

# Women's Policy Group NI

20<sup>th</sup> February 2020

To whom it may concern,

Please see below consultation responses on:

- Same-sex religious marriage in Northern Ireland
- Marriage and Civil Partnership – Conversion entitlements in Northern Ireland

This response is on behalf of the [Women's Policy Group NI](#). The Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland is a platform for women working in policy and advocacy roles in different organisations to share their work and speak with a collective voice on key issues. It is made up of women from trade unions, grassroots women's organisations, women's networks, feminist campaigning organisations, LGBT+ organisations, support service providers, human rights and equality organisations and individuals. Given our wide membership, we thought it was fitting that we submit a response to the below consultations.

If you have any queries please contact the Chair of the Women's Policy Group, Rachel Powell, on 02890 230 212 or [rachel.powell@wrda.net](mailto:rachel.powell@wrda.net).

Kind regards,

Women's Policy Group Northern Ireland

## Marriage and Civil Partnership – Conversion entitlements in Northern Ireland

Question 1: Do you agree that same-sex couples in Northern Ireland should be permitted to convert their civil partnership to marriage?	Yes, I agree	No, I do not agree	Not sure
	X		
If you have answered no, please explain your reasons.			

Question 2: Do you agree that opposite-sex couples in Northern Ireland should not be permitted to convert their civil partnership to marriage?	Yes, I agree	No, I do not agree	Not sure
		X	
If you have answered no, please explain your reasons. We believe that the ability to convert a civil partnership to a marriage or a marriage to a civil partnership should be open to all couples at any time and that the choice of whether to be in a marriage or civil partnership is a personal one for each couple to make reflective of their particular needs at any particular time.			

Question 3: Do you think that opposite-sex couples should have the right to convert their marriage to a civil partnership?	Yes, I agree	No, I do not agree	Not sure
	X		
If you have answered no, please explain your reasons.			

Question 3: Do you agree that same-sex couples in Northern Ireland should <u>not</u> be permitted to convert from marriage to a civil partnership?	Yes, I agree	No, I do not agree	Not sure
		X	
If you have answered no, please explain your reasons. We believe that the ability to convert a civil partnership to a marriage or a marriage to a civil partnership should be open to all couples at any time and that the choice of whether to be in a marriage or civil partnership is a personal one for each couple to make reflective of their particular needs at any particular time.			

Question 5: If we allow a civil partnership to be converted to a marriage, should the marriage be treated as existing from:	
The date the conversion takes place (i.e. the date the couple sign the conversion declaration); or	
The date the civil partnership was formed?	X

**Question 6: If we allow a marriage to be converted to a civil partnership, should the civil partnership be treated as existing from:**

The date the conversion takes place (i.e. the date the couple sign the conversion declaration); or

The date the marriage was formed?

X

**Question 6A: If you have answered ‘the date the marriage was formed’, should it be possible for couples who married before December 2005 (i.e. when same-sex civil partnerships were introduced in Northern Ireland) to have their civil partnerships treated as existing since the date of their marriage?**

Yes, I agree

No, I do not agree

Not sure

X

If you have answered no, please explain your reasons.

**Question 7: Do you agree that only those couples that formalised their relationships before 13 January 2020 should be able to convert?**

Yes, I agree

No, I do not agree

Not sure

X

If you have answered no, please explain your reasons.

We believe that the ability to convert a civil partnership to a marriage or a marriage to a civil partnership should be open to all couples at any time and that the choice of whether to be in a marriage or civil partnership is a personal one for each couple to make reflective of their particular needs at any particular time.

There may be couples who entered into a Civil Partnership between 13<sup>th</sup> Jan – 10<sup>th</sup> Feb 2020 during which time it would not have been possible to enter into a same-sex marriage.

**Question 8: Do you agree that all conversion rights should be brought to an end after a fixed period of time?**

Yes, I agree

No, I do not agree

Not sure

X

If you have answered a different period of time, please state how long you think this period should be.

We believe that the ability to convert a civil partnership to a marriage or a marriage to a civil partnership should be open to all couples at any time and that the choice of whether to be in a marriage or civil partnership is a personal one for each couple to make reflective of their particular needs at any particular time.

<b>Question 9: If you have answered yes to question 8, how long should couples (same-sex civil partners and opposite-sex married couples) have to convert their relationships from the date the conversion rights come into effect?</b>	<b>One year</b>	<b>Two years</b>	<b>Three years</b>	<b>Other period of time</b>
<p>If you have answered no, please explain your reasons.</p> <p>We believe that the ability to convert a civil partnership to a marriage or a marriage to a civil partnership should be open to all couples at any time and that the choice of whether to be in a marriage or civil partnership is a personal one for each couple to make reflective of their particular needs at any particular time.</p>				

## Same-sex religious marriage in Northern Ireland

Question 1: Do you agree that consent of the governing authority should be required before officiants can be appointed to solemnise same sex religious marriage?	Yes, I agree	No, I do not agree	Not sure
	X		
If you have answered no, please explain your reasons.			

Question 2: Do you agree that officiants should be free to choose whether to solemnise same-sex marriages, even where their religious body chooses to consent to such marriages?	Yes, I agree	No, I do not agree	Not sure
	X		
If you have answered no, please explain your reasons.			

Question 3: Do you agree with the proposed general definition of “governing authority”, whose consent is required for religious bodies to solemnise same-sex religious marriages?	Yes, I agree	No, I do not agree	Not sure
<p><i>Please note the general definition of “governing authority” in Northern Ireland is: ‘the person or persons recognised by the members of the religious body as competent for the purpose of giving consent’.</i></p>	X		
If you have answered no, please explain your reasons.			

Question 4: Do you agree that the definition of governing authority should also include a person or body (such as a recognised decision-making body) that, on request, is specified in regulations?	Yes, I agree	No, I do not agree	Not sure
	X		
If you have answered no, please explain your reasons.			

<b>Question 5: Do you agree that no religious bodies or persons acting on behalf or under the auspices of such bodies should be compelled to undertake specified activities relating to same-sex marriage?</b>	<b>Yes, I agree</b>	<b>No, I do not agree</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
	<b>X</b>		
If you have answered no, please explain your reasons.			

<b>Question 6: Do you agree that religious bodies (including persons acting on their behalf and under their auspices) and officiants should not be compelled to undertake the core functions specified in paragraph 49?</b>	<b>Yes, I agree</b>	<b>No, I do not agree</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
	<b>X</b>		
If you have answered no, please explain your reasons.			

<b>Question 7: Do you agree that the existing protections plus the exceptions we are proposing to the Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006 and the Sex Discrimination (Northern Ireland) Order 1976 cover the services a religious body or person acting on its behalf might provide to the public in connection with same-sex marriage?</b>	<b>Yes, I agree</b>	<b>No, I do not agree</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
	<b>X</b>		
If you have answered no, please explain your reasons.			

<b>Question 8: Do you agree that the proposed protections (set out in sections 1.6, 1.7, 1.8 and 1.9) relating to consent, non-compulsion and equality law exceptions are appropriate for ministers/chaplains working in secular organisations?</b>	<b>Yes, I agree</b>	<b>No, I do not agree</b>	<b>Not sure</b>
	<b>X</b>		
If you have answered no, please explain your reasons.			

## Monitoring information

<b>Question 1: Are you responding as an individual or are you representing the views of an organisation?</b>	<b>Individual (please complete further questions)</b>	<b>On behalf of an organisation</b>
		<span style="color: red; font-size: 1.5em;">X</span>
If an organisation, what is the name of the organisation you are responding on behalf of? Women's Policy Group NI		
Who does the organisation represent? 30+ organisations, NGOs, individuals, trade unions and LGBT+ organisations that work collectively on issues impacting all women in Northern Ireland		
What is the approximate size of the organisation? 30+ organisations who each have their own membership		
How were the views of members sought? (if known) Members of WPG were consulted at the last WPG meeting held on 12 <sup>th</sup> February 2020.		

<b>Question 2: As per the introductory text, we are required to publish organisational responses in full. Are you happy for us to publish your organisation's response to this consultation in full?</b>	<b>Yes, I agree</b>	<b>No, I do not agree</b>
	<span style="color: red; font-size: 1.5em;">X</span>	
If no, please explain why not, referring to specific sections where relevant (please note, this does not guarantee that we won't publish your response.)		

<b>Question 3: what region are you from?</b>	<b>Please put a cross next to the region that applies</b>
Northern Ireland	<span style="color: red; font-size: 1.5em;">X</span>
Scotland	
England	
Wales	
Republic of Ireland	
Other	

<b>Question 4: How old are you?</b>	<b>Please put a cross next to the age range that applies</b>
0-15	N/A
16-24	N/A
25-34	N/A
35-44	N/A
45-54	N/A

55-64	N/A
65-74	N/A
75-84	N/A
85+	N/A

<b>Question 5: What is your sex?</b>	<b>Please put a cross next to the sex that applies</b>
Female	N/A
Male	N/A
Other (please state)	N/A

<b>Question 6: Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were registered at birth?</b>	<b>Please put a cross next to the answer that applies</b>
Yes	N/A
No (please write in your gender if you wish)	N/A

<b>Question 7: Sexual orientation. This question is about your sexual orientation. Do you identify as:</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
Heterosexual or straight	N/A	N/A
Gay or lesbian	N/A	N/A
Bisexual	N/A	N/A
Other	N/A	N/A
Prefer not to say	N/A	N/A

<b>Question 8: What is your relationship status?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Prefer not to say</b>
Single – that is, never married and never in a civil partnership	N/A	N/A	N/A
Married	N/A	N/A	N/A
In a civil partnership	N/A	N/A	N/A
Separated, but still legally married or in a civil partnership	N/A	N/A	N/A
Divorced or civil partnership dissolved	N/A	N/A	N/A
Widowed	N/A	N/A	N/A

<b>Question 9: What is your religion?</b>	<b>Please put a cross next to the answer that applies</b>
No religion	N/A
Catholic	N/A
Presbyterian	N/A
Church of Ireland	N/A
Methodist	N/A
Baptist	N/A



Free Presbyterian	N/A
Brethren	N/A
Protestant – other, including not specified	N/A
Christian – Other, including not specified	N/A
Buddhist	N/A
Hindu	N/A
Jewish	N/A
Muslim	N/A
Sikh	N/A
Any other religion	N/A

<b>Question 10: What is your ethnicity?</b>	<b>Please put a cross next to the option that best describes your ethnic group or background.</b>
White	N/A
Irish traveller	N/A
White and Black Caribbean	N/A
White and Black African	N/A
White and Asian	N/A
Any other Mixed/Multiple ethnic background	N/A
Indian	N/A
Pakistani	N/A
Bangladeshi	N/A
Chinese	N/A
Any other Asian background	N/A
African	N/A
Caribbean	N/A
Any other Black / African / Caribbean background	N/A
Arab	N/A
Any other ethnic group	N/A

<b>Question 11: Do you have any dependent children (aged under 16 years, or aged Yes No Prefer not to say 25 between 16-18 years in full-time education or training) living with you?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Prefer not to say</b>
	N/A	N/A	N/A

