

AN EXPLORATION OF THE WORK OF WEDDING CELEBRANTS: BRIEF SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

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Respondents and response rate

There were 287 responses to the survey from eligible celebrants: those who conducted at least one wedding celebration ceremony in England or Wales in 2019. The best estimate of the response rate is 29.5% of eligible celebrants who received a link to the survey. These results cannot be generalised to all celebrants.

Growth in numbers of celebrants and ceremonies

No respondent reported practising before 2003. There was steady and significant growth in celebrant numbers in the decade from 2010–2019, and over half the respondents (154) began to practice in 2017–2019. The numbers of wedding celebration ceremonies conducted by respondents rose very significantly, and probably more than doubled, between 2015 and 2019. The best estimate is that around 9,500 wedding celebration ceremonies were conducted by celebrants in 2019.

Celebrants' motives, experience and training

Over half of respondents (158) stated that their main reason for becoming a professional wedding celebrant was 'desire to provide person-centred ceremonies that reflect couples' beliefs, personalities and lifestyles'. The second most popular reason (68) was 'desire to use my creative skills to help people celebrate the major occasions in their lives as they wish'. The most common types of relevant experience were being a teacher, trainer or educator (144), or a celebrant for another type of occasion (116).

Celebrants' organisations

Unsurprisingly, the most commonly selected professional membership organisations to which respondents belong were five of the six WCC member organisations, via which the survey was distributed. Respondents' main reasons for belonging to membership organisations are continuing professional development/training (68), accreditation (52), initial training (48) and insurance (31).

How celebrants present their services to clients

The four most popular terms used by celebrants to describe what they do were: wedding celebrations or wedding ceremonies (264), renewals of promises or renewals of vows (184), handfastings or handfasting ceremonies (151), and weddings (140).

It is not accurate to describe wedding celebration ceremonies as ‘weddings’ or ‘marriages’, but all except five respondents indicated that they would always explain that the ceremonies that they conduct do not constitute legally binding marriage ceremonies. The great majority would always (259), usually (20), or sometimes (4) ask whether the couple have entered, or are planning to enter, into a legally binding marriage – which is a further reminder that ceremonies are not legally binding.

Where, how, and for how much, celebrants practise

There were no obviously significant patterns in the areas in which respondents conduct most ceremonies: 51 stated that they would do so anywhere in England or Wales with no concentration in any local authority area, and 100 of the 175 areas were not identified by any respondent. In general, most respondents practised primarily in English counties, and fewest in London boroughs.

The vast majority of respondents (262) operate as sole traders.

About three-quarters of respondents (215) would conduct only the lowest-risk type of ceremony suggested in the options: ‘Any non-criminal content that is not obscene, violent or likely to give offence to one or more guests, and does not pose a health and safety risk’.

About 85% of respondents had a standard fee for conducting a ceremony in July 2019. Some 93% of these reported a standard fee of £251–£750. Nearly 70% of respondents (200) had conducted, or would, conduct, a wedding celebration ceremony for no fee, or for less than 75% of their usual fee, most commonly for compassionate reasons.

The couples who engage celebrants

A large majority of couples – between 80% and 90% – who had participated in wedding celebration ceremonies led by respondents were already married to each other at the time of their ceremonies, and most of the rest stated that they intended to marry each other.

So far as celebrants were aware, couples’ reasons for choosing celebrant-led wedding celebration ceremonies were very diverse, with the desire for a person-centred or outdoor ceremony being the two most popular options.

The question about the most unusual feature of wedding celebration ceremonies conducted by respondents yielded a very wide range of answers. Several responses to this question made clear respondents’ enthusiasm for, and commitment to, their role.

Views on formalising the profession of wedding celebrancy

All except 13 respondents would like a statutory body – most popularly the WCC, changed by law into a statutory body – to become involved in the representation and/or regulation of their profession. The most popular option, favoured by 173 respondents, is for the WCC to be responsible for representation and regulation.

Almost all respondents would like the law to be changed so that they could conduct legally binding marriage ceremonies, but most opted for a qualified response that would leave them total, or a great deal of, freedom regarding the personalised elements of ceremonies. There is no clear majority in favour of a particular combination of methods for accrediting or authorising celebrants to conduct legally binding ceremonies, but many would be prepared to pay up to £500 for initial accreditation or authorisation, and up to £200 as an annual renewal fee.

Further information

A more detailed summary of these findings is available on request from contact@weddingcelebrancycommission.org.

Please write ‘An exploration of wedding celebrancy: summary of findings’ as the title of your email.