

Part I – Accessibility and participation

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1 Making registration accessible

Introduction

1.1 The Electoral Commission believes that access to the electoral registration process is an essential part of a healthy democracy and indeed is necessary to ensure a complete register.

1.2 This guidance draws on the Commission's review of equal access to electoral procedures published in *Equal access to democracy*.¹ It also takes account of legislative changes made since that report, and offers further suggestions for good practice.

Legislative background

1.3 There are a number of legal provisions directed specifically at facilitating the registration of disabled people, people with mental health problems and speakers of languages other than English or Welsh. The EAA, in particular, has gone some way to address problems experienced by people with low levels of literacy when trying to register and vote.

Disability Discrimination Act 1995

1.4 Electoral registration is not specifically mentioned in the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (DDA 1995). The Commission, however, supports the view that the registration process is a public service, as does the UK Government.² As a result, it is the Commission's view that Electoral Registration Officers must not discriminate against disabled people by providing a worse service to a disabled person than they would to a non-disabled person.

1.5 Since December 1996, it has been unlawful for a service provider to discriminate against a disabled person. Discrimination includes:

- refusing to provide any service to disabled people that it provides to non-disabled people
- providing a worse standard of service to disabled people than it provides to non-disabled people

1.6 Since 1 October 1999, service providers have had to change practices, policies and procedures that make it impossible or unreasonably difficult for disabled people to use a service. What is 'reasonable' will be decided by the courts, but until there is a body of case law, this will be difficult to define.

1.7 From 1 October 2004, service providers have had to make reasonable adjustments to the physical features of their buildings to overcome physical

¹ The Electoral Commission, *Equal access to democracy: report and recommendations* (June 2003).

² *The Government's Response to The Electoral Commission's Report: Voting for change – An electoral law modernisation programme* (December 2004).

barriers to access. This covers many of the buildings used as polling stations, as they are in use for a wide variety of other functions. The provisions in Part III of the DDA 1995, which cover access to goods and services, apply to electoral services. It is debatable whether the postal vote system would be considered a 'reasonable alternative' to direct provision of election services.

1.8 The DDA 1995 has now been amended by the Disability Discrimination Act 2005, which places a duty on all public sector authorities to promote disability equality and to publish a disability equality scheme.

1.9 The disability equality duty, which came into effect in December 2006, places a duty on all public authorities, when carrying out their functions, to have due regard to the need to:

- promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons
- eliminate discrimination that is unlawful under the Act
- eliminate harassment of disabled persons that is related to their disabilities
- promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons
- encourage participation by disabled persons in public life
- take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where this involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons

1.10 Local authorities should consider taking these issues into account when considering access to the democratic process. Electoral Registration Officers will want to have regard to their appointing authority's disability equality scheme in approaching these issues and should ensure that they conduct a disability impact assessment on any new policies or procedures.

Race Relations Act 1976

1.11 The Race Relations Act 1976 gives local authorities various duties in respect to race equality. The general duty set out in Section 71(1) of the Act and the statutory Code of practice on the duty to promote race equality is to have due regard to the following three objectives:

- Eliminate unlawful racial discrimination.
- Promote equality of opportunity.
- Promote good relations between people of different racial groups.

1.12 Councils are required to publish a race equality scheme. This lists the functions and policies assessed as being relevant to promoting race equality. The scheme must also include an explanation of arrangements for monitoring policies and services, consulting on them and assessing their impact on race equality, and for monitoring the workforce and key employment practices. Electoral Registration Officers should consider taking these issues into account when considering access to the democratic process.

Electoral Administration Act 2006

1.13 Section 69 of the EAA introduced a duty on Electoral Registration Officers to encourage participation in the electoral process. The Commission believes that providing equal access to registration procedures should be seen as integral to the fulfilment of that duty. The Act also makes special provisions for election documents, with the exception of nomination papers and ballot papers, to be published in different languages and formats.

Disabled electors

General considerations

1.14 When considering access to electoral registration, it is important to remember that not all disabled electors have the same needs or require the same type of assistance. Electoral Registration Officers should ensure that they attend any disability equality training provided by their appointing council and should use their own judgement and common sense when tackling access issues. With the diversity of local authorities and the different types of access barriers encountered, it is difficult to provide any one-size-fits-all guidance.

1.15 As a first step towards tailoring their facilities to local needs, Electoral Registration Officers should consider the demography of their area: if their area contains residential accommodation catering for a particular impairment or condition, they could encourage registration by sending forms and guidance in an appropriate format. Alternative formats that could be considered include large print, Braille, easy read and audio. Electoral Registration Officers should contact accommodation managers, wardens or disabled electors themselves to enquire about the preferred format in order to avoid causing offence. Council social services staff might be able to help with contact details. Electoral Registration Officers should not make assumptions: for example, just because a person is blind, this does not necessarily mean that they will be able to read Braille.

1.16 Most disabled electors do not, however, live in special accommodation and it is therefore important to raise awareness among disabled electors of electoral registration generally and the support that is available to meet their particular requirements. A range of channels should be used to transmit this information, including written, electronic, specialist media and local radio. Relying on one channel only may exclude certain disabled people: for example, a strategy solely reliant on posters would not benefit many visually impaired electors. Tailoring publicity strategies to local needs is therefore crucial.



Section 2, 'Public awareness activities', below, makes recommendations for developing publicity strategies.

1.17 Social services and education departments might be able to provide details of local campaign and support groups who work with disabled electors. The Electoral Registration Officer could liaise with these local groups to discuss the best approaches for disseminating any relevant information.

1.18 Electoral Registration Officers should also be aware that some disabled people with multiple impairments may need additional support.

Blind and visually impaired electors

1.19 Blind and visually impaired electors may face a number of obstacles when trying to register to vote.

1.20 Electoral Registration Officers may decide to run local campaigns about registration that are specific to those who are visually impaired. If they do, they should involve local groups, such as societies of blind and partially sighted people and local talking newspapers. Publicising registration to visually impaired electors should be approached in a way that is accessible to them. The type of information that could be included in publicity to this group of electors includes:

- the type of form that will be sent
- what time of year it is likely to be sent
- what information will need to be supplied
- when the form should be returned and the significance of the deadline set
- to whom they should return the form
- where help can be obtained in completing the form

1.21 Ideally, as part of any campaign, registration forms should be made available in Braille, in an audible format and in a print size larger than the standard print size. A 16 point font size is a suitable minimum, although for some it may need to be increased further. Rolling registration forms are available to order from the Commission in audio, Braille and large-print formats.

1.22 The Commission believes that the Royal National Institute of Blind People's (RNIB's) clear print guidelines should be followed for all registration forms. These include:

- using a minimum of 12 point font size, although the RNIB strongly recommends the use of 14 point
- sticking to typefaces like Arial that people are used to, and avoiding highly stylised or ornamental ones
- using bold or semi-bold rather than light-weight font
- avoiding the use of italics and block capitals
- avoiding titles and headings that are underlined: instead the text should be enlarged to denote a heading
- aligning text to the left and keeping spacing even
- ensuring good colour contrast (e.g. black type on white or yellow paper)

- using matt paper, as the glare of glossy paper can make text less legible
- ensuring that paper is of adequate quality, so that any print on the reverse cannot be seen

1.23 Also, a central contact point where blind and visually impaired people could seek assistance should be prominently displayed on the form.

1.24 As some visually impaired people will be unable to access any printed form, however well laid out, it is important to have in place alternative formats and procedures for providing personal assistance.

1.25 Signing a form may pose a particular challenge for a visually impaired person. This can clearly be an obstacle to filling in rolling registration forms, which must be signed by the person applying to be registered. If necessary, assistance should be offered. The use of a template might prove helpful, although in some cases guiding the hand of the blind or partially sighted person might be more appropriate.

1.26 Some visually impaired electors may find the requirement to provide a signature on postal and proxy voting applications difficult to fulfil. If the Electoral Registration Officer is satisfied that an applicant is unable to sign or to provide a consistent signature, they can waive the requirement for a signature to be provided.³



For further details on absent voting applications and waivers, see Part G, 'Absent voting'.

1.27 Some visually impaired electors will prefer to deal with the electoral registration office by telephone or email and so all office and contact centre staff should be trained to deal with this type of contact effectively. Other electors may want to deal with the electoral registration office directly. It is therefore important to keep reception areas accessible, clearly signposted and well lit, and to provide aids, such as magnifying glasses, where possible.

1.28 Processes should also be in place to ensure that a visually impaired person can check their entry on the register by having the information communicated verbally at the electoral registration office.

Deaf electors

1.29 It is important to remember that not everyone who has a hearing impairment is deaf, but equally canvassers and office staff should not assume that because a deaf person is wearing a hearing aid, they will be able to hear what is being said.

1.30 Canvassers and office staff should know how to communicate effectively with deaf and hearing impaired people. They should:

³ Paragraphs 3(8), 4(5) and 7(11), Schedule 4, RPA 2000; Articles 9(7), 10(7) and 12(11), Scottish Parliament Order; Articles 8(8), 9(5) and 12(12), NAW (RoP) Order 2007.

- Face the person directly: if they look away the deaf person will not be able to read their lips.
- Speak clearly at a normal pace and not shout.
- Make sure there are no bright lights behind them that could make it difficult to see their face.
- Use whole sentences rather than one-word replies: when lip-reading, many words look the same and so using sentences gives contextual clues.
- Ask the deaf or hard of hearing person to repeat themselves several times if they do not understand what that person is saying to them. Deaf and hard of hearing people are used to being asked to repeat themselves and will be pleased that the effort is being made to communicate with them effectively.
- Change sentences slightly when asked to repeat something.
- Try writing things down if they are not understood.
- Use gestures: for example, showing size and shape with their hands or backing up directions by pointing can be very helpful. Facial expressions can also help to convey meaning.

1.31 Some deaf electors may wish to deal with the Electoral Registration Officer's staff by email, textphone or Tynetalk and office staff should receive training in order to be able to deal with this type of contact. At the office, the Electoral Registration Officer could consider installing induction loops in reception areas to facilitate communication. There are different types of induction loops and consideration should be given to which one would be the most appropriate. Staff should also be given training on how to operate them.

Electors with reduced mobility and wheelchair users

1.32 The DDA 1995 places a duty on public authorities to remove physical features from their premises which could potentially restrict access to those who are disabled and to provide reasonable additional supporting features.⁴

1.33 Councils should have an accessibility scheme in place that takes into account access to the main entrance of the office building. When assessing access inside the office, the following should be considered:

- Are doors wide enough for an electric-powered wheelchair or mobility scooter?
- Are there any internal steps or barriers?
- Are reception points clear of obstacles?
- Is there room for wheelchair users to move within the reception space?
- Is there additional seating available for those who may need to rest?
- Are any doormats level with the floor? If not, can they be removed?
- Are there any other trip hazards?
- Is there suitable non-slip floor covering?
- Would the floor become slippery when wet?

⁴ Section 21D, DDA 1995 (as amended).

- If the premises have movable mats, heavy curtains trailing on the floor, a mix of carpet and wooden flooring with edging lips in between or highly polished floors, all of which can be potential hazards, can anything be done to remove or improve them?

Postal and proxy voting

1.34 Although many people, including disabled people, prefer to vote in person, others find it more convenient to vote by post or to appoint a proxy to vote on their behalf. Disabled people are entitled to vote by proxy for a definite or indefinite period.⁵

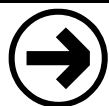
1.35 Electoral Registration Officers should ensure that there is adequate publicity surrounding postal and proxy voting to make people aware of these provisions and to inform people as to how to apply. Absent voting applications could also be produced in a variety of formats in order to make it easier for people to successfully complete the forms.

1.36 The Commission produces postal voting application forms in a number of formats, including audio tape, Braille and large print.



The Commission's leaflets are available to order free of charge and all formats, except Braille, are also available as downloadable PDFs from the Commission's Do Politics website at www.dopolitics.org.uk. Order details can also be found on the website.

1.37 Some disabled electors may find the requirement to provide a signature on postal and proxy voting applications difficult to fulfil. If the Electoral Registration Officer is satisfied that an applicant is unable to sign or to provide a consistent signature they are able to waive the signature requirement.⁶



Further details on absent voting applications and waivers are available in Part G, 'Absent voting'.

Electors with learning difficulties and low levels of literacy

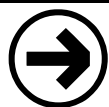
1.38 People with learning difficulties find it more difficult and take longer than non-disabled people to learn, understand and communicate. As a consequence, a number of people with learning difficulties will have low levels of literacy or may take longer to read information provided. Low literacy levels are not, however, exclusive to people with learning difficulties as there are many other factors that can result in someone having reading and writing difficulties.

⁵ Paragraph 3(3), Schedule 4, RPA 2000.

⁶ Paragraphs 3(8), 4(5) and 7(11), Schedule 4, RPA 2000; Articles 9(7), 10(7) and 12(11), Scottish Parliament Order; Articles 8(8), 9(5) and 12(12), NAW (RoP) Order 2007.

1.39 It is important to remember that each person is different and conditions can vary. A one-size-fits-all approach should be avoided. People with a mild learning difficulty, for example, may only need limited help, while others may need more extensive support, particularly if they also have other physical disabilities.

1.40 Some people with learning difficulties and low literacy levels may need some assistance in understanding the registration process and with navigating the forms. Leaflets with pictorial guidance and written in clear English can also help.



The Commission has produced an Easy Guide to voting, which includes a section on registration. It is available for download from the Commission's Do Politics website at www.dopolitics.org.uk. Order details can also be found on the website.

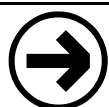
1.41 It is important that office and contact staff are trained to deal with enquiries from people with learning difficulties and from people who have low-level reading and writing skills. In particular, they should be made aware of the importance of speaking clearly to people with a learning difficulty and, if necessary, be prepared to repeat the information to them.

1.42 Easy-read guides with a range of commonly used pictures, photographs and symbols can benefit both disabled and non-disabled people alike. There are a number of organisations, such as Mencap, with experience in producing easy-read literature and Electoral Registration Officers may want to contact them for advice.

1.43 Attitudes of staff are vital. Patience and understanding are important when communicating with all members of the public, but particularly so for disabled electors: if a disabled person has a negative experience, it may deter them from registering in future.

Electors with mental health conditions

1.44 Some disabled people with a mental health condition may also have other impairments or conditions, including learning difficulties, that make registration and navigating the forms more difficult. Leaflets with pictorial guidance and written in clear English can help.



The Commission has produced an Easy Guide to voting, which includes a section on registration. It is available for download from the Commission's Do Politics website at www.dopolitics.org.uk. Order details can also be found on the website.

1.45 People who have a mental health condition may need the process to be explained to them several times, as they may have difficulty concentrating and taking in large amounts of new information at any one time. Some people with a mental health condition may also find it very difficult to make what may seem like minor decisions, such as registering to vote. The attitude of staff

dealing with these electors is vital and no pressure should be applied to the person: applying pressure will only make the situation worse, as the person with the mental health condition may become anxious and distressed. Instead, staff should explain the registration process as many times as necessary and ask them to return again later if needed.

Sources of advice

1.46 Guidance and advice on access issues are available from a variety of organisations, some of which are listed below. In addition, local groups for both disabled electors and those from minority ethnic communities may also be able to offer advice and assistance. The council's social services and education departments may hold contact details for these local groups and may be able to advise on how best to approach electors with disabilities. They may also have useful training materials that can be adapted for use by canvassers. Professional advice could also be obtained from an access auditor.

Equality and Human Rights Commission

1.47 The Equality and Human Rights Commission replaced the Commission for Racial Equality, the Disability Rights Commission and the Equal Opportunities Commission. Set up under the Equality Act 2006, it is a non-departmental, publicly funded body that promotes awareness and understanding of human rights and encourages good practice by public authorities. It brings together the work of the previous commissions and covers England, Scotland and Wales. For further information, see www.equalityhumanrights.com.

Plain English Campaign

1.48 The Plain English Campaign is an independent pressure group whose aim is for public information to be written in plain English. The Campaign offers editing services as well as the Crystal Mark for approved documents. Further information is available at www.plainenglish.co.uk.

Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID)

1.49 The RNID represents deaf and hard of hearing people in the UK. They can provide information on communicating with deaf people. More information is available at www.rnid.org.uk.

Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB)

1.50 The RNIB offers information, support and advice to people in the UK with visual impairments. The RNIB has produced clear print guidelines to improve access for blind and partially sighted people.

1.51 The RNIB can also offer guidance on producing tape recordings, Braille, e-text and accessible websites. Further information on these issues is available at www.rnib.org.uk.

Scope

1.52 Scope is a disability organisation working throughout England and Wales. In Wales, it is known as Scope Cwmpas Cymru. Its aim is for disabled

people to achieve equality. Scope runs the Polls Apart campaign to make elections accessible to disabled voters and reports have been produced on all UK Parliamentary general elections since 1992. Scope has also produced a range of guidance for staff involved in elections. Further information is available at www.scope.org.uk.

Capability Scotland

1.53 Capability Scotland works with local authorities and disabled people to improve access to elections in Scotland and encourages disabled people to vote. It also conducts surveys of disabled voters and their carers after each scheduled election. While not geared towards the registration process, its questionnaires cover ease of access to register as an absent voter. Further information is available at www.capability-scotland.org.uk.

Mencap

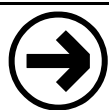
1.54 Mencap is a UK charity which campaigns for equal rights for children and adults with a learning disability. They also have experience in producing easy-read literature. Their website www.mencap.org.uk provides further details.

Electors from minority ethnic communities and speakers of languages other than English or Welsh

1.55 Although not everyone belonging to a minority ethnic community is able to vote due to citizenship restrictions on the franchise, it is fair to assume that a significant proportion can register because they are qualifying Commonwealth citizens, citizens of European Union member states or have become British citizens.

1.56 Many of those eligible to be registered will have no problems communicating in English or Welsh, but some may speak no English or Welsh at all or may have difficulties reading or writing in English or Welsh. This may cause problems when registering to vote, or when completing the canvass form to confirm that no-one resident at that address is eligible to register.

1.57 Raising awareness of the importance of registration is the first step to maximising the registration of all those speakers of other languages who are eligible. There may be a concentration of particular minority ethnic communities in the Electoral Registration Officer's area. In such cases, the Electoral Registration Officer should consider contacting relevant local community groups, as they may be able to help their members complete the registration form and alert them to the canvass and registration process more generally.



More information on how to raise public awareness among speakers of other languages and minority ethnic groups can be found in Section 2, 'Public awareness activities', below.

1.58 The Commission provides rolling registration forms in a variety of languages (including Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Gujarati, Polish,

Punjabi and Urdu), both in hard copy format and for download as a PDF from the Do Politics website at www.dopolitics.org.uk. Order details for all of the Commission's publicity materials and forms can also be found on the website.

1.59 As a prescribed form, the canvass form should not be translated. Electoral Registration Officers may, however, find it helpful to provide copies of the Commission's translated rolling registration forms to canvassers making house-to-house enquiries.

1.60 Below are a few examples concerning translated material and publicity for electoral registration which Electoral Registration Officers may wish to consider:

- Try to recruit canvassers who speak the languages used in the communities where they will be working. This will enable them to answer any questions that people may have on the doorstep.
- Training sessions for canvassing staff are vital and they should cover registering people from minority ethnic communities.
- Guidance notes should be issued to electoral registration staff who will be canvassing in areas where there are minority ethnic communities. These should give advice on nationality and the franchise and how to deal with questions from minority ethnic households. The Commission has developed a canvasser instruction manual that is available to download from www.electoralcommission.org.uk.
- Issue leaflets to accompany electoral registration forms in the languages spoken by local communities, explaining what the form is and how to complete it.
- Use a 'translation sheet' to explain to residents why the canvasser is calling – the Commission has provided a downloadable statement of the purpose of the annual canvass in Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu and Polish on www.electoralcommission.org.uk.
- Have rolling registration forms available in the languages spoken by local communities.
- Leaflets with pictorial guidance and written in clear English can also help a variety of people, including those who have learning difficulties and low levels of literacy, as well as those who speak English as a second language.
- Consider specialised publicity on rolling registration and the canvass and why people should register. This can be included in any newspapers circulated among minority ethnic communities and also on local radio stations and in the council's newspaper. Posters and leaflets could also be provided to local community centres, doctor's surgeries, temples and mosques. Also, local community publications such as newsletters for specific minority groups could be used.
- Reminder notifications to non-responding households could also be issued in languages other than English and Welsh.
- Consider equipping canvassers with a telephone translation service. These services allow a three-way conversation to take place, using a mobile phone (or landline), between a canvasser, a translator and a resident.

- It may be possible to ask the translations team at the appointing council, where there is such a team, to contact any householders who have difficulties in understanding the registration form.
- Consider depositing the register of electors in places frequented by members of the minority ethnic communities, although keeping in mind the statutory provisions for inspection of the full register to be carried out under supervision.

Call management centres

1.61 Many local authorities have introduced contact or call management centres as the first point of contact for residents telephoning the council. Some authorities may wish to use them for registration purposes. The Electoral Registration Officer should ensure that those working at contact or call management centres are trained to deal with registration enquiries from all types of people, including disabled people, people with a mental health condition, people with speech impairments, people with learning difficulties and people for whom English is not their first language.

Designing electoral forms

1.62 Registration is largely a form-based process. If potential electors are unable to complete forms and register, they will be deprived of their right to vote. People may experience difficulties in completing electoral registration forms for a variety of reasons: for example, they may not be able to see the writing on the form or may not understand what the form asks them to do.

1.63 Electoral Registration Officers use a wide range of different form designs, particularly in relation to the size and type of font used, layout, use of colour and language. The objective of the following paragraphs is to provide a 'toolkit' for Electoral Registration Officers to use in designing electoral forms.

1.64 Forms used for registration are classified as either:

- prescribed – where the form is included in the legislation, e.g. the canvass form, or
- not prescribed – where legislation only sets out what information is sought, e.g. the rolling registration form, and not the form in which it must be presented

1.65 While absent voting application forms are not prescribed, regulations require that the signature appears against a background of white unlined paper of at least three centimetres long and two centimetres high and that the date of birth is configured [d][d] [m][m] [y][y][y][y].⁷

1.66 The only form used for registration purposes that is prescribed is the canvass form. The legislation does, however, allow for some limited variation,

⁷ Regulation 51(3A), RPR 2001; Paragraph 1(1A), Schedule 3, Scottish Parliament Order; Paragraph 1(3), Schedule 1, NAW (RoP) Order 2007.

as a form 'to the same effect' may also be used.⁸ There is no case law on the degree of latitude permitted in relation to prescribed forms. Electoral Registration Officers should consider whether they need to deviate from the wording and format of prescribed forms for a legitimate reason before so doing.

1.67 In general terms, the following two principles should be applied when considering any departure from prescribed forms:

- whether a variation of a prescribed form will be lawful is a question of fact and degree in each case, turning on a comparison between the prescribed form and the particular form used
- any variant on the prescribed form should accomplish the same purpose as the prescribed form, not just in general terms but in relation to communicating the detail of the law

1.68 The following sets out what these principles mean in practice:

- **Is it lawful to give electors more information on a form than is included in the prescribed form set out in legislation?** This might in some circumstances be legal, particularly where the law expressly allows a variation. This is provided that nothing in the additional information is inconsistent with the information that must be given or requested. The weaker the link between the additional information and the purpose of the form, the less likely it is to be lawful.
- **Is it lawful to request more information from electors than is requested on the prescribed form?** This is likely to be unlawful unless it is made clear that the information sought need not be provided (i.e. completion of these parts of the form is optional). Even then, the weaker the link between the request and the purpose of the form, the less likely it is to be lawful, particularly where there is no express provision for variation in the legislation.
- **Is it lawful to omit questions, statements or requests for information that are included in the prescribed form?** The Commission's view is that it is not lawful to omit any such information, whether or not there is express provision for variation. The way in which questions or statements are phrased might in some circumstances be altered, particularly where there is express provision for variation, but not to such an extent that the question or statement, or a significant element of either the question or statement, is excluded or its meaning or purpose is altered as a result.

1.69 When new or amended electoral forms are to be prescribed, the Commission urges the relevant government department to ensure that the design is both user tested and written with plain English criteria in mind.

⁸ Section 10(4), RPA 1983.



Electoral administrators in Wales are reminded that the provisions of the Welsh Language Act 1993 place a responsibility on local authorities in Wales to provide services to the public in Welsh on an equal basis to English. In practice, this means that election materials produced and published by local authorities in Wales may have to be produced bilingually. Each local authority should consult its statutory Welsh Language scheme in order to determine which publications or materials will need to be produced in a bilingual format. As a matter of good practice, it is recommended that individual registration and canvass forms, as well as postal and proxy vote applications, are produced bilingually. Such an approach offers members of the public a language choice when dealing with the Electoral Registration Officer and reinforces the principle that language equality is an integral part of the equality agenda in Wales.

Basics of forms design

1.70 Where the Electoral Registration Officer needs to design a form, the following general guidelines should be followed. They not only apply to forms used in connection with electoral registration, but could potentially also have wider application.

1.71 **Consider design and layout as an integral part of the communication and to assist navigation.** The design should be effective in leading the user through the information. Clear pictures and symbols to reinforce information, particularly about processes, could be used. If so, the text should appear next to or underneath any supporting picture. Writing should never appear across the picture itself.

- The use of clear headings (numbered if appropriate) can 'signpost' the different sections of the communication, as can white boxes where information is required to be provided by the elector.
- The form should not be cluttered, as can be the case where there is too much text and too many instructions on the face of the form. The first impression of the form is vital as this can affect the likelihood of the recipient completing or not completing the form.

1.72 **Use a clear, easy-to-read font.** Arial or a similar typeface, at a minimum size of 12 point, is used by the Commission for public documents. These guidelines reflect recommendations outlined by the RNIB for making information easier to read for people who are partially sighted. The full RNIB clear print guidelines are reproduced on the RNIB website at www.rnib.org.uk.

1.73 **Publicise contact details.** By publicising the contact details, access to the service will be enhanced. This information should include as many methods of contacting as possible to allow full access. Many local authorities now have a dedicated helpline number, particularly during election time. A fax number, a website and/or an email address should also be included. This should be linked, where appropriate, to clear instructions as to how forms can be returned, for example by post, in person, or by fax.

1.74 Promote availability of translations, Braille, large print and audio tape. Ideally, all forms designed for public use should be available in languages used by a significant proportion of the local community. Rolling registration and postal vote forms are available from the Commission in English and Welsh and a variety of other languages, as well as in Braille, in large print and on audio tape. Whichever formats are available locally, it is important that their availability is clearly signposted on the 'standard' version of the form. This signposting itself should be in large print and in the relevant languages: there is little point producing leaflets in Urdu if the only publicity for their existence is in English.

1.75 Include guidance notes if necessary. Guidance notes should be designed to help people speedily complete forms with minimum inconvenience. Notes should avoid information that is there solely 'for the record'. Wherever possible, notes should use pictures, photographs, diagrams, numbering that reflects the form, or colour-coding to illustrate what action is required.

1.76 Request contact information, such as daytime telephone number/ email address. This can increase efficiency and reduce costs, as making a telephone call or sending an email can help to solve a query more quickly than having to send a letter or return the form and then waiting for a response. The form or its notes should make clear why contact information is being requested and that those completing the form do not have to give this information.

1.77 Use plain English.⁹ Where forms are not prescribed, consideration should be given to how requests for information are expressed. The Plain English Campaign can provide guidelines on using accessible language and operates a 'Crystal Mark' scheme to approve plain English texts. For further information visit www.plainenglish.co.uk/guides.htm. Using plain English can also make translation easier. Where forms are prescribed, consideration can also be given to changing the precise words used in the model forms, although legal advice should always be sought to ensure that the textual changes planned do not depart significantly from the legal requirements.

1.78 Consider including a checklist where actions are required by the elector, either on the form or on associated stationery, such as on the inside of the return envelope flap. In relation to the canvass form, for example, a checklist could include a reminder to the householder to check that they have signed the declaration and have asked all those named on the form if they want to opt out of their details appearing on the edited register.

1.79 Consider administrative requirements. If forms are to be scanned, it is important that the form is designed with this in mind, and draft forms tested.

1.80 Try out a new form design on colleagues or with stakeholder groups. If any electoral forms have been reviewed and revised, try them out

⁹ 'Plain English' is defined by the Plain English Campaign as language that the intended audience can understand and act upon from a single reading.

on colleagues in other departments within the appointing local authority and with any stakeholder organisations as appropriate. This may assist in teasing out any issues with the forms. Electoral registration staff may find it useful to involve disabled people at the beginning of the process, so that access barriers can be minimised from the start. Specialist advice should be sought from relevant departments of the appointing local authority.

1.81 Review your main forms. Record any emerging problems and take advantage of opportunities to make small-scale changes. The National Audit Office also recommends carrying out large-scale 're-engineering' reviews every three to five years.¹⁰ These types of reviews are set up with a definite objective and their focus is directed at getting the objective implemented. This will often result in a more radical alteration to the form's overall design. Reviews should at the least cover:

- the design of the form's questions
- the relationship between the form and any guidance notes or leaflets
- how customers obtain forms
- the relationship between paper and electronic forms

Writing for the web

1.82 Registration information and forms are commonly available for download from council websites, and it is therefore important to consider how information and forms are presented online.

1.83 Accessible websites benefit disabled and non-disabled people alike: the more accessible a website is, the more user-friendly it will be and the more people will be able to use it. Accessible websites can also help users with slow modem connections, older computers and web browsers that only read text.

1.84 The key thing to remember in presenting material on the internet is that people read web pages differently to printed materials. There are particular considerations that need to be borne in mind when placing information and forms online. Below are a few general guidelines on creating user-friendly and accessible web pages. These are based on the World Wide Web Consortium's¹¹ Web Content Accessibility Guidelines and on advice provided by a number of disability groups. The guidelines do not cover the technical details for designing an accessible web page, but these can be found on the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Initiative at www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10/ and www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/.

1.85 Place relevant content at the top of the page. A study has revealed that people skim-read web pages and tend to read them in an F-shaped pattern.¹² This means that they concentrate on the top half of a page and then

¹⁰ See www.nao.org.uk/publications/nao_reports/02-03/02031145.pdf.

¹¹ The World Wide Web Consortium is an international consortium where member organisations and the public work together to develop web standards.

¹² See, for example, www.useit.com/alertbox/reading_pattern.html.

scroll down to search for relevant information by scanning the beginning of each line only.

1.86 Make sure that all text is clear and resizable. This will make it easier to read for those with visual impairments. A minimum 12 point font size should be used as standard.

1.87 Choose a colour scheme that provides good contrast. As with printed text, the higher the contrast, the more legible the text will be.

1.88 Remember that some readers may be colour blind. For example, some users will not be able to differentiate between red text and a green background. Vischeck is a free tool that simulates the effects of different types of colour blindness on web page colours. For more information, go to www.vischeck.com/vischeck/vischeckURL.php.

1.89 Do not rely on colour alone to transmit information. Colour can help signpost different parts of a page if used consistently, but do not use items like green click buttons for 'yes' or red ones for 'no' without any supplementary text.

1.90 Provide text alternatives for all images. People who rely on special software to read web pages aloud or to have them translated into Braille will not be able to access images. Also, images do not scale well and become blurred and pixelated when magnified. Ask the IT department to use descriptive alt tags for all images which, unlike images, text readers will pick up: for example, the alt tag for a picture of a ballot box could read 'photograph of a ballot box'.

1.91 Use plain English where possible. This will help those with low literacy levels and those for whom English is not their first language.

1.92 Use punctuation to break up large sections of text. Screen readers used by the visually impaired and by those with low literacy levels will recognise punctuation marks and introduce pauses at those points. This will help users to understand the contents of the page.

1.93 Do not use 'click here' for links. Some text readers will read a page's links separately and the phrase 'click here' will not give them the information they need to navigate the site or to access related information.

1.94 Keep blank areas to a minimum. The RNIB recommends this because large areas of blank space can prove problematic for visually impaired people.¹³ Many partially sighted people will use screen magnification software to read web pages and as they scroll down large blank areas they may find it difficult to find a specific item or may not even realise that there is something else on the page to find.

¹³ See

www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/publicwebsite/public_screenmagnification.hcsp

1.95 Check that the web page does not contain items that flash more than three times per second. Specific sequences of flashes or rapidly changing image sequences can trigger seizures in some people. There is a tool that can be used to check whether a page is safe: go to <http://trace.wisc.edu/peat/> for further information.

1.96 Ensure that the page is fully functional without a mouse. This is particularly relevant for drop-down selection lists and interactive forms. There should be a logical and predictable tab sequence to the different items on a page to assist visually and mobility impaired people who are unable to use a mouse. Drop-down menus should have manual 'Go' buttons, rather than triggering a change instantly in order to allow users to review their choice.

1.97 Test the web page on colleagues and with stakeholder groups. Local disability groups should be contacted and asked to user-test the web page or form. The RNIB also provides accessibility testing and accredits websites it considers to be accessible.

Resources

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

1.98 The former Disability Rights Commission, now part of the EHRC, has developed a guide to good practice in commissioning accessible websites, which can be downloaded from: www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/publicationsandresources/Disability/Pages/Websiteaccessibilityguidance.aspx. This document also offers advice on how to find web developers with accessibility expertise.

Mencap

1.99 Mencap offers some general advice on making websites accessible for people with a learning disability at: www.mencap.org.uk/download/webaccess.pdf.

RNIB

1.100 The RNIB awards its 'See it Right' logo to websites it has found to be accessible. Information on how to receive 'See it Right' accreditation and links to accredited websites can be found at: www.rnib.org.uk/xpedio/groups/public/documents/PublicWebsite/public_accessiblewebsites.hcsp.

Screen reader demo copies

1.101 There are a number of free downloadable demo copies of screen readers that can be used to check whether a web page provides equivalent information and functionality if read aloud. While the Commission does not recommend any one in particular, JAWS (www.freedomscientific.com/fs_downloads/jaws.asp) and IBM's Easy Web Browsing download (www-03.ibm.com/able/dwnlds/index.html) are two such examples.

Colour blindness tool

1.102 Vischeck is a free tool that simulates the effect of different types of colour blindness on web page colours. Further details can be found at: www.vischeck.com/vischeck/vischeckURL.php.

Photosensitive Epilepsy Analysis Tool (PEAT)

1.103 PEAT is a free tool that checks whether web content risks inducing seizures and is available for download at <http://trace.wisc.edu/peat/>.

World Wide Web Consortium's Web Accessibility Initiative

1.104 The World Wide Web Consortium (www.w3.org) is an international consortium where member organisations and the public work together to develop web standards.

1.105 It provides accessibility guidelines through the Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI), which works with organisations around the world to develop strategies, guidelines and resources to help make the web accessible to disabled people. The consortium published its first set of guidelines and techniques to meet them in 1999, which are still its standard reference material and can be found at www.w3.org/TR/WCAG10/. Its guidance is in the process of being updated and a draft version can be found at www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/. The guidelines cover three accessibility levels, ranging from basic (A) to advanced (AAA).

2 Public awareness activities

Introduction

2.1 For most electors, their contact with electoral registration services is limited to the annual canvass form. Not everyone will be familiar with the registration process and therefore publicity is essential so that individuals know why, how and when they need to register and how to apply for an absent vote.

Statutory requirements

2.2 Section 69 of the EAA introduced a duty for Electoral Registration Officers to promote registration and electoral participation and states that they must have regard to any guidance from the Commission on this matter.

Planning a public awareness strategy

2.3 Developing a public awareness strategy can help Electoral Registration Officers to fulfil their legislative duty to promote registration and can help them to maximise their available time and resources.

2.4 As a starting point, Electoral Registration Officers should consider their target audience. Local circumstances will, invariably, differ and activities necessary to raise awareness in one area may not be relevant, or may fail to work, in a different context.

2.5 Before developing a strategy, Electoral Registration Officers need to be aware of what their starting point is. They may need to carry out a baseline audit to evaluate what processes are already in place in their area to raise awareness of registration.

2.6 To help develop a strategy, the Commission recommends that Electoral Registration Officers carry out the following:

- **Set up a public awareness working group.** Electoral Registration Officers could set up a working group with Electoral Registration Officers from neighbouring areas and with key service providers or community groups. This group could help to develop and monitor their strategy.
- **Carry out an information audit.** Work with their appointing council to assess where people are likely to pick up information or fill out forms, for example when joining the library or paying bills.
- **Build on existing work.** Find out if any democratic engagement work is already being done by local youth and community service teams and see if this work can be incorporated into the strategy.
- **Target under-registered groups.** Identify which groups are under-represented in terms of electoral registration in the area.
- **Find local contact organisations.** Contact local organisations or individuals that have access to, or influence with, the groups that have been identified, which could include voluntary sector groups, youth or

social services workers, housing associations, sports clubs or faith groups.

- **Set out when to target the groups.** If resources are limited it may not be possible to target all these groups at once and so it is worthwhile making it explicit in the strategy which groups will be targeted and when.
- **Identify key events.** Focusing activity around key events, such as forthcoming elections and voter registration deadlines, Local Democracy Week, Black History Month and freshers' weeks, could be used to lift exposure of the work.
- **Be realistic.** It does not matter how many glossy leaflets, radio or television advertisements Electoral Registration Officers have, the key to promoting public awareness at a local level is by building good partnerships across council departments and community groups.

2.7 The Electoral Registration Officer should consider working with other Electoral Registration Officers and with Returning Officers in the development of their public awareness strategy. Such joint working can help to deliver cost and efficiency savings and can also ensure a consistency of message across a wider area.

2.8 When developing a public awareness strategy, budget considerations will need to be taken into account. It is recommended that each Electoral Registration Officer has a dedicated publicity budget. The Electoral Registration Officer has considerable discretion over the best use of publicity: this could perhaps take the form of billboards, posters, messages on outgoing post, or adverts in the press and other local media such as local commercial radio stations; or it may be appropriate to use promotional events such as road shows to increase voter awareness.



The Ministry of Justice has an Electoral Participation Fund (a total of £2.5 million per financial year) which Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers in England and Wales can claim against to offset expenditure that they have incurred in pursuance of Section 69 of the EAA. The fund is available for activities relating to any statutory election and/or registration. The nominal maximum entitlement that a given Electoral Registration Officer or Returning Officer will be entitled to will be determined by reference to local authority area and calculated on a 'per local elector' basis. Claims may also be submitted jointly with other local authorities. For further details, please contact Kamla Joshi on 020 7210 8227.



In Scotland, funding is provided to local authorities via their Grant Aided Expenditure, which is intended to be used to meet the responsibilities arising from the EAA. While it is not ring-fenced money, it should be available to encourage participation in elections, in making preparations for new duties being introduced and any other obligations imposed by the Act. Sheila Scobie at the Scotland Office can be contacted on 0131 244 9007 for further details.

2.9 The Commission has developed a number of leaflets and other resources which Electoral Registration Officers can use as part of their public

awareness strategy. The use of these materials can save Electoral Registration Officers the costs associated with developing their own branding for publicity materials. Further information on these and how to obtain and access them can be found below.

Evaluating public awareness work

2.10 It is vital that Electoral Registration Officers evaluate their public awareness work. Evaluations are necessary for measuring the effectiveness of a project and demonstrating achievements. As such, they play an important role in showing that appropriate use is being made of taxpayers' money.

2.11 An evaluation of public awareness work should help to collect the right information about the work undertaken, so that successes and lessons learnt are documented and recommendations can be made for the future.

2.12 The best time to plan and scope any evaluation is during the planning stage of the project. The advantage of making an evaluation plan at the start of a project is that it can sometimes identify ambiguities or inconsistencies in the proposed activity which can be corrected before it is launched. At the planning stage it is important to define the questions to be addressed by the evaluation and how these questions might be answered.

2.13 Any evaluation plan should clearly describe why the evaluation is taking place and what it intends to do. The evaluation should relate back clearly to the initial objectives of the project.

2.14 An evaluation plan should set out any limitations to the evaluation, including any potential risks to the reliability and validity of the evaluation design and the resulting findings.

2.15 The evaluation plan should identify relevant stakeholders who would be interested in the evaluation and who the findings should be shared with. It might also be worth seeking stakeholder views on the evaluation plan.

2.16 All evaluations need quantifiable measures for the general objective of the initiative being evaluated. A mix of indicators should be used, some of which might be behaviour-based (what people have done, what has actually happened) or perception-based (what people believe to have happened). It is important to attempt to measure:

- cause and effect: e.g. is an increase in participation the effect of public take-up of the new initiative or has increased participation caused public take-up?
- environmental factors or 'background noise': to what extent is increased participation the result of the initiative or of some other factors?
- the base case: i.e. what would have happened in the absence of the initiative?

2.17 When measuring the success or otherwise of initiatives to promote registration, Electoral Registration Officers may wish to consider the following:

- whether the number of people registering to vote increases
- whether positive feedback is received from participants in a scheme
- whether people's understanding of the democratic process increases
- whether there has been an increase in requests for alternative formats

2.18 It is likely that a variety of methods will be used to evaluate a project. At the planning stage it is important to think about the most appropriate methods to use for evaluation. The following are some examples of different evaluation methods:

- distributing evaluation questionnaires at the end of an event
- recording feedback from the public at events or via the corporate website
- recording the number of new registrants
- recording the number of hits to the website requesting information about registration and/or absent voting
- conducting a public opinion survey to determine whether the public were aware of the initiative, their thoughts about it and whether they registered as a result
- pre-initiative and post-initiative surveys to determine whether people's knowledge and awareness of registration and the electoral process has increased as a result of the initiative
- interviews with stakeholders to determine what they thought of the initiative

2.19 The evaluation plan needs to set out who and how many will participate in the evaluation. The evaluation plan should also determine who is going to be responsible for the various parts of the evaluation. The timetable should include implementation of the project, analysis and reporting of the evaluation.

2.20 Consideration should be given to the resources allocated to evaluating a particular project. The cost of the evaluation should be proportionate to the cost of the project, but a satisfactory account of the effectiveness of an individual programme cannot be given without evaluation.

Producing leaflets

2.21 Leaflets can be an effective way to convey information about registration and absent voting. A leaflet provides the space to present ideas clearly and with graphical impact. It also gives people a chance to take information home so that they have more time to absorb it and can keep a visual reminder of it. Once distributed, a leaflet may end up being read by many more people than the person it was first handed to, thus widening its impact. Leaflets can, without much expense, be disseminated by hand or by post, inserted in local newspapers for distribution, and left in venues such as shops, restaurants, cafes and libraries. Local authority reception areas should also be stocked with up-to-date leaflets.



Public awareness leaflets produced by the Commission can be ordered and delivered free of charge. For more information and a full catalogue visit the Do Politics Centre at www.dopolitics.org.uk, or call the Commission's distribution centre on 0845 8500 501. Leaflets are also available in a variety of languages and formats on request.

2.22 Consideration should be given to how much information to include on a leaflet. Well-written material will always enable people to make more informed judgements quickly. A leaflet should not contain too much text. The aim of any leaflet should always be clarity, strong argument and quality.

2.23 Size is also relevant. A leaflet that does not fit easily into a pocket or a bag will be thrown away. Libraries tend to have leaflet racks of a particular size, and so if leaflets are to be deposited in libraries, it would be advisable to enquire about the size of their leaflet racks so that leaflets can be designed accordingly.

2.24 Presentation is also important. Pictures and graphics can be useful aids to reinforce the information provided in the text. How these pictures are presented will contribute to the way readers perceive their importance.

2.25 In order to create a leaflet, the Commission recommends adhering to the following:¹⁴

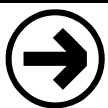
- **Contents.** What needs to be said should be identified at the outset. Though there may be lots of space on a leaflet, it is essential to be clear and informative and not overpopulate the leaflet with text.
- **Text editing.** The text of the leaflet should be:
 - persuasive
 - interesting to read
 - appealing and memorable

Formatting should be used to make the text stand out and create an impact. Short paragraphs marked with headings can be useful. Font size or colour may also be used to highlight particular text sections, while bullet-pointed lists can help users to navigate the information. The information should also be presented in easy-to-understand language, using plain English where possible.

- **Picture design.** Pictures can help to get the message across. As a general rule, if not using photographs taken by registration staff themselves, pictures from official sources should be used. The Electoral Registration Officer may also consider stocking photos or pictures downloaded from the internet. When considering using images or graphs from third-party sources, permission should be sought to re-use them. The Commission has stock images available for use from the Do Politics Centre (www.dopolitics.org.uk).

¹⁴ Adapted from Christian Aid's Pressureworks website – www.pressureworks.org.uk.

- **Layout design.** The layout of a leaflet needs to be carefully thought out. It might be helpful to sketch out where blocks of text, headings, pictures and suchlike will go. When deciding on the colour scheme, it is important to remember that some readers may be colour blind or have a visual impairment. Low contrast will make the text less user-friendly. Large blocks of white text over a dark background can also be hard to read.
- **Making a booklet.** An A5 booklet could have a front and back cover and a two-page spread inside. The front cover lends itself to a single, powerful statement and a hard-hitting graphic to support the leaflet's title. These should be gripping enough to make anyone want to read on. Pages two and three can then be used to provide all the main information, such as how and when to register to vote. Finally, the back cover should include contact details for people who want to know more or want to get involved. Partnership organisations should also be mentioned if relevant.
- **Printing.** It is generally best to give the job to a professional. Any printer will print, cut and fold leaflets and may even help with the design. There are different printing methods and these will depend on the number of leaflets that need to be produced. For small print runs of around 500 leaflets or less, it might be worth considering digital printing. This means the leaflets will be printed on a high-end colour photocopier and can use as many colours as required. For larger print runs, offset printing will be needed, which means that leaflets will be printed on a large printing press. When using this method, it is cheaper to print with one or two colours and more expensive to print in full colour. Electoral Registration Officers should remember to get at least two or three quotes, asking each printer to quote on exactly the same specifications, so that quotes are easily comparable.



Section 1, 'Making registration accessible', above, provides guidance on how to make publications more accessible.

Raising awareness among hard-to-reach groups

2.26 There is evidence that there are a number of societal groups that are under-registered. Some of these groups are listed below, together with advice on how to tailor specific campaigns to them.

Young people

2.27 It is crucial to remember that young people are new to the electoral process and that their awareness of registration may be limited. A review of relevant studies on voter engagement among young people in the UK is provided in the Commission's report, *Voter engagement and young people*, which is available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk.

2.28 Liaising with secondary schools and sixth-form colleges can be a good way of ensuring that 16- and 17-year-olds are identified and made aware of the electoral process. Local authorities may work with schools to become involved in citizenship activities – such as the running of school elections. It may be appropriate for Electoral Registration Officers or their staff to attend Local Democracy Week, or school/college-based events and to encourage attendees to complete an electoral registration form.

2.29 It may also be appropriate for Electoral Registration Officers to attend university ‘freshers’ weeks’ to encourage university students to complete an electoral registration form. Equally, it may be useful to establish relationships with organisations or college staff responsible for assisting with accommodation, so that student details may be obtained. Electoral Registration Officers should also work with neighbouring local authorities that also provide student accommodation where any cross-over occurs.

2.30 The Commission has produced a wide variety of resources aimed at young people, teachers and youth workers. These include the *Democracy Cookbook*, posters, postcards and other youth-oriented materials. These are all downloadable from the Do Politics website (www.dopolitics.org.uk) and can also be ordered in hard copy from the Commission’s warehouse (see Part A, ‘Context’, Section 6, ‘Resources’).



The following are some examples of activities, which have been trialled with young people and that are designed to bring politics alive and get young people thinking about how politics affects them. The Do Politics website contains more details on how to run each activity at www.dopolitics.org.uk/HowTo/how-to-2.cfm.

Run a do politics workshop. The basic idea of this workshop is to take an issues-based approach and talk about all the different ways in which politics affects our everyday lives. On the Do Politics website the Commission has provided a sample outline which can be adapted to suit the needs of different Electoral Registration Officers. Many of the activities in the outline are drawn from the *Democracy Cookbook*.

Run a ‘political speed dating’ event. Political speed dating is a fun and light-hearted way for participants to interact with their representatives. Like conventional speed dating, each session consists of a series of three-minute dates (or interactions). During this time people can ask their partner anything except their age, party affiliation and place of residence. The idea is to focus on what the person is really like. When the gong sounds, regardless of how engrossing the conversation, everyone moves on.

Organise a Democracy Day. Democracy Days bring young people into contact with elected representatives and aim to bridge knowledge gaps around democratic institutions and the electoral process. These could be run as a one-day conference, comprising interactive educational workshops followed by a question and answer session.

Do street marketing. Street marketing involves a team of staff or volunteers making generally quite brief face-to-face contact with people, for example at an event such as a road show or by offering giveaways from a stall in a shopping centre. It can be a useful tool for targeting under-registered groups as the information can be brought to them, rather than requiring them to seek it out. Because it requires an immediate response, forms can be collected on the spot, making the process of registration seem a lot easier. This also gives the public the opportunity to ask about anything they do not understand.

Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups

2.31 The Commission's media campaigns target these groups specifically and response from members of the community to these campaigns is an essential criterion for measuring success. The Commission also produces a range of forms and material directly aimed at BME audiences which can be accessed through the Do Politics Centre (www.dopolitics.org.uk). These include translations of some of the Commission's key materials, including:

- *Register to vote* leaflet
- *Apply to vote by post* leaflet
- *Who has my personal details?* leaflet
- *It's easy to vote* leaflet

2.32 Apart from accessing the materials listed above, there are steps Electoral Registration Officers can take to improve registration among BME communities in their area.

2.33 If there are particular community groups that are known to be under-registered, the Electoral Registration Officer may want to provide materials in the appropriate languages. The Commission does provide a range of information and forms in a variety of languages (including Arabic, Bengali, Chinese, French, Gujarati, Punjabi, Urdu and Polish). These are available from the Commission's website (www.electoralcommission.org.uk) and the Do Politics website (www.dopolitics.org.uk). The Electoral Registration Officer may, however, want to tailor information to local circumstances. In that case, there are a few issues that will need to be considered:

- **Which languages?** Specific areas may have particular language needs and so it is worthwhile contacting community groups to see if there is a demand for translated materials. Even if there have not been any requests, that does not necessarily mean that people do not require translations. It may simply be that people do not know the information is available and so it could be worth doing some outreach work.
- **Time and budget:** Many organisations do not factor in how long translations can take and so could end up having to pay extra for the work to be completed quickly.
- **Layout:** Translations may take up more space than the English version of a document. It is important to allow for extra time and costs for design of the completed translation. Many translation agencies will be able to organise this.

- **Proofing:** It is possible to part-proof the document without being able to speak the language. Punctuation, colours and headings can all be checked to see if they are all in the right place. But it is advisable to get the translator to check the final printer's proofs.

2.34 Some communities have local radio stations which broadcast in particular languages. A short piece on registration and canvassing may promote awareness and could be used to give straightforward advice on how the form should be completed. The corporate communications team within appointing authorities may be able to assist with radio and newspaper contacts. Some local authorities are able to link their web pages to translation services in order to enable information to be given in other languages.

2.35 All those becoming UK citizens by naturalisation must attend a citizenship ceremony, run by local authorities. Electoral Registration Officers should consider how they could promote voter registration at these events.



Further information on citizenship ceremonies and promoting electoral registration can be found in Part B, 'Entitlement to register' and Part E, 'Improving completeness and accuracy'.

Disability groups

2.36 Disabled people are not one single homogeneous group and different people will encounter very different access barriers. Disabled people may also have multiple impairments and could therefore face multiple barriers. While it is important to consider how to deliver information about the electoral process to all disabled voters, the following paragraphs go into more detail for two groups that are particularly affected by inaccessible information which are people with visual impairments and people with communication or learning difficulties. Information is also provided about producing materials in accessible formats such as Braille, large print and audio.

2.37 The DDA 1995 places a duty on public authorities to have regard to the promotion of equality and the prevention of unlawful discrimination. Councils are public authorities and the Commission believes that, as an officer appointed by the council, the duty to promote equality and prevent discrimination extends to the Electoral Registration Officer. This includes meeting disabled people's information needs.

2.38 The following paragraphs provide examples of how to raise awareness of registration among the blind and partially sighted, as well as among people with learning difficulties.

2.39 To ensure that the information needs of people with a visual impairment are being met, the following points should be considered:

- Compile a list of those in the local area who require information in Braille, on audio tape or in large print. This can be done by working with the sensory impairment team (if there is one) in the local council or by

contacting local disability charities. Whenever information is sent out, the people on this list should then automatically receive information in their preferred format.

- Work with visual impairment support groups to distribute information. Make sure that support workers are aware of the registration process and what support is available.
- Ensure that all printed information adheres to the RNIB's clear print guidelines. This includes ensuring that the font size is no smaller than 12 point, that high-gloss paper is not used (as the reflected light can make it difficult to read) and the contrast between the typeface and the background is clear. For further information on this see also Section 1, 'Disabled electors', above.
- Make sure that websites comply with accessibility guidelines. For more information see Section 1, 'Writing for the web', above.
- Provide information through talking newspapers. There are over 500 local talking newspapers across the UK. They record local news and information in audio format for blind and visually impaired people. To find out if there is a talking newspaper in a specific area, contact the Talking Newspaper Association (www.tnauk.org.uk).

2.40 It should not be assumed that people with learning difficulties will not understand how the registration process works. All that needs to be recognised is that some people may need appropriate support with some aspects of registration:

- Electoral Registration Officers may want to work with local learning difficulty groups to ensure that people with a learning difficulty have access to assistance when registering to vote. They may also want to develop a card that people can present to the Poll Clerk on election day, which states that they have a learning difficulty and may require additional assistance.
- Some people prefer information that is presented graphically. This does not necessarily mean they cannot read text, but symbols can help to confirm what they think the text is saying. Materials relating to registration could be produced in this format, and assistance should be sought from groups that have experience of producing easy-read or pictorial-supported text. The Commission has an easy-read guide to voting that includes advice on registration, which Electoral Registration Officers could distribute to disability groups in their area.
- The layout of the text on printed materials is also important. Dyslexic people may be able to read text more easily if the type, colour and size of text are chosen with care.

- If there is a telephone helpline, it is important to train staff to be able to take calls from disabled people, particularly from disabled people with learning difficulties.

2.41 The Commission has a range of public information leaflets and forms available in Braille, large-print and audio formats. The Commission also has an illustrated easy-read guide to voting for people with a learning difficulty: see the Commission's catalogue at www.dopolitics.org.uk for more information. Disability rights organisations also provide practical advice on different aspects of the electoral process, including registration. A list containing a number of these organisations is provided in Section 1, 'Disabled electors', above.

Service voters

2.42 The Commission works closely with the Ministry of Defence to encourage service personnel to register. Unit Registration Officers (UROs) have been appointed in military units across all three armed forces.

2.43 The Commission and the Ministry of Defence have recently run an activity during the annual canvass period to promote registration among service personnel. This activity included:

- distribution of the *Voting information for armed forces personnel and their families* leaflet to units across the world
- unit registration days taking place in all units, where UROs gave a presentation and encouraged personnel to register to vote
- advertising in service-orientated press titles encouraging personnel to speak to their URO for information on registering

2.44 Registration of service electors can be supported in the following ways:

- Help to arrange or attend a Service Electoral Registration Day at the local barracks – give a presentation, answer questions, put up posters and hand out registration forms.
- Talk to UROs about giving an article or interview to service media, such as the British Forces Broadcasting Service, Garrison Radio, service magazines or regional newspapers.
- Talk to HIVE Information Officers in units – these officers provide information and support to the families of service personnel.

2.45 The following should also be taken into account:

- If there is a military unit (barracks or base) in the registration area, make regular contact with the URO. Remember that the URO role tends to rotate fairly frequently as personnel are deployed.
- Service voter declarations (registrations) are valid for three years, but it is also important for the service personnel to update Electoral Registration Officers when their address changes.

- Many service personnel can be posted abroad at short notice, which means that many of them vote by post or by proxy. Make sure that voting methods are explained fully, including the timescales involved and the forms that need to be filled out in order to apply for them.
- The families (spouses and civil partners) of service personnel can also register as service voters if they wish, or may choose to register as ordinary electors.



Guidance on the practicalities of registering service voters is provided in Part F, 'Special category electors'.

Homemovers

2.46 People who fall within this target audience tend to be under-registered due to situational factors rather than attitudinal ones. It is important to bear this in mind when considering the sort of message Electoral Registration Officers may wish to convey. This audience is unlikely to require as much convincing to get involved as other under-registered groups and so the message can be more factual with less emphasis on the motivational content.

2.47 In order to maintain a complete and accurate register it is vital that Electoral Registration Officers reach out to homemovers. Electoral Registration Officers should coordinate efforts with other departments within the council, such as council tax, which might have data relating to this group. Estate agents may also be able to provide some relevant information.



Part E, 'Improving completeness and accuracy', provides details on the inspection of other data for registration purposes.

Further information

2.48 The Do Politics Centre (www.dopolitics.org.uk) is the Commission's online resource for electoral administrators. It pulls together all of the Commission's public awareness and educational materials, along with advice and guidance for practitioners aiming to increase voter awareness and registration.

2.49 All materials on the website are free to access and include good practice case studies, campaign techniques and templates for awareness-raising activities among a variety of target audiences such as those detailed above.

2.50 Electoral Registration Officers can also sign up to receive monthly Do Politics newsletters to stay up-to-date on electoral participation issues.

2.51 If Electoral Registration Officers know of any good case studies to include on the Do Politics Centre, or would like more information, they should contact the Commission at dopolitics@electoralcommission.org.uk.