

PRACTICE DIRECTION NO 3 OF 2026

**IN THE HIGH COURT OF NORTHERN IRELAND
FAMILY DIVISION**

MATRIMONIAL AND CIVIL PARTNERSHIP PETITIONS

This Practice Direction applies to all Matrimonial and Civil Partnership Petitions.

This Practice Direction will take effect from 12 October 2026.

Signed this

5th of October 2026

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Siobhan', followed by a large, stylized flourish or initial.

**The Right Honourable Dame Siobhan Keegan
Lady Chief Justice of Northern Ireland**

PRACTICE DIRECTION NO 03/2026
IN THE HIGH COURT OF NORTHERN IRELAND
FAMILY DIVISION

Amendment to Matrimonial and Civil Partnership Petitions

This Practice Direction revokes and replaces Practice Direction 01/2011 Amendment to Matrimonial and Civil Partnership Petitions issued on the 27th January 2011.

INTRODUCTION AND SCOPE

1. This Practice Direction shall take effect from 12 October 2026 and shall apply to all Petitions and Civil Partnership Petitions lodged in the Matrimonial Office in the High Court. This Practice Direction should be read and applied in conjunction with Practice Note 1/2025 – The Submission and use of e-bundles when setting down and Hearing a Defended Cause.

THE OBJECTIVES OF THE PRACTICE DIRECTION

2. The objective of the Practice Direction is to achieve an effective and efficient process for the lodgement of Petitions and Civil Partnership Petitions lodged in the Matrimonial Office in the High Court. Failure to comply with any part of this Practice Direction may result in the case being removed from the list.

LITIGANTS IN PERSON

3. This Practice Direction has been drafted with litigants in person in mind and as far as possible the use of legal jargon has been avoided. If a party is acting without legal representation, they should still comply with the terms of this Practice Direction.

FILING OF THE PETITION

4. All Petitions submitted to the Matrimonial Office must be accompanied by a completed signed checklist confirming that the petition has been checked for compliance with the guidance notes. The appropriate forms and checklist are available at: Getting a divorce or dissolving a civil partnership | Department of Justice.
5. Parties are reminded that it is the responsibility of the lodging party to ensure the quality of documents prior to signing the checklist and submission of the petition to the Matrimonial Office, Guidance on the completion of documents in divorce proceedings is available at the following link: Guidance for the Completion of Documents in Divorce Proceedings | Department of Justice.

6. The Matrimonial Office will carry out an initial check of the petition upon receipt, should the petition contain any of the errors listed at Annex A, the petition and accompanying documents will be returned to the lodging party for amendment. No further checks of the petition will be carried out by Matrimonial Office staff beyond this point. This process does not override or replace the judicial function of the Master or Judge who may direct an amended petition should be lodged, it remains the responsibility of the lodging party to ensure the petition has been completed correctly.
7. Parties are reminded when completing a petition, if the petitioner is habitually resident¹ in Northern Ireland the dates of residence and the appropriate addresses must be included in the petition, failure to comply with this, may result in a direction from the court to file an amended petition.
8. Should the court direct that an amended petition be lodged, a summons seeking leave to file an amended petition may be required pursuant to Rule 2.13(2) of the Family Proceedings Rules (Northern Ireland) 1996.
9. Unless the court otherwise orders, Legal Aid will not be granted in respect of such applications, nor will they qualify for party and party or own client taxation.

¹Being "habitually resident" means that a person normally lives in a country, has made it their main home, and intends to stay there for the foreseeable future.

Annex A

The Matrimonial Office will carry out the following checks on divorce and dissolution petitions prior to issuing for service;

1. all documents and copies for issuing have been lodged (including original certificates);
2. the parties and names of any children are spelt correctly;
3. place of marriage and date of marriage are correct;
4. dates of birth of all parties, including any children are correct;
5. habitual/domiciled has been selected correctly;
6. the petition has been typed;
7. the petition has been signed and dated.