



# QUALTRAIN AUSTRALIA

## *Ongoing Professional Development*

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Registered Training Organisation Provider Number 51465

## Resources for registered marriage celebrants:

- Guidelines on the Marriage Act 1961 Version 4 July 2018
  - The Guidelines provide essential information on the solemnisation of marriage in Australia – the most accurate information and guidance available.
- Marriage Act 1961
- Marriage Regulations 2017
- Information and resources for celebrants available on the Attorney-General's website:  
<https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage/resources-marriage-celebrants>

QualTrain encourages registered marriage celebrants to regularly review the Guidelines and the resources on the Attorney-General's website.

QualTrain recommends membership to a celebrant association/network. A list of associations can be found on the Attorney-General's website: <https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage/resources-marriage-celebrants/networks-associations-celebrants>

Information in this OPD workbook has been reviewed and approved by MLCS. The information is updated regularly and is correct at the time of printing. Where case studies appear in workbooks, they are examples only and any comparison made with other persons either living or deceased is purely coincidental.

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*Thank you for choosing QualTrain  
We hope you enjoy your OPD activities*

## 21QT041 Crafting inspirational ceremonies 2 hours

The aim of this professional development activity is to provide both recently registered and experienced celebrants with the skills and knowledge to assist them to craft high quality, inspirational ceremonies, using good writing skills and incorporating appropriate use of the arts in ceremony. This includes the writing process, questions to ask the client, useful resources and developing ceremonies to meet client(s) needs and expectations.

### The role of the celebrant in the community.

A formal description of the role of the celebrant in the community can be found on the Attorney-General's website: <https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage/become-marriage-celebrant>

*Quote: As a Commonwealth-registered marriage celebrant, you'll play an important role in your community. You will also have legal responsibilities.*

All Commonwealth-registered marriage celebrants must adhere to the Celebrant Code of Practice. You should regularly review the code, here is the link: <https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/publications/code-practice-marriage-celebrants>

**Consider this ...** We've all been innocently enjoying a coffee in a café at some time or another when we have overheard people chatting about a ceremony they have attended and our ears pick-up.

Have you ever heard comments such as this spoken by people who are chatting *about anyone else's ceremonies apart from yours!*

- 'it was just the same old ceremony ...'
- 'fancy using that reading ... I didn't understand a word of it ...'
- 'I thought I was at the wrong funeral'
- '... it didn't sound like A's and X's ideas at all ...'
- 'boring ... I switched off straight away ...'

Self Reflection: Make notes of the feedback you have received from your clients ... are there any indicators for improvement?

**Self reflection:** How would being aware of these 'indicators' assist celebrants to improve their work? Review the following examples and make notes.

Comment	Indicator	Action
it was just the same old ceremony		
... a reading ... I didn't understand a word of it		
I thought I was at the wrong funeral		
it didn't sound like A's and X's ideas at all		
boring ... I switched off straight away		
<i>What else did you come up with?</i>		
<i>Anything else?</i>		

**'Okay, now I'm ready to write the ceremony!'**

So ... you have a great idea for crafting a ceremony ... how are your writing skills? Try this simple test.

Select **one of the three** writing prompts and write 30 - 60 words on the topic, taking care to employ effective writing skills. (five minutes)

- Prompt 1 = If you could have one super-power, what would it be and how would you use it?  
or
- Prompt 2 = If you were a sauce, what sauce would you be and what why did you choose it?  
or
- Prompt 3 = Imagine you could program a robot to perform one daily task for you for the rest of your life, what task would you choose and why did you choose it?

**If you're happy, make notes and share your writing with colleagues during the webinar.**

Can you get some feedback from your colleagues? What do they say about your ...

- Grammar?
- Sentence structure?

- Spelling?
- Punctuation?
- Creative ideas transferred effectively into text?

Yes, that was a very quick test and you didn't have a lot of time to pay attention to most of the items above. However, when you are writing ceremony for performance it is tremendously important that you use **effective writing skills**.

**Question:** Why does it matter that you have effective writing skills?

### **Where can I get help to improve my effective writing skills?**

Investigate the following sites, many of these are free and offer the option to upgrade:

- **Grammarly** is a free online writing assistant and scans your text for common grammatical mistakes (like misused commas) and complex ones (like misplaced modifiers). <https://www.grammarly.com/>
- **Microsoft Editor** - Write with confidence with Microsoft Editor, your intelligent grammar, spelling, and style checking writing assistant. <https://www.microsoft.com/en-au/microsoft-365/microsoft-editor>
- **Scribens** is a free online Grammar Checker that corrects over 250 types of common grammar, spelling mistakes and detects stylistic elements such as repetitions. <https://www.scribens.com/>

*And many more to search for ...*

**Write effectively** – Review the following points to develop structure, flow, tight writing – kill the adverbs!

**Sentence structure** - vary your sentence structure by using a combination of short, medium and long sentences. When used correctly, short sentences add impact whilst well-crafted longer sentences can develop a key idea, add in details and build to an important conclusion.

**Flow** is a word used to describe writing that has logical structure and varied language within and between sentences and paragraphs.

**Avoid 'Wordy'** writing - this refers to lengthy and grandiose phrases that clutter meaning with writing that has inappropriate word choices, unusual sentence structure, or instances of passive voice. Remove the redundant words to give power to the sentence. Example:

*'For all intents and purposes, the reason Sarah arrived late for her wedding ceremony was due to the fact that the limo had to stop at so very many traffic lights that were red in colour.'* = 32 words.

'Sarah arrived late for her wedding because the limo stopped at numerous red traffic lights.' = 15 words.

**Avoid adverbs** like *lovely, suddenly, perfectly, beautifully*. They are well-meaning words that do nothing for the value of the written piece and diminish the effect of each sentence. Good writing is specific and paints pictures in the audiences' minds.

**Why use a Thesaurus?** A thesaurus can allow you to have a stronger connection with your audience, as well as a better understanding of your topic. By learning what other words you can use, you can adjust the tone of your writing or speech, helping you to be as effective as possible.

Apart from printed thesauri, you will find many online, here are some examples:

- <https://www.thesaurus.com/>
- [https://www.macmillandictionary.com/about\\_thesaurus.html](https://www.macmillandictionary.com/about_thesaurus.html)
- <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english-thesaurus>

**Read aloud what you have written.** You may think you have a good feel for the flow of words, but you can't judge until you hear the words spoken. Record and listen for the content that doesn't make sense, or for the sentence that doesn't get the message across with sufficient impact.

## **What is the secret to creating high quality, inspirational ceremonies?**

What connection can the celebrant make to each ceremony that will assist in achieving a dynamic and inspirational effect? Is it the setting or venue? ... the date or time of year or day? ... the relevance to history or tradition? ... the season? ... the inclusion of the arts: poetry, music, dance? Or is it about story? ... the couple? ... the subject? ... the community?

**Self reflection:** What do your clients want and how can you be sure you are assisting them to achieve a personally meaningful and deeply rewarding ceremony? How do you identify and record their needs?

You may like to share your thoughts, knowledge and experiences and make a note of where you locate appropriate resources and how you incorporate relevant, meaningful readings, poetry, prose, ritual and symbolism in ceremony, for the benefit of your clients. 10 Mins

*For discussion during webinar*

## How Do We Define 'Ceremony'?

A ceremony may be elaborate or simple, formal or intimate - ceremony conveys meaning even without the use of language.

A hug, kiss on the cheek, and handshake are in their own right 'ceremonies' capable of touching deep emotions and conveying meaning; sprinkling of water, anointing with oil, 'laying on of hands' or the joining of hands in marriage is also 'ceremony'.

Closing a casket in view of or with the assistance of the bereaved is a 'ceremony' within the funeral ritual. Committal, when the deceased's coffin 'goes out of sight', is 'ceremony'.

"All ceremonies on earth are healing gestures. They are all symbolic performances which heal psychic wounds and help us make the great transitions in life." *Marie Louise Von Franz*

"Ceremonies are celebrations that stand outside of time's normal flow. They are occasions for stepping out of our routines and preoccupations so we may touch something essential in life. We seek ceremony when we feel that something powerful and profound is happening." *David Oldfield (USA) from "The Journey"*

## Establishing the Needs of Clients in Ceremony

"It is as though he listened  
and such listening as his enfolds us in silence  
in which at last we begin to hear  
what we are meant to be."

*Lao-Tzu*

"Vasudeva listened with great attention. It was one of the ferryman's greatest virtues that, like few people, he knew how to listen ... the speaker felt that Vasudeva took in every word, quietly, expectantly, that he missed nothing ... He did not await anything with impatience and gave neither praise nor blame--he only listened ... Siddhartha felt how wonderful it was to have such a listener who could be absorbed in another's life ... " *Herman Hesse, Siddhartha*

## **Crafting the Ceremony**

### **Statement of intention**

Before you begin to create a ceremony, you should talk with your clients about what it is they hope to accomplish in this ceremony. The ceremony must state the intention clearly – the clearer the statement, the more powerful the ceremony.

### **Who will participate in the ceremony?**

Participants should be identified before the ceremony is crafted. Who will be the principal participants? Define their roles – will they be actively involved or passive witnesses to the ceremony? If they are to be actively involved, they must be advised in advance so that they can prepare for their role – last minute invitations to participants, without preparation, are not wise.

### **Authoring the ceremony**

The celebrant's role is to assist the clients in achieving a deeply rewarding ceremony. On occasions the clients will want to author their own ceremony, but more frequently the celebrant will author the ceremony and include the clients' specific wishes and personal thoughts to create a personally meaningful ceremony. Advise your clients about the appropriate use of rituals, symbols, poetry and music to enhance the ceremony.

### **Creating the space**

What kind of atmosphere do your clients want to achieve during this ceremony? Is there a most appropriate time of day or night? What time of year would best suit this ceremony? Should the ceremony take place indoors or would outside be more appropriate? What can you advise your clients to do to enhance the space? Perhaps use soft lighting, or candles? Choose floral decorations with care; use oils to heighten the spiritual awareness. Select music carefully, or have live musicians playing.

### **Opening and closing the ceremony**

Ceremonies are set apart from normal time through the atmosphere created in opening and closing the ceremony. Symbolic actions such as processions, music, singing, silence – all announce that something special is about to take place. Begin the ceremony by ringing a bell, or have people sprinkle herbs or rose petals before the participants in the procession.

## **Presenting ceremony**

Ensure that everyone can hear and see what is going on. After working hard to create a deeply rewarding ceremony, it would be a shame if the guests were unable to hear or see it. The celebrant must deliver the ceremony in a dignified and professional manner, paying special attention to public speaking and personal presentation.

## **Enhancing ceremony through storytelling, ritual, symbolism and the arts**

**Storytelling** in the context of ceremony refers not only to the general process of telling a story but also to cultures where the tradition/history is oral. Often the elders in a community may be the official storytellers. Storytelling is a communal event, intended to pass on information that will be remembered. Historically/ traditionally, they were often rhythmic, often sung.

Storytelling may be presented in ceremony in the form of poems, prose and song, or it can be a spoken as personal contribution. In many cultures, it is believed that stories have the power to heal, that they contain the rituals and ceremonies that can cure individuals and communities.

As a story is told communally or is shared by one person with another, it creates a sense of community between those people.

**Rituals, Symbols and Ceremony Signpost Culture** and are indispensable as they provide identity and recognition. Rituals and ceremonies unite people, strengthen their belief and transmit historical information. Rituals may involve eating certain foods or participating in sports or pilgrimage as well as song, dance, music and art.

'When people participate into these rituals and ceremonies, they gain a deeper understanding of their own history, famous figures, myths and legends and acquire a sense of belonging while experiencing shared values.'

*From 'The Journey' by David Oldfield*

**Music, Dance and the Arts** The following information is provided by Dally Messenger, International College of Celebrancy.

'A marriage ceremony, indeed, any ceremony, distinguishes itself from other human activities by a structured presentation of ideas and ideals, in the context of the visual and performing arts. Place, interior design, words, movement and symbolism all play a part. The atmosphere is also enhanced by other less acknowledged artistry, for example, the florist, the dress designer, the tailor, the hairdresser and so on.

'... consider the power of music ... of how music has the ability to inspire individuals in many human endeavours. Music is acknowledged to move the emotions, effect mood and heighten experience. The thoughts and associations, intensified by the beauty and joy of music at a Marriage ceremony, give much more emotional credibility to the values, the commitment between the parties,

and the expression of sentiment. Heightened emotions, psychologically, have the power to create long term behavioural impact on the individual so moved.'

Dally went further in pursuit of incorporating meaningful music in ceremony by encouraging the guests to sing along during the ceremony ... quote from Dally's texts:

'Singing together: nothing beats this! Everyone must have a copy of the words of the songs; it must be played in a key most people can cope with, and it must be led by a competent singer or singers. Sometimes the singer can practice with the guests while waiting for the bride, or at least, have the celebrant explain what will happen later so everyone is prepared.'

Here are some examples of the songs he encouraged ... 'Annie's Song' by John Denver; 'I can't help falling in love with you', Elvis; 'Always', Willie Nelson; 'From me to you', Lennon-McCartney.

## Resources

- **Music** (*warning: Downloading music for free from disreputable sites is not only illegal, but also unethical. Support the musicians who make the music you love by purchasing their art legally.*)
  - <https://music.apple.com/us/browse>
  - <https://www.amazon.com/music>
  - <https://m.youtube.com/channel>
  - <https://www.spotify.com/au/>
- **Poetry** (*be conscious of Copyright*)
  - <https://www.poetrylibrary.edu.au/poems-theme-occasion>
  - <https://librivox.org/short-poetry-collection-215-by-various/>
  - [https://www.bookrix.com/\\_ebook-m-a-new-beginning/](https://www.bookrix.com/_ebook-m-a-new-beginning/)
- **Traditions/rituals/symbols** (*Copyright!*)
  - <https://www.easyweddings.com.au/articles/10-awesome-wedding-traditions-from-other-cultures/>
  - <https://www.brides.com/gallery/wedding-traditions-around-the-world>
  - <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/13-amazing-coming-of-age-traditions-from-around-th/>

## **21QT043 Value the role of the Australian marriage celebrant (2 hours)**

### References

Attorney-General's website. <https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage/resources-marriage-celebrants/your-responsibilities-marriage-celebrant>

*Messenger III, Dally (2012), Murphy's Law and the Pursuit of Happiness: a History of the Civil Celebrant Movement, Spectrum Publications, Melbourne (Australia), 2012, ISBN 978-0-86786-169-3 p.24ff*

*The Beginnings of Celebrancy  
Address by Lois D'Arcy  
to the Christmas in July Conference  
of the New South Wales and ACT branches of the Australian Association of Civil Marriage Celebrants.  
July 1992  
<http://www.collegeofcelebrancy.com.au/Articles/loisd'arcy1992.html>*

*The Power of an Idea: The History of Celebrancy  
Australian Federation of Civil Celebrants Conference  
Keynote Address; by Dally Messenger III  
Monday July 13th, 2009  
[http://www.collegeofcelebrancy.com.au/Articles/keynote\\_afcc09.html](http://www.collegeofcelebrancy.com.au/Articles/keynote_afcc09.html)*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celebrant\\_\(Australia\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celebrant_(Australia))

*Marriage Act 1961 Section 39*

*Marriage Regulations 2017 Schedule Two*

### **Question for small group discussion: Why should marriage celebrants value their role?**

*(Answers may include ... privilege to participate in the marriage ceremony / becoming a celebrant is an honour / respecting the institution of marriage ... and so on)*

See this extract from the Attorney-General's website <https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage/resources-marriage-celebrants/your-responsibilities-marriage-celebrant>

## Rules for Commonwealth-registered marriage celebrants

Commonwealth-registered marriage celebrants play an important role in our communities.

As a celebrant, you have legal responsibilities you must follow. If you don't, you could face serious consequences.

You must follow all the rules in the:

- [Marriage Act 1961- external site](#)
- [Marriage Regulations 2017- external site](#) (including the code of practice for marriage celebrants)

### Download the code of practice:

- [Code of practice for marriage celebrants](#)

## Guides to help you understand the rules

We manage the Marriage Celebrant Program in Australia. Through the program, we aim to help you understand your responsibilities and how to meet them.

Our guides contain essential information on how to meet your responsibilities as a Commonwealth-registered marriage celebrant. We cannot provide legal advice.

*End quote*

In order to value your role as a Commonwealth registered marriage celebrant it is important to understand how and why the role became available. Let's start with the history and consider the social and cultural needs of Australian marrying couples in the 1970's.

*Quote from Diane Storey - Celebrant since 1975, as she reflects on the book 'Murphy's Law and the Pursuit of Happiness: a History of the Civil Celebrant Movement'.*

*'How can you understand your proud profession unless you are completely educated and can converse on its history, growth and development?*

*If you are deeply committed to your profession and wish to engage others with genuine knowledge of your profoundly significant work, it cannot be done well without an appreciation of its history. This book by Dally Messenger III will give you insight and strengthen your commitment to the privileged work we do.'*

## History of The Marriage Celebrant Program in Australia

Prior to 1961 each state in Australia had its own marriage legislation. Attorney-General Sir Garfield Barwick drafted the Marriage Act in 1961. This unified the various states and territories marriage legislation and services under the one Commonwealth Act thus the Marriage Act 1961 was created.

The Civil Marriage Celebrant Program was established in 1973 by the then Attorney-General, the Hon. Senator Lionel Murphy, to provide a secular alternative and freedom of choice for marrying couples who did not want to have a religious ceremony and yet did not want a registry wedding. It enabled the appointment of suitably qualified people to perform marriages and provide couples with a meaningful alternative to Registry Office and mainstream church weddings.



*The Honourable Justice Lionel Murphy*



*Mrs Lois D'Arcy*

*The following extracts were found here:*

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celebrant\\_\(Australia\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Celebrant_(Australia))

## Origin of civil celebrancy in Australia

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Mrs Lois D'Arcy was the first independent civil marriage celebrant ever appointed — by Attorney-General Lionel Murphy. Her appointment is dated 19 July 1973. This photo illustrates Murphy's radical move in appointing women into a hitherto male dominated profession, and his confidence in young people. Lois D'Arcy was, at the time, a young mother aged 26.

Civil celebrancy was established by the Australian Commonwealth Attorney General Lionel Murphy on 19 July 1973, when his first appointee, Mrs Lois D'Arcy, was categorised as a Civil Marriage Celebrant.

Later, as civil marriage celebrants branched out into the performance of other ceremonies such as Funerals and Namings the term was shortened to Civil Celebrant. According to civil celebrant **Dally Messenger III**:

The civil celebrant program is almost entirely the result of one man's vision. Murphy himself told me the story of how he was opposed by his own staff, the public service, his fellow members of parliament and officials of the Labour Party. He defied all, and, on July 19, 1973, in the dead of night, typed the first appointment himself, found the envelope and stamp, walked to a post box and posted it himself.[13]

In fact the enabling legislation, the Marriage Act, had been passed in 1961 but Murphy's personal involvement in using the Act's powers and bypassing the bureaucracy made him a hero to the first civil celebrants. Lois D'Arcy, in a 1992 address to celebrants, recollected Murphy's own account of his authorising the first appointment:

(Lionel had) returned to his office one evening. There he had taken a piece of paper with his letterhead, typed my authorisation, and then placed it in an envelope, which he then posted to me. What other person in such a high position would have done such a thing. No one other than Lionel Murphy![14]

Murphy's stance on marriage reform (and on divorce reform) was part of wider desire to free Australians from restrictive laws. High Court Justice Michael Kirby remarked in 2000:

Lionel Murphy was a big figure on the stage of Australian public life. He pursued with energy, imagination and determination a vision of Australian society which was not warped and gnarled and inward-looking. It was one which reached out to everyone, particularly the disadvantaged.

## **What social/cultural changes led to the development of the program at this time?**

The 1970s in Australia is recognised as a decade of rapid social change.

**Question: who remembers the 70's? What were some of the significant social and cultural events that shaped the decade? Webinar discussion ... answers might include:**

- *Demonstrations / protests*
  - *Vietnam War*
  - *South African Springboks tour*
  - *Women's rights*
  - *Aboriginal rights*
  - *Lesbian and Gay rights*
- *Publication of 'The Female Eunuch' by Germaine Greer*
- *The new Family Act established in 1976 (increase in blame-free divorce)*
- *White Australia Policy dismantled (functioned since 1901)*

- *Ethnically specific criteria removed for evaluating prospective migrants – the first influx of Vietnamese refugees 'boat people'*
- *Australia's 'cultural renaissance', a period when the creative arts blossomed throughout the country as never before*
- *The resurgence of Australian television / pop music / theatre*

**Question: how do you think some of these events changed the attitude of the populace in the 70's?** *Webinar discussion*

There were 13 civil celebrants when the program commenced, the first, Lois Darcy, was appointed on 19th July 1973. There are now more than 8,000 civil and independent religious marriage celebrants appointed under the program.

In 1997, the Government commenced a review of the Marriage Celebrant Program and a Proposals Paper for reform was released in November 2000.

The review process and particularly the Proposals Paper identified a number of problems with the existing system.

Amongst other notable problems the Paper suggested:

- previous arrangements for marriage celebrant appointments resulted in an unequal distribution of celebrants across Australia
- the current system of authorisation on the basis of regional or community need, prevented able and potentially talented celebrants being authorised and hence impacted the quality of the program
- there was an absence of clear definition of the civil marriage celebrant's role
- the Marriage Act did not set down express selection criteria or standards for celebrants other than a celebrant must be 'fit and proper' to solemnise marriage
- there was no formal training scheme available for marriage celebrants, and
- there was no formal procedure for the review of a celebrant's practice.

**Question for discussion amongst small group members: When/why/how were you appointed as a marriage celebrant?** *Webinar discussion*

## **How did the new program change the concept of marriage (1973)?**

***Extracted 10.01.2021 from <https://aifs.gov.au/publications/couple-relationships>***

The age at getting married is one of the many factors affecting the crude marriage rate.

Since the mid-1970s, the median age at first marriage increased for both men and women.

The rise in median age at first marriage for men and women appeared to pause between 2006 and 2010, and has resumed its rising pattern since then, but at a slower pace compared to the decades before the new millennium. In 2018, the median age at first marriage was 30.7 and 29.2 years for men and women respectively.

It is also worth noting that the gap in median age at first marriage between men and women has narrowed from 2.3 years in 1980, to 1.8 in 2000 and 1.5 years since 2018.

There has been a significant shift in the choice of celebrant for marriage ceremonies over the final decades of the 20th century and into the 21st century. An increasing number of couples have turned to a civil celebrant to conduct their marriage ceremony rather than a minister of religion.

In 1970, ministers of religion performed 88% of marriages, while marriages conducted by civil celebrants accounted for 12%. Since then the number of marriages performed by civil celebrants has surged dramatically.

In 1980, 36% of marriages were performed by civil celebrants. By 2018, 80% of marriages were conducted by civil celebrants (76%) while one-fifth were conducted by ministers of religion

The rise in cohabitation is also evident in the extent of pre-marital cohabitation. The proportion of marriages that were preceded by cohabitation has increased since the mid 1970s.

Sixteen per cent of marriages in 1975 were preceded by cohabitation. The proportion was 81% in 2017, and the rate appears to have been stable at around 80% in the last few years.

*End quote*

### **Some significant changes in attitudes include:**

- The new independence of women – expecting a more equal share in the choice and manner of the marriage ceremony.
- The new personal freedoms of youth enabled men and women to form healthier relationships and build more successful lives as singles and encouraged the development of a less formal, ritualised concept of marriage.
- The concept of a personally meaningful marriage ceremony enhanced by the arts (poetry, music, dance).
- The flexibility of time, place and venue for the marriage ceremony.

### **What are some of the obstacles that were faced by the newly appointed celebrants in 1973/1974?**

- Lack of available resources
- No training available
- Difficulty of communicating with other celebrants (just a few in each state)

### **Where did these new celebrants find support?**

- Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages
- Support from the Attorney-General's Department
- Drawn together by Dally Messenger in 1974 to meet in Melbourne
- The birth and development of celebrant associations

### **Question: do you belong to one or more celebrant associations?**

*Webinar discussion and responses regarding the rewards of membership.*

### **Where can you find a celebrant association?**

Answer: the Attorney-General's Department website

<https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage/resources-marriage-celebrants/networks-associations-celebrants>

### **What happened next?**

The following information is extracted from:

[https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Bills\\_Legislation/bd/bd0102/02bd112](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/bd/bd0102/02bd112)

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- the current system of authorisation on the basis of regional or community need, prevents able and potentially talented celebrants being authorised and hence impacts the quality of the program
- there is an absence of clear definition of the civil marriage celebrant's role
- the Marriage Act does not set down express selection criteria or standards for celebrants other than a celebrant must be 'fit and proper' to solemnise marriage
- there is no formal training scheme available for marriage celebrants, and
- there is no formal procedure for the review of any celebrant's practice.

A meeting of celebrants was called by the Attorney-General, the Hon Daryl Williams, to be held in Melbourne. Approximately 300 celebrants from around Australia attended. This was an informative meeting as the Attorney-General outlined the essential points of the Paper. Further consultation was made available to celebrants, representatives of associations, relationship and marriage educators and representatives from BDM.

The result was the implication of **MARRIAGE AMENDMENT BILL 2002**. You can read more about this bill here:

### **1998 – 1999 – 2000 - 2001 - Federal Register of Legislation**

### **In 2003 the new marriage celebrant program is launched**

What are the most notable changes? Details can be found here:

<https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2003B00208> In short:

- New - Marriage Law and Celebrants Section (MLCS)
- Qualification and skills required for registration as a marriage celebrant
- New – application for registration process
- Celebrant Code of Practice
- Details to be entered in the Register of Celebrants
- Ongoing professional development, annually
  - *Some items have since been further amended.*

## **Reason for the Code of Practice**

Although the Code was introduced in 2003, it was evolved in response to complaints received by the Attorney-General's Department over a period of time, from couples who had received less than satisfactory service. There was also an appreciation of the fact that Commonwealth-registered Marriage Celebrants were conducting an increasing percentage of all marriages in Australia, and as such had an increasing role to play in the approach by couples to their marriage.

The government considered it most important that besides providing a high standard of service, and of course complying with the Marriage Act, celebrants should recognise the importance and status of marriage in Australia and should also understand the role of family relationship services in the community.

Consultation with existing celebrants occurred whilst the Code was in Draft phase. The Code of Practice then commenced operation with the reforms to the Marriage Act which occurred in September 2003.

## ***Review the Code of Practice (current)***

<https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/publications/code-practice-marriage-celebrants>

## **SMALL GROUP TIME**

During the webinar; share knowledge and experiences as you discuss the history and how the development of the Marriage Celebrant Program and any significant issues that have affected your celebrant work. (10 mins)

## **Structure and function of ceremony**

A celebrant is in the privileged position to guide their clients towards achieving a personally meaningful, deeply rewarding ceremony.

The purpose of ceremony might be to celebrate:

**Love** (betrothal/ engagement, marriage, civil union, commitment, renewal of vows, wedding anniversaries)

**Life** (christening/ baby blessings/ naming-giving's, coming of adolescent, coming of age, graduation, major birthdays such as 21st, 40, 60, 65, 70 etc, retirement, house warmings, coming of wisdom age, boat blessings,)

**Loss** (funerals, memorials, civil community memorials, companion animal funerals, divorce, living wakes, community ceremonies re natural disasters e.g. flood, bush fire)

Or indeed, any recognition of a particular rite of passage not mentioned in the above categories. To effectively assist clients, the celebrant must have knowledge of the following:

- Cultural issues in service delivery
- Community issues and resources in relation to specific rites of passage
- The relation between ceremony and performance arts – ceremony as ‘non-fiction’ theatre, art and craft in the delivery of ceremony
- The elements of communication (all 6 senses), differences in communication styles and impact for individuals and groups
- Symbols and metaphors, their importance for integration of complex ideas and meanings
- A wide range of poetry, prose, music and symbols appropriate for ceremonies whether love, love or loss as their major focus
- The range of information required for developing a life story from ‘whole’ person perspective

Through active listening and effective questioning, the celebrant will be able to determine the specific nature of client requirements based upon stages of human development and psychology of change.

### **Self reflection:**

What do you believe are the most important aspects of the work of an Australian celebrant in providing services to clients? Is it the ability to craft ceremony? Being a good listener? Understanding the needs of the clients? Delivery and performance? Make a note of your ideas, prepare a statement and be prepared to share them with the whole group. (ten minutes)

The most important aspects ...

## Plan for continuous improvement

In a few minutes, you will be asked to work in small groups to discuss your plan for implementing continuous improvement in your professional celebrant practice. BEFORE YOU START, consider the following:

As with any small business it is wise to reflect on your goals and aspirations.

- Identify the opportunities available for development of the practice.
- Assess and match your personal skills and knowledge to meet these opportunities.
- Identify any perceived risks.
- Identify available resources.

Consider how you will develop values and leadership by practicing:

- Sound values and work ethics that relate back to having clear personal principles and values.
- Ensuring clear values and principles inform all aspects of one's own life and work.

A marriage celebrant holds a respected position within community therefore, it is important to develop a culturally appropriate work ethic in terms of personal, family and community obligations.

The legislation and regulations that relate to marriage celebrants are intended to ensure minimum standards of client care. Regularly check the free advice and information on the Attorney-General's website: <https://www.ag.gov.au/families-and-marriage/marriage/resources-marriage-celebrants>

**Self reflection:** how do you value your role as an Australian marriage celebrant, you may make notes in the box provided: