

Respondents' guide to dissolution



An overview

To obtain a dissolution your partner will need to prove to the court that your civil partnership has irretrievably broken down.

The court will accept one or more of the following facts as proof:

- That you have behaved in such a way that your partner cannot reasonably be expected to continue to live with you;
- That you have deserted your partner for at least two years;
- That you and your partner have lived separate and apart for two years and you consent to a dissolution;
- That you and your partner have lived apart for a continuous period of at least five years.

What are the stages that I will have to go through?

This fact sheet will give you a step by step guide to the stages of a dissolution. How long your dissolution will take will depend on several factors. These will include how co-operative your partner is, how quickly you both fill in the documentation and return it to the court and how busy the court is. The speed the court will deal with your documents varies from court to court. Some courts will deal with the documentation within 7 days and some can take up to 28 days.

1. Notification of intention to petition

In most circumstances your partner's solicitors will write to you directly or to our offices to confirm their intention to commence dissolution proceedings and the fact upon which they intend to rely. In some circumstances your partner will be able to make a claim for the costs of the dissolution against you. A claim for costs will usually only be successful on the basis of an unreasonable behaviour petition. If your partner intends to make a claim for costs against you we will advise you as to whether or not they are likely to be successful and attempt to negotiate an agreement on your behalf.

2. Drafting the petition

The petition will confirm the fact upon which your partner is petitioning and will include details to support that fact. If your partner has alleged unreasonable behaviour they will need to give examples of the behaviour, including the most recent incident. If they have alleged desertion they will need to give the date that the desertion took place. If they have alleged either 2 or 5 years separation they will need to give the date of separation and brief details of how the separation came about.

In most cases we will receive a draft of the petition prior to your partner issuing it with the court. If therefore there are errors or you take issue with some of the content and provided your spouse or partner is prepared to co-operate the petition can be amended by agreement.

3. Statement of arrangements for children

If you have children born to you and your partner, or who have been treated by you as though they had been born to you and they are under 16 or between 16 and 18 and still at college or school full time, or training for a profession, trade or vocation, they will be regarded as "children of the family" and the court will require a statement of arrangements form to be completed. In this form your partner will confirm the arrangements in respect of where the children will live, what the contact arrangements will be, details of their health and schools and whether maintenance has been agreed.

Again in most cases we will receive a draft of the form prior to issue. Therefore if there are any errors in the drafting or if you require amendments these can be agreed with your partner and the form amended prior to issue.

4. Service of the petition

Your partner will issue their petition in the local county court or The Principal Registry in London. Once the court has issued the petition they will send it to you by first class post with the statement of arrangements for children form and a form called the acknowledgement of service. We may accept service on your behalf and therefore in some cases the court or your partner's solicitors will send the documents directly to our offices.

On the acknowledgement of service form we will confirm your position in relation to the petition and the statement of arrangements for children form. If your partner is making a claim for costs we will also confirm your position in relation to their claim.

The acknowledgment of service form needs to be returned to the court within 8 days from the date it was sent to you or us. Your partner cannot progress with the divorce until they can prove service of the documents upon you. Therefore if you do not return the acknowledgement of service form they will have to arrange to personally serve you by either the court bailiff or by a process server.

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It is important that you file the acknowledgement of service on time otherwise your partner is likely to claim their additional costs of arranging personal service against you.

If you intend to defend the proceedings your case will follow a different procedure from this stage.

5. Application for Conditional Order

Once the acknowledgement of service form has been filed with the court your partner can apply for Conditional Order. This is the stage at which your petition and statement of arrangements for children form will be considered by the judge and they will confirm whether or not your partner is entitled to a divorce. To apply for Conditional Order your partner will need to swear an affidavit (a sworn statement) to confirm that the contents of their petition are true.

6. Certificate of Entitlement

If the judge is satisfied with your partner's petition they will authorise the issue of a Certificate of Entitlement. This certificate will confirm the time and date when the judge will grant the first stage of your dissolution. This is called "Making the Conditional Order". The conditional order is the first of two orders you must have before your partnership is dissolved. The second order is called the Final Order.

If the Judge is satisfied with the statement of arrangements for the children they will also authorise the issue of a Notice of Satisfaction. If the judge is not satisfied with the arrangements they will issue a notice that you cannot obtain your final order until satisfactory arrangements have been made. Where the judge issues this notice they will also give directions on how they wish your case to proceed. This can include a written request for information, a short appointment before the judge, the ordering of a welfare report on the children, requesting one party to make an application for a court order (e.g. for a residence, or contact order).

If the Judge decides you are not entitled to a dissolution we will receive Notice of a Refusal of judge's Certificate. This form will tell us why the judge has decided you are not entitled to a dissolution. In most cases the court will simply require further information in correspondence. In some circumstances the judge may decide you need to attend court. This is called removing your case from the special procedure list and entering it into the undefended list.

7. Conditional Order

It is not necessary to attend court for the pronouncement of the conditional order unless costs are still an issue. If costs are an issue then we will discuss with you whether or not your attendance at court is required. If an order for costs has been agreed or if the court makes an order against you the order will be sent to you with the decree nisi. You will have 14 days from the date of the order to make the payment to your partner.

8. Decree Absolute

Your partner can apply for the final order after 6 weeks and 1 day have passed since the pronouncement of the conditional order. Once pronounced this legally ends the partnership. Certain financial benefits are lost upon the grant of the final order (for example the loss of a partner's pension on death). If therefore financial matters have not been agreed by the time your partner can apply for the final order they may be advised to delay the application. We will let you know if this is relevant to you and depending on your instructions ask your partner to confirm that they will or will not apply at the earliest date.

As the respondent on the dissolution you are able to apply for the final order at any time after the expiration of three months from the earliest date on which your partner could have applied.



Contact us

Please feel free to discuss your own position and concerns. Contact your nearest Russell Jones & Walker office or call:

Call: 0800 916 9055

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Our offices:

Birmingham, Bristol, Cardiff, Edinburgh (Associated Office), London, Manchester, Milton Keynes, Newcastle, Sheffield, Wakefield

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