

Introduction to registering a political party

This document is for people who are thinking of setting up a political party and want to know where to start.

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Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact the Electoral Commission:

Tel: 020 7271 0500

Email: publications@electoralcommission.org.uk

Terms and expressions we use

We use '**must**' when we refer to a specific legal or regulatory requirement. We use '**should**' for items we consider to be minimum good practice, but which are not legal requirements.

You do not have to follow this guidance, but if you do, you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law.

Our approach to enforcement

The Commission regulates political funding and spending. We are committed to providing those we regulate with a clear understanding of their regulatory obligations through our guidance documents and advice service.

Wherever possible, we use advice and guidance proactively in order to secure compliance. And we regulate in a way that is effective, proportionate and fair.

If you do not comply with legal or regulatory requirements you or your organisation may be subject to civil or criminal sanctions. You can find more information about the Commission's approach to enforcement at

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/enforcement

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Introduction to registering a political party

This document explains:

Why and how to register a political party, the basic rules you'll need to follow and where to find more information

The document covers:

- Introduction to the Electoral Commission
- The registers of political parties
- Official roles within a party or group
- Who can register with us
- The structure of your party
- Choosing a party name, description and emblem
- Financial reporting requirements and responsibilities
- What next?

Related documents

- [Overview of party names, description and emblems](#)
- [Overview of maintaining a party details](#)
- [Process for registering a political party](#)
- [PEF Online: Getting started](#)
- [Introduction to being a party treasurer](#)

You can find all our guidance on our website at:

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance-for-political-parties>

Summary

If you are thinking about setting up a political party, you may need to register with us. If you do, there are rules you will need to follow.

This document explains why and how to register with us, outlines the basic rules you'll need to follow and tells you where to find more information.

Political parties and campaigners are vital to a healthy democracy and we encourage participation

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Introduction

The Electoral Commission – who we are

We are an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. Our aim is integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. The Electoral Commission:

- registers political parties and regulates party compliance under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA)
- maintains the registers of political parties in Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- sets standards for electoral registration and running elections, and report on how well this is done
- runs any referendums held under PERA
- publishes details of where parties and other election campaigners get money from and how they spend it
- makes sure people understand and follow the rules on party and election finance
- makes sure people understand it is important to register to vote, and know how to vote.

Why register?

Registration of a political party is not compulsory. Candidates can contest elections without being a party being registered.

The main benefit of registering is that your party name, description and emblem can appear on the ballot papers. We use the term '**identity marks**' when we refer to party names, descriptions and emblems.

The rules for each election set out which identity marks can appear on ballot papers. You should check with your local returning officer to verify what you can and cannot use for each election.

If you have registered your name or other identity marks with us, no other party can register this name or a name that is

likely to result in voters confusing it with your party. This is designed to stop voters mistaking one party for another on the ballot paper.

Can I stand for election without being a member of a party?

Yes, you can stand for election without being a member of a party. If you don't register with us, you can use the word 'Independent' (and/or 'Annibynnol' in Wales) to identify yourself on ballot papers, or have no description.

Parish and community council elections

At parish and community council elections independent candidates can at the discretion of the Returning Officer use a description not registered with the Commission provided that the description does not exceed six words in length and cannot be confused with a registered political party.

Types of political party

There are two types of registered political parties that can stand for election. These are:

- **political parties** that can stand in all elections their registration applies to, either in Great Britain or Northern Ireland (separate registers apply in each area)
- **minor parties** that only intend to contest parish or community elections in England and Wales.

Registered political parties

Registered political parties can contest all elections including those for:

- parish and community councils
 - local authorities
 - Police and Crime Commissioners
 - National Assembly for Wales
 - Northern Ireland Assembly
 - Scottish Parliament
 - UK Parliament
 - European Parliament
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PPERA imposes a number of controls and responsibilities on registered political parties. You can find all our guidance for parties online at :

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance-for-political-parties>

They can be registered as political parties on the Great Britain register, the Northern Ireland register or both. Depending on which registers they appear on, they can contest elections in Great Britain, Northern Ireland or both.

Registered minor parties

Minor parties are parties that only contest parish council elections (England) and community council elections (Wales). Minor parties are unable to contest elections in Scotland.

They are registered on the Great Britain register. You cannot register a minor party in Northern Ireland.

Parish and community council elections

In England and Wales parties can choose to only contest parish council elections (England) or community council elections (Wales). If you intend to only contest these elections you should consider registering as a minor party.

Under PPERA, minor parties are not subject to the financial controls that registered political parties must comply with. They are only required to submit an annual registration confirmation with us. The information they need to submit when registering with us is much less detailed.

A minor party can always apply to change its status to a registered political party at a later date if you wish for an additional fee of £150.

The registers of political parties

There are two registers of political parties in the UK, one for Great Britain (GB) and one for Northern Ireland (NI). We maintain both the GB and the NI registers.

These registers contain the details of all political parties registered to contest elections in all or some of England,

Scotland and Wales (GB register) and Northern Ireland (NI register).

You should only apply to appear on both registers if you plan to stand candidates for elections in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

A party registered on both the Great Britain and the Northern Ireland registers are two separate registered parties for PPERA purposes.

Parties on the GB register must also indicate whether they want to contest elections in all or some of England, Scotland and Wales.

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Registering your party

To register a party you will need to submit an application to the Commission which we will assess against the statutory tests set out in PPERA.

What do I need to send to the Commission in order to register a political party?

Whether by post or online your new party application will need to include:

- your completed form (either by post or submitted online)
- a copy of your party's constitution
- a copy of your party's financial scheme
- a non-refundable fee of £150. If you send the payment by cheque please make the payment to 'The Electoral Commission'.

Your completed form will include:

- your party name, any descriptions and emblems
- your party's headquarter address and contact information
- where you intend to stand candidates.

You will also need to complete declarations on that form by the party officers that:

- the party intends to stand candidates at elections
- the party has processes in place to comply with the rules with govern the election and financial activities of parties.

What officer roles are needed in a registered political party?

Your party must apply for people to be registered for certain official roles.

These are:

- a party leader
- a party treasurer – who is responsible for your party's compliance with the financial rules
- a nominating officer – who will authorise the use of the party's name, descriptions and emblems on ballot papers.

You must have at least two officers for the party. If one person fills all three official roles, you must register someone as an additional officer. This additional officer must hold some specified office or role within the party.

The treasurer and nominating officer cannot be the same person unless they are also the leader.

You are not required to appoint a treasurer if you are registering a minor party. All of your party officers, including any optional officer roles if you are required to have one, must sign your application form.

Optional officer roles

- campaign officer – who will be responsible for your party's compliance with the financial rules for campaign expenditure instead of the treasurer. They cannot also be the treasurer.
- additional officers - You must apply to have an additional officer if the party leader is also the treasurer and nominating officer.

What officer roles are needed in a minor party?

Minor parties are only required to register a party leader and nominating officer.

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You must have at least two people to hold these roles. If one person fills the two official roles, you must register someone as an additional officer.

Your financial scheme

Unless you are a minor party, you must include a financial scheme for our approval as part of your application.

Your financial scheme demonstrates how your party will comply with the legal requirements of party and election finances under the PPERA.

Your scheme should include procedures for:

- accounting records
- handling donations and loans
- maintaining your registered details with us
- authorising and reporting on campaign spending

We produce a [template scheme](#) that you can use to create your party's own financial scheme. You do not have to use this scheme, but it includes all the relevant areas you will need to consider.

Most parties operate as a single unit. However, you may wish to have party branches. These are called 'accounting units' and each unit is responsible for their own finances. Each accounting unit must have their own treasurer and second officer. When you apply, you must tell us if you plan to have accounting units. If your party will have accounting units, our standard template scheme is not suitable. We can provide further advice on what is required, so please contact us..

Your financial scheme must reflect how the party is run and managed in relation to the above procedures. If these procedures change you may need to update your financial scheme. If you update your financial scheme you must provide an updated copy to us for approval.

The Party constitution

As part of your application, you must send us your party's constitution. This is the document (or documents) which shows

the structure and organisation of your party and should set out the arrangements for your party's governance and the rules for carrying out its business

Your constitution must be consistent with the processes and detail of your financial scheme under PPERA. For example, the two documents should agree on how your accounts are signed off and who is responsible for the accounts.

Your constitution must reflect how your party is run and managed. As a guide your constitution should include:

- your party's aims and objectives
- that one of your objectives is to stand candidates at elections
- the structure of your party – for example, if you have branches or accounting units
- how the party is run – for example, the frequency the frequency, timing and type of meetings, the quorum for meetings and how decisions are made what officers you have and what their responsibilities are
- if you have membership requirements.

If your constitution does not include the above details we may ask you to provide us with more information before we accept your application.

If your constitution does not include the above details we may ask you to provide us with more information before we accept your application as being complete.

Your constitution should be kept up to date and you must provide us with particulars of any change occurring in your constitution during your annual confirmation of registered details. **Please also send us an updated copy to us whenever you change it.**

Choosing a party name, descriptions and emblems

As part of your registration application, you must specify a party name. In addition to your name you may also apply to have party descriptions and emblems.

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You must choose a party name.

You can also choose to register:

- up to 12 party descriptions
- up to 3 emblems

You can apply to change your party name, descriptions, emblems and add joint descriptions at a later date if you wish for an additional fee of £25 per application.

What is a description?

A party description is an optional identity mark that you can register in addition to the party name. A voter should be able to recognise your party from the description.

A description can, depending on the specific election, can either act as an alternative to the party name or be used in addition to the party name on the ballot paper.

We do not regulate the political content of campaign material, so you do not have to register with us any messages that you intend to use in your campaign. You only need to register any description that you intend to use on ballot papers.

What is an emblem?

A party emblem is an optional, visual, black and white representation (or logo) of a party. Your party and its candidates will be able to choose to use one of your emblems on ballot papers at all elections.

What identity marks (names, descriptions and emblems) can't we register?

As a guide, we cannot register an identity mark that:

- is likely to mislead voters as to the effect of their vote
- is the same as another registered identity mark which is on the same register
- is the same as an identity mark from a deregistered party which was on the same register and is protected until the end of that party's financial year in the year they were deregistered
- is likely to result in voters confusing it with another party identity mark that is already registered or protected

- is likely to contradict or hinder instructions or guidance given for voting
- is obscene or offensive
- contains certain prohibited words
- is, or contains an acronym or abbreviation that is not well known and widely used and not spelt out
- links in any way to online material or contains reference to online content
- contains a reference to a person's name unless it is a person directly associated with your party
- an emblem that contains text which cannot be read at the size emblems appear on ballot papers (2cm square)
- is longer than six words
- is not in Roman script
- is likely to amount to an offence if published.

You must submit your emblem in black and white.

For more detail on the tests, and how we apply them, please read our guidance [Overview of party names, descriptions and emblems](#).

What will appear publicly on the register of political parties once you are registered?

Once registered the following details will be made publicly available online:

- the party's name
 - whether you are registered in Great Britain or Northern Ireland
 - date of registration
 - if registered in Great Britain whether you intend to stand candidates in England, Scotland and Wales
 - the party's descriptions (if any)
 - the party's emblems (if any)
 - the party officers' names
 - the party's head office address. As this information will be publicly available, if using your home address you may wish to consider using a PO Box or other address.
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Financial reporting requirements and responsibilities

Registered political parties

Under PPERA, registered political parties must comply with rules on donations and spending and reporting requirements.

These rules include continuous donation and loan controls, spending controls during regulated elections, annual accounts reporting and annual registration renewal.

These rules are to ensure the integrity and transparency of party political finance. If you don't follow them, you may be subject to fines or other enforcement action. In some cases, this can include a referral for criminal prosecution.

The officers of a registered political party have significant responsibilities, so it's important that you understand these fully before you register with us.

Minor parties

Under PPERA, minor parties are not subject to the financial controls that registered political parties must comply with. They are only required to submit an annual registration confirmation with us.

Independent candidates

Under PPERA, independent candidates have no party reporting responsibilities, but they must report their election spending and donations to the local Returning Officer after the election.

What next?

If you have decided that you want to register your party, you are almost ready to apply.

We recommend that you now read the following documents:

[Overview of party names, descriptions and emblems](#)

[Process for registering a political party](#)

These documents will explain the rules and process of registration in more detail. You will then have all the information you need to make the correct application decisions.

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Where can I get further advice?

You can find more information in the guidance documents we have suggested in this document, or you can view our full range of guidance and up-to-date resources on our website:

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance-for-political-parties>

If it's easier, you can also contact us on one of the phone numbers or email addresses below. We are here to help, so please get in touch.

Contact us on:

England: 0333 103 1928
partyreg@electoralcommission.org.uk

Scotland: 0333 103 1928
infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk

Wales: 0333 103 1929
infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk

Northern Ireland: 0333 103 1928
infonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk

Visit us at <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk>

We welcome feedback on our guidance – just email us at:
partyreg@electoralcommission.org.uk.