



## **BECOMING A CELEBRANT WITH HUMANIST CEREMONIES™**

### **Background**

The British Humanist Association (BHA) is the UK's principal charity representing people who hold no religious belief. For over a century, the BHA has provided ceremonies for people who are not religious but who wish to mark significant events in their lives. Humanist Ceremonies is now the BHA's organised network of trained and accredited celebrants in England and Wales. (The Humanist Society of Scotland is the equivalent organisation in Scotland.)

Over time the number of people offering non-religious ceremonies has grown, in response to demand. More people recognise that religion is not for them and feel uncomfortable, even hypocritical having a religious ceremony. They recognise that life without religion does not mean a life without morality. They want a ceremony that is distinctive, personal and significant, specifically devised for them.

Many individuals and organisations now offer non-religious ceremonies. However, a humanist ceremony is more than just an event with no religion. A humanist ceremony will reflect humanist principles, namely the value we place on humanity and reason, on our rights and responsibilities, on our individuality, on our personal histories and on our connections with others. In short, Humanist Ceremonies celebrate human lives in all their particularity and variety.

### **Ceremonies**

Celebrants in the Humanist Ceremonies network can train to lead funerals, weddings or partnerships, and namings.

Most Humanist Ceremonies celebrants are trained and accredited to do funerals. Our humanist funerals are the ceremonies most in demand as our reputation for highly personalised and meaningful ceremonies grows.

However, requests for humanist weddings, partnerships and naming ceremonies are rising. Even though these ceremonies have no legal status in England and Wales, we are finding that couples want a ceremony that celebrates their commitment to each other in terms of their values and perspectives. Likewise, parents from all walks of life want a special celebration for their child (or children) that properly reflects their principles and circumstances.

## Being a Celebrant

The celebrant's role is rewarding and demanding. You are immensely privileged to be invited into people's lives, trusted with their stories and emotions and asked to lead a ceremony that enables their friends and family to mourn, or to celebrate, in ways they find moving and appropriate. At the same time, you carry a great responsibility. The ceremony you are being asked to conduct is very important and you must get it right.

**As a funerals celebrant**, your first ceremonies are likely to be more 'straightforward'. However, you could soon find yourself leading the funerals of young children, suicides, murder victims, or of people who have died in other tragic and traumatic circumstances. You will be dealing with families stunned or ravaged by grief; families whose worst nightmares have come true.

It takes a special kind of person to do this work. The work you will be expected to do will be of an exceptional nature and of exceptionally high quality. You will have to be determined always to give your best, mindful that each ceremony is unique. You need strong personal qualities and a variety of equally important high-level skills and competencies.

**As a weddings or partnerships celebrant** you will be helping a couple to make their personal commitment to each other public, to express their feelings before families, friends, and the people who matter most to them. All couples who wish their marriage to have legal status in England and Wales have to have a separate legal ceremony at a register office (unlike Scotland, where humanist weddings have legal status). However, the humanist ceremony will have more significance for those couples who have chosen to have one. You will be responsible for creating the atmosphere the couple wants, coordinating contributions from family and friends, and you'll need to be prepared to conduct ceremonies in a variety of locations.

**As a naming celebrant** you will be helping parents (single, cohabiting or married, straight or gay) celebrate the arrival of a child, or children, into their lives. The children in question may be new babies, newly adopted, or stepchildren joining a new family. You will be responsible for coordinating the involvement of friends and family members and may be expected to have creative ideas that will make each naming ceremony particularly special.

### You Will Have:

- **Finely-tuned interpersonal skills.** You'll be working with people from a wide variety of backgrounds. You'll need to win their confidence and put them at ease. You'll need to be a constructive and sympathetic listener, able to draw out salient facts with empathy, sensitivity and insight. If you're a funerals celebrant, you'll probably be doing this in highly charged, emotional circumstances.
- **Diplomacy and communication skills.** You'll need to be friendly and assured, even firm sometimes, and always polite. If you're a funerals celebrant you'll be liaising with funeral directors and crematoria staff. If you're a weddings or a namings celebrant you might be communicating with wedding planners, relatives or caterers. As part of the Humanist Ceremonies network, you will support, and be supported by, colleagues. You won't necessarily like or agree with everyone: few groups, families or households are 100% harmonious.

- **Writing skills.** You'll need to be a very competent user of the English language. Your spelling, grammar and punctuation must always be correct. You'll have to construct a ceremony that's dignified and meaningful. You'll need to draw on appropriate music, poetry, or prose readings. You'll also have to include in your ceremony the contributions made by friends and family members. Enjoyment of this creative process will definitely be an advantage!
- **Presentational skills.** You'll need to be well turned out, in an appropriate standard of dress. You'll need to have the presence and authority to take charge of proceedings, to deal calmly and reassuringly with the unexpected and to deliver the ceremony with feeling and sincerity.
- **Organisational skills.** You'll always need to be punctual and reliable. You'll often have to work to tight deadlines (especially for funerals). You'll need to be efficient with your record keeping and accounts.
- **IT skills and driving licence.** You'll need to be capable of using standard word-processing and spreadsheets (Word and Excel), and of using email and the internet. You'll need a PC, printer, and an answering machine. Unless you live in an area with reliable public transport you'll need your own car: ceremonies are often held in out-of-the-way places.
- **Humanist principles.** You will need to be non-religious and committed to humanist principles. You will need to be a member of the British Humanist Association when you apply, and to remain a member while you work as a celebrant with Humanist Ceremonies.

#### **You Will Gain:**

- **Excellent training.** You will be trained by experienced celebrants, many of whom also have professional backgrounds in training or education. Our standards are rigorous. You will not be accepted for training unless we think you are right for this work and you will not be thrown into the water until your trainers really think you are ready to swim.
- **Immense satisfaction** from your work as a celebrant. With training, the ceremonies you devise will be greatly appreciated by your clients. You will be providing a service that meets emotional needs and which should exceed their expectations. The thanks and compliments our celebrants receive make this work very rewarding.
- **A new outlook on life.** You'll meet people from all kinds of backgrounds, with a wide variety of views, in very different circumstances. Being a celebrant really allows you to see, hear and enjoy the richness of life's extraordinary tapestry.
- **Personal and professional support.** Your Humanist Ceremonies trainers and mentors will help you develop to a standard where you feel equipped and confident to conduct ceremonies on your own. You will be part of a local and national network of colleagues in which you can receive and give support, advice, guidance, a listening ear and robust debate! You will benefit from practical support in the form of the BHA's Ceremonies website and forum, business cards, assistance with local marketing and promotion, regular updates, a programme of continuous professional development training and an annual conference. You will also be covered by the BHA's public liability and professional indemnity insurance.

- **An income.** You will charge a fee for each ceremony you do. Some celebrants in the Humanist Ceremonies network work to the extent that they are able to live entirely from their income as celebrants. Others use the fees they earn from ceremonies to supplement other sources of income. **There is no guarantee of any ceremonies after training is completed.**

### **You Will Pay:**

- **A training fee.** Training courses are not free. Fees cover the costs of trainers, venue hire, overnight accommodation, catering, recruitment, and administration.
- **A levy.** For each ceremony for which you are paid a fee, you will be required to pay a levy to the BHA. This levy is 10% for all types of ceremony. The levy contributes to offsetting the BHA's costs of administration, marketing and PR, website maintenance, and the running of Humanist Ceremonies as an organised, professional network.
- **Time.** Your training and the ceremonies you prepare and do will take time and commitment. You'll need to be able to make yourself available. You should be prepared for something much more than a hobby.
- **Stress.** You'll be dealing with emotional people and emotional situations. Frankly, this is why most celebrants love this work. However, it can be exacting and if you are not careful of yourself it can take a toll. You need to know yourself and your limitations well. You'll need support you can call on and should make sure you have time to unwind and enjoy yourself too.

### **Humanist Ceremonies – the Celebrants' Training Programme**

In the Humanist Ceremonies network, the training period for each trainee is considered to extend from the time the applicant is accepted for training until their accreditation. **Throughout this period, trainees are continually assessed and expected to demonstrate the skills and personal qualities as described above.** Not everyone who is accepted for training is found to be suitable, and successful completion of each stage of training is necessary before the trainee can progress to the next stage.

### **Recruitment, applications and interviews**

Applications are assessed according to applicants' suitability for work as a celebrant in the Humanist Ceremonies network, their life and work experience, and the time they will make available for their work as a celebrant. (Please note that most funerals take place on weekdays). Applicants will need to show a clear commitment to humanist principles and must be members of the BHA. There are specific regions of the country where Humanist Ceremonies is currently under-represented and applicants from these areas will be given priority on courses, if they are suitable.

If your application is accepted, a telephone interview will be arranged. If you pass this successfully, you will be added to our training course website and offered a place on a training course at the earliest opportunity. If we are not able to accept you on the next training course we are running, you will be guaranteed a place on the next course after that.

## **Funeral courses**

Training for funerals takes place in three stages, with intervals of about four weeks between each stage.

Stage 1 (Induction) involves a full day. If your journey to the training venue for this stage involves an overnight stay you will have to make your own accommodation arrangements. Stage 2 (General Skills) and Stage 3 (Technical) each take two consecutive days and involve an overnight stay. Your overnight accommodation and catering are booked by the BHA training team and are included in your training course fee. The first day of the third stage will be held in a hotel near a crematorium. On the second day, training will take place at the crematorium itself.

On the Induction Day (Stage 1) you will discuss Humanism and how to explain it, and carry out an overview of the skills involved – questioning, listening, writing, and speaking. At the second stage, you will consider issues around bereavement, look in more detail at the key skills required in order to become an effective funeral celebrant and discuss the whole process in more detail, from the first contact from the Funeral Director onwards.

The third stage looks principally at speaking skills, and provides you with the opportunity to deliver part of a ceremony in the realistic environment of a crematorium.

About a week before each stage of the course you will be sent by email relevant sections of the manual which you will be expected to print off. A ring binder will be provided at the Induction Day in which you can keep the pages from the manual and other handouts for future reference.

Both prior to and during your training you will be required to complete several written assignments and observe as many ceremonies as possible. A mentor, who will be an experienced celebrant, will be assigned to you to offer support and guidance and you should contact him/her when you need help.

At each stage your work and progress will be assessed according to the Humanist Ceremonies competencies framework.

## **Wedding and partnership courses**

Training for weddings and partnerships takes place in three stages, with intervals of about four weeks between each stage.

Stage 1 (Induction) involves a full day. If your journey to the training venue for this stage involves an overnight stay you will have to make your own accommodation arrangements. Stage 2 (General Skills) and Stage 3 (Technical) each take two consecutive days and involve an overnight stay – usually in the hotel where these stages of training takes place. Your overnight accommodation and catering are booked by the BHA training team and are included in your training course fee.

You will be sent a free copy of the BHA publication [Sharing the Future](#). You will be expected to be familiar with this soon after the first stage of the course. You will also be expected to read other publications which are not covered by the course fees.

On the Induction Day you will discuss Humanism and how to explain it, and carry out an overview of the skills involved – questioning, listening, writing, and speaking. At the General Skills stage (Stage

2), you will look in more detail at the skills required in order to become an effective weddings celebrant and consider some of the issues around weddings and partnerships.

The technical stage (Stage 3) covers the whole process in more detail, from the first contact from the couple onwards, and enables you to deliver part of a ceremony in a reasonably realistic environment.

About a week before each stage of the course you will be sent by email relevant sections of the manual which you will be expected to print off. A ring binder will be provided at the Induction Day in which you can keep the pages from the manual and other handouts for future reference.

During your training you will be required to complete several written assignments and observe as many ceremonies as possible. A mentor, who will be an experienced celebrant, will be assigned to you to offer support and guidance and you should contact him/her when you need help.

At each stage your work and progress will be assessed according to the Humanist Ceremonies competencies framework.

## **Naming courses**

Training for namings takes place in two stages, with an interval of about four weeks between each stage.

Stage 1 (Induction) involves a full day. If your journey to the training venue involves an overnight stay you will have to make your own accommodation arrangements. Stage 2 (General & Technical skill) is two consecutive days and is residential with an overnight stay. Your overnight accommodation and catering are booked by the BHA training team and are included in your training course fee.

You will be sent a free copy of the BHA publication New Arrivals. You will be expected to be familiar with this and will also be expected to read other publications which are not covered by the course fees.

During your training you will be required to complete two written assignments and observe as many ceremonies as possible. You will also be sent by email about a week before the course a copy of the manual which you will be expected to print off.

## **Accreditation**

If you successfully complete your training, you become a probationary accredited celebrant of the BHA and can promote yourself as such. This means that you will be able to take on ceremonies work, have access to the Humanist Ceremonies online forum, receive regular updates and newsletters, and have your name and contact details included on the website search engine for celebrants. You can have BHA business cards and BHA folders in which to present your scripts, and you will also be covered by the BHA's public liability and professional indemnity insurance.

In order to gain full accreditation as a BHA celebrant, you must then be observed taking a ceremony by another experienced celebrant within six months (for new funerals celebrants) or within twelve months (for new weddings and namings celebrants).

## **Training for more than one kind of ceremony**

Humanist Ceremonies recommends new celebrants to train to do one kind of ceremony at a time.

If you are already accredited to conduct one ceremony type with Humanist Ceremonies and wish to train to conduct another, you are only required to undertake the final two stages of the weddings or funerals training, or the second stage of the namings training. Fees are adjusted accordingly.

## **Course schedule and fees**

If you have any questions, please [email the Humanist Ceremonies training team](#).

- Your application will be acknowledged within two days. If you do not receive an acknowledgement within this time, please email [training@humanism.org.uk](mailto:training@humanism.org.uk) or call the office on 020 7324 3060 to check that we have received it.
- The completed application form will help us form a full picture of your experience, capabilities, talents, and availability for making client visits and taking ceremonies.
- We may then ask you to contact an experienced and accredited celebrant in your area – to help you find out more about what is involved. We may also ask the local celebrant to advise us on your suitability for celebrant work.
- We shall take into consideration current and potential levels of work available in your local area – to ensure, as best we can, that both your and our investment (time, money and commitment) in your training proves to be worthwhile.
- All these factors will be considered and the final decision whether to proceed with a formal interview will be made by a member of our Training and Development team.