Humanist Weddings

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

March 2015

Disclaimer: Please note that these questions and answers are for general information purposes only. The answers are correct to the best of our belief and knowledge at the present time, but are not definitive.

Different celebrants take slightly different approaches, so please speak to a celebrant if you have a particular query or concern.

1. Q: Is a humanist wedding a legally binding ceremony?

A: Yes, if it is conducted according to the Civil Registration Act 2004, as amended in 2012. This requires that the couple to be married must be:

- a man and a woman,
- aged over 18 years,
- mentally capable to understand the importance of the legal contract they are signing,
- not related to each other,
- not already married, and
- not under duress.
The couple must give notice to a HSE Registrar’s Office - refer to http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/bdm/marriagesinireland/.

The marriage must take place in a place open to the public especially on the day of the wedding. Your celebrant will advise you about the suitability of your proposed venue. The couple must freely consent to be husband and wife in the presence of two named witnesses and a registered solemniser. Celebrants accredited by the HAI are all registered solemnisers and may legally solemnise the marriage without a separate registry office wedding.

2. Q: Is a humanist wedding the right option for me?

A: Humanist weddings are wonderful and personal ceremonies. One of the tenets of humanism is a tolerance for others who hold different belief systems. Therefore everyone feels included during a humanist ceremony.

However, humanists have no belief in a god or the supernatural, relying on scientific evidence and appreciation of the world around us and the achievements of humans. So our ceremonies are secular and non-religious occasions. They are designed to be a positive option for those who share the same philosophical belief system as humanists whether you wish to call yourself a humanist or not, and even whether you are a member of any humanist association or not.

Please think carefully about this choice. If you think you don’t share the same philosophy, or you actually believe in a god or the supernatural, then perhaps a humanist ceremony is not the right choice for you. There are many other organisations out there that would be a more appropriate vehicle for your special day.

If you wish to discuss this more, please contact your celebrant. Celebrants’ contact details: http://humanism.ie/ceremonies-2/celebrant-profiles/
3. **Q:** My fiancé(e) and I have just gotten engaged! We have heard so much about Humanist weddings – how do we organise one?

**A:** Firstly, you as a couple should consider **when** and **where** you wish to get married, and contact a Humanist celebrant as close as possible to that area to check their availability. Due to the current popularity of humanist weddings, our celebrants can find themselves booked up a year or more in advance for popular dates, particularly weekend and holiday seasons. We recommend that you only provisionally book a venue until you have secured a celebrant’s services.

If you cannot find a celebrant based locally, then try celebrants further away. Many celebrants are happy to travel across the country to conduct your wedding, but will charge travel expenses. Your celebrant will arrange a meeting with you and will be happy to explain all the processes involved, including the possible content of your ceremony.

Some celebrants will travel abroad to conduct wedding or commitment ceremonies, but this would not be legally valid unless somehow the celebrant can meet the local legal requirements for a valid marriage ceremony.

4. **Q:** My partner and I are not religious and would love to celebrate our civil partnership with a humanist ceremony. How do we do that?

**A:** Humanists can provide warm and wonderful civil partnership ceremonies, but at present cannot legally solemnise the union, so the legal union must still be conducted by a registrar: refer to [http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/bdm/civilpartnership/](http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/bdm/civilpartnership/).

This position may change after the referendum on same-sex marriage in May 2015.

As with weddings, please consider the date and location of the ceremony and then discuss with your celebrant.
5. Q: Is a humanist civil partnership ceremony legally binding?
A: No, but this may change after the referendum on same-sex marriage in May 2015.

6. Q: Can I get married outdoors?
A: Yes, provided that the ceremony takes place in a venue open to the public and clearly identifiable by an address. Your celebrant will advise you as to the suitability of your proposed venue.

7. Q: Can I get married in my parents’ house?
A: A humanist ceremony that includes the act of solemnisation of the marriage cannot take place in a private location. If the house is a private home and not usually open to the public, then the wedding may not take place there. Your celebrant will advise you about the suitability of your venue.

8. Q: I am non-religious but my partner/fiancé(e) is religious – is there a ceremony that will embrace both our sets of beliefs?
A: One of the tenets of humanism is a tolerance for others who hold different belief systems, therefore everyone feels included during a Humanist ceremony.

9. Q: How much does a humanist wedding ceremony cost?
A: Humanist celebrants are accredited by the HAI but operate as independent service providers so do not have a fixed fee rate – please discuss with your celebrant. Typically you can expect a guideline fee in the region of €450 where the celebrant lives close to your venue. Fees may vary from celebrant to celebrant, particularly if the venue is some distance from them as they will include travel and accommodation costs.
The HSE registry office fees of €200 for notification of registration of marriage and €20 for a marriage certificate are separate from the celebrant’s fee and are payable directly by the couple to the HSE registry office.

10. Q: On what days of the week can I get married?
A: Humanist celebrants are not restricted as regards time of day, or day of the week, month or year.

11. Q: I am trying to organise my wedding in Ireland but live abroad – how do I do it?
A: You should try to decide on a venue and date and then contact a celebrant, as discussed above.

You can obtain a form from a registry office which allows you to give notice of your intent to marry by post - http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/list/1/bdm/MarriagesinIreland/Marriage%20Postal%20Notification,%20couples%20living%20outside%20of%20the%20state.html

Due to the unprecedented demand for humanist wedding ceremonies, you may find it difficult to find a celebrant available on a given date. Hence we recommend that you only provisionally book a venue until you have secured a celebrant’s services. It is advisable to check if a celebrant is available for a particular date before you confirm the venue booking.

12. Q: How long does a Humanist wedding ceremony take?
A: The duration of the ceremony will depend on the amount of content you choose to include. The more readings, music, and other elements you include can increase the duration, but it typically lasts about 25-35 minutes. If in doubt, please discuss the duration with your celebrant.
13. Q: What’s included in a humanist wedding ceremony?

A: A humanist wedding ceremony is typically made up of an introduction (traditional bridal entrance if you wish), words on love and marriage, music, readings, a symbolic ritual or two, vows, marriage declaration, exchange of rings, signing of the register and closing words - you can personalise your ceremony to suit you. In essence, you have a great deal of control as to how your unique ceremony can proceed.

14. Q: One of my parents is deceased and we would like to remember him/her in our ceremony. Can we?

A: Yes, it is quite common to acknowledge early on in the ceremony that there are loved ones who are no longer with us and to have a short pause to remember them with love. Some couples light a remembrance candle. Please discuss this with your celebrant because different celebrants will have different approaches.

15. Q: I will be getting married legally in another country; can I have a humanist ceremony that does not include the legalities?

A: Yes, but it must be made clear at the ceremony that you are already married and that this is a symbolic ceremony only. In this case the humanist celebrant cannot make a pronouncement of marriage (declare you husband and wife).