

Part C – The annual canvass

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1 Duties of the Electoral Registration Officer

Steps to be taken by the Electoral Registration Officer

1.1 Under Section 9 of the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA 1983) an Electoral Registration Officer has a duty to maintain registers of UK Parliamentary and local government electors containing the name, qualifying address and electoral number of those persons appearing to them to be entitled to be registered in it.

1.2 This duty on the Electoral Registration Officer to maintain the register includes, but is not limited to, the requirement to conduct an annual canvass in accordance with Section 10 of the RPA 1983 for the purpose of ascertaining any persons who are entitled to be registered. This annual canvass is conducted with reference to the relevant date of 15 October, the relevant date being the date on which a person must be resident at the address they are applying to be registered at.

1.3 Section 9A of the RPA 1983 places a duty on the Electoral Registration Officer to take all steps that are necessary for the purposes of maintaining the electoral register. Section 9A sets out the following steps:

- sending more than once to any address the form to be used for the canvass
- making on one or more occasions house-to-house enquiries
- making contact by such other means as the Electoral Registration Officer thinks appropriate with persons who do not have an entry in the register
- inspecting any records held by any person which the Electoral Registration Officer is permitted to inspect
- providing training to persons under their direction or control in connection with the carrying out of the duty

1.4 The Electoral Registration Officer can use their own judgement in deciding what steps are 'necessary', whether listed in Section 9A of the RPA 1983 or not, in order to ensure that their duty to maintain the register has been fulfilled; the obligation on the Electoral Registration Officer is to take **all steps that are necessary** to ensure that they meet their duty to maintain the register, taking into account the circumstances in each case.

1.5 The Electoral Registration Officer must therefore actively consider each of the steps listed in Section 9A of the RPA 1983 and take all such steps, or indeed any other step(s) not listed, that they consider necessary in order to fulfil their duty and to ascertain who is eligible to register to vote and include them in the register of electors. The steps do not need to be taken in any particular order.

1.6 If the Electoral Registration Officer fails to take steps where necessary, they will be in breach of their official duty, which on summary conviction can result in a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale.¹

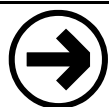
1.7 The Electoral Registration Officer should be able to demonstrate that all necessary steps have been taken in respect of all properties in their area.



Example: A property has not returned the canvass form and there is nothing to suggest that that property is empty – what steps should be taken?

While recognising the Electoral Registration Officer's discretion to determine what steps are necessary, the Commission would recommend in such an instance that the minimum contact the Electoral Registration Officer should make would be to send two canvass forms and have the property visited by a door-to-door canvasser on at least one occasion, or such of these actions as are required until a satisfactory response has been achieved. The Electoral Registration Officer should have documentary records of this contact, such as postal docketts evidencing what has been sent and records from the canvasser showing the date(s) and time(s) when the property was visited.

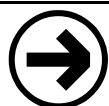
In addition, in circumstances where no response has been obtained, the Electoral Registration Officer should consider taking the step of inspecting other records using their powers to do so. Further consideration of this step is given below and also in Part E, 'Improving completeness and accuracy'.



The duty set out in Section 9A of the RPA 1983 is not limited to the annual canvass period but applies equally to the work of the Electoral Registration Officer throughout the remainder of the year. Further consideration of the duty in respect of the rolling registration process can be found in Part D, 'Monthly alterations to the register'.

Duty to encourage electoral participation

1.8 In addition to the duties outlined above, Section 69 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA) gives Electoral Registration Officers a duty to take such steps as they think appropriate to encourage the participation of electors in their area in the electoral process. In doing this, Electoral Registration Officers are required to have regard to any guidance issued by the Electoral Commission.²



Guidance for Electoral Registration Officers on public awareness activities can be found in Part I, 'Accessibility and participation'.

¹ Section 63, RPA 1983.

² Section 69(2), EAA.

Planning the annual canvass

1.9 The Electoral Registration Officer should adopt a project management approach to the annual canvass and indeed to their ongoing registration activities.

1.10 A canvass plan should be prepared and an assessment of risks undertaken. This documentation should set out how the Electoral Registration Officer intends to fulfil their duty and should also highlight any possible issues and what actions will be taken to address these.

1.11 The plan should provide an overview of how the canvass is to be managed. The plan should cover areas such as establishing roles, responsibilities and lines of reporting, risk assessment and management, and mechanisms for monitoring and ensuring quality. These topics are indicative only and there may be other management issues that Electoral Registration Officers will want to include in their plan.

1.12 The plan should be task based and set out what steps the Electoral Registration Officer will take. The plan should also contain details of any training being provided to staff under the direction or control of the Electoral Registration Officer, including personal canvassers, temporary office staff and call centre staff.

1.13 The canvass plan should provide an explanation of the processes to be followed and resources required to manage the canvass effectively. The Electoral Registration Officer should ensure that their plan sets out a workflow which reduces the number of forms that have been received but not yet processed at peak periods, such as when initial mailings of canvass forms result in large scale returns.

1.14 Electoral Registration Officers must ensure that every canvass is organised in such a way that they can keep on top of the processing of returned forms, preventing the build up of a backlog. If such arrangements are not in place, the Electoral Registration Officer will find themselves unable to respond quickly in the event of an election being held during the canvass period, and could face considerable difficulties in processing all relevant canvass forms received back by the registration deadline for the election.

1.15 The risks of being unprepared are magnified where the electoral services office will also be involved in administering an election at the same time as conducting the canvass. In such cases, particular consideration will need to be given at an early stage as to how the registration and election administration processes will be managed in parallel.

1.16 Electoral Registration Officers should liaise closely with Returning Officers to ensure that, in the development of their election plans, consideration is given to how elections during the canvass may impact on the processes for managing the election. This enables procedures to be agreed and put in place to ensure that both the registration and election management functions can be delivered effectively.



Planning for elections during the canvass

In developing their canvass plan, the Electoral Registration Officer must consider the potential for an election to take place during the canvass period.

An election during the canvass is defined as any of the following elections, whether general or by-elections, where the date of the poll is between 1 July and 1 December.³

- UK or European Parliamentary elections
- Scottish Parliamentary or National Assembly for Wales elections
- Local government – unitary, county, county borough, district, metropolitan borough, London borough and directly elected mayoral elections
- Local government – parish and community council elections in England and Wales

Given the extent of the elections covered, there is a real possibility that the Electoral Registration Officer will be faced with an election during the canvass, and so it is imperative that procedures are developed and put in place in order to be prepared to deal with any election that does arise.

In the event of an election during the canvass, the Electoral Registration Officer is required to process and action all new applications and amendments to existing elector details made on canvass forms that have been received by the registration deadline for that election (that is, 11 working days before the date of the poll).⁴

The canvass plan should identify how the canvass will be arranged in order to ensure that if an election occurs during the canvass period, all canvass forms received back from the relevant electoral area can be considered, applications determined, and names added to the electoral register as appropriate in time for the election.

The workflow set out by the Electoral Registration Officer in their canvass plan should explain how canvass forms will be sorted on their return. Returned canvass forms should be sorted as soon as possible into three categories: those with new applicants or amendments to existing elector details; those containing only deletions; and those with no changes. The forms sorted as a 'change' should include those with any new requests for postal vote applications even if there are no other changes on the form. This is because if there is an election these electors will need to be sent an application form in time for it to be completed and returned before the postal vote application deadline for that election.

³ Section 13BB and 13B(4), RPA 1983.

⁴ Section 13BB, RPA 1983.

The forms with new applications and amendments to existing elector details should be prioritised and processed first. Once these have been completed, canvass forms containing only deletions should be processed. The Electoral Registration Officer must ensure, however, that although these forms are processed, any deletions falling to be made as a result of names crossed off the canvass form are not removed from the register in the event of the publication of a notice of alteration triggered by an election during the canvass period. These deletions can only be made on the publication of the revised register. Further information on what additions and deletions can be made in the event of an election during the canvass can be found in Section 5, 'Elections during the canvass'.

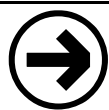
The forms with no changes should then be processed once all other received forms have been considered.

If there is an election during the canvass period that affects only part of the registration area, the Electoral Registration Officer will need to ensure that their processes will allow forms from the relevant area to be prioritised.

1.17 Adopting a project management approach to the annual canvass and year-round registration activities, will provide a framework for ensuring that the necessary steps are taken and should provide evidence of compliance with the statutory duties.

1.18 Electoral Registration Officers should ensure that they have appropriate insurance to cover any risks identified, giving particular consideration to employer responsibilities in respect of personal canvassers.

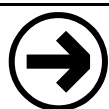
1.19 As part of their planning process, the Electoral Registration Officer also needs to consider what budget and resources they require in order to undertake a canvass in line with their statutory duties. This includes identifying the required resources to enable them to structure their canvass so that they are prepared to deal with an election during the canvass period.



Further consideration is given to budgets for electoral registration in Part A, Context, Section 4, Budgets.

Performance standards

1.20 When planning for the annual canvass, the Electoral Registration Officer should keep in mind the requirement to have in place a comprehensive written canvass plan in order to be able to meet the Commission's performance standards.



For further information on performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers, see Part J, 'Performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain'.

The Commission also produces a range of resources to assist Electoral Registration Officers with planning for and carrying out the annual canvass. These can be found at:
www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/electoral-registration/

The canvass form

1.21 The canvass form is a prescribed form.⁵ The Electoral Registration Officer may, however, conduct the canvass using a form to the same effect.⁶

1.22 The form as contained in the regulations has been user tested and written with plain English criteria in mind. As it is a prescribed form, Electoral Registration Officers can be assured that they are complying with the legislation by using this form. Electoral Registration Officers should therefore consider whether they need to deviate from the wording and format of the prescribed form for a legitimate reason before doing so.



Electoral Registration Officers 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. This will need to be reflected in the development of their canvass forms.



Canvass forms are available in PDF format from the Commission's website. The England and Wales form is also available in Welsh language and in bilingual format (English/Welsh).

1.23 The Commission has developed translations of its rolling registration forms. Electoral Registration Officers could provide copies of these to canvassers making house-to-house enquiries. Alternatively, canvassers could be asked to report to the Electoral Registration Officer the addresses of households with residents whose first language is not English or Welsh in order to enable a translated form to be sent to them.

Pre-printing information on the canvass form

Names and addresses

1.24 We are aware that most Electoral Registration Officers pre-print name and address information on the canvass form, which may assist with eliciting a greater level of response in the early stages of a canvass.

1.25 The Commission's view is that the canvass form with this information pre-printed on it is likely to be a form to the same effect as the form prescribed in the regulations, and is therefore acceptable.

⁵ Representation of the People (Form of Canvass) (England and Wales) Regulations 2006; Representation of the People (Form of Canvass) (Scotland) Regulations 2006.

⁶ Section 10(4), RPA 1983.

Nationality

1.26 Again, the Commission's view is that the canvass form with this information pre-printed on it is likely to be a form to the same effect as the form prescribed in the regulations, and is therefore acceptable.

1.27 The retention of nationality information will enable pre-printing of the nationality on the following year's canvass forms and would also be of use should the nationality qualification change in the future. It is essential to remember, however, that nationality information, beyond the use of G and K markers, must not be shown on the register.

1.28 When pre-printing nationality information on the canvass form, Electoral Registration Officers should ensure that the terms used reflect that person's nationality. The use of terms such as 'Commonwealth' or 'British, Irish or Commonwealth', for example, although setting out the franchise of the individual, does not in fact show their nationality, and should therefore not be used.

1.29 Given that any error in the collection of nationality information might result in an incorrect assessment of eligibility for registration or in the wrong franchise being identified, it is essential that the nationality information is accurately transcribed from the records held by the Electoral Registration Officer onto the canvass form. It is also important to ensure that the householder confirms, by their signature on the returned canvass form, the accuracy of the pre-printed information.

Pre-printing a tick in the 'opt-out' box

1.30 It is the Commission's view that to pre-print annual canvass forms with the elector's previous choice regarding opting out of their details appearing on the edited register by including a tick in the opt-out box would be a significant departure from the prescribed form and would change the effect of the form. It is the fact that this part of the form requires the elector to make a decision that makes this different in substance to the principle of pre-printing names, addresses and nationality as set out above.

1.31 The opt-out box should therefore remain blank in order for the elector, or the householder on their behalf, to exercise the choice as to whether or not to opt-out each year.

Including additional non-electoral material on or with electoral registration forms

1.32 When sending out electoral registration forms, Electoral Registration Officers can occasionally be asked to include additional material which has no connection with electoral matters. Although the decision as to whether to include such material rests with the Electoral Registration Officer, it is the view of the Commission that no additional material should be included with registration forms unless that material is directly connected with electoral issues, such as an explanatory leaflet from the Electoral Registration Officer or the Commission.

1.33 The return of a canvass form is a legal requirement and it should not be combined with non-electoral material which does not carry that requirement. The inclusion of any additional material with an electoral registration canvass form may risk contravening the legislation which prevents the Electoral Registration Officer and their staff from making use of any information contained in the full register other than in accordance with the regulations.⁷

Absent voting

1.34 There is a facility on the canvass form to request an absent voting application form. There are several options as to how to manage these requests: send application forms on an ongoing basis whenever a returned canvass form containing such a request has been received and processed; or send application forms to all who have requested one either on conclusion of the canvass or at one or more fixed times during and up to the conclusion of the canvass.

1.35 In the event that applications are not sent as soon as the request has been received, if an election is then called, the absent vote applications for the affected area(s) should be sent out as soon as possible. The workflows established as part of the canvass planning process should be capable of facilitating this.

1.36 New absent vote application forms should be sent to any existing absent voters who have indicated a change of name on the returned canvass form in order to obtain a new signature for the personal identifiers record.

⁷ Regulation 94(3), RPR 2001.

2 Undertaking the canvass

Delivery of canvass forms

2.1 At the time of the annual canvass, Electoral Registration Officers will generally make initial contact with households in their registration area by sending by mail or delivering by hand a household registration form. Although Section 9A of the RPA 1983 does not require the sending of a registration form to be the first step, in practice this will usually be the case.

2.2 One of the issues that the Electoral Registration Officer will need to consider when drawing up their canvass plan is how the canvass forms will be delivered.

Delivery by post

2.3 A large number of Electoral Registration Officers use postal services to deliver their initial and reminder canvass forms, with electors then able to return the forms using a freepost facility.

2.4 The availability of discounts from Royal Mail and other service providers means that it may be more cost effective to deliver initial forms and reminders by post than to employ canvassers to do so.

2.5 The performance of a postal service is, however, outside the direct control of the Electoral Registration Officer. Furthermore, changes in property status will not be collected and notified to the Electoral Registration Officer by postal service providers.

Delivery by canvassers

2.6 Many Electoral Registration Officers use canvass staff to hand deliver the initial and/or reminder canvass forms, for electors to then send them back using a freepost facility. This has the advantage that canvassers can become familiar with their canvass 'round' before making contact with residents during the house-to-house enquiry stage. Additionally, they can report back any relevant changes in property use to the Electoral Registration Officer.

2.7 The use of canvassers to deliver forms may be time consuming for Electoral Registration Officers, as canvassers have to be recruited, trained and supervised. Also, this may be more expensive than using a postal service, as any opportunity to receive discounts is lost.

Personal delivery and collection

2.8 Some Electoral Registration Officers may choose to use canvass staff to both deliver and collect registration forms. In this case, canvassers would call at each property to either collect the details of eligible electors on the doorstep or leave the form for later collection. Usually such canvassers would also be

responsible for preparing documentation for the Electoral Registration Officer to update the records after completion of the canvass.

2.9 Such a system may result in a high level of accuracy but may not be the most cost-effective way of dealing with the initial delivery of canvass forms. House-to-house enquiries are, however, one of the steps listed in Section 9A, and this method is widely used to follow up non-returned forms at the later stages of the canvass.⁸ Further consideration to the making of house-to-house enquiries is given below.

2.10 Each Electoral Registration Officer must decide which method best suits their area and enables them to fulfil their responsibilities under the legislation. This decision may well be dictated by social or geographic circumstances: for example, sparsely populated rural areas might suit a postal delivery, whereas densely populated urban areas might be better suited to a hand delivery of the registration form. In each case a freepost envelope should be included for its return.

Elections during the canvass

2.11 Given the potential for an election to occur during the canvass period, the Electoral Registration Officer will need to consider the impact such an election would have on the personal delivery and collection of canvass forms. The canvass plan should set out what approach they would take in that situation, and should address such things as:

- what canvassers will have to do differently
- how canvass staff will be informed that there is an election and given their revised instructions
- what the Electoral Registration Officer will do to try to maximise the return of forms to reduce potential disenfranchisement
- how the canvass will resume after the election
- how the decision on when to publish the revised register will be taken and what factors will be considered, bearing in mind publication can be delayed up to 1 February in the following year⁹

2.12 The Electoral Registration Officer will have provided instructions to canvassers on how often forms should be returned to the registration office, and will need to make clear how this will change if an election occurs. As a minimum, canvassers should be instructed to return to the registration office as soon as possible any forms that they have collected by the registration deadline for an election during the canvass. Forms that are collected by canvassers by the registration deadline, even if they are not brought to the office of the Electoral Registration Officer until after the registration deadline, are deemed to have met the registration deadline.¹⁰

2.13 To make sure it is clear which forms were received by canvassers by the registration deadline, canvassers should be instructed to suspend their house-

⁸ Section 10(5), RPA 1983.

⁹ Section 13(1A), RPA 1983.

¹⁰ Sections 13BB(9), 9A(2)(b) and 10(5), RPA 1983.

to-house enquiries by not later than the end of the eleventh day before the poll. This will ensure that only forms received before the registration deadline will be processed. If the election only affects part of the registration area, canvassing only needs to stop in the affected area(s) and not across the whole of the registration area.

2.14 If there is an election in part of the Electoral Registration Officer's area during the canvass period, the collection and return of canvass forms to the Electoral Registration Officer from that area should be prioritised. It may be appropriate to re-allocate staff resources which could help to ensure that as many forms as possible are collected and returned to the Electoral Registration Officer in time for the election.

2.15 The Electoral Registration Officer should also consider additional ways of promoting the return of outstanding canvass forms by the deadline for registration for the election. The use of local media and public awareness exercises may be useful in setting out to residents how they can return their canvass form to the Electoral Registration Officer in time to be included on the register for use at the election.

Sending more than once

2.16 The steps in Section 9A of the RPA 1983 make reference to sending the canvass form 'more than once' to any address. The Commission does not, however, believe that this is necessary in every case. For example, there would be no need to do this when a form has been properly completed and received back, and the Electoral Registration Officer has no reason to believe that the circumstances have changed since the receipt of this original canvass form.

2.17 If no canvass form has been returned, one has been received but with incomplete information, or there is any other reason or evidence to cause the Electoral Registration Officer to doubt the information provided on the form, they should consider what other steps are necessary to take: for example, the Electoral Registration Officer might send a request for further information to the address, make a house-to-house enquiry or inspect records held by the council. Further consideration of these other possible steps is given below.

Reminders

2.18 In some circumstances, particularly where several canvass forms have been sent to an address but no response has been received, it may be helpful for reminders to be accompanied with a letter from the Electoral Registration Officer, explaining that there is a legal obligation to complete the canvass form¹¹ and stating the possible consequences of non-response and non-registration, such as being prosecuted and fined, being disenfranchised and so on.

¹¹ Regulation 23(3), RPR 2001; Regulation 23(2), RPR (Scotland) 2001.

2.19 Reminders should be delivered at such a time as to avoid a high number of duplicate returns yet still be close enough to the original despatch to keep the registration process in householders' minds and prompt a response. Additionally, reminders should be sent early enough that canvassers will not be visiting households who have only just received a reminder and been prompted to send in their forms; although again the gap between reminder and visit should not be so long that householders will have forgotten that a form has been sent to them.

2.20 Where reminders still do not elicit a response, the Electoral Registration Officer should then consider taking such other steps as are necessary, such as making a house-to-house enquiry or inspecting council records, in order to establish whether a particular property is inhabited and whether anyone at that address is eligible to be included on the electoral register.

Making house-to-house enquiries

2.21 The steps set out in Section 9A of the RPA 1983 include making such house-to-house enquiries as are necessary for the purpose of complying with the Electoral Registration Officer's duty to maintain the register. Section 10(5) of the RPA 1983 allows the Electoral Registration Officer to make house-to-house enquiries in connection with the canvass.

2.22 The wording of this step specifies that house-to-house enquiries should be made on 'one or more occasions'. Consequently, if the Electoral Registration Officer does make a house-to-house enquiry and considers that sufficient information has been received with regard to the duty under Section 9 of the RPA 1983 on the first occasion, there is no need for further enquiries to be made.

2.23 An Electoral Registration Officer may consider it appropriate to defer making house-to-house enquiries until all other steps have been carried out. If, however, no response has been received at this stage and the Electoral Registration Officer considers that insufficient information has been received to enable them to fulfil their duty under Section 9 of the RPA 1983, the Electoral Registration Officer should then make house-to-house enquiries.

2.24 There may be, however, circumstances which could lead an Electoral Registration Officer to not canvass a particular address, for example in an extreme case where for reasons of personal safety the Electoral Registration Officer may not deem it safe to send a personal canvasser. In arriving at such a decision, the Electoral Registration Officer would need to be able to demonstrate that all options had been considered and would need to be able to justify any such decisions on a case-by-case basis.

Working with canvassers

2.25 The duty to make house-to-house enquiries where necessary in order to ensure that all eligible residents are registered and that those who are no longer eligible for inclusion on the register are removed from it means that canvassers are a crucial part of the electoral registration team.

2.26 Many electors, especially those with disabilities or literacy difficulties, may only be able to register to vote as a result of the assistance that can be made available to them in the course of a visit from a personal canvasser. In addition to fulfilling their duties under electoral legislation, the personal canvass of all non-responding properties therefore helps the Electoral Registration Officer to meet their responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 (as amended) by providing service provision to those who cannot complete and return a form by post.

2.27 Other electors may simply have been busy or have forgotten to complete and return the canvass form, and a personal visit, unlike a posted form, is more difficult to ignore or put to one side for future consideration. Canvassers also have an important role in identifying properties that are empty, non-existent or being built, in addition to identifying properties where none of the residents are eligible to register.

2.28 Furthermore, in many cases canvassers are one of the only types of face-to-face contact that local authorities have with their residents. An effective canvasser can therefore act in an ambassadorial role for the Electoral Registration Officer and their appointing local authority, and is ideally placed to assist the Electoral Registration Officer with their duty to promote awareness of, and participation in, the democratic process.

2.29 For each of these reasons, it is therefore essential that the canvass team is well trained and effectively managed.

Assessment of the canvass 'rounds'

2.30 Electoral Registration Officers will need to consider how canvass areas, or 'rounds', can be set at the optimum size when drawing up their canvass plan, as this may affect the overall response rate to the canvass.

2.31 Theoretically, the smaller the canvass area and the lower the number of households a canvasser has to visit, the higher the response rate will be as canvassers will be able to visit non-responding households more frequently during the canvass period. Additionally, if the area allocated to canvassers is kept relatively small, where a particular canvasser underperforms for whatever reason the impact this will have on the overall canvass response rate will be limited.

2.32 Where large numbers of canvassers are employed, however, the allocation of smaller areas necessitates the need to use more resource in their recruitment, training and supervision.

Recruitment of canvassers

2.33 As an early part of the canvass planning process, the Electoral Registration Officer should determine how canvassers are to be used and, as a result, how many canvassers are likely to be required. In particular, the Electoral Registration Officer will need to ensure that sufficient time is built into the process for the recruitment and training of canvassers. Guidance

should be sought from the appointing authority's human resources department in terms of how long any recruitment process may take.

2.34 Since the canvass is an annual process, a key source for recruitment of canvassers may well be persons who have been employed as canvassers in previous years. The performance of canvassers should be monitored annually and any canvassers whose past performance has been unsatisfactory should not be used again.

2.35 Also, it should be remembered that the appointing local authority is under a legal obligation to provide the Electoral Registration Officer with the necessary staff to enable them to fulfil their statutory functions.¹²

2.36 Some Electoral Registration Officers take the view that canvassers should be employed in the same area in successive years, thus gaining a detailed knowledge of their 'rounds'. Others take the alternative view that rotation of the areas allocated can be beneficial as canvassers may need to be more alert in an unfamiliar area. Both approaches are acceptable and so individual Electoral Registration Officers should consider the consequences of both alternatives and any local circumstances before confirming their staff allocations.

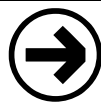
2.37 If new canvassers are needed, potential sources of recruitment include:

- staff who are employed by the Returning Officer to assist with the election, including polling station, postal vote and count staff
- a waiting list of potential canvassers built over time
- information placed on the council or Electoral Registration Officer's website or sent out via email
- tenants and residents associations
- advertisements around the offices and other departments of the local council
- ethnic minority and local community groups
- job advertisements at the local Jobcentre
- local newspaper advertisements
- word-of-mouth: canvassers themselves may know of other suitable people who would be willing to work as canvassers. In some areas it may be appropriate to consider paying an 'introduction fee' to any canvasser introducing another to the Electoral Registration Officer.

2.38 Electoral Registration Officers should liaise with their HR department early in the process in order to ensure that any recruitment exercise complies with the relevant recruitment and selection and diversity policies, and to confirm the relevant employment policies. It may be necessary to require potential employees to complete a formal application form. The Electoral Registration Officer should draw up a job description and person specification for canvassers, which will assist with the preparation of a contract of

¹² Section 52(4), RPA 1983.

employment for the canvasser. The Commission's view is that all temporary canvassers should have contracts of employment.



The Commission has developed a template canvasser job description, which can be downloaded from the Commission's website.

2.39 In addition to the usual personal details, it is important to ascertain the following about potential canvassers:

- their availability to work, and in particular the availability to work evenings and/or weekends
- the availability of, or access to, transport (and, in the case of car drivers, that they have adequate car insurance to cover them for business use)
- their ability to work outside, in all weathers
- details of any convictions (whether spent or not)
- their interpersonal skills

2.40 Any foreign language skills that potential canvassers have should be recorded as this may be helpful in deciding which canvass area they should be allocated, particularly where there are areas within the registration area where a significant number of residents speak a particular language.

2.41 It may be useful to ask potential canvassers to express a preference as to where in the registration area they would like to work. In particular, it may be advantageous to allocate canvassers to areas near their home or work address as that may mean that they will be able to make more frequent visits to the canvass area and at more varied times than if they have to travel a considerable distance to get there. This is particularly the case when the canvass is nearing completion and the number of outstanding households is smaller; it may be easier to encourage 'local' canvassers to continue with house-to-house enquiries than others for whom the travel time and expense may otherwise have made it uneconomic for them to continue.

2.42 Local residents will generally have a familiarity with the local community. This may simply be a greater knowledge of the local geography, which in itself would be an asset when planning an efficient route, but may also mean that other residents will react positively when interacting with someone they recognise, whether by completing a registration form or, for example, by allowing a canvasser entry into a block of flats.

2.43 Electoral Registration Officers may find that it is easier to recruit canvassers for some areas than for others. Electoral Registration Officers should be aware of any problematic areas from previous experience and may wish to undertake some targeted recruitment with local residents for those particular areas. In addition, Electoral Registration Officers may find it helpful to talk to local housing officers or the officers of local housing management boards or other local housing providers in order to establish whether there are any local housing office or other staff in the particular area who could usefully be invited to apply to canvass for the Electoral Registration Officer. Also,

these and similar contacts could be used where possible to help arrange for recruitment advertising to be put in communal areas.

Canvasser training

2.44 It is essential to issue detailed written instructions to all staff engaged in the canvass, covering all aspects of the process and highlighting the types of difficulties that they will be likely to encounter.

2.45 One of the necessary steps for the purpose of complying with the duty to maintain registers of UK Parliamentary and local government electors set out in Section 9A of the RPA 1983 is the step of 'providing training to persons under [the Electoral Registration Officer's] direction or control in connection with the carrying out of the duty.'

2.46 The Commission recommends that Electoral Registration Officers provide training for all canvassers each year. In some instances, experienced canvassers could attend a brief 'refresher' session, with new staff attending a more detailed session. Alternatively, it may be helpful to mingle the more experienced with the less experienced and to use the mentoring method of ongoing training. Whatever approach is selected, the length and timing of training sessions will need careful consideration. Payment may need to be made to ensure that all canvassers attend. Also, it may be necessary to schedule evening and weekend sessions in order to make it possible for all canvassers to attend.

2.47 Prior to attending a briefing session, all canvassers should be issued with written instructions to enable them to fully appreciate the importance of their appointment and to give them some understanding of their canvassing duties. These instructions could contain:

- an outline of basic duties
- a timetable for the canvass
- rules and regulations on eligibility to be registered
- notes on the correct way to complete the canvass form and to collect the required information
- an overview of the doorstep procedure, including how to approach the householder in a friendly and professional manner and how to obtain the relevant information
- notes on special category electors
- guidance on dealing with difficult householders
- advice on the completion of paperwork
- guidance on appropriate dress and presentation, both in respect of reflecting their role as an employee of the Electoral Registration Officer and of dressing appropriately for all weather conditions
- examples of canvass forms and any other relevant paperwork
- lone working policy and procedures
- health and safety awareness and guidance
- diversity guidance
- any other relevant local information

2.48 This information pack should then be followed up by briefing sessions which should cover and expand on the written instructions. The opportunity for canvassers to ask any questions they may have should be provided as part of any briefing session.

2.49 Materials for training sessions will need to be carefully prepared. Use of examples, role plays and other participative exercises should be considered.

2.50 It is important to bear in mind the needs of ethnic minority communities both in the preparation of instructions and in the provision of training sessions. If canvassers are to be provided with translated materials, it would be helpful to make sure they are familiar with the contents and understand how such materials should be used. Additionally, where canvassers have access to a telephone translation service, it would be advisable to organise a demonstration of the service before canvassers have to use it in a live situation.

2.51 The particular local circumstances of the areas the canvassers will be covering may require other specific issues to be covered at the training sessions. For example, Electoral Registration Officers in rural areas will need to provide different guidance from those in urban areas; and areas with specific populations such as students will need to reflect this in their briefings.

2.52 Canvassers should be instructed to ask at every household at which they are making house-to-house enquiries whether there are any 16- or 17-year-olds resident at the address. It may be useful to require canvassers to record the answer on the form they complete with the householder even where there are no 16- or 17-year-olds in order to demonstrate to the Electoral Registration Officer that the question has been asked.

2.53 The importance of recording the date and time of all visits canvassers make to properties should be enforced at the briefing session. This record can be used as evidence of what steps the Electoral Registration Officer has taken as part of their duty to maintain the register.

2.54 At the conclusion of the training session, canvassers should be encouraged to complete an evaluation form showing how effective they felt the training was and indicating where improvements could be made in future years. Alternatively, or indeed additionally, canvassers could be asked to complete an evaluation of the training on conclusion of the canvass, by which time they will be in a better position to evaluate the training's relevance and applicability.

Supervision and motivation of canvassers

2.55 Where a large number of canvassers are employed, it may be helpful for supervisors to be appointed to offer advice and guidance not only within office hours but also outside normal working hours. Supervisors should monitor their canvassers' performance in order to ensure that the work is being undertaken

properly and on time. Regardless of whether or not supervisors are used, canvassers should be closely monitored.

2.56 As part of the supervision and monitoring of the work of canvassers, there are a number of activities that it may be worthwhile to consider. One such action that could be undertaken would be to compare response rates for each canvasser's 'round' against the previous year's returns at the same point in the canvass. Where this is significantly lower, the canvasser should be contacted in order to establish if there are any unforeseen problems with the canvass area or if the canvasser is not able to carry out the required level of work.

2.57 It may also be helpful to compare response rates of similar 'rounds' to each other, particularly where canvassers are used to deliver canvass forms, as a large difference in response may indicate that canvass forms have not yet been delivered in a particular area.

2.58 Canvassers should be provided with sufficient time to carry out an effective personal canvass and encouraged to utilise their time effectively. One possible method to assist canvassers with timetabling their activities could be to include dates during the household enquiry stage by which completed canvass forms must be returned by canvassers to the electoral registration office.

2.59 In the event that forms are not returned according to the timetable, the canvasser should be contacted as soon as possible to establish why the arrangements are not being adhered to. This can help to avoid the situation arising whereby the Electoral Registration Officer discovers at a late stage in the canvass period that a large number of canvass forms have not been completed. A failure to return forms in time could be due to a number of factors: it could be because a canvasser has been unable to carry out the canvass due to sickness or injury; or because they have stalled in starting the work and will then be unable to complete it in a timely fashion. While unauthorised absence or the sudden resignation of a canvasser is not within the Electoral Registration Officer's control, the sooner that they are aware of it, the sooner action can be taken to limit the impact on the canvass return rate.

2.60 It may be beneficial for canvassers, particularly those who are inexperienced, to bring in their first few days' work to the electoral registration office or to their supervisor in order that any errors or misunderstandings can be identified and corrected before the greater part of the work takes place.

2.61 Early intervention with any canvassers who may be underperforming is desirable. In order to be able to achieve this, frequent communication between the canvassers, any supervisors and the Electoral Registration Officer is essential.

2.62 Electoral Registration Officers should consider how best to motivate their canvass team, who will often have to work in the cold, wet and dark, and will sometimes have to deal with difficult people. The performance of canvassers

is central to the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register and so it is essential that they are motivated to work to the very best of their ability. While sufficient levels of pay are of course important, other non-financial methods of encouraging and motivating staff should also be considered.



While these may not appeal to all canvassers, some examples of low-cost, non-financial rewards that may be worth consideration are:

Ask the Electoral Registration Officer or another senior officer to welcome canvassers to the team

This could be facilitated by, for example, arranging for the entire canvassing team to collect registration forms at the same time, with the Electoral Registration Officer giving a short briefing on the duties involved. This would not replace a training session but would provide another opportunity to highlight the key points, and would demonstrate to canvassers that senior staff take the exercise seriously.

Ensure that canvassers know how they are performing

Providing regular feedback on the percentage of households completing registration forms will enable canvassers to see the progress that is being made and to chart their own performance. This feedback could be either sent directly to canvassers or disseminated via supervisors where used. At the end of the annual canvass, canvassers should be given feedback both individually and as a team on how they have performed: if they have achieved a good result, they should be told this and thanked for their efforts.

Provide certificates of achievement to the top-performing canvassers

The Electoral Registration Officer could sign such certificates and present them in person, recognising their good work. Top-performing need not mean achieving the highest response rate but should take account of other factors, such as the particular area canvassed or any special efforts that canvassers have made to ensure that residents are registered.

Publicise the success of the canvass team

One way of doing this could be to include a story in the in-house staff magazine or on the appointing council's intranet. This could also have the additional advantage of raising the profile of electoral registration with other staff employed within the authority, and who may consider applying for canvassing in the future.

2.63 We recommend that the Electoral Registration Officer's staff undertake some canvassing themselves in order to acquire practical experience and an understanding of both the difficulties and satisfactions involved. This can be invaluable when devising and delivering training and also in supervising and motivating canvassers in the future.

Supporting the canvass team during the canvass

2.64 Where possible, canvassers should be kept up-to-date about the status of the households within their canvass area: for example, if a household has

completed and returned a registration form, the canvasser should be informed as soon as possible in order to prevent the canvasser making unnecessary visits and the householder being disturbed needlessly.

2.65 There may be occasions in which members of the public behave in a difficult way, for example by being rude to canvassers calling at their address, or refusing to give the canvasser any information, despite understanding that the canvasser is genuine and that there is a legal obligation to provide the registration information. Where this falls short of offensive or threatening behaviour, which would usually be dealt with as a health and safety matter and possibly involve a police inquiry, it may be worthwhile for the Electoral Registration Officer or another relevant senior officer of the appointing council to prepare a letter that can be sent to the residents in question when the canvasser informs the Electoral Registration Officer of such a situation.

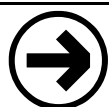
2.66 Any such letter should explain that the canvasser was carrying out an official duty and was refused the information lawfully requested, and should set out the possible consequences of non-compliance and non-registration, namely that they could be fined up to £1,000¹³ they will not be able to vote and it may be more difficult to obtain credit. Such correspondence demonstrates to both residents and canvassers that the Electoral Registration Officer takes voter registration seriously and is prepared to support their staff.

2.67 It must be stressed to canvassers that they should make careful notes of any conversations they have at households where the occupiers have behaved in a difficult way, noting also the name of the person concerned (if known) and a brief description of them; it would clearly be inappropriate for the Electoral Registration Officer to send correspondence such as that described above if all that was known about the conversation was that 'lady said she wasn't interested' or 'person refused to answer the door'.

Elections during the canvass period

2.68 If there is an election during the canvass period, all canvassers in the relevant area(s) will need to be informed of what procedures should be followed and of the deadline for registration for the election.

2.69 The revised timescales for completing house-to-house enquiries following the conclusion of the poll will need to be communicated to canvassers. Some canvass staff may not be willing or able to canvass outside of the original timeframe agreed when they were employed, and so there may be a need to recruit and train additional staff to enable the completion of house-to-house enquires. The canvass plan should include provisions setting out how any additional canvass staff would be recruited and trained, and what additional resources this would require.



See 'Personal delivery and collection' above for further consideration of planning for the possibility of elections during the canvass period.

¹³ Regulation 23(3), RPR 2001; Regulation 23(2), RPR (Scotland) 2001.

Payment of and allowances for staff

2.70 Decisions relating to the payment of staff will be influenced by how the canvass is to be organised, with payments reflecting the scope and degree of the work carried out. The payment of canvassers is a matter for each individual Electoral Registration Officer to consider and to determine the appropriate approach for their area.

2.71 Some Electoral Registration Officers pay a flat rate fee to each canvasser simply for undertaking the work, regardless of how they have performed. If this method is used, the payment could either be uniform for all canvassers without regard to their allocated areas or could be related to the number of electors or properties in their allocated areas. The former payment method may be helpful in attracting canvassers to more sparsely populated areas where other electorate or property-based calculators might result in too small a payment to make the work attractive.

2.72 If staff are to be encouraged to attempt to collect completed forms at the time of delivery of initial and/or reminder forms, an additional payment per form collected could be considered, reflecting the fact that return postage costs will not be incurred by the Electoral Registration Officer. Since return postage rates would be charged at the full rate by Royal Mail, there is scope for the payment of a considerable additional amount to canvassers, particularly if this is offered at the time of delivery of the initial forms where achieving a return at that point would also avoid the costs of printing a reminder form.

2.73 If canvassers are making house-to-house enquiries to collect forms still outstanding after the delivery of initial and reminder forms, an incentive payment could still be considered, particularly as by that stage staff will be approaching the households least likely to return the form or respond to the canvass. Financial incentives could take the form of a flat rate related to the number of properties to be visited, with an additional payment for each form collected. Alternatively, a larger payment related solely to the number of forms collected might be considered.

2.74 As an extra incentive to encourage canvassers, an additional payment could be considered for those canvassers achieving a specified response rate. Where this approach is adopted it should be sensitively applied and care should be taken to ensure that the targets set are not unreasonable, and that if any penalties are to be imposed they can be fairly justified. Consideration may also need to be given to the areas of work the canvasser has been allocated. Any incentive scheme adopted should recognise that some areas are more difficult to canvass than others and should be sufficiently flexible to ensure that the work of the canvassers in the more challenging areas can be appropriately rewarded.

2.75 It may be helpful to regard each stage of the canvass as a separate process when considering payment methods and amounts, with tailoring the payments to the actual work involved in each stage likely to result in a fairer

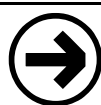
payment system overall. This approach would also enable the costs of each stage of the canvass to be separately identified and evaluated.

2.76 Although performance-related pay often ensures a higher return of forms, where this is used, particularly if payment is calculated simply on the number of forms returned, Electoral Registration Officers should be aware that some canvassers may be tempted to make false returns to inflate their rate of pay. Where monitoring shows that the response rates appear unexpectedly high, the Electoral Registration Officer may consider it appropriate to carry out further checks on the work of that canvasser.

2.77 Additionally, it may be appropriate to carry out spot checks on returned forms, which could include comparing information on canvass forms with other council records or checking signatures from 'no change' households against other records held by the Electoral Registration Officer, such as previous registration forms or absent vote application forms.

2.78 In any event, Electoral Registration Officers should inform canvassers that any attempt to falsify records will be treated seriously. This should be done in both the written guidance supplied to them, and also at any training sessions that take place. Should it appear that a canvasser has been falsifying records, it is essential that action is taken immediately. Although Electoral Registration Officers will need to determine the appropriate action to be taken on a case-by-case basis, it is recommended that the Electoral Registration Officer consult their human resources department regarding the appropriate disciplinary procedures to be followed. Where warranted, Electoral Registration Officers could also consider prosecuting canvassers for theft or forgery, in which case it would be advisable to seek guidance from the appointing local authority's legal advisers on how to proceed.

2.79 Whatever pay scheme is adopted, care must be taken to ensure that it complies with the minimum wage legislation. In order to evidence that the minimum wage has been paid, it may be advisable to ask canvassers to maintain a log of the number of hours they work on the canvass.



For information on the national minimum wage, see <http://www.berr.gov.uk/whatwedo/employment/pay/index.html>

2.80 The payment of allowances to staff will also need to be considered. If, for example, staff are to be paid travelling allowances, the audit requirements will likely necessitate the keeping of detailed records of actual miles travelled or public transport costs incurred, and Electoral Registration Officers should not underestimate the amount of work involved in this process. An alternative approach may be to dispense with travel allowance payments and instead increase the other rates of payment offered. The same approach could also be adopted in respect of any other allowances traditionally paid to staff engaged in this type of work, such as the payment of premium rates for out-of-hours and weekend working.

Methods of payment of staff

2.81 Canvassers will be liable for both income tax and National Insurance unless they are below the threshold or exempt respectively.

2.82 Their period of employment will vary depending on the method of canvass. The Inspector of Taxes will generally accept that, while in practice a canvasser may receive a single payment at the completion of their work, for tax purposes this can be construed as being spread over a period of, for example, 10 to 13 weeks.

2.83 The Electoral Registration Officer's or their appointing authority's employment policies and procedures may require the payment of all staff through the weekly/monthly payroll system. There may be benefit to the staff concerned if staged payments are made as the work progresses, although a greater incentive may be to pay all fees and allowances in one lump sum on completion of the work.

2.84 Use of the payroll system will avoid the need for the Electoral Registration Officer to become involved in detailed calculations regarding tax deductions and National Insurance contributions. Where the payroll system is used, the Electoral Registration Officer will need to ensure that all relevant payroll forms are completed and deposited with the payroll section in good time. These payroll forms should be completed and returned by canvassers at the training sessions, enabling any queries to be resolved at an early stage and without the risk of delay to payments.

Safety and risk

2.85 As the annual canvass takes place in the autumn and many canvassers will also have day jobs, much of the work undertaken by canvassers will be done in the evenings, which will become increasingly dark as the canvass period progresses. In addition, the Electoral Registration Officer may be aware of areas or properties within the registration area where there are particular issues which may affect the safety of canvassers. These factors should be carefully considered when making arrangements for personal canvassing: the health and safety of staff employed on the canvass should be a primary consideration.

2.86 The appointing local authority should have a lone working policy which the Electoral Registration Officer could adopt for the purposes of the annual canvass. It is advisable to seek the assistance of those with experience of administering and using the policy in order to ensure that all risks to personal safety are considered and evaluated by way of a proper risk assessment process, and that appropriate measures are put in place to ensure the safety of the canvassers.

2.87 Electoral Registration Officers should ensure that there is appropriate insurance in place to cover any risks associated with the employment of personal canvassers.

2.88 Health and safety issues should form a central part of any guidance for canvassers, including both printed material and briefing sessions. If supervisors are to be employed, they should also be briefed to be able to provide appropriate advice on health and safety issues to their canvassers.

Identification of staff

2.89 All staff engaged in work for the Electoral Registration Officer should be issued with a photographic identity card. Staff should be instructed to wear it at all times when undertaking their work and to show it when challenged. It may be useful to give a list of names of canvassers to the police or, at the very least, to inform the local constabulary of the likely start and completion dates of the canvass. It could also be helpful to provide a copy of this list to the appointing local authority's 'duty officer' or 'out-of-hours team' to enable members of the public to check on a canvasser's credentials at any time should they wish to do so.

2.90 The necessary photographs should be requested from newly engaged staff on their appointment in order that preparation of the identity cards can be completed well before staff commence work.

2.91 All cards must be surrendered by staff at the completion of the canvass in order to avoid the possibility of misuse during the remainder of the year.

2.92 Electoral Registration Officers may also want to consider supplying canvassers with 'calling cards' to leave at addresses where they are aware that someone is home but is not answering the door or intercom. Such cards should explain who the canvasser is and why they are calling, and could also have space for the canvasser to write in the date/time they will next be in the area. 'Calling cards' may reassure residents that the caller is genuine and may make them more amenable to opening the door when the canvasser next calls. Alternatively, they may simply act as a further reminder to the householder to complete and return the canvass form.

3 Information from other sources

Inspection of other council records

3.1 The Electoral Registration Officer is authorised to inspect, for the purposes of their registration duties, records kept in whatever form by:¹⁴

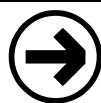
(a) the council which appointed them and any registrar of births and deaths;¹⁵

(b) any person, including a company or organisation, providing services to, or authorised to exercise any function of, any such authority as defined in (a) above.

3.2 Those persons, companies and organisations in (b) above include those that are providing 'outsourced' services under any finance agreement.

3.3 The Electoral Registration Officer is also entitled to make copies of any information contained within these records.¹⁶

3.4 The Electoral Registration Officer is required to make such use of these powers as is necessary in order to maintain the register.¹⁷ This duty applies throughout the year and is not confined to the canvass period.



Further consideration on the inspection of other council records is contained in Part E, 'Improving completeness and accuracy'.

3.5 In order to be able to provide evidence that the duty to carry out the necessary steps given in Section 9A of the RPA 1983 has been fulfilled, Electoral Registration Officers should ensure that a record is kept of the use they have made of other council records.

Households in multiple occupation

3.6 Canvassing households in multiple occupation (HMOs) may cause Electoral Registration Officers some issues. For example, canvass forms addressed to 'the occupier' of such a building may not be opened and then completed by any of the residents, simply because the form is addressed to 'the occupier' and not to any particular room or flat within the building.

3.7 Electoral Registration Officers should therefore be aware of the provisions of the Housing Act 2004, which introduced compulsory licensing of HMOs in England and Wales, and the Housing (Scotland) Act 2006, which makes similar provisions regarding HMOs in Scotland.

¹⁴ Regulation 35, RPR 2001.

¹⁵ In Scotland, it is the registrar of births, deaths and marriages.

¹⁶ Regulation 35(3), RPR 2001.

¹⁷ Section 9A(2)(d), RPA 1983.

3.8 In England and Wales, landlords of HMOs are required to provide the licensing council with the following information:

- the name and address of the landlord
- the name and address of the managing agent, if there is one
- the number of separate letting units
- the number of households in the HMO
- the number of people occupying the HMO

3.9 Each local authority is required to maintain a public register of the licences it has granted, which must contain the number of rooms in the HMO which provide sleeping and living accommodation (or, in the case of an HMO comprising flats, the number of flats).

3.10 Similarly, in Scotland landlords must supply the local authority with specific information regarding the HMO and in turn local authorities are required to maintain public registers containing information regarding HMO licences for living accommodation in their area.

3.11 We recommend that Electoral Registration Officers should arrange to inspect these records when reviewing their property database in order to ensure that as far as possible all households within HMOs receive separate electoral registration forms.

3.12 Additionally, Electoral Registration Officers should consider making contact with landlords and managing agents for information about their tenants. Although it may be difficult for them to provide all of the necessary registration information, they may be able to provide the names of those living there, which would at least enable the Electoral Registration Officer to write to those residents directly.

3.13 Where there is university or college accommodation in the Electoral Registration Officer's area, they must ensure that those students are correctly registered. If it is not possible to canvass each individual accommodation unit, an officer in charge of that accommodation or from the educational establishment should be asked for a list of those people resident and for any other information about them, such as their dates of birth if any are under 18 and their nationality, which will enable their registration to be completed where this is provided during the canvass period. Outside the canvass period, if such a list were obtained it would at least allow for personalised communications to be sent to the residents, even though they could not be added to the register without providing a signature and the other details required on a rolling registration application.

3.14 It may be appropriate in some circumstances for Electoral Registration Officers to take a similar approach with other places of multiple occupation such as residential homes, nursing homes and hospitals. As with university or college accommodation, these properties could also be canvassed by means of data collection from a person or company responsible for that property.

Electoral Registration Officers' entitlement to request information

3.15 The Electoral Registration Officer may require any person to provide information required for the purposes of the Electoral Registration Officer's duty to maintain the register.¹⁸ This power gives Electoral Registration Officers considerable authority to elicit information. It means that, for example, housing associations, private landlords and student accommodation managers can be required to give information to the Electoral Registration Officer.

3.16 The requirement to supply information extends beyond applicants and householders to any other person, including companies and organisations. The information that the Electoral Registration Officer may ask for is limited to that which they require to maintain the register, such as the names of people living at any address, their nationalities and, if relevant, their leave to enter or remain in the UK. Even where a person who is asked for information does not have all of the necessary registration information, what information they do have must nevertheless be provided. For example, if only the names of people living at an address are known, that information must still be supplied and it would then be for the Electoral Registration Officer to make further enquiries of those individuals regarding the other registration criteria.

3.17 Any individual, company or organisation that refuses to supply information is liable to a maximum fine of £1,000. The return of false information can result in a maximum prison sentence of six months and/or a £5,000 fine.¹⁹

Making contact by other means

3.18 The steps set out in Section 9A of the RPA 1983 include making contact by such other means as the Electoral Registration Officer thinks appropriate with persons who do not have an entry in the register.²⁰

3.19 This duty is applicable at any time of the year and not solely within the canvass period. For example, during the canvass period it may be appropriate for Electoral Registration Officers to attend freshers' fairs or school/college-based events and encourage attendees to complete an electoral registration form. Outside the canvass period, this contact could include sending rolling registration forms to an address where the Electoral Registration Officer is aware that there may be new residents, such as following inspection of the council tax records. Making contact might also include making a personal visit to a property.

¹⁸ Regulation 23, RPR 2001.

¹⁹ Section 13D, RPA 1983.

²⁰ Section 9A(2)(c), RPA 1983.



For further consideration of the Section 9A duty to take necessary steps in regard to the rolling registration process, see Part D, 'Monthly alterations to the register'.

Retaining entries in the register

3.20 Once the Electoral Registration Officer has exhausted the steps listed in Section 9A of the RPA 1983, there may still be some households from which they neither have received a registration form nor have sufficient information to remove any electors currently registered at that address.

3.21 In the event that the annual canvass form is not returned or for any other reason insufficient information is obtained as to residence, the Electoral Registration Officer may retain a person's entry in the register of electors 'for the period expiring with the publication of a revised version of the register'.²¹ If there is no response at the following canvass and the Electoral Registration Officer cannot otherwise satisfy themselves that the elector is still resident at that address, the elector's name must be removed from the register.

3.22 In respect of Regulation 34 of the RPR 2001, if the Electoral Registration Officer can satisfy themselves that a person is still resident despite the fact that a canvass form has not been returned, most likely through having taken the necessary steps outlined in Section 9A of the RPA 1983, there is no need to invoke this provision as the circumstances set out in Regulation 34(2) do not apply. This in effect means that on the Electoral Registration Officer satisfying themselves that a person is still resident and entitled to remain registered, the clock is reset and it would only be if a form were not returned at the following canvass **and** the Electoral Registration Officer could no longer be satisfied that the person was still entitled to be registered that Regulation 34 would apply.

3.23 Where an Electoral Registration Officer intends to remove a name from the electoral register because a registration form has not been returned for two canvasses and it has not otherwise been possible to be satisfied that the elector is still resident, a notice of the intention to remove the name from the register should be sent to the elector concerned.

3.24 Where a name is removed from the register under these provisions, it is advisable to keep a record of the action taken as it may be useful to have this evidence should, at the time of an election, that person make enquiries as to why they cannot vote.

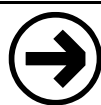
Opt-out and the 'carry-forward'

3.25 In the event that the annual canvass form is not returned or for any other reason insufficient information is obtained as to residence and the carry-forward provisions contained in Regulation 34 and described above are

²¹ Regulation 34, RPR 2001.

invoked, the elector's opt-out choice should be taken over into the carry-forward period.

4 Rolling registration forms received during the canvass period



Detailed guidance on the rolling registration process outside the canvass period can be found in Part D, 'Monthly alterations to the register'.

4.1 Rolling registration is not suspended for the canvass period: it continues during September, October and November despite the fact that the Electoral Registration Officer is not required to issue a monthly notice of alteration.²²

Any such applications received and determined as valid during the canvass period must be applied to the revised register published by 1 December.²³

4.2 In the event of an election during the canvass period, any rolling registration applications from that area during the canvass period, which have been received before the registration deadline for the election and which have been successfully determined, must be included on the election notice of alteration. They must not be left until the publication of the revised register.

4.3 Rolling registration is also not suspended when an election during the canvass results in the Electoral Registration Officer deciding to extend the canvass period beyond 1 December. Any forms received during the canvass period up until the revised register is published should, if successfully determined, be included in the revised register. Those that have already been added to the register by an election notice of alteration must also be included in the revised register unless the Electoral Registration Officer has since determined that the person is no longer eligible.

4.4 Rolling registration forms received during the annual canvass cannot be rejected or suspended on the grounds that the application has not been provided on a canvass form: no application can be suspended or rejected unless the application does not contain the required information or the Electoral Registration Officer is not satisfied as to the applicant's eligibility to register.



The processing of rolling registration forms received during the annual canvass period is essential in order to ensure that the applicant is able to vote at any by-elections taking place shortly after the publication of the revised register. It also enables applicants to make donations to political parties if they so choose, as to be eligible to do so a person must be included on the electoral register.

4.5 It is important to ensure that all persons in a household are registered and so the receipt of one rolling registration application should not necessarily be accepted as a return for the whole property. Receipt of a rolling registration form should not prevent further canvass forms and reminders being sent to

²² Section 13A(3), RPA 1983.

²³ Section 13(2), RPA 1983.

that property if no canvass form has yet been received back by the Electoral Registration Officer.

4.6 It may be practical to separate out rolling registration applications from the canvass forms, date stamp them and then compare them with any canvass returns from the same properties towards the end of the canvass period. While rolling registration applications must be available for inspection for five days after receipt, they could be determined later as long as this is done in sufficient time that they will still appear on the revised register to be published by 1 December.

4.7 If a canvass form has been returned but does not contain the name of the rolling registration applicant, the rolling registration form should not be ignored. In these cases, it is advisable that the Electoral Registration Officer confirms the situation of the residents, and they may wish to consider doing so by instructing a personal canvass of that address.

5 Elections during the canvass

5.1 An election during the canvass is defined as any of the following elections, whether general or by-elections, where the date of the poll is between 1 July and 1 December.²⁴

- UK or European Parliamentary elections
- Scottish Parliamentary or National Assembly for Wales elections
- Local government – unitary, county, county borough, district, metropolitan borough, London borough and directly elected mayoral elections
- Local government – parish and community council elections in England and Wales

5.2 The deadline for new applications for registration for any election, including an election during the canvass period, is midnight on the eleventh working day before polling day,²⁵ and the Electoral Registration Officer must publish a notice of alteration to the register of electors on the fifth working day before the poll.²⁶ Successful applications from both rolling registration forms and returned canvass forms are added to the register by this notice of alteration.

5.3 Any form, whether a canvass form or a rolling registration application form, that:

- is delivered by post or in person to the office of the Electoral Registration Officer; or
- has been collected by a canvasser who is undertaking house-to-house enquiries on behalf of the Electoral Registration Officer

by midnight on the eleventh working day before the date of the poll, is deemed to have been returned to the Electoral Registration Officer by the registration deadline.²⁷ If these applications are then successfully determined by the fifth working day before the poll, they can be added to the register by the notice of alteration published before the election.

Adding and deleting names from canvass forms when there is an election during the canvass period

Adding names

5.4 The Electoral Registration Officer must treat all names that have been added to a canvass form and that are not already on the register at that address as new applications for registration and, subject to the usual

²⁴ Section 13BB and 13B(4), RPA 1983.

²⁵ Section 13B, 13BB(3), RPA 1983 and Regulation 29, RPR 2001.

²⁶ Section 13B and 13BB, RPA 1983.

²⁷ Section 13BB(9), RPA 1983.

procedure for determining applications, the names included on these forms must be included on the election notice of alteration.²⁸

5.5 If the election is taking place in only part of the registration area, the notice of alteration will only include applications where the qualifying address is within the relevant electoral area. If the election affects the whole of the registration area, all successful applications should be included.

5.6 Applications made on a canvass form are deemed to contain all of the information required for an application for registration if they include all of the information requested by the prescribed canvass form, that is:²⁹

- surname
- first name and any middle initials
- nationality
- address
- date of birth (if applicant is 16 or 17)
- an indication if an applicant is over 70 (England and Wales only)

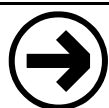
5.7 To be successful, an application on a canvass form should also contain the following details of the person who is completing the form and/or is signing to the information contained in it:

- their signature
- the date of signing
- their name (printed)

5.8 The person completing and/or signing the form does not need to be one of the people listed on or added to the form.

5.9 All canvass forms showing an amendment to an existing entry on the register can also be processed, determined and added to the notice of alteration as appropriate. This includes situations where an elector:

- indicates that they have a nationality other than the one previously recorded by the Electoral Registration Officer which gives them a different franchise, for example as a result of naturalisation
- indicates that, in the case of an attainer, the date of birth has been incorrectly recorded previously
- indicates that their name has been incorrectly recorded previously or has changed



See Part D, 'Monthly alterations to the register', for further consideration of the process and timescales for determining applications.

²⁸ Section 13BB, RPA 1983.

²⁹ Section 10A(2) and 13BB(1)(a), RPA 1983; Representation of the People (Form of Canvass) Regulations 2006.

Deletions

5.10 When a canvass form contains pre-printed names that have been crossed out or where some other indication has been given on the canvass form that a person is no longer resident at that address, their entry **cannot** be removed from the register by the election notice of alteration on these grounds alone. These names must not be deleted by the notice of alteration and must remain on the register for the election.³⁰ There are, however, certain limited circumstances in which names can be removed from the register by the election notice of alteration, which are explained in 'Other deletions', below.



Names that have been 'crossed off'.

When a name that is pre-printed on a canvass form has been crossed out or where some other indication has been given on the form that a person is no longer resident, the elector should be removed from the revised register published at the end of the canvass.³¹

The Electoral Registration Officer must have a system in place to ensure that such deletions are processed in a way that does not see them removed by the publication of a notice of alteration for any election during the canvass, but ensures that they are not included on the revised register published at the conclusion of the canvass.

5.11 The prescribed canvass form does not contain a space for applicants to supply their previous address, and indeed applicants are not required to provide this information on a canvass form. Some applicants may, however, nevertheless provide their previous address details voluntarily.

Previous address within the Electoral Registration Officer's area

5.12 If a returned canvass form contains an applicant's previous address, which is within the Electoral Registration Officer's area, that person must be removed from the register at their previous address only where **all** of the following conditions are met:

- the canvass form has been completed and returned by the deadline for registration for the election
- the canvass form is capable of being considered as an application for registration (that is, it includes a name that is not currently on the register at that address and contains all of the information required for the Electoral Registration Officer to make a determination)
- the application is for the electoral area where the election is being held
- the Electoral Registration Officer determines that the application is successful and that they will be added to the election notice of alteration

5.13 If these conditions are met, the election notice of alteration must include a deletion of the entry for the previous address.³² This deletion must be

³⁰ Sections 13BB(4), 10A(5) and 10A(9), RPA 1983.

³¹ Section 10A(5), RPA 1983.

³² Section 13BB(5), RPA 1983.

included even where the elector's previous address is in a part of the Electoral Registration Officer's area where there is no election taking place.³³

Previous addresses outside the Electoral Registration Officer's area

5.14 If a returned canvass form contains an applicant's previous address and this address is in another Electoral Registration Officer's area, the elector can only be removed from the register at their previous address if **all** of the following conditions are met:³⁴

- the canvass form has been completed and returned to the Electoral Registration Officer for the new address by the deadline for registration for the election
- the canvass form is capable of being considered as an application for registration (that is, it includes a name that is not currently on the register at that address and contains all of the information for the Electoral Registration Officer to make a determination)
- the application is for the electoral area where an election is being held
- the Electoral Registration Officer for the new address determines that the application is successful and that they will be added to the election notice of alteration
- the Electoral Registration Officer for the new address informs the Electoral Registration Officer for the previous address of the details of the successful application
- at the time of the determination by the Electoral Registration Officer for the new address, there has also been a notice of election published for an election to be held during the canvass period in the area of the previous address
- the Electoral Registration Officer for the previous address has received the notification from the Electoral Registration Officer for the new address and made a determination by the fifth working day before the date of the poll

5.15 If these conditions are met, the election notice of alteration published by the Electoral Registration Officer for the previous address must include a deletion of the entry for that address.³⁵

5.16 If the Electoral Registration Officer receives details of electors that have moved from their area but there is no election during the canvass period in their area, the information should be used to remove the entry at the conclusion of the canvass on publication of the revised register.

5.17 Any notification to the Electoral Registration Officer for the previous address should only be sent by the Electoral Registration Officer for the new address after they have determined that the application is successful and that the applicant will be added to the election notice of alteration. Such notifications should be sent on a regular basis, and the Electoral Registration Officer should not wait to issue all notifications on the fifth working day before

³³ Section 13BB(5)(a), RPA 1983.

³⁴ Section 13BB(1) to (5), RPA 1983, Regulation 31C(2)(b), RPR 2001.

³⁵ Section 13BB(4), RPA 1983.

the poll. A notice should not be sent where the Electoral Registration Officer has reason to believe that the elector is also entitled to remain registered at their other address.

5.18 Although the legislation does not make it compulsory to provide details of electors who are registering at a new address by a canvass form to the Electoral Registration Officer for any previous address given on that canvass form, to aid with maintaining the accuracy and completeness of the registers, these details should be sent wherever possible.



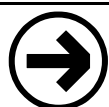
See Section 3, 'Determination of applications' in Part D, 'Monthly alterations to the register', for further consideration of sending notifications to other Electoral Registration Officers.

Other deletions

5.19 There are other circumstances which can result in the requirement for an Electoral Registration Officer to delete an entry from the register. Such situations include where:³⁶

- an elector has died and a relative or a registrar sends notification of the death to the Electoral Registration Officer
- the elector themselves notifies the Electoral Registration Officer that they are no longer resident or qualify for registration
- the Electoral Registration Officer determines after an objection or a review of registration that an entry in the register should be removed

5.20 These circumstances require the relevant entry to be removed whenever the register is next updated.³⁷ This includes updating the register by the publication of an election notice of alteration, as long as the determination has been made by the fifth working day before the date of the poll.



For further information on making deletions in these circumstances, see Section 6, 'Reviewing entitlement to be registered' in Part D, 'Monthly alterations to the register'.

Publication of the notice of alteration

5.21 If there is an election during the canvass period, the election notice of alteration must be published on the fifth working day before the date of the poll. The notice will include those electors added, changed and removed under the rolling registration system as well as those applications that have been actioned from canvass forms. It will also include any deletions that can be made as a result of the limited circumstances set out above.

³⁶ Regulation 31B to 31F, RPR 2001.

³⁷ Section 13, 13A, 13B and 13BB, RPA 1983..

5.22 Electoral Registration Officers should liaise closely with their software suppliers to ensure that their systems are capable of giving effect to additions, amendments and deletions from canvass forms at the correct time.

5.23 The notice will alter the register which was last altered either on the first working day in September or by a previous election notice of alteration published for any earlier election that has already taken place during the canvass period.



For details of how the register should be published and supplied see Part H, 'Access and Supply'.

Publication of the revised register

5.24 The Electoral Registration Officer **should not** publish their revised register early for any election during the canvass period, even in the event of a UK Parliamentary general election being called.

5.25 If for any reason the Electoral Registration Officer does take the decision to publish the revised register early, they should note that they are required to remove any elector who was subject to the 'carry forward' rule in the preceding year **and** who has not yet returned a canvass form, and the Electoral Registration Officer is not otherwise satisfied that the person is still resident. This would therefore have the effect of shortening the registration period of any elector to whom this applied and who would normally have remained registered until 1 December (or, where there has been an election during the canvass, until the revised register is published, which must be done by 1 February).

5.26 Early publication of the revised register could result in a number of such electors becoming disenfranchised and for this reason is not recommended. In reaching this recommendation, the Commission has taken into account the fact that Electoral Registration Officers will be at different stages of their canvass should any election be called, and recognises that the impact could be different in each area.

5.27 If the Electoral Registration Officer were to publish the revised register early as a result of an election towards the end of the canvass period and the revised register contained all of the alterations that would appear on the election notice of alteration, no such notice of alteration needs to be published.³⁸

5.28 An election during the canvass period changes the date by which the canvass must be concluded. The deadline for the publication of the revised register is extended: instead of being published by 1 December, the revised register must be published by 1 February. For further consideration of this, see Section 6, Conclusion of the canvass, below.

³⁸ Section 13BB(7), RPA 1983.

Postal voting

5.29 Postal vote applications should be sent to electors and applicants who have requested one on returned canvass or rolling registration forms as soon as possible in order to provide electors with time to complete and return their applications by the postal vote deadline for the election. There would be no need to send absent vote forms immediately to persons who would not be able to vote at the election in question, which would include any attainers whose eighteenth birthday falls after the date of the poll.



Summary of the Commission's recommended approach for elections during the canvass

The Electoral Registration Officer should action all rolling registration applications and canvass forms with additions and amendments received during the canvass period and before the 11 day registration deadline. A notice of alteration must be published five days before the poll to add these electors to the register in time for the election.

Deletions should only be made to the register via the election notice of alteration if any of the following occurs:

- an elector has died and a relative or a registrar sends notification of the death to the Electoral Registration Officer
- the elector themselves notifies the Electoral Registration Officer that they are no longer resident or qualify for registration
- the Electoral Registration Officer determines after an objection or a review of registration that an entry in the register should be removed
- the applicant has successfully applied for registration at a different address in the Electoral Registration Officer's area and the previous address is given on or with the application
- notification has been received from another Electoral Registration Officer stating that an elector has successfully applied for registration in another area

6 Conclusion of canvass

Publication of the register

6.1 Following the conclusion of the canvass, the Electoral Registration Officer must publish the revised register by 1 December each year, unless there has been an election during the canvass period.³⁹ This requires the publication of:

- the full register of electors for all election types combined as far as possible into one register and containing the appropriate franchise markers
- the edited register, which is an exact copy of the full register but with the exclusion of those who have opted out of their details appearing on it
- the list of overseas electors⁴⁰

6.2 If 1 December in any year is not a working day, the register must still be published by that date.⁴¹ Unlike in other election time calculations, the period is not extended until the next working day.

6.3 If there has been an election during the canvass period, the Electoral Registration Officer has the power to delay publication beyond 1 December, as in that case the latest date for publication of the revised register is 1 February of the following year.⁴²



The canvass plan should set out the factors the Electoral Registration Officer will consider when deciding the date of publication of the revised register following an election during the canvass.

These factors should include:

- what election(s) took place during the canvass
- when in the canvass the election(s) took place
- what canvass time was lost due to the election
- when the canvass was re-commenced
- whether the objectives in the canvass plan have been met
- what plans the Electoral Registration Officer has in place to fulfil their year-round duty to take the necessary steps to maintain the register, and how these could be used to minimise the impact of the interruption to the canvass

³⁹ Section 13(1), RPA 1983.

⁴⁰ Regulation 45(3), RPR 2001.

⁴¹ Section 13(1)(a), RPA 1983.

⁴² Section 13(1A), RPA 1983.

6.4 In the same way that a notice of alteration is not published in October, November and December, no notice of alteration is published in December, January and February if a revised register has not yet been published.⁴³

6.5 If, however, the revised register is published earlier than 1 February, the Electoral Registration Officer should publish a notice of alteration on the first working day of January and/or February, depending on the time of publication of the revised register, if there are determined rolling registration alterations that were received before the determination deadline which have not been included on the revised register.

6.6 As the revised register that is published at the conclusion of the canvass should not include the names of any person crossed off a canvass form, Electoral Registration Officers who have had an election during the canvass period will need to take particular care to ensure that such deletions are actioned on publication of the revised register.

RPF29

6.7 The Electoral Registration Officer is required to supply to the Secretary of State a document setting out certain prescribed information relating to the results of the annual canvass for the register of electors.⁴⁴

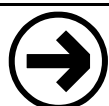


In Scotland, this must also be supplied to Scottish Ministers and the Registrar General of Births, Deaths and Marriages for Scotland.

6.8 Each year the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and, in Scotland, the General Register Office for Scotland (GROS) will issue to the Electoral Registration Officer the form RPF29 for this purpose. Electoral Registration Officers are required to submit this information as soon as possible after publication of the revised register.

Performance standards returns

6.9 The Commission has the power to set and monitor performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers and referendum Counting Officers, and to collect information on the costs of electoral services.⁴⁵ The Commission introduced a performance standards framework for electoral registration in 2008. Electoral Registration Officers are required to report on their performance against these standards annually.



For a copy of the performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers and guidance on completing the self-assessment return see Part J, 'Performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain'.

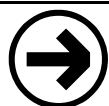
⁴³ Section 13A(3), RPA 1983.

⁴⁴ Regulation 44, RPR 2001.

⁴⁵ Sections 9A–9C, PPERA.

Supply of the full register

6.10 Once the revised registers have been published, the Electoral Registration Officer will need to supply registers to those organisations entitled to receive a copy.



Further guidance on the supply of copies of the register can be found in Part H, 'Access and supply'.

Retention of registration forms

6.11 Copies of registration forms should be kept either as scanned images or paper copies. By doing so, any later questions regarding possible clerical errors can be answered and also the retained applications can be used to check against the personal identifiers provided on any subsequent absent vote application.

Register to be used for elections taking place after publication of the revised register

6.12 The revised register which must be published by 1 December (or, where there has been an election during the canvass, by 1 February) has immediate effect on publication. As a result, any election with a polling day on or after the date of publication will be based on the revised register. Unlike a notice of alteration which only has effect at an election if published on or before the fifth day before the poll, a revised register has immediate effect for all elections.

6.13 Electoral Registration Officers should note, however, that while the register to be used at an election on or after the date of publication will be based on the revised register, there remains the requirement to publish a notice of alteration on the fifth day before the poll, although this will only contain entries of those who submitted rolling registration applications on or before the eleventh day before the poll and who are not already included on the revised register.

6.14 Any person who is on the appropriate register on polling day is eligible to vote and those who are removed from the register by polling day are not eligible to vote.

6.15 The nomination of candidates will, however, be based on the register in force on the last date for publication of the notice of election, which may be the register at 1 September (or, if there has been an election earlier in the canvass period in that area, at any subsequent date where an election notice of alteration was published) depending on the date of poll and the date of publication of the revised register.

6.16 The Electoral Registration Officer may opt to publish the revised register early where there are elections in their area in December. The register must, however, be published as one single document, and single wards or electoral areas cannot be published on their own. In making a decision as to whether to publish the revised register early, Electoral Registration Officers should consider the fact that doing so may result in a lower response rate to the canvass, with less time for householders to return the canvass form and less time for Electoral Registration Officers to take steps to ensure the completeness and accuracy of the register.

6.17 Poll cards should be sent out as soon as is practical, which would normally be very shortly after the notice of election. For elections in December, however, it may be reasonable to send poll cards only when the revised register is published and those who are eligible to vote at the election are known, even if this is a few days before the poll. A similar approach may need to be adopted in respect of postal votes in order to ensure that only those eligible to vote are sent postal ballot packs.

6.18 To enable the production and distribution of postal votes and poll cards, the Electoral Registration Officer may wish to consider publishing their revised register no later than the eleventh working day before the poll.

7 Further resources

Opt-out leaflets

7.1 Electoral Registration Officers may wish to include a copy of the Commission's leaflet *Who has my personal details?* with their canvass forms. This leaflet explains about the two versions of the electoral register and the choice electors have to opt-out of their details appearing on the edited register.

7.2 The leaflet can be downloaded in different formats and languages at www.dopolitics.org.uk/Toolbox/toolbox-6.cfm and hard copies are also available to order.

Annual canvass resources

7.3 The Commission has produced a range of template resources for use at the annual canvass. These are available to download from the Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk