

Same-Sex Marriage legalised in England and Wales

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The Same-Sex Marriage Bill has been given royal assent and is now law. However, the first marriage is unlikely to take place before next summer as the Government has promised an inquiry into pension inequality and other matters, including whether humanist marriage ceremonies should be legally recognised.

Catholic bishops have expressed anger at the passing of the legislation, saying that the Church could not accept it and that it compromised "[religious freedom](#)".

The Act, which applies to England and Wales, will enable same sex couples to marry in civil ceremonies. It will ensure that those religious organisations wishing to do so can opt in to marry same sex couples according to their rites.

It provides strong protection for religious organisations and their representatives from successful legal challenge if they do not wish to marry same sex couples. It will enable civil partners to convert their partnership to a marriage, if they wish. It will also enable individuals to change their legal gender without having to end their marriage.

There will be a review (including full public consultation) on whether to enable celebrant-based authorisation of marriages by belief organisations, to be published before 1 January 2015. There will also be a review (including full public consultation) of the operation and future of the Civil Partnership Act 2004 in England and Wales, to start as soon as practicable, and with a report on the outcome to be published.

Another review will examine current survivor benefits of occupational pension schemes (including consultation) with a report on the outcome to be published before 1 July 2014.

Non-Government amendments introduced by peers in the House of Lords aimed at diluting or damaging the bill or introducing even more religious opt-outs and privileges, were defeated. Demands that marriage registrars should be able to "opt-out" were thrown out as were those regarding how "faith schools" should approach teaching in sex education concerning the importance of marriage.

Meanwhile, a Yougov poll for Centre Ground on same-sex marriage among 1932 adults found that 54% of respondents supported the new law to make marriage available to gay people with only 36% opposed.

The same poll asked "Do you regard yourself as belonging to any particular religion?" A massive 42% said they did not regard themselves as belonging to any particular religion. This increased to 63% among the 18-24 year age group.

33% said they were CofE and 10% Catholic; 2% said they were Islamic with 1% each saying they were Sikh, Hindu or Jewish.

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