



Marriage

General Election 2017 Policy Paper

Background

Marriage is a key social institution ordained by God which is good for the family and therefore good for society. CARE is committed to marriage as defined by scripture and upheld across the centuries, i.e. the voluntary union for life of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others. Although the state has provided an evolving legal framework for marriage this has always been for the purpose of regulating marriage, the definition of which predates the state and the law.ⁱ



Marriage brings with it benefits which go far beyond the fulfilment of romantic love. Marriage is good for adults, children and communities. There is compelling evidence that the stability and durability of the family unit is closely linked with the quality of the commitment and relationship of a couple. It is in this regard that marriage – with its distinctive commitment requiring long-term emotional, economic and social investment as well as sacrifice – is so important. This level of commitment generates stability, security and trust, giving and longevity within relationships which in turn brings many benefits, from health and happiness to general well-being.

Some facts and figures relating to marriage:

- Regardless of socio-economic status and education, cohabiting couples are between two and two and a half times more likely to break-up than equivalent married couples.ⁱⁱ Although unmarried parents make up just 20 per cent of all couples with children in the UK, they account for 51 per cent of annual family breakdown.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Cohabiting couples are approximately three times more likely to have split up by the time their child is five years old.^{iv}
- 93 per cent of couples who remain together by the time their child is 15 years old are married.^v
- 76 per cent of couples who marry before having children remain married, compared to 44 per cent of those who married after they had their first child. Of couples who were cohabiting at the time of their first child's birth and never took the decision to marry, only 31 per cent had avoided family breakdown by the time their child took their GCSEs.^{vi}
- *"Marriage is important and has become a social justice issue – aspirations to marry are high throughout society but low-income communities face massive financial and cultural barriers to realising these."*^{vii}
- Even the poorest 20 per cent of married couples are more stable than all but the richest 20 per cent of cohabiting couples.^{viii}

- The size of the health gain from marriage may be as large as the benefit from giving up smoking.^{ix}
- During early parenthood, the single biggest predictor of stability is whether the parents are married or not, even when controlling for age, income, education, benefits and ethnic group.^x
- Children are 60 per cent more likely to have contact with separated fathers if the parents were married.^{xi}
- The cost of family breakdown is extraordinary and continues to increase, from £37 billion per annum in 2009 to £48 billion in 2015 – equivalent to £1,820 per taxpayer.^{xii}
- Nearly 90 per cent of young people aspire to get married.^{xiii}

Marriage in the 2010-2015 Parliament

Over the course of the 2010-2015 Parliament, MPs considered issues such as marriage support and the recognition of marriage in the tax system (which is the subject of a **separate General Election Policy Paper**), as well as the redefinition of marriage in England and Wales.



Redefinition of marriage in England & Wales

The following is a timetable covering in brief the process and introduction of same-sex marriage in England & Wales:

Sept 2011: the Coalition Government indicated its intent to consult on implementing “*equal civil marriage for same-sex couples*”.^{xiv} This had not featured in any party manifesto prior to the 2010 General Election.

20 Feb 2012: the Coalition for Marriage – a group of faith-based and non faith-based organisations and individuals – was launched to defend and support the traditional definition of marriage.^{xv}

15 March 2012: the Government began its ‘Equal Marriage’ consultation which asked ‘how’ not ‘whether’ to redefine marriage to include same-sex as well as different sex unions.^{xvi} The Government indicated it would proceed regardless of the outcome of the consultation.^{xvii}



Dec 2012: prior to the publication of the Government’s response to its consultation on ‘Equal Marriage’, then Prime Minister David Cameron announced that he wished to allow same-sex marriages to take place in churches.^{xviii} Whilst the Government subsequently claimed 53 per cent of submissions to its consultation supported redefining marriage, the views of 500,000 Coalition for Marriage petitioners were disregarded.^{xix}



24 Jan 2013: the Marriage (Same-Sex Couples) Bill was introduced to Parliament in the House of Commons.^{xx} The three main party leaders eventually announced that the redefinition of marriage would be a free vote issue and would not be whipped, despite earlier indications to the contrary.^{xxi}

5 February 2013: MPs debated the Bill at Second Reading and voted by 400 votes to 175 (with 75 abstentions) to allow the Bill to progress to a Public Bill

Committee.^{xxii}

Feb-March 2013: a Committee of 19 MPs received oral and written evidence and scrutinised the Bill.

21 May 2013: following the conclusion of Committee Stage and further debate on amendments at Report Stage with little change to the Bill, MPs voted to approve the Bill by 366 votes to 161.^{xxiii}

4 June 2013: a vote to deny the Bill a Second Reading in the House of Lords was defeated by 390 votes to 148 after the Government engineered a vote at a preferable time to ensure the Bill was able to continue its progress through the House of Lords.^{xxiv}

24 June 2013: Committee Stage of the Bill was completed with no amendments made.

8 and 10 July 2013: Report Stage took place with only minor Government amendments made.

15 July 2013: Third Reading in the House of Lords

16 July 2013: the House of Commons approved amendments made to the Bill by the House of Lords

17 July 2013: the Bill was granted Royal Assent.^{xxv}

CARE was very disappointed at the outcome of the Bill which saw the Government overturn, in law and with unseemly rapidity, the Biblical meaning of marriage. The radical changes made removed the significance of sexual union in marriage and have created a situation where the procreation and rearing of children is no longer a fundamental purpose of marriage. All this was done without an electoral mandate.

Marriage support services

In 2010, as Prime Minister David Cameron stated that £7.5 million a year would be distributed to Christian and non-Christian projects supporting marriage and relationships.^{xxvi} In this way, £30 million had been committed to relationship support initiatives during the Government's Spending Review period 2011-2015.^{xxvii} Funding for projects specifically dedicated to marriage was distributed to marriage counselling interventions and marriage preparation courses.

The Department for Education published a report in January 2014 which noted that monies given for marriage preparation courses and marriage support and counselling interventions were good value for money. For every £1 spent on Marriage Care's FOCCUS® marriage preparation course, the report identified an £11.50 benefit in terms of avoidance of future costs associated with

relationship breakdown.^{xxviii} Likewise, the report revealed that for every £1 spent on Marriage Care's counselling interventions there was an £8.60 benefit.^{xxix}

Marriage in the 2015-2017 Parliament

In December 2015, MPs debated a Private Members' Bill introduced by Caroline Ansell MP. The Assessment of Government Policies (Impact on Families) Bill was designed to ensure David Cameron's commitment to subject all policy proposals to a 'family test' is put into action.^{xxx}

Up to this point the Government's 'family test' had only been the subject of guidance which seemed to largely to be being ignored by government departments. The Bill sought to establish the family test on a statutory footing, meaning that it would be mandatory and would help hold the Government to account to ensure policies are measured by how family friendly they are, as well as ensuring that policies which are not family friendly are not brought forward.

Mrs Ansell's Bill was the subject of a good Second Reading debate but did not make any further progress. In March 2016, a report revealed that only four of fourteen government departments were able to identify specific policies where the family test had been applied.^{xxxi} Also in March 2016, the Centre for Social Justice published a report entitled 'Where next for the family test?' which made recommendations to ensure the success of the family test, directed towards government departments and the Cabinet Committee.^{xxxii}

In a debate during Marriage Week in February 2017, the Minister, Caroline Nokes MP, commented that the Government would shortly be publishing a Green Paper which would engage with issues related to relationship support.^{xxxiii} This Green Paper was promised following the shelving of the Government's Life Chances Strategy in December 2016^{xxxiv}; however, no paper was published prior to the dissolution of Parliament.

During the same debate, Mrs Nokes noted that:

"Over 48,000 couples have participated in counselling and more than 17,000 practitioners have been trained to help families in difficulty in the last four years, during which we have invested more than £30 million in services offering support to couples, to reduce parental conflict. In total, 160,000 people have been given access to support, to reduce that conflict."^{xxxv}

With regard to the definition of marriage, in February 2017 the Court of Appeal ruled against a heterosexual couple seeking to compel the Government to change the law to extend civil partnerships to heterosexual couples.^{xxxvi}

Marriage in the coming Parliament – pressures for change

During the next Parliament it will be particularly important to monitor developments in the following areas:



Family Test – Whilst the commitment to subject new policy initiatives to a family test was made under David Cameron, if the Conservatives are elected, it will be particularly important to ensure the test is made fit for purpose. This is a policy initiative which should be supported by all parties.

Marriage support – With the wrapping up of the Government’s Life Chances Strategy, into which it would seem the subject of marriage support had been rolled up, it is unclear to what extent the Government will continue to invest in and back not simply relationships support but marriage support services in particular. It will be important to encourage whoever forms the next Government to consider the Department for Education’s advice that funding marriage support services is cost effective.

Marriage freedoms – Ministers provided multiple assurances of protections for churches and individual Christians wishing to uphold a traditional definition of marriage.^{xxxvii} There remain concerns about the capability of these protections to stand up to scrutiny.

Party policies on Marriage

It is important to note that votes on the redefinition of marriage were the subject of a free vote for MPs who could be found on either side of the debate.^{xxxviii} You can see how your MP voted on the redefinition of marriage here: www.engaGE17.org.uk/your-mp



For further information on party manifesto commitments – including commitments regarding marriage – please see www.engaGE17.org.uk/blog

What if you live in Scotland or Northern Ireland?

Scotland

Marriage is a devolved issue in Scotland, where the Scottish Government’s Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill which redefined marriage was endorsed by MSPs on 4 February 2014 by 105 votes to 18. The Bill received Royal Assent on 12 March 2014.^{xxxix}

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland remains the only part of the British Isles not to have redefined marriage and legislating on this issue falls under the remit of the Legislative Assembly, where the most recent debate on the subject took place on 2 November 2015. A joint motion tabled by Sinn Féin and the

SDLP was unsuccessful due to a lack of support across Unionist and Nationalist lines, despite a narrow 53-52 vote in favour of the motion.

However, due to the current political situation in Stormont there is every chance that following the General Election there will be a period of direct rule from Westminster in the absence of an Assembly. In this context it will be particularly important to engage with election candidates in Northern Ireland.

Key questions for candidates

1. Do you support the right of those who believe in marriage solely as the union between one man and one woman to articulate their view?
2. What would you do to ensure those who maintain a traditional definition of marriage as the union between one man and one woman remain free to hold and express their view?
3. Do you recognise that it is important and appropriate to use public monies to invest in marriage support services because of the significant benefits of marriage for both adults and children?
4. Will you commit to openly investing in marriage support services and to increasing the amount of money invested in this crucial area?



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- i This was codified in *Hyde v Hyde and Woodmansee* (1866) LR 1 P&D 130
- ii *Green Paper on the Family*, the Centre for Social Justice, 2010
- iii Benson, H, 'Annual Family Breakdown in the UK', Marriage Foundation, March 2017
- iv IFS Briefing Note BN107, Institute for Fiscal Studies, 2010, p.4
- v 'The myth of "long-term stable relationships outside marriage"', Marriage Foundation, May 2013, p.3
- vi 'Get married BEFORE you have children', Marriage Foundation, March 2015
- vii 'Fully committed? How a Government could reverse family breakdown', Centre for Social Justice, July 2014, p.19
- viii Benson, H. 'The conflation of marriage and cohabitation in government statistics – a denial of difference rendered untenable by an analysis of outcomes', Bristol Community Family Trust, 2006 *NB. Age is another risk factor for relationship breakdown; however, marital status still has such a strong influence that even younger married mothers are more stable than older cohabiting mothers.*
- ix Wilson, C. and Oswald, A. 'How does marriage affect physical and psychological health? A survey of the longitudinal evidence', 2005
- x Benson, H. 'The conflation of marriage and cohabitation in government statistics – a denial of difference rendered untenable by an analysis of outcomes', Bristol Community Family Trust, 2006
- xi Amato, P. Meyers, C. and Emery, R. 'Changes in non-resident father-child contact from 1976 to 2002', Family Relations, 58, p.41-53
- xii 'Counting the cost of family failure, 2016 update', Relationships foundation, 2016, p.3
- xiii 'Young people's lives in Britain today', The Opinion Research Business, 2000
- xiv Full speech available:
<http://www.libdems.org.uk/lynne-featherstone-s-speech-to-liberal-democrat-autumn-conference> (accessed 22 May 2017)
- xv For more information, see: <http://c4m.org.uk/> (accessed 22 May 2017)
- xvi Equal marriage consultation, Government Equalities Office and Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 15 March 2012 <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/equal-marriage-consultation> (accessed 22 May 2017)
- xvii For more on this point, see: 'When is a consultation not a consultation?', Don Horrocks, Evangelical Alliance, 22 March 2012 <http://www.eauk.org/current-affairs/politics/when-is-a-consultation-not-a-consultation.cfm> (accessed 22 May 2017)
- xviii 'EXCLUSIVE: Prime Minister David Cameron backs gay weddings in church', Evening Standard, 7 December 2012 <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/exclusive-prime-minister-david-cameron-backs-gay-weddings-in-church-8392931.html> (accessed 22 May 2017)
- xix Civil servants suggested that signatories to the Coalition for Marriage petition would be counted as consultation submissions in answer to Question 1 of the consultation which asked: 'Do you agree or disagree with enabling all

