

No rush for same-sex weddings when compared with civil partnerships

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An Oxford University study estimates that of all same-sex couples who had formed a civil partnership in England and Wales by mid-2015, one in eight had converted their partnership to a same-sex marriage by that time.

The paper published in the journal *Family Law*, shows there was no rush for same-sex [marriages](#) compared with the numbers wanting civil partnerships, which first became available in December 2005 (with the

Civil Partnership Act).

Legislation allowed civil partners to convert to marriage from December 2014. The study says most same-sex marriages in England and Wales have been between couples who 'converted' their civil partnership, although the size of that majority has declined. It adds that although men's civil partnerships initially outnumbered those of women by two to one, women's same-sex marriages have outnumbered men's.

During the first half of 2015, 5,300 couples converted their civil partnership to a marriage, twice the number of [same-sex couples](#) who were marrying without first having had a civil partnership (2,500). Almost 15,000 couples entered civil partnerships in the first full year (2006), with numbers declining to around 6,000 each year thereafter, falling further after March 2014 (the month when same-sex marriages were introduced).

In England and Wales, same-sex marriages could be solemnised from 29 March 2014, with further provision taking effect in December that year which allowed civil partners to make a 'conversion' to [same-sex marriage](#). The paper by John Haskey, a senior researcher in Oxford's Department of Social Policy and Intervention, examines the monthly trends for same-sex marriages in England and Wales following both legal changes, comparing their effects with the passing of the Civil Partnership Act.

The study shows there was a relatively 'slow start' in the numbers that opted for same-sex marriages in England and Wales. 360 couples opted for same-sex marriages in England and Wales in the first full month (April 2014). The numbers rose subsequently, peaking in August at 844, before declining in a way that the study suggests shows 'a seasonal pattern similar to that for traditional weddings'. The further legislation on 10 December 2014, allowing civil partners to convert, resulted in a spike of 2,400 that month or around 100 such 'conversion' same-sex

marriages per day, on average.

One other issue raised by the paper is that of extending the legal status of civil partnerships to opposite-sex couples as England and Wales is in the 'unique' position of giving [gay couples](#) more legal protection than opposite-sex couples who cohabit. The study suggests there is a demand for an extension to opposite-sex [couples](#), but that, for the time being, the Government has stated that no further legislation will be considered until same-sex marriage has become properly established.

The study also charts marked shifts in public attitudes towards homosexuality and same-sex marriage, based on analyses of British Social Attitudes Surveys. Attitudes are far more tolerant than they were in the late 1980s. The paper explains that 'changes in legislation have generally forged ahead of public opinion', and the law's 'moral authority' may have caused a change in attitudes. The research also notes, however, that most of the religious and Christian denominations in England and Wales have not 'opted in' to solemnise same-sex marriages, although some non-conformist denominations are considering doing so.

Provided by University of Oxford

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