

Please let the government know your views on same-sex marriage by 14 June

Responding to the consultation questions

Some of the consultation questions are specifically directed at people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual or transsexual, or at people who are transsexual or married to a transsexual person.

Several other consultation questions are based on the assumption that the law will be changed to permit same-sex marriage by means of a civil ceremony. Since we do not accept that assumption, we recommend that supporters do not address the questions about same-sex marriage by means of a religious ceremony, the future of civil partnerships, or the conversion of a civil partnership into a same-sex marriage.

We therefore suggest that you limit your responses to questions 1 and 2. As you are limited to 1,225 characters (approx 200 words) in your response to question 2, you may like to make some additional points in response to question 16, which invites further comments on the consultation proposals.

At the very least, please indicate your **disagreement** with same-sex marriage in response to Question 1.

Question 1: Do you agree or disagree with enabling all couples, regardless of their gender to have a civil marriage ceremony?

X Disagree

Question 2: Please explain the reasons for your answer. Please respond within 1,225 characters (approx 200 words).

In responding to this question, you will have to be very brief. You will need to select the main reasons why you disagree with the government's proposals and express them in as few words as possible, and try not to use religious language or references.

You may wish to make some of the following points, but **please put them in your own words as far as possible**:

- A small minority should not be allowed to change the definition of marriage – and hence its meaning – for everyone else.
- Marriage does not merit special recognition simply because it marks an intimate relationship between two people. If that were the case, there would be no reason to prevent marriage between siblings or between a parent and his or her child. Rather, marriage between a man and a woman has a unique place in law because of its potential to produce children, because of the proven benefits it brings both to children and to society, and because of the web of intergenerational support it provides.
- There are four key components in the definition of marriage: it is voluntary, heterosexual, monogamous and lifelong. These four elements belong together. If any one of them were to be amended or removed, it would change the definition of marriage and the meaning attached to marriage in society. Parliament should no more be asked to legislate for same-

sex marriage than it should be asked to legislate for forced marriages, polygamous marriages, or temporary contract marriages.

- Same-sex couples can already obtain all the legal benefits of marriage by entering a civil partnership, which is a uniquely same-sex institution in the same way that marriage is a uniquely opposite-sex institution. Equality is not to be equated with sameness. There is therefore no justification for changing the definition of marriage. The homosexual Labour MP, Ben Bradshaw, has said, 'This is not a priority for the gay community, which already won equal rights with civil partnerships. We've never needed the word "marriage"'.¹
- Same-sex relationships are not the same in character as a marriage between a man and a woman and therefore should not be treated in the same way.
- Rather than extending the benefits of marriage to same-sex couples, redefining marriage would introduce the instabilities and infidelities commonly associated with homosexual relationships into society's understanding of marriage.
- The law would be sending out the message that a household of two women or two men is just as appropriate a context for raising children and that it does not matter whether children are reared by both their mother and their father, or by a parent of each sex at all.
- Legislating for same-sex marriage would have implications for the education of our children. Children in schools would have to be taught that society recognises no distinction between a marriage between a man and a woman, and a marriage between two men or two women. Large numbers of both parents and teachers would object to this.
- Throughout history, heterosexual marriage has been the norm. There is no evidence to suggest that redefining marriage will bring any social benefit. It is an unproven social experiment.
- The majority of the British public does not support changing the definition of marriage. A ComRes poll found that 70 per cent supported the view that marriage should remain an exclusive commitment between a man and a woman,² and the Coalition for Marriage petition in support of retaining the existing definition of marriage gained half a million signatures in little over two months and is still growing. (See www.c4m.org.uk for the current figure.)
- Once the state legislates for marriage between two men or two women simply because they 'love each other and want to formalise a commitment to each other',³ it is difficult to maintain a principled objection to marriage between a group of men and/or women who are seeking a formal recognition of their love for each other.
- The experience of other countries that have legislated for same-sex marriage suggests that it is likely to lead to demands for a further redefinition and devaluation of marriage.
- Legislating for same-sex marriage would inevitably lead to individuals and organisations facing legal challenges for expressing the view that, by its nature, marriage can only be between a man and a woman.
- Despite government promises that churches will not be required to carry out same sex marriages even though they perform heterosexual weddings, there is serious doubt whether European law will permit churches to refuse if same sex marriage is legalised.
- Some employees have already faced disciplinary action and even dismissal because they found themselves unable in good conscience to facilitate civil partnerships as part of their

¹ Andrew Pierce, 'Why Britain doesn't need gay marriage', *Daily Mail*, 14 April 2012.

² Marriage Survey, ComRes, 23-24 February 2012, Table 1, page 2.

³ Government Equalities Office, *Equal civil marriage: a consultation*, Ministerial Foreword.

employment duties. Since same-sex marriage arouses stronger sensitivities than civil partnerships, the conflict experienced by employees would be more widespread.

- Marriage as we know it is an institution which has benefited couples, children and communities for centuries. It takes a man and a woman to produce a child and all the available evidence confirms that children tend to do better healthwise, educationally and socially when they are raised by their natural parents in the context of a married relationship. In view of all these proven benefits, we tamper with marriage at our peril.
- Same-sex marriage was not in the manifesto of any of the major political parties at the 2010 General Election. The government therefore has no mandate to force through such controversial legislation.
- By stating a firm commitment to change the legal definition of marriage at this stage, the Home Office is pre-empting the outcome of the consultation and acting in a profoundly undemocratic way.
- Marriage predates the state and any organised religion. It is not the role of the state to redefine it, but rather to recognise it for what it is and protect it as a unique institution.
- If the government regards civil partnerships as 'an established mechanism to recognise same-sex relationships' after only seven years, there is a much stronger argument for keeping marriage as an established mechanism to recognise opposite-sex relationships when it has been practised for thousands of years.

Question 16: Do you have any other comments on the proposals within this consultation? Please respond within 1,225 characters (approx 200 words).

You may wish to use Question 16 to make some of the points you did not have space to make under Question 2.

How to respond

You can access the Government Equalities Office consultation document on equal civil marriage on the Home Office website at <http://homeoffice.gov.uk/equal-civil-marriage>

There are three ways to respond.

1. Online You can respond online using the response form at:
<http://homeoffice.gov.uk/equal-civil-marriage>

2. By email You can send your response by email to: equalcivilmarriage@geo.gsi.gov.uk

3. By post You can post your response to:

Equal civil marriage consultation responses
Government Equalities Office
3rd Floor Fry
2 Marsham Street
London, SW1P 4DF

Don't forget, your response must be received by the Home Office by Thursday 14 June 2012.