



HM Passport
Office



General Register Office

Authorised Persons Newsletter ■ Issue 5 ■ Feb 2014

Introduction

Hello and welcome to the fifth edition of the Authorised Persons Newsletter and the first of 2014.

We really do value your feedback so it has been wonderful to receive your comments and views on previous issues. It's great to know that you are finding the articles both informative and useful in your day to day duties as an Authorised Person.

In this issue you will find a reminder on your vital role in submitting quarterly returns, an article on how we are seeking to improve on our communication and stakeholder engagement and an update on the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013.

Reminder: Please complete the Change of Contact Details form (held on GOV.UK) if necessary. It is important that our records contain the most up to date contact details for you in order that we may advise you when a later edition of the newsletter is available to you but also that on the rare occasion we need to discuss a registration we are able to do so without delay.

We hope you enjoy this latest issue.

**The Training and Improvement
Team**
General Register Office

It Starts with You!

Quarterly Returns – Your role is vital!

As you know four times a year you send copies of your register entries to your local register office. However what you may not be aware of is how important it is for these returns to be made and how your role in the whole process is vital.

By submitting your returns in good time and of a good quality you act as the starting point for the journey which transforms an unassuming, albeit important, piece of paper into an electronic record which provides national records, informs debates on social policy and enables the citizen to obtain marriage certificates for production to organisations, as well as keeping it as a personal reminder of the happy event.

On receipt of your return, via your local register office, our team here at the General Register Office firstly check for completeness and legibility. In this respect we would like to thank you for all your hard work on this front. Back in 2011 when we started keying records onto our system approximately 50% of all the records could not be used straight away as they contained errors, omissions or weren't completely legible, with your co-operation this has been turned-around and now we have at least 90% of records ready to be keyed on receipt.

Once keyed, the data creates the annual national index of marriages which is available at host sites throughout England and Wales for public inspection.

The keyed data also is provided, via our electronic system, to colleagues within the Office for National Statistics who produce annual statistics which are used by Government departments such as Department for Work and Pensions, which feeds into their planning in respect of pensions and welfare provisions, as well as those involved with social policy initiatives not to mention churches and religious organisations who use the data for their own planning purposes.

Lastly but just as important, once we have the record we are in a position to provide that record in the form of a marriage certificate. This means that we do not have to refer the

applicant back to the building where the marriage took place (which we may have to do if we haven't received the return in the first place) which may be inconvenient for all those involved.

As you can see the quarterly return you produce provides for all of the above and without it and ultimately you we would not be able to meet the expectations of society and in particular the individual so we would like to say a big thank you for all your hard work.



Community News

Can you help please?

At GRO we are always looking to improve our communication with stakeholders. Some of the feedback we have received suggests that the information we send out is not always understood or would be better received in a different format. To this end we are trying to engage with representative groups from faith communities.

If you are part of a group of representatives from your community or if you attend interfaith meetings, we would like to hear from you how we can improve future communication.

Please contact:

mandy.clough@gro.gsi.gov.uk

For general queries please contact:

GROTrainingandBusinessImprovement@gro.gsi.gov.uk



Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013

The Act received royal assent on 17th July 2013 and the key elements are:

- To enable same sex couples to get married in England and Wales by either a civil or a religious ceremony. **Religious ceremonies will only be possible where the religious organisation agrees.**
- To ensure that there will be **no obligation or compulsion to carry out or participate in a religious marriage ceremony of a same sex couple.**

- To provide **protection for organisations and individual ministers of religion who do not wish to marry same sex couples.**
- To provide a means for those in a civil partnership to convert that relationship into a marriage.

The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 states clearly that no religious organisation or individual minister of religion can be compelled by any means (including court action) to marry same sex couples or to permit this to happen in their places of worship. Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights guarantees the right to religious freedom and the Act protects and promotes this through the Government's 'quadruple lock'. This ensures that religious organisations and individual ministers can act in accordance with their beliefs.

The first marriages are expected to take place from 29th March 2014 (notice may be given from 13th March at the local register office). It is a matter for individual religious organisations to decide whether they wish to opt in to hold same sex religious marriage ceremonies. If the relevant governing authority wishes to do so there will be processes in place by the end of February to make an application for the building to be registered in this way. Forms may be obtained from the Home Office website (gov.uk).

Please note that Authorised Persons who are currently appointed to register marriages between a man and a woman must not register any marriage of a same sex couple until the building has been registered for that purpose and they have also been appointed by the trustees to do so. No authorised person can be compelled to register marriages of same sex couples.

Further information will be available before the end of March and can be found on the [Home Office Website](http://www.gov.uk) (gov.uk) at :-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/nick-clegg-on-same-sex-marriages-taking-place-from-march-2014>

Further guidance is contained within the Guide for Authorised Persons which can be found at:-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-guide-for-authorised-persons>