

Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP  
Chairman, APPG Armed Forces Covenant  
House of Commons  
Westminster  
SW1A 0AA

9 March 2016

Dear Ms Trevelyan

I am writing to acknowledge your recent letter to the Prime Minister in which you asked what the Government is doing to ensure our Armed Forces are able to vote in the forthcoming EU Referendum and at future general elections. I thought I would take the opportunity to provide you with some information on our own plans for raising awareness among service personnel of the need to register to vote ahead of both the elections in May 2016 and the EU Referendum.

The Commission has worked closely with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) for a number of years to encourage service personnel to register to vote ahead of elections. Unit Registration Officers (UROs) are encouraged to hold a registration day event on bases throughout February and March – both in the UK and overseas – and the Commission produces a toolkit to help UROs run the day which includes links to downloadable posters; and registration and postal vote application forms. I am pleased to let you know that for the second year running, the Commission has worked with the MoD to ensure that all MoD employees (almost 200,000) receive a register to vote reminder in their February wage slip.

In addition to placing register to vote adverts in publications popular amongst service personnel, the Commission has continued to work closely with partners such as the RAF Families Federation, Navy Family Federation and Army Families Federation to spread registration messages ahead of the May 16 elections. Our [‘Ballot Box Man’ advert](#) has also been airing on British Forces Broadcast Services Overseas TV encouraging service personnel and their families to register to vote.

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## Putting voters first

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We heard concerns from some service personnel and their families based overseas last year that they did not receive their postal vote ballot packs in time to be able to complete and return them to the UK before. Our report on the May 2015 UK Parliamentary general election highlighted that the Government and electoral administrators need to make improvements for voters overseas, including service voters, at future elections. We recommended that Returning Officers must attach the correct postage on postal ballot packs for overseas electors, so that they can be delivered to voters and returned as quickly as possible before polling day. This would involve increasing the funding provided by the UK Government to Returning Officers for this purpose.

At the forthcoming EU referendum, you may be aware that the Chair of the Electoral Commission, Jenny Watson, is also the Chief Counting Officer. She is responsible for issuing directions to Counting Officers about the administration of the poll. This has included a direction stating that Counting Officers despatch overseas ballot packs between 23 May and 27 May. She has also directed that each Counting Officer must make arrangements with Royal Mail for an international business response licence and ensure that this is used on all return envelopes included in postal ballot packs to be sent to overseas addresses. These measures are in place to ensure, as far as possible, that all postal ballot packs are sent with sufficient postage paid so they can be received and returned by the voter in time for inclusion in the referendum count. As well as overseas postal ballot packs, the CCO has directed that postal ballot packs are delivered to electors at UK addresses between 27 May and 3 June.

The Commission will, of course, also run a major registration and voter information campaign ahead of the EU referendum. We will be using Facebook to target service personnel and their families, based in the UK and overseas, to encourage them to register to vote as soon as possible. We will be working with the MoD to ensure copies of our voter information booklet are distributed to bases across England, Scotland and Wales; and we will again produce resources for UROs to help them encourage members of our Armed Forces to register and have their say in this historic poll.

I hope this response has been useful but if you do require any additional information or would find it helpful to discuss our service voter campaign activities in person, please

contact Karim Aziz in our Public Affairs team on 0207 271 0512 or  
[kaziz@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:kaziz@electoralcommission.org.uk).

I am copying this letter to those people included in your letter. I am also arranging for a copy of this letter to be placed on the Electoral Commission's website.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Claire Bassett', written in a cursive style.

**Claire Bassett**  
**Chief Executive**

cc. David Cameron MP, Prime Minister  
Michael Fallon MP, Secretary of State for Defence  
John Penrose MP, Minister for Constitutional Reform