

Secretary for Marriages Newsletter

Hello and welcome to the first edition of the Secretary for Marriage newsletter.

Since the General Register Office (GRO) became part of the Identity and Passport Service we have been reviewing who our customers are and how we communicate with them. We know that a secretary for marriages of a synagogue will normally only come into contact with GRO when they;

- Order stock.
- Have a query regarding a marriage or burial.
- Find an error in a marriage entry.

We acknowledge that the majority of training and guidance that you have received on these particular matters has been provided by staff at your local register office. The main aim of this newsletter is to establish a direct communication link with yourselves and to provide you with information that you will hopefully find both engaging and useful as you perform your registration duties.

This issue will cover the following topics:

- Help us to help you.... guidance on registration and quarterly returns.
- Civil Partnerships in Religious Buildings.
- Updated guidebook for Secretaries for Marriages.
- Re-ordering marriage certificates.
- Advice for couples with a foreign divorce.
- New forms for correcting a marriage entry.

Whilst this newsletter has been distributed to you by your governing body please feel free to pass it on to other secretaries for marriages who may not have received a copy.

Further copies of the newsletter can be downloaded from the Home Office Website as detailed on page 3.

Help Us to Help You....

Change is here.....!

As you may be aware, the marriage returns you send to your local Superintendent Registrar every quarter are forwarded to the GRO who are based in Southport in the North West of England.

A team then process the returns and from 1st January 2011 key all of the details onto an internal system called "Registration On Line" – a system which is known as RON by both GRO and local registration officers.

It is important that this process is completed to provide statistical information to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and to create a central record and index.

Whilst the majority of returns that we process are completed correctly, we occasionally see errors that create problems for the team that key these records onto the RON system.

Help Us to Help You.... (cont'd)

Following the hints and tips below will ensure that the marriage registrations and the subsequent quarterly returns you produce can be quickly and efficiently processed by the team at GRO, ensuring that we hold an exact and up to date record of all marriages that have occurred within England & Wales.

1. Signatures in the marriage entry.

We appreciate that not everyone's signature is legible and would ask that you print the name of the persons signing, including the witnesses and the officiating minister, in pencil in the margin of the marriage entry in both registers. This will assist you when copying out your quarterly return.

2. Certification. Please ensure your quarterly returns are always correctly certified and the certificates for marriage are attached (e.g. the 262). This is a legal requirement of section 57 of the Marriage Act 1949.

3. True Copy. The quarterly return that you submit must be an exact copy of the all the information held in the register entry including all corrections, miss-spellings, marginal notes and numbers. Please do not abbreviate or omit any details on your return as this will create an incorrect central record of the marriage as the team at GRO can only key the information detailed on the return onto the RON system.

4. Legibility. Please ensure that all fields on your quarterly return are clearly written / printed as this will help with both the keying process and the production of any hand written certified copies.

5. Father's details - columns 7 and 8.

If the fathers details are not known please insert a dash in both columns (-). If the columns are left blank we would investigate the omission to establish if a correction is required.

6. Registration District. Please ensure that you complete this information in every registration.

7. Date of marriage. Please ensure that this is recorded in the correct format e.g. Tenth March 2011

8. Quarterly returns. Please only enter marriages from the same quarter onto one quarterly copy form. There have been occasions where marriages from up to four different quarters have been entered onto one form. This will delay the processing of the returns. e.g. only marriages registered between January and March 2012 should be included in the return made for the March 2012 quarter. Any previous entries should be entered on a new form.

9. Timeliness. Please ensure that you submit your return (even if it's "nil") to your Superintendent Registrar by the required date. It is a legal requirement of the 1949 Act to make and deliver your returns in January, April, July and October and doing so will enables a full public index to be produced without delay.

10. Method of solemnization. It is important that the method of solemnisation is correctly detailed in the marriage entry. As a marriage can only proceed on the issue of 2 certificates for marriage (or in exceptional circumstances by Registrar General's licence) the correct description of certificate or licence should be written. There have been occasions when the name of the person solemnizing the marriage has been entered instead of the method of solemnization. Omitting or inserting incorrect information will result in the entry being investigated and a correction may be required.

11. Registration ink. As the marriage registers are kept as a permanent record please use proper registration ink. The guidebook for Secretaries for Marriages details where this can be obtained.

Civil Partnerships in Religious buildings

The Equality Act 2010 introduced a power to amend the Civil Partnership Act 2004 to allow for civil partnership registrations to take place in religious buildings. Earlier this year the Government published a consultation document which sought views from interested parties, including faith groups, on how to implement this provision. The consultation ran until 23 June 2011 and the results are now available on the Government Equalities Office website. <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/equalities/lgbt/>

The resulting legislative changes came into force on 5th December 2011. As the power in the Equality Act 2010 is permissive, any religious organisations who do not wish to host civil partnerships will not be required to do so. However, those that do, will, subject to obtaining the necessary consents, be able to apply to their local registration authority for their building (which is already certified for religious worship) to be approved for the registration of civil partnerships. The application procedure is intended to be broadly similar to the application process that hotels or stately homes currently follow to have their premises approved for civil marriage and civil partnerships. The guidance on the approval of premises can be downloaded from: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/agencies-public-bodies/ips/general-ips-publications/civil-reg/guidance-approving-premises>. If you have any queries about the application process, please contact your local authority.

It is possible for Ministers of religion to be able to be designated as civil partnership registrars, however this is a matter for individual local authorities. The civil partnership registration will remain a secular event. This change is intended to allow that secular event to take place in a religious setting.

Guidebook for Secretaries (for Marriages) of Synagogues

We have recently placed an updated and fully revised version of the “Guidebook for Secretaries (for Marriages) of Synagogues” on the Home Office website and we hope that you will take the time to read it.

The booklet provides useful guidance on all aspects of the role of secretary for marriage. It covers the following topics:

- Roles and Responsibilities
- Registration Stock
- Leaving Office
- Marriage Preliminaries
- Solemnisation of Marriage
- Registration of Marriage
- Corrections
- Quarterly certified copies

The guide is available to download via the Home Office website

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/agencies-public-bodies/ips/civil-registration/marriage-reg/>

Alternatively you can request a copy by emailing GRO at marriages@ips.gsi.gov.uk

Re-ordering Marriage Certificates

As part of our commitment to maintaining the security and integrity of documentation, Registration Supplies Unit (RSU) at GRO have made further improvements to the procedures relating to the processing and despatch of secure marriage certificates.

Whilst the preferred method of receiving and authenticating an order is by completion of the re-order card within each certificate book, RSU will also accept requests for certificates by either telephone or email. However to confirm their validity, customers will be required to provide the following:

- The prefix and serial numbers of the last book of certificates issued to their place of worship
- Name of the church
- Addressee and full postal address: as stock is sent by secure courier there will need to be someone at the address to receive and sign for it
- Contact telephone number
- Denomination of the congregation
- Marriage number
- Parish or district of church
- Local registration district
- Approximate number of certificates issued per year

Processing and Delivery Times

Target time for processing and delivery is 10 working days from point the order is received. However the RSU team recommend that you order replacement stock at least one month prior to the date that you anticipate making your last entry. Any orders received where information provided is incomplete or illegible may result in longer processing and delivery times.

Foreign Divorces

When a couple first approach you to solemnize their marriage, you will be aware that they will need to be referred to a Register Office to give notice of intention of marriage.

If either party has been married before and have a divorce which was obtained outside the UK the Superintendent Registrar may need to refer it to the casework team at GRO.

This referral process can often take longer than the minimum 15 day waiting period.

To reduce the number of marriages that have to be postponed whilst waiting for this clearance, it is recommended that the couple are advised to give their notices at the earliest possible point i.e. up to 12 months prior to the intended date of marriage.

Marriage Corrections

Following a recent review, the casework team at GRO have introduced a marriage correction application form. This form is to be completed by the couple when an error in their marriage entry has been found and then sent directly to GRO for authorisation.

The application form and guidance leaflets are available to download from the "Correcting a Record" page on the Directgov website: www.direct.gov.uk and can also be obtained from either your local register office or directly from GRO.

More guidance on marriage corrections and an example of the form and leaflet can be found in Chapter 5 and Appendix J and K of the Secretaries for Marriages guidebook.