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| **I** | So, the first question is can you tell me about the last wedding ceremony you conducted in England and Wales, specifically focusing on the type of ceremony and location please? |
| **R** | Well, the last ceremony that I conducted, obviously, because of the pandemic now was I think way back in January or February. So, it was a Nikah. I conducted a Nikah and… I have been conducting Nikahs and I have tried to bring it out on that other situation that we were talking about earlier, Rom, that you know, you do not have to wait for an Imam to conduct a Nikah and aMuslim woman is perfectly able and, you know, to conduct a Nikah. And so I conducted it with a young couple. The lady was from an Arab background, the gentleman was a convert to Islam from an Eastern European background. They were both very mature and that was really it. So, I met them a month before the Nikah. I always sort of try to … I mean Muslims are sometimes generally running off the street and wanting to conduct a marriage in 10 minutes and I always say to them, “look, I’m sorry. We can’t do this because there are certain things that I really need to have in place and to know and established before we move into the Nikah stage. So, if you were to go and register a marriage, it would take you at least a month/6 weeks or whatever it is. And so, you should, at least, afford us the same mannerisms in relation to that and the same respect. So I asked them to come and sit with me, talk to them about their relationship, about their forthcoming marriage, you know asking them for certain papers/documents. I need their passports. I need Shahadah certificates, if there are any. I need any divorce certificates from both of them, both for him and her of marriages that have taken place before and have now been dissolved or whatever. And any other documents that I can get that can establish who they are and the legitimacy of the situation. I talk to them. I show them the marriage certificate. I show them where they’re going to get married and walk them through the whole thing. I show them my marriage ceremony, which I have done out specifically because I was dealing with a lot of convert marriages to born Muslims and for the convert marriages there was always a group of people who would come, who would not be Muslims and I wanted to make them entirely comfortable with what they were seeing and hearing and taking them through a very nice marriage ceremony, which I always do out on little nice paper, fold them, leave them on all the chairs, make sure that all the mothers and fathers and everybody … I have their names; I have their correct spellings and everything like that and everything is there. So, my marriages are very well organised, and I will not … you know, negate on anything or … because I think it is so important. So, that was the last marriage I conducted.  |
| **I** | Okay. |
| **R** | I feel that, as Muslims, we sometimes rush into marriages and somebody conducts it and just says, “do you, I do, do you, I do”, Al-Fatihah and we’ll all go home. That, for me, is not a marriage. It has to be more than that. It has to be deeper, more meaningful, memorable, an occasion, something that everyone who is there … you know, joins in with through prayers, extra prayers and collective prayers for the couple and everything. So, yeah.  |
| **I** | Okay. So, you mentioned, obviously that you had brought in a little snippet about Rom and the idea that you’re a female conducting the Nikah. What has that been like? What is the reception to that usually? |
| **R** | Very good. Very open, usually. There was only one occasion that I was asked could it be a man and I said, “yes, if you want it to be a man, we can certainly organise that for you.” One of the things that I would ask them is, “I will conduct the ceremony. If you would like somebody from your family or somebody that you know very well, or somebody you respect to do the Khutbah of the Nikah, by all means. Ask them to come.” But then I will always maybe speak to that person and talk to them about the Khutbah and about the things that should be mentioned or said, or whatever it is. And the things that should not. |
| **I** | Okay. Wonderful. So, my next question is … |
| **R** | Or that maybe are just a little embarrassing and should be left out. You know, I’ve had Khutbahs marriage and I’ve cringed. |
| **I** | So, the second question: is it usual to meet or otherwise communicate with the couple before the wedding ceremony? |
| **R** | Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think … you know, with respect to everyone involved I think it has to be an obligation that you meet with the couple. And I just think that, as somebody that will conduct the marriage, and as somebody who is family mediator as well, I just like to talk to them quite frankly and openly about marriage and about the realities of marriage and about mutual love and appreciation and respect and sometimes … you know, what I find right now is that sometimes a born Muslim comes into a marriage situation with a convert Muslim with this feeling of superiority and that’s a position that I always advise is not a good one to start any marriage. Respect each other and respect the backgrounds from which each one came in relation to who they are now and the relationships with non-Muslim family and friends and the need to attend non-Muslim family celebrations and so on. And that this has to be respected and if you are not prepared to respect this, then you are really not in the right relationship. And so, there are specifics in relation to the marriages that I conduct right now because a lot of them are convert born Muslim ones. But yes, I do think it’s absolutely essential that you see them and be able to talk to them. And make them feel relaxed as well. Because already because this born Muslim is marrying a convert, there’s already issues. There are family … there’s family who are voicing opinions that are not helpful, not supportive and not in any way pleasant sometimes. And so, you have to talk them through these things and try to give them a little light at the end of the tunnel that it’s really about them. It’s about how they are going to conduct their relationship and the relationships around them who may be hostile and confrontational and whatever it is. And how they can navigate all of that. |
| **I** | Okay. Thank you so much. So, the third question is: are the ceremonies you conduct part of a process towards a legally binding marriage? So, this means that the Nikah … do you consider the Nikah to be a step in a process where, at the end, they will do a legal ceremony? |
| **R** | Yes. I do. And I do bring that up with them and discuss that with them. And because the legal system has been making it really … what would you say … difficult, for us to perform a Nikah without a civil marriage having already taken place, and because they’ve made Mosques really scared about this and lots of people go to Mosques and say, “we want to get married”. “Have you done your legal marriage?” “No.” “I’m sorry. We can’t marry you … do the Nikah until you’ve done that.” Which I think is just unhelpful because the Nikah for the Muslim is the religious faith based ceremony, which is essential to us as practising aware Muslims. And I don’t see that this hanging … these kind of threats over people’s heads is going to resolve some of the issues that we have to deal with when somebody comes. And there’s a problem or there’s a marriage that needs to take place soon because there are other situations that have occurred and so on. And because of that, I’ve been … I’ve done something and it always kind of irritates me in the sense that I feel that I’m not being fair and I’m not being completely … you know, I’m not taking the situation to a complete conclusion for them. I have to say to them something along the lines, “we will have to retain your Nikah certificate here until you can present us with your civil marriage certificate”, so that we, ourselves, are protected in law. And it’s kind of, “oh god! What do I do here?” I think it’s unnecessary and it’s … why? Why do I have to do that? And do I really have to do that or am I being overly cautious because I’m afraid of the big legal hand of the law here in the UK coming down on top of us for performing a Nikah. Why should I have to do that? We are an Islamic organisation. The whole ethos is run on Islam and Islamic ethics and principles. So, why do I have to do something like that? I feel compromised. |
| **I** | Okay. You’ve sort of already answered this I guess, but I don’t know if you want to add anything else. How do you perceive your role in advising couples on the legal status, under English law, of the marriage ceremony that you conduct? |
| **R** | Well, I … my status is only on the basis of having mediation. And obviously we go through so much. I mean we’re almost like solicitors when we have to do family mediation. Because I’m an all-issues mediator, so I do property, finances and children. So, I’m familiar with where the … how the law stands in relation to relationships where there’s no marriage and where assets are not held by both parties. And it seems unfortunate that a woman is married to somebody and because the home that she lives in is only in his name and has always been in his name, that she has to forfeit any rights to. So, it’s all about, as a mediator obviously it’s all about trying to find a way forward and negotiate a way forward. So, we … even though the property may belong to him because that’s … it’s in his name or whatever … we always try with regards to savings and bank accounts and stuff like that, how can we try to compensate her for what’s she’s losing on the other hand. It’s hard and I do try to make them see how this is. But you know, the other thing is that in most Muslim countries when they do a Nikah, the mahr is quite substantial. It’s fairly robust, you know. I’ve had people coming in to me throwing the loose change in their pockets on my desk and saying, “oh … you know …” because they haven’t discussed this, and he has certainly not even talked to her about it. So, he puts his hand in his pocket and takes out his loose change and there’s a couple of £10 notes and maybe a couple of £20’s and so on. And I look at her and say, “well, there you go. That’s what you’re worth. Are you happy with that?” So, it’s like sometimes you have to make women think. It’s like they’re seeing this whole relationship through rose-tinted glasses and he’s almost saying, “well, she ought to be lucky! I’m getting married, she’s a convert to Islam”. In other words, she’s got no-one out there to speak on her behalf. So, “she’s so lucky. I’m getting married to her and I’m a good upstanding Muslim.” Well, excuse me! And sometimes, honestly, I’m just lost for words. So, actually when, and this is what I say to them, “if you are giving her a gold ring as a mahr, that’s really not going to take her very far”, given today’s market for gold and here in the UK and whatever. But if you’re both married or even if you’re not married and you both buy a property and the property is in both names, then that is kind of her mahr as well. It’s kind of her safety net, in a sense. Because she owns that property jointly with the other person. So, I do talk to them about that. “If you can’t afford a mahr at this point in time, fine. But let me point out that if there’s any property that is attained during the marriage, any assets, property, savings, whatever it is, that is part of the marital assets, then you have to understand that they are jointly owned and that she has a joint right to them. So, if you’re not going to give her £5,000 or £15,000 or whatever it is that they ask for in Egypt or in Saudi or whatever it is, then let’s look at the joint ownership of property here in terms of that futuristic mahr that she might walk away with, should this marriage break down.” Sorry, I’m not… I am sure you have thought of that yourself, but there you go. |
| **I** | I hadn’t. I made a quick note. That is very interesting. Very interesting. Okay. So … |
| **R** | Because I know here in this country, that to come up with £20,000 or £15,000 or whatever it is for a mahr, I mean who has this kind of money? Nobody has this kind of money. So, the mahr will be very little or it will be … they will try their best. But, based on that, I’m saying let’s look at what could be regarded as a mahr in relation to this marriage and the possibility of this marriage ever getting into trouble or getting into difficulty. This secures her right to that. But she doesn’t have to be married to him legally. All she has to do is make sure that there is some contract and some signing of documents and some joint things that happen that can be turned into a consent order by a solicitor. Yeah. |
| **I** | Okay. Thank you. So, the next question … coming back to the wedding, where do the ceremonies you perform generally take place? |
| **R** | And let me say, as well, in relation to the last one that … what was I going to say now … I’ve forgotten what I was going to say. Sorry, can’t remember now. But it was an important point. Anyway. Okay, where did they take place? They take place in the [name of organisation]. |
| **I** | Okay. So, that’s all of them? |
| **R** | Yes. Now, let me say, having said that, I spent the last year registering the [place] Mosque. |
| **I** | Okay. |
| **R** | A bit of a palaver, but … |
| **I** | Tell me about that. Can I have some more details? |
| **R** | … like I said in Rom the other day, I don’t know what is the matter with all these people who are constantly whinging about the mosque and about the place for registering a marriage and this and that. Just do it! Just do it! You know, what is the matter with you? Just get the papers and do it. And then you mosque is registered as a place where you can have a registered marriage as well. But, yeah, but Ina was talking the other day about, “well, we’re Muslims and we need to be able to get married wherever we like, and we need … at whatever time we like”. Come on Ina! We’re not talking about some old patched up Eid party here. We’re talking about marriage. We’re talking about marriage. So, let’s not be looking for stupid things that try to trivialise marriage. Let’s try to … because with the marriage thing, we’re either doing it on a shoestring and “oh, but sister, the nicest, the best mahr is the one that’s … that your husband will teach you a surah from the quran”. “Excuse me? No! No!” That happened during the time of the prophet *(salallahu alaihi wasalam)* when this man had absolutely nothing. He hardly had clothes to put on his back. The prophet *(salallahu alaihi wasalam)* asked him about so many things and then in the end he said, “have you got a sword?”. He asked him about whether he had property, whether he had a house, whether he had land, whether he had gold, whether he had a ring, which is what I include in my marriage ceremony, the exchange of rings. Why? Because it’s part of Urf in this country. Urf is a major part of Sharia. If the Urf itself is a longstanding accepted cultural exercise that everybody respects and everybody knows about … so, in my marriage ceremony, there’s an exchange of rings with a prayer for each person on the exchange. I will send you a copy of the marriage ceremony. |
| **I** | That would be great. |
| **R** | And when I showed that to somebody and said, “what do you think of my marriage ceremony?” He read through it. And he said to me … do you know what he said to me? I was just..... He said, “it’s a bit English, isn’t it?” I said to him, “you are living here in this country for the past 35/40 years. Why would it be anything else other than a bit English?” Anyway, so, what did you say to me? |
| **I** | So, can you … so, you said that you’re going through this process of registering the mosque. |
| **R** | Right, so I registered the mosque and now I have registered it as a place where marriages can be held for the Registry Office as well. I have also sent my marriage ceremony, that I’ve done out myself, to the place of registration, which includes the two pieces of lines that you have to include in order to make the marriage a registered marriage.  |
| **I** | Right, okay. So, in terms … |
| **R** | You understand? |
| **I** | Sure, carry on. Sorry. |
| **R** | So, you know, when they say, “I, so-and-so, declare that there’s no lawful impediment why I … should not marry so-and-so”. And then the other one is “I, so-and-so, take you as my lawful wife”. You know? So, they are the two things … specific things at a place where you want to carry out … to use this ceremony as a Nikah and as a registered marriage, you can put those two things in. And that is acceptable to the registries place as a marriage, you know for their legal ascriptive. |
| **I** | So, just in terms of that process, of getting the place registered as a place for marriage, how was that? Was that relatively straightforward? Did you find it easy? |
| **R** | It was kind of … it was a bit of a palaver but there was nothing hugely complicated about it. I think probably the worst thing was the fact that I had to get 20 signatures, addresses and contact details of 20 people who use the facility as a place of worship. |
| **I** | Right, okay. That’s fine. Right, so the next question I have is: have you seen a change in demand for non-legally binding ceremonies in the last 10 years and if so, what do you think the reasons are? So, are more people coming to you or … |
| **R** | Non-legally binding ceremonies? |
| **I** | Yeah, so you know the Nikah ceremony that you perform? |
| **R** | Yeah, yeah. Not particularly. I mean most people will say that they just want to have the Nikah first because for them that’s the really sacred part of the marriage, for them and their family. That, to them, is the core, the essence of a marriage. And that’s why sometimes it’s hard for us to understand why the legal opinion is so dry and prescriptive and non-empathetic with kind of situations for Muslims. That is the core of the Muslim thing. I mean, I tell you something, my daughter was in a relationship with somebody down in London. Not in a relationship that they were living together but in a relationship that she wanted to … they wanted to take it to the next step. And she met me in [place] train Station for a coffee and she was saying, “oh, me and [name of daughter’s partner] want to move in together”. And I looked at her and I said, “[name of daughter], are you for real? Are you honestly asking me this? You know what I’m going to say here. Over my dead body! Right?” And then she started crying. And I said, “listen. I’m going to finish this coffee (or this hot chocolate or whatever I had) and you can sit here crying for as long as you like, [name of daughter]. I have a train to catch but that is it. End of.” And they did have the Nikah. They did have the Nikah. Because I said to her, “look [name of daughter]. I am not having you moving in with any man who does not understand that he has a responsibility towards you and that Islamically you are a young Muslim girl, and I am your mother. And I know your father has passed on now, but he would be shocked and horrified to hear you ask me something like this. And I know that you are, yourself, a bit shocked and horrified to hear those words coming from your own mouth, because you know, you know yourself what it means. So, what I’m saying to you is, I need [name of daughter’s partner] to go through this ceremony so that he understands that you are my daughter. You are a young Muslim girl, and I am responsible for you. And now he is responsible for you and he had better step up to the mark for that responsibility. So, he has to understand this whole relationship thing. Okay, you can wait for a while and you can do your civil marriage and whatever it is. But that’s where we start. That’s the starting point.” And it happened. And he … even [name of daughter’s partner] would say to me, “I’m so glad that you made us go through this because that was the point at which I knew that this relationship and this marriage was important. Was absolutely vital to us moving forward.” |
| **I** | Okay, thank you so much for sharing that. This actually links to what you’ve just said. So, why do you think it’s important to be able to conduct these ceremonies? So, to be able to conduct the Nikah? |
| **R** | It’s crucial. It really is crucial. Because it’s part of our faith and it’s part of our essence and the core of life for us. So that we don’t trivialise something like this. This is a huge step and out of this relationship comes children and family and relationships. Wider relationships with family and everything. So … and community and everything and we have to not trivialise it and it has to be carried out because it’s part of the community, knowing and coming to realise that this couple are now a new entity. A unit within the community that should be respected and appreciated and prayed for and made dua for and supported by people who know these are young people starting out on a very difficult journey forward. Yeah. |
| **I** | Okay. Thank you so much. So, has there been any change in your role since you began conducting the Nikah ceremonies? For example, has there been any change in the form of the ceremonies that you now conduct? So, you’ve obviously mentioned in some detail what it looks like now. Did it always look like that? |
| **R** | No, it wasn’t always like that. I had to change the ceremony because of the nature of the marriages or the ceremonies that I was conducting. Because it was a convert to Islam and a born Muslim. I wanted the convert to Islam and their family to feel as comfortable and to be able to recognise aspects of the marriage ceremony as common to themselves so that they could come to me afterwards and say, “oh my god, we didn’t realise that the marriage ceremony in Islam could be so much like the marriage ceremony outside of Islam.” And I always used to say, “look, when William waited at the top of St Paul’s Cathedral for Kate, her Wali took her up the aisle, her father. He took her up the aisle as telling the whole congregation, this is my daughter, and we accept that she’s going to be married to this man and we accept this union. Well, why wouldn’t he? But anyway. And when he arrived at the top, he was asked, who gives this girl in marriage? And he said, I do. Only then did the marriage ceremony take place.” So, this is the same as a Wali, a father or a mother or whoever it is, and I will accept a mother giving her daughter in marriage as much as I will accept a father giving his daughter in marriage. So, when that person says, “I accept that this is the …”. In my ceremony it says, “Fatima gives herself freely to this marriage”, because I want to make sure that she’s not under any kind of coercion to marry this person … you know, this forced marriage thing … “with mine and her family’s support and blessings.” So, that’s there and any other people from different religions can recognise that as part of religious ceremonies outside of Islam that have this aspect to them as well. And then they … we ask them if they will get married and if they’re happy to accept each other. And then we have the exchange of rings. And then we have prayers that they say for each other and prayers that the people come together and say together. And then we read Al-Fatihah and then it’s Mashala … [*inaudible 00:30:54*] and cake. And it has changed and now, of course, it has changed again because I’m including the registration aspect of the marriage into it. If they are getting married by Nikah and registration. If not, then just the Nikah. It’s entirely up to them. But sometimes they will come to me, and they will say, “oh, can we have the Nikah because we’re really nervous”. And then they say afterwards, “and then we went and did the civil ceremony and then we were really relaxed, and it was … whereas before, we were just all worried and concerned and under pressure and stress and everything.” So, you know, you just want to relieve people of that kind of bother. |
| **I** | Okay. Thank you. So … now, you’ve mentioned that you’ve gone through the process of registering the mosque at [place] … at the [name of organisation], sorry, for the … for marriage. Have you conducted any ceremonies there yet? |
| **R** | No |
| **I** | No? Okay. |
| **R** | That’s just come through … |
| **I** | Okay, fine. |
| **R** | Now the whole registration of marriage is changing at the moment. So, before, where we would have had to have kept a registry book at [place] and filled it in and give them their marriage certificate register … give it to them there, now the whole process is changing. When they go to the Registry Office and say they want to get married and they’re getting married at [place] and they’re going to have the Nikah and registry marriage together, the Registry Office will give them a form to give to us. They bring that form with them and we will fill in the form … |
| **I** | So … sorry … |
| **R** | … once the marriage has taken place. |
| **I** | Sorry. If I can just stop you there for the moment. So, this is the proposed reforms that you’re mentioning? |
| **R** | This is the proposed reforms. So, then we fill in that form and then we give them back the form. They take the form back to the Registry Office and then they’re given the registered certificate. So, now we won’t have to hold all this stuff in the safe and make sure … because it is a big ordeal, you know, to make sure that all the names are spelt correctly, dates, everything is filled in correctly and the certificate is registered properly. So, we don’t have to do that now anymore. We’re waiting until this reform takes place. We are in touch with [local] Registry Office now and this reform is going through. So, we’re just waiting until this happens. And anyway, it’s COVID so nobody is coming to us at the moment. |
| **I** | Sure. Okay. So, that’s great. Thank you. So, you’ve already mentioned the reasons, which is fine. And then the question eleven isn’t relevant at the moment. Okay. So, if we now turn to the Law Commission’s consultation paper and the proposed reforms. So, it sounds as though you are very familiar with them. So, there is a process … an easier process for giving notice. So, instead of having to make an appointment at the Registry Office they can potentially do that now online and then there will be an appointment at which they will have to be there in person. The other big change, which will be relevant to somebody in your position, is that religious groups would be able to nominate officiants to officiate at weddings. So, the groups making the nomination could be an overarching organisation or, in your case, it’s the same sort of 20 members. And all of their names would be accessible publicly. The main duties of the officiant would be to ensure that both parties freely exchange consent to the marriage in the presence of two witnesses and that the marriage schedule, which is provided by the Registry Office is signed and the officiant could also lead the ceremony, or they don’t have to. So, it could be somebody else who leads the ceremony as well. And in terms of the ceremony itself, there would be no legal restriction on the types of places in which marriage could be legally celebrated and it would be for the officiant to decide whether the location proposed by the couple is safe and dignified. So, a lot of reforms there. So, firstly, would the proposed reforms make it easier for the types of ceremonies you perform to be legally binding? |
| **R** | You see I … this all kind of worries me now. Because to be honest, I’m trying to … it kind of worries me the way the Muslim community approaches these things and wants them to be … I just don’t know, to be honest. It concerns me because I’m concerned about women being pushed into marriages. I’m concerned about where they’re going to take place. Marriages have taken place in front rooms and back alleys and all sorts of places and then women don’t know who the witnesses were. They don’t know who to go to. There were no certificates of marriage given to them. It was just some kind of cowboy thing that went on and lots of women have really gone through suffrage on account of them. As a Muslim community we’re not into the business of conducting our affairs in a way that applies a degree of respect and responsibility towards them. And I’m just a little bit afraid about all these reforms that’s going to open the gates towards a free for all. I mean it’s been bad enough, but I don’t know what to say about them. I don’t know how to … what do you think? I’m just … |
| **I** | I can’t share my views right now. So, obviously I’m trying to gage your engagement with it and actually you’ve made your points very clear there, about what your concerns would be. So, you think a … almost deregulation, if you like, is going to be problematic? |
| **R** | If you’re saying that any Tom, Dick or Harry Muslim can be picked out of a group to conduct a marriage … I mean even the marriage itself, I just need the Muslim community to give it the relevance and the respect that it deserves and this kind of rushing down, as I did when I got married, to the mosque and just sitting in the room where my husband was located somewhere else and then somebody told me that I was married now. And … you know … really, I can see all of this going back into this situation where the woman isn’t even in the same room as the guy and can’t speak for herself and … you know, it worries me. It really does worry me. Because I don’t want to burden people with unnecessary aspects to this. I don’t want to trivialise it to the point where it may cause incredible problems. |
| **I** | Okay. You raise some very, very important and interesting points there. Okay. So, the next and in fact you’ve covered this, would any of the proposals give rise to problems for the Nikah ceremonies that you conduct? |
| **R** | I wouldn’t mind the fact that people would get in touch with us online, but I certainly would need to see them face-to-face and arrange the situation and dates, times, venue, everything properly. The only worry I have would be making sure that I got the right kind of documents. I don’t conduct marriages where the man is already married, and people have come to me at [place] and I’ve sat down with my book and I’ve everything, organised, and I have my pen out and I’m telling them what I need. And I say, “I need all your divorce certificates and your divorce papers and documents” and the guy says to me, “yeah, but I’m married already. So, this is my second marriage.” And I just go, “that’s it! End of! We’re going nowhere with this.” “Yeah, but Islam says this and who are you to tell me that God …” and I say, “well, I’m sorry. We can’t conduct a marriage … a Nikah, where there’s already a marriage in place and it’s not within our limitations to be able to legally protect everybody within that situation and blah-de-blah and whatever … and the law won’t… and whatever”. And eventually they just go.  |
| **I** | Okay. |
| **R** | They tell me that they go to a mosque in [place] who will do the marriage for them and I know very well that they’ve been to all the mosques in [place] and that’s why they’ve ended up with us. Probably most of the mosques won’t do it. Yeah |
| **I** | Okay. |
| **R** | But, yeah, so I just need to make sure that everything is legal and above-board, and we have all the documents. We have all the certificates. I always give a certificate to each of the parties so that she has her own, he has his own and nobody is saying, ten years down the line, “yeah, but the document was given to him and he won’t give it to me now and he refuses to …”. No. I give you yours, “this is yours; this is his”. |
| **I** | That’s a really important point. Okay, so the third question about the proposals … the reform proposals. How do you think the proposals might impact on the process of getting married amongst Muslims? So, do you think it would have a negative or a positive impact overall? |
| **R** | I think … I mean they’re making it extremely easy in the sense that you can do a lot of this stuff online and stuff. But I mean I’m just worried about how that would be abused. So, yes, they’re making it easy. They’re definitely … you know, making it easy. But how easy do you want something so serious and so important and vitally important to the community, how easy do you want that to be? Yeah. |
| **I** | Okay. So, is there anything else that you would like to say about the proposals? |
| **R** | You know, I started filling in the response to the proposals online and I didn’t finish it. So, I’m not really up to speed with all of the proposals and with all of my thoughts in relation to the proposals. So, I have to go back to that. I’ve just parked it and I have to go back to it |
| **I** | So, in terms of the overall, you know the “At a Glance” guide that I provided? I can share it on the screen now if that would help? |
| **R** | Yeah.  |
| **I** | Just to get an idea, really, of your thoughts. Sorry, just one moment while I try to do this. Yeah, just to get an idea of your thoughts really or if there’s anything else you would like to add to. So, that’s … I mean it is a very executive summary version. |
| **R** | Yeah. That you will be able to give notice remotely, that’s fine. And choose the registry office where they want to attend to complete the preliminaries, I think that’s okay. Because at the end of the day people are working, they’re not always available to do this. Upcoming weddings will be published online accessible to the wider community. I think that’s fine and I think … I’m never really sure that even posting marriage plans in the Registry Office has been that successful in the first place. I would wonder how the upcoming marriages online would be flagged up. How would they be flagged up to the wider community and to what extent would we be able to go through the lists and so on and so forth? Would the Registry Office send out details on a regular basis and have a very large database of people? How would it work? I’m not sure how it would work. You would just personally have to take it upon yourself to go into the site and see who’s getting married? Would you be bothered? I don’t know. I mean would you be bothered before? Couples must choose between the civil or religious ceremony. There is no option to have a wedding according to beliefs that are non-religious. Our scheme would enable weddings conducted by non-religious belief organisations (such as Humanist) and/or independent celebrants, if the Government decided to permit them. I think that would be fantastic, really. As long as the people and the organisations conducting those weddings give it an importance and a depth that it should be given. Yeah? And responsibility. And I’m not sure to what extend the Muslim community are able, prepared or willing to do that. And I think there would have to be some maybe discussions held so that the community would be able to set up a kind of a structure around that, which would give it that importance and responsibility and ceremonial effect. With few exceptions, all couples must have their wedding either in a place of worship or a licensed secular venue. Couples generally cannot marry outdoors, even in the garden of a licensed venue. All weddings will be legally permitted to take place in a location chosen by the couple. Couples would be able to marry outdoors and in their own homes. I agree with part of that and I disagree with other parts of it. Couples will be able to marry outdoors and in their own homes. In their own homes? I would really have a problem with that, and I would kind of have a problem with anything that wouldn’t have some kind of an entity that gives it a permission to be used as a marriage … a place for marriage. What, you know, you can go down to the local swimming pool and jump in and get married under water? You can … you know, these kinds of things are just ridiculous. So, I just think that there has to be some degree of importance or license given to places where you can have a marriage. It can be extended beyond the narrow situation that is there now but how far do you want it to go? How far do you want to extend it? I would worry about ‘at home’, particularly in the Muslim community where you would have marriages that are coerced. People that are coerced into it. Things like that. |
| **I** | Okay.  |
| **R** | And, also, where it’s not possible to maybe see the person you’re getting married to and that person is visible. Their face is visible. They are … you know … they are identifiable and so on. And I think that’s why a lot of mosques weren’t … you know, the traditional mosques weren’t going to register themselves for marriage because the registration of marriage means that the couple have to be in the same room, have to be together, have to be able to see each other and identify each other. So, that would worry me. Civil weddings and some types of religious weddings are required to include prescribed words. There will be no prescribed words, giving couples greater freedom as to the form their wedding takes, enabling the law to recognise the variety of ceremonies that people use to mark their weddings, including religious ceremonies. Yes. I agree with that but, in my case, what I always do, I send them the ceremony and I request that if there are any prayers or anything, they would like to say to each other or anything like that, please include that. Send it back to me and we will lay it out for them. If everything is agreed and we feel that what they’re saying is appropriate of whatever it is, we will include that in the layout of the marriage ceremony leaflet. |
| **I** | Okay.  |
| **R** | Couples cannot include elements in a civil wedding that reflect religious beliefs. I don’t see why that was the case and … so long as it is still identifiable as a civil ceremony, couples will be able to have religious songs, readings and hymns as part of their civil weddings. Yeah, I think that’s fine. If a couple fails to comply with the legal requirements, either intentionally or without realising, the law might not recognise them as being legally married. Yeah. Fewer ceremonies will result in a wedding that the law does not recognise at all. Yeah, I think that’s appropriate.  |
| **I** | Okay. So, I will just stop sharing that document now. Okay. That’s great. So, thank you for your responses to those. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the marriage process? |
| **R** | I don’t think there is. I think I’ve covered as much as I possibly can now. I do want it to be something that young people, or people generally, take seriously and that, like I said, there’s one thing just going into a place and the person who’s conducting the marriage … I mean, you know what I’m talking about. Even converts to Islam, they go into a mosque or they go into a place and they want to make the Shahada, and nobody knows how to conduct even a Shahada. What about a funeral you’ve been to and somebody has started trying to explain to the congregation about the funeral prayer and makes such a bags of the explanation that you’re even more confused now than you were when you started. I mean it’s just … our communities are not .. they just don’t know how to get it, that maybe coming from a Catholic background … I can come in from a Christian/Catholic background for myself, you know, funerals, weddings, baptisms, confirmations, holy communions and everything. All have a sequence to them. They are very respectful and everything like that. I’ve always to put that kind of respectful responsibility into all our ceremonies, as Muslims, which shouldn’t be the fact that any old Tom, Dick or Harry can be dragged in and do a wedding ceremony. Nor should it be so hard and so difficult that it’s impossible. We need to have a balance like we’re always having about everything. And that balance has to be respectful. |
| **I** | Thank you so much. Right, I will stop recording. |
| **0:52:26** |  |