



## Guidance on the registration of an Armed Forces Chapel (AFC) for the marriage of same sex couples and opposite sex couples

This document answers some frequently asked questions and provides information to Service personnel, including Reservists, their close family members, and veterans, who wish to marry in an AFC.

### Background information

Before a marriage can take place in a church, the church must be registered for marriage; once registered, it remains so. All AFCs are registered for the marriage of opposite sex couples and have been for many years. However, to date, only two AFCs have been registered for same sex couples' marriage.

The process for registering an AFC for a same sex couples' marriage is the same as for an opposite sex couples marriage, but requires additional documentation. Defence wants to make everyone aware that both same sex and opposite sex couples can seek to register an AFC for marriage, although legislation restricts the use of some specific sites.

In 2023 and as part of a 10-year review, Defence recognised that the involvement of the Secretary of State (SofS) in the process of registering an AFC for marriage was not only daunting but could be time consuming. As a result, SofS has now delegated the responsibility for the registration process to the Director of Armed Forces People Policy.

This change in process has meant that it is now easier and quicker for both opposite sex and same sex couples to register an AFC for marriage, increasing availability and choice for same sex couples.

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### What process do I follow if I want to register an Armed Forces Chapel for marriage?

Firstly, please visit your chaplain who will be able to guide you through the process. All chaplains are aware of the intricacies of the process and there is a wide range of support available.

## Frequently asked questions

### Does registering an Armed Forces Chapel for marriage differ depending on if it's an opposite sex couples or same sex couples' marriage?

The requirement to register is the same, but the documents to be provided for registration differ.

### Are all Armed Forces Chapels able to be registered for marriage, or just some?

All AFCs can be registered for opposite sex marriage. There are legal restrictions on registering AFCs for same sex couples' marriage. Your chaplain will be able to advise further.

### Are there any barriers to which Armed Forces Chapel I could get married in?

The AFC must be registered for opposite and/or same sex couples' marriage (as appropriate). If not already registered with the General Register Office, it will need to be registered before a marriage can take place. There are no barriers for registration of an AFC for opposite sex couples. For same sex couples, AFCs which are consecrated or belong to a Christian denomination that has not 'opted-in' to same sex marriage, are not available for this. These restrictions were introduced by the Marriage of Same Sex Couples (Use of Armed Forces' Chapels) Regulations 2014.

As the religious conscience of some Christians does not recognise same sex couples' marriage, only officials from churches that have opted-in to same sex marriage may solemnise such marriages, but they cannot be forced to do so. It is the Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 that explicitly protects officials of the church from prosecution via equalities legislation in this matter of conscience. It is the amended Equality Act 2010 that deems such refusal is not unlawful discrimination.

Your chaplain will be able to advise you on both these matters.

### Can an Armed Forces chaplain refuse to register an AFC for same sex couples' marriage?

No, it is not for a chaplain to decide. As with non-military churches, legislation defines which AFCs can be registered. Ensuring that an AFC can legally be registered now resides with the Director of Armed Forces People Policy.

### Do I have to belong to, or actively participate in any specific religion to get married in an Armed Forces Chapel?

No, but for your marriage to be legal you will have to agree to say the words of the declarations, vows, proclamation, blessing, and the registration.

## Frequently asked questions

### Is the process for registering an Armed Forces Chapel the same for opposite and same sex couples?

The basic process is the same, but for the registration of an AFC for same sex couples' marriage, different documents are required. These differences are defined in law.

### What is a quadruple lock?

Details of the Quadruple Lock are outlined in the Marriage (Same Sex couples) Act 2013. These are the four requirements of the same sex couples' marriage legislation which enable a church official to follow their religious conscience in matters of same sex couples' marriage. They protect both AFCs and non-military churches, and their officials, from prosecution under equalities legislation when following their religious conscience and declining to take part in the marriage of a same sex couple.

### What are my rights as someone in a same sex couple who wants to get married in an Armed Forces Chapel?

Providing you are eligible, your legal rights are the same as if you wished to marry in a non-military church, although the process for registering an AFC differs slightly.

### Is additional support available throughout this process for Service personnel and their partners? If so, where and who should I speak to?

Yes, very much so. Talk with your chaplain who will help you with the process and admin, preparing you for the day and for the rest of your married life together. Same sex couples can expect to be signposted to an appropriate chaplain who will conduct the ceremony.

### If an AFC is already registered for same sex couples' marriage, what do I do?

If the AFC is already registered for same sex couples' marriage you will not have to register the AFC first. Contact your local chaplain and they will take you through the process for marriage.