



The Faculty Office of the Archbishop of Canterbury

Changes to the requirements for EEA Nationals to marry in the UK from 1st July 2021

Background

Following the UK's exit from the EU and the end of the transition period on the 31st December 2020, EU free movement ended meaning that EEA citizens and their family members will require permission to enter and remain in the UK. EEA citizens and their family members lawfully resident in the UK before the end of the transition period on 31 December 2020 are required to regularise their immigration status by making an application to the EU Settlement Scheme (EUSS) for Settled Status (or Pre-Settled Status if they have not been resident in the UK for at least 5 years before making the application) before the end of the grace period on 30 June 2021. EUSS status may be granted to any nationality provided they meet the eligibility and suitability requirements of the EU Settlement Scheme.

At the end of the grace period, an EEA citizen who wishes to marry in the Church of England (CofE) or Church in Wales (CiW) and who does not hold Settled Status or Pre-Settled Status under the EUSS will no longer be permitted to be married after the calling of Banns or the issue of a Common Marriage Licence but instead they will have to give notice of their intention to marry at a register office and be issued with a Superintendent Registrar's Certificate (SRC). This means that EEA citizens who do not hold Settled or Pre-Settled Status will be treated the same as all other foreign nationals have been since 2nd March 2015 when the sham marriage referral and investigation scheme came into being. Irish citizens will continue to be exempt from the EUSS and will be free to enter the UK without permission and to marry after Banns or by Licence.

What do the changes mean for Anglican weddings?

Any wedding taking place in the CofE/CiW on or after the 1st July 2021 where either or both of the parties are non-UK/Irish nationals and who do not have Settled Status or Pre-Settled Status under the EUSS will only be able to take place on the authority of an SRC (or a Special Licence – see below). It will be illegal for the wedding to take place after the calling of Banns or by Common Marriage Licence unless the Banns have been started or the Common Licence arranged before 1st July 2021 (see below for further detail on the Transitional Provisions). As these changes are likely to result in a significant increase in Anglican weddings where an SRC is required, all register offices in England & Wales will be designated for the purpose of giving notice and a couple in scope of the scheme will be required to give notice together and in person at a register office in the district where one or both of the parties reside. EEA citizens travelling to the UK in order to marry will require a mandatory marriage visitor visa issued through the British embassy in the country where they normally reside before coming to the UK.

What this means for clergy is that they will be required to check that couples are either UK or Irish Nationals (ideally by seeing an in-date Passport) or that any other national has Settled Status or Pre-Settled Status under the EUSS before agreeing to call Banns of Marriage. Surrogates for Marriage and others responsible for the issue of Common Licences will also need to check. Note that it is possible for a non-EEA citizen to have been granted Settled Status if they are a family member of an EEA citizen.

How do clergy and others check whether a person has Settled Status or Pre-Settled Status? The answer is that there is a simple to use online status checker tool. A person with EUSS status is required to share their status through the online EUSS status checker tool. The holder must request a six digit 'share code' to provide to the member of the clergy either before or at their initial appointment to give notice to marry. The person's name, date of birth and code will be used to confirm that the person has been granted EUSS status.

The six digit share code would be requested on the 'view and prove your settled or pre-settled status page' on GOV.UK at: <https://www.gov.uk/view-prove-immigration-status>. The member of the clergy would then need to input the person's name, date of birth and code into the EUSS online status checker tool on the 'check someone's settled or pre-settled status' page on GOV.UK: <https://www.gov.uk/view-prove-immigration-status>. The result will display details of the person, including a photograph, to enable clergy to confirm that the person does have the required status.

Transitional arrangements

Transitional arrangements are in place for couples who will be affected by the changes but who have already started marriage preliminaries before 1 July 2021. Couples marrying following Anglican ecclesiastical preliminaries will not be required to obtain an SRC if any one of the following applies:

- Banns of marriage have been published on at least one Sunday before 1st July 2021 in at least one of the parishes where they are required to be called;
- both parties have given notice to the incumbent or priest-in-charge for the calling of Banns of marriage in all of the required parishes before 1st July 2021 together with evidence that they were, at that time, relevant nationals (ie a UK/Irish/other EEA/Swiss National);
- a Common Licence for the marriage was granted before 1st July 2021;
- an application for a Common Licence was received but not determined by 1st July 2021, and such application included evidence that the parties were at that time relevant nationals; or
- one of the parties has sworn the oath required for a Common Licence before a person with authority to grant the licence.

Where a couple fall within one of the above transitional provisions on 1st July 2021, they will be able to marry whilst that preliminary remains valid (ie within three months of the final calling of the Banns or the issue of the Common Licence). If the authority of the preliminary expires before the marriage is solemnised, the couple will need to give notice again, together, at a designated register office in the district where one or both of the parties resides to obtain SRCs – Banns cannot be re-called nor a Common Licence re-issued.

Couples resident abroad

Where a couple are normally resident abroad and either of them are non-UK/Irish nationals without an EUSS status, then in order to marry in a CofE/CiW church which is licensed for marriages after 1st July 2021 they would need to apply for SRCs (unless they already have a Common Licence before the 1st July under the Transitional Arrangements).

They would both need to be resident in England or Wales for the minimum qualifying residence period for an SRC (ie seven clear days, not counting the day of arrival in the England or Wales) before they can give notice to marry at the register office of the registration district where they have been residing. As is the case with all SRCs, there is then a 28 day waiting period (which can be extended up to 70 days

if the application is referred under the sham marriage scheme) before the SRCs are issued. The couple do not need to be resident during the notice period but may need to be available for an interview if called upon as part of the referral.

If the couple already have a Qualifying Connection with the parish where the wedding is to take place, their pre-notice residence period can be in any registration district in England or Wales and their notice would be given in the register office of that district. However, if they do not have a pre-existing Qualifying Connection then their period of residence must be in the parish where the wedding is due to take place and give notice in the registration district which covers that parish in order to qualify for an SRC to be married in the parish church.

Special Licences

The changes do not affect Special Marriage Licences issued through the Faculty Office and these will continue to be available to permit the marriage of couples regardless of their nationality or EUSS status. However, in accordance with the policy which we have adopted since the March 2015 changes came into force, we will not issue a Special Licence in circumstances where another legal preliminary is available ie, where the marriage is to take place in a CofE/CiW place of worship which is ordinarily licensed for marriages and in which the couple have the legal right to marry.

Further Information

The Home Office have issued a guidance document which contains more detail and which can be viewed here: {insert link}. Clergy or couples with enquiries about their specific circumstances should contact their Diocesan Registry or the Faculty Office for further guidance if needed.

The Faculty Office

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