

A Guide to Civil Ceremonies

To hold a civil ceremony in the UK, you must give notice of your intention to marry at your local register office, stating you wish to have a civil ceremony, and provide documents for ID, nationality, and residency. You must then conduct the civil ceremony at a register office or approved venue with a registrar and two witnesses, signing a marriage schedule. The ceremony can include personalised readings and music but must not contain religious elements.

1. Give Notice of Marriage

- **Visit Your Local Register Office:** Go to your local register office to sign a legal statement saying you intend to marry.
- **Provide Documents:** You will need to provide documents for proof of name, date of birth, nationality, and residency.
- **Wait for the Notice Period:** Your notice will be publicly displayed for 28 days, after which the superintendent registrar can issue the certificate that allows the marriage to take place.
- **Timing:** You must give notice at least 28 days before your ceremony, but you can give notice up to 12 months before your ceremony date.

2. Choose a Venue and Book a Registrar

- **Select a Venue:** The ceremony must be held in a register office or an approved venue.
- **Book the Registrar:** Book the registrar at the same time as your venue, especially if getting married at a popular time, as they get booked up quickly.

3. The Ceremony

- **Legal Vows:** You must exchange legally binding vows during the ceremony.
- **Non-Religious Content:** You can include personalised readings, songs, or music, but no religious content.
- **Personalisation:** You can often add your own heartfelt messages, such as an anecdote about how you met, but remember to check with the registrar beforehand to ensure the chosen music or readings do not have religious connotations.
- **Signing the Schedule:** After the ceremony, you, your partner, two witnesses, and the registrar must sign the marriage schedule.

4. After the Ceremony

- **Registering the Marriage:** The signed schedule is sent to the local register office, and your marriage is added to the register.
- **Obtain a Certificate:** You can then apply to get your marriage or civil partnership certificate.