

# N. Ireland to adopt marriage law reforms backed by NSS

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

In a [statement](#) on Friday, NI minister of finance Conor Murphy announced that his department will work to prepare for raising the minimum age for marriage to 18 and legalising non-religious belief marriages.

Both reforms were supported by the NSS in its [response](#) to the Department of Finance's consultation in February.

The law currently allows people aged 16 and 17 to enter a marriage or civil partnership with 'parental consent'. This increases the risk of forced marriage, particular for young people in insular religious communities, the NSS said. Support for raising the minimum age to 18 was close to unanimous, with 97% of online respondents supportive.

The proposed reforms would also allow couples to have their marriage legally solemnised by a celebrant who subscribes to a non-religious philosophy such as humanism. The NSS backed the proposals as they would bring about "greater equality and fairness". A majority of consultation respondents also backed the move.

The legislation can only be enacted once there is a functioning NI Assembly and Executive.

## Marriage in England and Wales

The Law Commission is [investigating](#) broader reforms to wedding law in England and Wales, which would include making it possible for couples to have humanist and other nonreligious belief marriages.

The proposed reforms would also bring greater equality, freedom and simplicity to marriages across all religion and belief groups. The NSS supports the reforms, as it has long campaigned to [remove barriers](#) to couples wanting to marry according to nonreligious or minority religious traditions.

The Law Commission is due to report on its consultation on the reforms this month.

A recent [YouGov survey](#) suggests the demand for nonreligious weddings is likely to increase. Forty-eight per cent of respondents aged 18-24 said they "don't like the religious element associated with marriage".

## NSS: Reforms are "extremely welcome"

NSS head of campaigns Megan Manson said: "The Department of Finance's support for modernising Northern Ireland's marriage laws is extremely welcome.

"They will help protect young people from forced marriage while enabling those who wish to legally marry according to nonreligious traditions to do so.

"We hope Northern Ireland's progressive approach will be adopted by England and Wales, where marriage law is still confusing, restrictive and unequal."

*[Image: ANURAG1112 from Pixabay](#)*

## What the NSS stands for

The Secular Charter outlines 10 principles that guide us as we campaign for a secular democracy which safeguards all citizens' rights to freedom of and from religion.

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