more consistent system that gives couples meaningful choice in how and where they marry, and supports the role of faith in public life, while retaining necessary safeguards for individuals and for the state.

The vital institution of marriage is a strong symbol of wider society's desire to celebrate commitment between partners. It binds society together and makes families stronger. The Conservative Government is committed to helping more couples form stable relationships that give them legal protections for them and their children.

While there is a great deal of good in current marriage law that we can be proud of, some of the technical provisions in law are outdated and reflect fragmented legislation passed over several centuries. The tradition in the law demonstrates the continuing importance of marriage through the ages. The provisions for religious groups to solemnize marriages shows the importance of faith in our public life and the longstanding British liberties of freedom of religion and freedom of association.

Yet it is time to look carefully at the law, which has never had systematic review or consolidation, and to assess what is necessary to support marriage, whether through a religious or a civil ceremony. The Government believes that couples should be able to marry in a way that is meaningful to them and that reinforces their commitment. The current law does not always allow them to do this, and it retains certain historical restrictions for couples and for faith groups.

For couples who choose the responsibility of marriage, we want to make the ceremony of marriage more achievable and significant and give them greater choice in how they can celebrate their commitment. This will include greater flexibility for different faiths and for non-religious belief organisations, whilst also recognising the continuing and important role of the Church of England as the Established Church in England.

It is for these reasons that I have invited the Law Commission to complete its review of the law on how and where couples can marry. The Law Commission has the expertise to resolve issues in a notably

complex law and to take into account the views of a wide range of groups with an interest in marriage formation and experience of conducting marriages.

Alongside this, the Government will take forward separate work to explore what can be done to deliver interim reform within the existing buildings-based system for certain civil ceremonies. The Government will explore the extent to which regulations governing approved premises could be reformed to allow outdoor locations for civil weddings and civil partnership ceremonies, whilst maintaining the requirement that venues be seemly and dignified.

Yours ever  


**RT HON DAVID GAUKE MP**