

Success: government won't extend same-sex marriage exemptions in NI

Posted: Fri, 17th Jul 2020

The government has confirmed businesses will not be able to refuse services for same-sex marriages in Northern Ireland after lobbying from the National Secular Society.

Exceptions in equality law allowing religious organisations to refuse to solemnise same-sex marriages would not be extended to other service providers, ministers said on Thursday.

This includes hoteliers, florists and wedding photographers.

The announcement was made in a [report](#) on the government's consultation on same-sex religious marriage in Northern Ireland, held at the beginning of the year.

Religious lobbying and NSS response

The Presbyterian Church in Ireland and the DUP lobbied for exemptions to be extended to include Christian owned businesses who do not wish to provide services to same-sex couples.

In March the NSS [wrote](#) to the secretary of state for Northern Ireland, Brandon Lewis MP, to highlight the dangerous impact any additional exemptions would have on UK equality law.

The NSS argued that any weakening of protections against discrimination would undermine equal citizenship.

Same-sex marriage has been [legally recognised](#) in Northern Ireland since 13 January after the UK parliament backed its legalisation last year.

Under the new laws, religious bodies can consent to officiating same-sex weddings. Twelve religious bodies that responded to the consultation indicated that they would do so.

NSS comment

NSS head of policy and research Megan Manson said: "It's welcome news that the government has not given into lobbying from Christian groups who want free rein to discriminate against same-sex couples."

"All businesses, regardless of the religion of their owners, should be equally accountable to the law."

"We also welcome the government's commitment to enable religious organisations that do accept LGBT people to solemnise same-sex weddings."

The debate on this issue highlights a deeper issue of the entanglement of religion and state in the legal institution of marriage. The [lack of separation](#) has resulted in significant complexity in the laws that govern marriage throughout the UK.

Image by [Bhakti Kulmala](#) from [Pixabay](#).

While you're here

Our news and opinion content is an important part of our campaigns work. Many articles involve a lot of research by our campaigns team. If you value this output, please consider supporting us today.

- [Support us from just £1 a month](#)

- [Share on What's App](#)
- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)
- [Share on Email](#)
- [Subscribe to RSS Feed](#)

Tags: [Marriage](#)

Related Campaigns

-

[Reform wedding laws](#)

Make marriage fairer for all people of all religions and beliefs.

[Read More](#)

Related Articles

[Don't let the Church dictate how we marry](#)

In justifying its uniquely privileged position as the [established religion](#), the Church of England likes to portray... [Read More »](#)

[Homophobic churches and liberal states make for unhappy bedfellows](#)

Parliament should begin the process of disestablishment rather than try to fix the Church of England, argues Stephen... [Read More »](#)

NSS welcomes recommended reform to weddings

The National Secular Society has welcomed a government-commissioned report recommending reform of wedding laws in... [Read More »](#)

N. Ireland to adopt marriage law reforms backed by NSS

Northern Ireland will adopt proposals backed by the National Secular Society to modernise marriage laws.

In a [statement... Read More »](#)

NSS welcomes legalisation of outdoor weddings in England & Wales

The National Secular Society has welcomed moves to permanently allow outdoor weddings in England and Wales.

The government... [Read More »](#)