

Assessment of progress with the transition to Individual Electoral Registration

May 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain

June 2015

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Executive summary

By law, the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in Great Britain, which began in summer 2014, is currently scheduled to end with publication of the revised registers in December 2016. At this point, any entries for electors who are not registered individually – that is, those who have not either been confirmed or successfully made individual applications to register to vote - will be removed from the registers.

However, the legislation allows the UK Government to make an Order - during a specified three-month period between June and August 2015 - which would end the transition 12 months earlier, in December 2015. A statutory instrument containing such an Order would not need to be debated by the UK Parliament, but could be annulled by a resolution of either House of Parliament.

This report provides our assessment of progress with the transition up to the publication of the registers in force for the May 2015 polls, and sets out our recommendation to the UK Government on the timing of the end of the transition. It builds on our earlier reports on progress with the transition which we published following key milestones in the process - on conclusion of the confirmation live run exercise (in October 2014 in England and Wales and November 2014 in Scotland), and following the publication of the revised registers (in December 2015 in England and Wales and April 2015 in Scotland).¹

To inform this report, we have collected data from Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) across Great Britain on the registers in force for the May 2015 polls.

In previous reports we highlighted that we had encountered some issues with the management information functionality of the electoral management software (EMS) systems which EROs use to manage the electoral registers, which had an impact on the quality of the data we received. We made clear in our February and April reports that these data issues not only had a significant impact on our ability to report on progress with implementing the transition at that point but they also raised a real risk that the Commission would not have sufficient information to be able to make a robust, evidence-based assessment and recommendation to inform the UK Government's decision on whether the end of the transition to IER should be brought forward to December 2015.

¹ All our reports on progress with the transition to IER are available on our website: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/electoral-registration/monitoring-the-change-to-individual-electoral-registration>.

Since the publication of our February report, the Cabinet Office have been working with us and the EMS suppliers in a different way in order to ensure that the data collected relating to the registers in force for the May 2015 elections was more accurate and reliable. In particular, there were regular meetings to ensure there was a clear and shared understanding of what each piece of requested data was intended to cover.

While there have still been some issues and we do not have a full, accurate dataset from every ERO, the data is substantially better than that we received for previous reports. Our analysis in this report is therefore based on sufficient, reliable data such that we are able to make a robust assessment of progress to this point.

The state of the electoral registers

The data we have received from all 380 EROs in Great Britain shows that:

- The **local government registers in May 2015 contained 46,814,081 entries**. This is an increase of 1% since February/March 2014, when the last registers were published under the household system of registration.
- The **parliamentary registers in May 2015 contained 45,336,013 entries**. This is an increase of 1% since February/March 2014.
- **Approximately 1.9 million register entries on the local government registers are for electors who are not registered individually and so are being retained under the IER transitional arrangements**. This represents 4% of all register entries.

The availability of online registration – which was introduced at the same time as the transition to IER began – has already demonstrated clear benefits, with 77% of all applications since then being made online. The service has also been particularly popular among some of those groups who are typically under-registered such as overseas voters and young people. For example, the number of registered overseas voters at the time of the May 2015 UK Parliamentary general election was 105,845, which is approximately three times the number registered around the time of the 2010 UK Parliamentary general election.

Attainers

The data we have collected does, however, indicate that there remains an issue with registering attainers.² The number of attainers on the May 2015 registers is 247,705. This represents a fall of 47% in the number of registered attainers since February/March 2014.

² Attainers are those who are not yet old enough to vote but will turn 18 (i.e. attain voting age) within the twelve month period starting on the 1 December after they make their application.

In our previous reports we noted that the fall in the number of attainers does not mean that those who were previously included on the register as attainers have been removed: attainers on the February/March 2014 register will, in most cases, have reached voting age since they were first included on the revised register and so will now be shown as ordinary electors. However, it does mean that new attainers are not being added at the same rate as in previous years.

We believe that this decline is largely attributable to the lack of comprehensive household canvass activity in 2014. Household enquiry forms (HEFs) – which are designed to identify who is living at a property and eligible to register so that the ERO can invite them to register to vote – were only required to be sent to properties where no electors were registered, or where the ERO believed there may still be other people living at the address who were not registered. The processes followed in 2014 were unique in this regard; canvass activity in 2015 and all subsequent years will involve sending household enquiry forms to **all** properties to check who is resident at an address and to identify new electors who can subsequently be invited to register, and carrying out follow up activity as required.

While household notification letters (HNLs) – which were designed to show who was registered to vote at that particular address and to prompt anyone who was not yet registered to do so – were sent in early 2015, they do not appear to have been as effective at prompting attainers to register as they were in getting other electors to either register or update their details. This may have been because the focus at that stage was on registering in order to be able to vote in the May 2015 elections, which the majority of attainers would not have been able to do.

Comprehensive household canvass activity will take place from 1 July 2015 and will involve sending HEFs to all properties. Where no response is received to a HEF, EROs are required to follow up with two reminders and at least one personal visit. Invitations to register will be sent to all attainers identified through this process and again EROs are required to follow up any non-responses with two reminders and at least one personal visit.

In addition, all EROs should be updating their local public engagement strategies ahead of the 2015 canvass, reflecting the activity they intend to carry out to target under-registered groups, such as attainers. All EROs will need to ensure that their engagement strategies reflect the activity they will carry out to maximise the number of attainers who are registered, and working with schools and colleges within their area is a key area of activity we will expect all EROs to explore. Through our performance standards work, we will continue to support EROs in the process of updating their engagement strategies and subsequently with delivering the activities identified within them.

We will be collecting further data from EROs on the conclusion of the 2015 canvass, including on the number of attainers, which we will report on in spring 2016.

Accuracy and completeness

Data collected for this report does not allow us to estimate levels of accuracy and completeness of the registers, neither was it intended to. In order to do that we would need to undertake a dedicated study, similar to those we have carried out in recent years.³

Our last such study, on the February/March 2014 registers, found the local government registers were 85% complete and 86% accurate. Since that assessment some activities will have had a positive impact on accuracy and completeness, including the introduction of online registration, HNLs and work to promote and encourage registration in the period leading up to the May 2015 elections. However, it is clear that other elements will have had a negative effect, such as the lack of comprehensive household canvassing activity in 2014.

The Commission will continue to monitor the transition to IER and will collect further data from EROs focusing on the 2015 canvass and the December 2015 registers. Our work will also include further studies on the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers.

Our assessment and recommendation

The end of the transition to IER, whether in December 2015 or December 2016, will impact on the registers as it is at this point that EROs must remove all remaining register entries relating to electors who are not registered individually and which are currently being retained on the register under the IER transitional arrangements.

Risks and benefits

If the transition ends in December 2015, there is a potential **benefit** to the accuracy of the register – with any retained entries which are redundant or inaccurate being removed – but also a **risk** to the completeness of the register and to participation, with retained entries relating to eligible electors being removed. Any individuals removed from the register as a result would need to make a successful registration application in order to re-register and so to be able to vote in any polls held after December 2015.

In contrast, if the transition continues to December 2016, the main **benefit** relates to completeness – with entries for any eligible electors who are not registered individually retained on the registers – with the potential **risk** being to accuracy, with retained entries which may be redundant or inaccurate being

³ Our study on the accuracy and completeness of the register can be found on our website at: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/our-research/electoral-registration-research>.

kept on the register for a further year unless the ERO takes steps to review or remove them.

In terms of managing these risks, the earlier timetable puts the greater onus on electors as they will need to take action in order to ensure they are able to remain registered and so can participate in the May 2016 polls. By contrast, the later timetable puts the greater responsibility on EROs to identify and take steps to remove redundant or inaccurate entries.

Analysis

Data collected from EROs across Great Britain indicates that, in May 2015, approximately **1.9 million register entries on the local government registers are for electors who are not registered individually and so are being retained under the IER transitional arrangements**. This represents 4% of all register entries. However, it is important to note that within this overall figure, retained entries as a percentage of total register entries vary by local authority area and range from 0% to 23%, and all of these areas will have at least one election in May 2016.

If the transition were to end today, the registers would therefore decrease in size by 1.9 million entries, with some registers decreasing significantly more than others. While there is still work to be done between now and December 2015 which we expect will reduce this number, it does provide an indication of the maximum potential impact of ending the transition this year.

Assessment and recommendation

It is likely that many of the entries that would be removed from the register when the transition ends will be redundant (i.e. they relate to people who are no longer resident at that address). However, at this time, we **cannot tell** how many are in fact for electors who are still resident and eligible to be registered to vote but who are not registered individually. We also **cannot tell** how this balance between redundant entries and those for individuals who are still resident and eligible to remain registered at that particular address varies across and within different local authority areas.

The Commission believes that there should be a compelling case for bringing forward the end of the transition. On balance, we believe that it is preferable to retain entries which may be redundant rather than remove now an unknown number of entries which relate to electors who are correctly registered and would otherwise have remained on the register. Retaining redundant entries on the registers does clearly have a negative impact on their accuracy. However, the volume of retained entries is not substantially greater than the volume of entries which were previously carried forward on household registers in the event of non-response to the annual canvass, and we do not

believe that these entries represent an unacceptable risk in terms of their fraudulent use.⁴ This is because ERO activity over the canvass period is designed to enable redundant entries to be identified and removed.

From 1 July 2015, EROs across Great Britain will be carrying out comprehensive household canvass activity which, unlike in 2014/15, will involve sending HEFs – which are designed to identify who is resident at an address and eligible to be registered - to all properties.

This exercise, coupled with other registration activity, will assist EROs with identifying redundant register entries, including those relating to someone who is not registered individually. For example, a response to a HEF with the name of an existing elector crossed out will act as a prompt for the ERO to check that person's entitlement to remain registered and, where appropriate, to trigger statutory processes to remove any redundant entries from the register.

Also, for those retained entries where the ERO believes the elector is still resident and eligible to remain registered at that address, there are specified steps in law that EROs must go through to try to ensure that the individual successfully completes an individual registration application, including sending an invitation to register to that individual and following up any non-responses with two reminders and at least one personal visit.

While EROs will be carrying out this and other public engagement activity over the canvass period, we cannot, at this point, know what the impact of that activity will be, and so cannot state with any certainty what this will do to the current volume of retained register entries.

Given the fact that any Order to bring forward the end of the transition must be made during the three-month period specified in law – between June and August 2015 – the decision on the timing of the end of the transition will therefore need to be taken in the absence of this vital information. It means that Ministers would need to ask Parliament to approve an important decision with no reliable information about how many redundant entries would be removed from the December 2015 registers and how many otherwise eligible electors would need to re-register individually in order to be able to participate in the 2016 polls.

Revised registers must be published by 1 December 2015.⁵ These registers will form the basis of the registers to be used for the May 2016 polls. Who is

⁴ Under the household registration system, the 'carry forward' was a mechanism which enabled EROs to retain entries of individuals in households who had not responded to the canvass but where the ERO did not have sufficient information to remove the electors currently registered at an address.

⁵ EROs are required by law to publish their revised register by 1 December 2015 except in cases where there is a by-election in their area during the period of the canvass (1 July – 1 December 2015), in which case the publication of the register can be postponed until up to 1 February 2016.

or is not included will depend in part on whether the transition ends in December 2015 or continues to December 2016. If the transition does end in December 2015, all remaining entries relating to electors who are not registered individually will be removed on publication of the revised registers. This creates a risk relating to the completeness of the registers and to participation if entries for eligible electors are removed at this point.

A significant number and range of polls are scheduled to take place across Great Britain in May 2016: elections to the Scottish Parliament; the National Assembly for Wales; the Mayor of London and London Assembly; Police and Crime Commissioners across England (except in London) and Wales; and local government elections in many areas of England.

The European Union Referendum Bill, which specifies that a referendum on the UK's continued membership of the European Union must be held by no later than 31 December 2017, is also currently being considered by the UK Parliament. It is therefore possible that a UK-wide referendum could also be held at some point in 2016.

Electoral registers are also used for other purposes, in particular determining the distribution and boundaries of parliamentary constituencies and other electoral areas. The registers published in December 2015 will be used as the basis for calculating the size of constituencies as part of the next scheduled UK Parliamentary boundary review. However, we have consistently stated that the Commission's focus is that the electoral registers support and enable effective participation in elections and referendums by all those who want to take part.

Taking into account the data and evidence which is available to us at this point and the significant polls which are scheduled for May 2016, we recommend that Ministers should not make an order to bring forward the end of the transition to IER. We recommend that the end date for the transition should remain, as currently provided for in law, December 2016.

Looking ahead

Regardless of when the transition ends, whether in December 2015 or December 2016, it is essential that focus is maintained on ensuring that electoral registers are as accurate and complete as possible.

As in December 2014 in England and Wales and March 2015 in Scotland, publication of the revised registers in December 2015 will be a key milestone but work will need to continue beyond this to ensure that as many people as possible are registered to vote in respect of the correct address in advance of the May 2016 polls

Throughout the period leading up to the May 2016 polls, EROs, the Commission and others will need to build on the significant work undertaken since the start of the transition to maximise registration.

Also regardless of when the transition ends, there remains more that can be done to further improve the electoral registration process across the UK.

We will continue to explore options for further improvements; and others with an interest in ensuring accurate and complete electoral registers, including EROs, political parties and elected representatives, will also expect and seek further improvements to current processes. The UK Government will therefore need to ensure that it retains the capacity to focus on and manage further change to electoral registration policy and legislation in the medium and long term.

There is, for example, potential to build on the many interactions citizens already have with a wide range of public services to help increase both the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers. We will encourage and work with Governments and EROs to develop workable proposals for prompting people to register to vote or update their registration details at key points when they use other public services, such as applying for or receiving benefits or tax credits, changing their GP, applying for a driving license or renewing their passport. This will, however, depend heavily on securing strong inter- and cross-Government commitments to make the necessary changes to agency-wide processes, forms and websites.

Additionally, while the data matching and data mining pilot schemes carried out by EROs in 2012 and 2013 have not yet successfully identified a workable model for using data from central government departments and agencies to identify potentially eligible electors, we will continue to support and encourage the UK Government to develop and test proposals for new tools, including using trusted local data, to help EROs meet their statutory duties.

1 Introduction

Background

1.1 On 31 January 2013 the Electoral Registration and Administration Act (ERA Act) received Royal Assent, paving the way for the introduction of individual electoral registration (IER), whereby each person is responsible for registering to vote individually. In addition, people can now register to vote online.

1.2 By law, the transition to IER in Great Britain, which began in summer 2014, is currently scheduled to end with publication of the revised registers in December 2016. At this point, any entries for electors who are not registered individually – that is, those who have not either been confirmed or successfully made individual applications to register to vote - will be removed from the registers.

1.3 However, the legislation allows the UK Government to make an Order - during a specified three-month period between June and August 2015 - which would end the transition 12 months earlier, in December 2015. A statutory instrument containing such an Order would not need to be debated by the UK Parliament, but could be annulled by a resolution of either House of Parliament.

Previous reports on progress with the transition

1.4 So far during the transition to IER, we have reported:

- on the first stage of the transition – the confirmation live run exercise – in October 2014 in [England and Wales](#) and in November 2014 in [Scotland](#)
- following the publication of the revised registers – in December 2014 in [England and Wales](#) and in March 2015 in [Scotland](#)

1.5 Our reports on the revised registers highlighted that we had encountered some issues with the management information functionality of the electoral management software (EMS) systems which EROs use to manage the electoral registers, which had an impact on the quality of the data we received. We made clear in these reports that these data issues not only had a significant impact on our ability to report on progress with implementing the transition at that point but they also raised a real risk that the Commission would not have sufficient information to be able to make a robust, evidence-based assessment and recommendation to inform the UK Government's decision on whether the end of the transition to IER should be brought forward to December 2015.

1.6 Since first identifying this issue after publication of the revised registers in England and Wales in December 2014, we have worked with the EMS suppliers and Cabinet Office in a different way to ensure changes were made to the systems so that the necessary data would be available. While there have still been some issues and we do not have a full, accurate dataset from every ERO, the data is substantially better than that we received for previous reports. Our analysis in this report is therefore based on sufficient, reliable data such that we are able to make a robust assessment of progress to this point.

This report

1.7 This report provides our assessment of progress with the transition up to the publication of the registers in force for the May 2015 polls, and sets out our recommendation to the UK Government on the timing of the end of the transition.

1.8 **Chapter 2** of this report provides background on the IER transition to date and summarises what registration activity will take place over the remainder of 2015.

1.9 **Chapter 3** contains an analysis of the registers in force for the May 2015 polls, including an assessment of the total number of entries on the electoral registers and levels of variations in the number of entries on the registers for different areas.

1.10 **Chapter 4** sets our recommendation to the UK Government on whether the end of the transition to IER should be brought forward from December 2016.

2 The transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER)

2.1 We have recommended since 2003 that Great Britain should move to a system of IER. In January 2013 the UK Parliament passed legislation to move to IER in Great Britain, and the transition began in England and Wales in June 2014 and in Scotland in September 2014, immediately after the independence referendum.

Preparing for the transition

2.2 Changing the electoral registration system required careful planning, which in turn has helped to facilitate effective implementation.

2.3 The Electoral Registration Transformation Programme (ERTP) was established by the Cabinet Office to oversee all aspects of the implementation of IER.

2.4 The Cabinet Office was responsible for the delivery of the IER Digital Service required to support Individual Electoral Registration (IER), including ensuring appropriate controls were in place around data security and that guidance was issued to Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and their staff on the changes to IT infrastructure and IT management processes. Additionally, the Cabinet Office has been responsible for funding arrangements to support the transition

2.5 In preparation for their critical role in delivering IER, EROs undertook considerable work well in advance of the start of the transition in preparation for the change, and the Commission and the Cabinet Office worked together to support them with this work.

2.6 The Commission provided comprehensive written guidance for EROs to support them in planning for and delivering well-run electoral registration services throughout the transition to IER. We also made available a range of resources, including template letters, forms and envelopes, and template text, branding, leaflets and advertisements for use in local public engagement activities.

2.7 To support the public engagement and registration activity undertaken locally by EROs we worked with the UK Government and others to develop and coordinate a programme of public awareness activity to make sure electors understood what they needed to do under the new registration system. To ensure the registration message reached a wide audience we undertook stakeholder and partnership work and ran a mass-media public

awareness campaign across TV, digital and outdoor media. Further detail on our partnership work and public awareness campaign can be found from paragraph 2.51.

2.8 In September 2013, following a period of consultation, we published a new performance standards framework which was designed to support EROs in planning for and delivering the transition to IER. The framework reflects what we and the UK Electoral Advisory Board⁶ agreed that EROs need to do in order to ensure a successful transition to IER.

2.9 The standards were developed around the key challenges facing EROs in the transition, with a focus on what EROs would need to do and know in order to effectively deliver the transition and to determine whether these challenges were being met. There are two standards: the first covering the planning phase and the second covering the delivery phase.

2.10 The objective of performance standard 1 was to ensure that all EROs had in place a local public engagement strategy reflecting their own specific challenges, taking into account their confirmation dry run results, and an implementation plan which set out how they planned to deliver the transition as a whole.

2.11 We reported in March 2014 that we were confident that all EROs had the necessary strategies and plans in place to be able to meet the challenges of IER in their local area and so were meeting the first of our two performance standards designed to support the delivery of the transition to IER.

2.12 The objective of performance standard 2 is to ensure that EROs deliver their strategies and plans, using available data to monitor progress and make amendments where necessary to ensure they remain appropriate. This includes EROs' work with entries which relate to electors who are not registered individually, as well as their work to identify and target potential new electors and under-registered groups.

2.13 We will provide a final assessment of ERO performance against the second standard in spring 2016, following conclusion of the 2015 canvass. At this stage in the transition we are content that all EROs are currently delivering their plans effectively and are on track to meet the standard.

Confirmation Live Run (CLR)

2.14 The first stage in the transition to IER involved the matching of existing entries on the electoral registers against the Department for Work and

⁶ The UK Electoral Advisory Board (EAB) is an advisory group convened by the Electoral Commission consisting of senior Electoral Registration and Returning Officers, and with representation from SOLACE (the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives) and the AEA (the Association of Electoral Administrators). The EAB gives the Commission strategic advice about matters relating to elections, referendums and electoral registration.

Pensions (DWP) database as well as locally held data, in order to identify which records could be automatically transferred to the IER registers. This process, known as the Confirmation Live Run (CLR), began in June 2014 in England and Wales and September 2014 in Scotland.⁷

2.15 Entries for electors that could be positively matched were confirmed and transferred directly to the new IER register. Those individuals not matched were written to by their ERO and asked to re-register by providing additional information (National Insurance number and date of birth).

2.16 Based on the CLR data matching:

- 87% of entries in Great Britain – equivalent to 40.5 million register entries – were positively matched and directly transferred to the new IER register
- 13% of entries – totalling approximately 6 million - could not be matched.⁸

2.17 The scale of the challenge facing EROs after the CLR varied across Great Britain as the proportion of electors matched at local authority/council and ward level varied considerably. It ranged from 59% in Hackney to 97% in Epping Forest and by ward the rate ranged from 7% in Oxford's Holywell ward to 100% in Lancaster's University ward.⁹

2.18 In addition, our published analysis of the CLR results – carried out at ward level using demographic data – found that areas with higher concentrations of private renters, young people, students and people not born in the UK had a lower match rate. People in these groups were also found to be less likely to be correctly registered, mainly as a result of population movement (more likely to move home) and participation in the electoral process (less likely to vote).¹⁰

⁷ A dry-run of this process – known as the 'confirmation dry run' or 'CDR' – was carried out in summer 2013.

⁸ The full dataset can be accessed on the Electoral Commission's website:

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/our-research/electoral-registration-research>

⁹ The ERO for Lancaster used data from the University Registrar to increase the match rate in University ward from 0.3% following DWP matching to 100% following local data matching. The ERO understood that some of the electors confirmed would be students who were no longer resident on campus (e.g. they completed their degree in June 2014 and will not return to the campus in September/October) and so followed up with the university in order to access more up to date information after the start of term. This allowed them to start the process of removing from the register entries relating to those students who had left campus.

¹⁰ The Electoral Commission, *Analysis of the Confirmation Live Run in England and Wales* (October 2014) and *Analysis of the Confirmation Live Run in Scotland* (November 2014) All our studies on electoral registration found a strong link between population mobility and turnout and electoral registration. Reports are available on the Electoral Commission's website: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/our-research/electoral-registration-research>.

2.19 The results were largely in line with the results from the test of the confirmation process in 2013, and meant that time and resources could be focused on targeting those existing electors who could not be matched, as well as those not currently on the registers at all.

2.20 On receipt of their CLR results, EROs were able to review their public engagement strategies – which had been developed based on results from the dry-run of the confirmation process – in order to ensure they had the right plans in place to be able to target those who were not registered individually or not currently registered at all.

2.21 We worked with EROs and their staff during this period to support them with reviewing their plans and, subsequently, to monitor their progress with delivering them.

Write-out

2.22 The write-out involved EROs sending confirmation letters to those electors who were confirmed through the CLR process and so could be automatically transferred onto the new IER register; and invitations to register to those who were not confirmed. In England and Wales this process began from July 2014 and in Scotland from October 2014.¹¹

2.23 Electors who were positively matched as part of the confirmation process were sent a confirmation letter informing them that they had been automatically transferred on to the IER registers and did not need to take any additional action.

2.24 Electors who could not be positively matched and automatically transferred to the new IER registers were sent an invitation to register, informing them that they needed to re-register by providing some more information and providing details of how to do this.

2.25 Anyone who could not provide the required information – National Insurance Number and date of birth – could use an exceptions or attestation process in order to become individually registered.¹²

¹¹ The precise start date of the write-out varied between EROs as a result of factors including the local data matching processes they followed and how long they took and practical factors such as IT systems and arrangements for printing and delivering letters and forms.

¹² The *exceptions* process is used by EROs when an elector cannot be matched against DWP records or using local data sources, or where the applicant cannot provide some or all of the required personal identifiers required to register. It involves asking the applicant to provide documentary evidence to prove their identity. Where the applicant cannot be matched and cannot provide the required personal identifiers or documentary evidence, the *attestation* process is used. This involves a 'person of good standing' on the electoral register verifying the identity of the applicant. Further information on both processes is available in [Part 4 of our guidance for Electoral Registration Officers](#).

2.26 To support the write-out, the Commission ran a public awareness campaign in England and Wales from 3 July until 10 August and in Scotland from 16 October until 13 November, which included TV, outdoor and online advertising. The aim of the campaign was to support local ERO activity by encouraging people to look out for their letter.

Household enquiry forms

2.27 EROs were also required to send Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) – which are designed to identify who is living at a property and eligible to register so that the ERO can invite them to register to vote – to those properties where no electors were registered, or where the ERO believed there may still be other people living at the address who were not registered.

2.28 The processes followed in late 2014/early 2015 were unique in this regard; canvass activity in summer 2015 and all subsequent years will involve sending household enquiry forms to all properties to check who is resident at an address and to identify new electors who can subsequently be invited to register.

The revised registers

2.29 Following the write-out process explained above, EROs in England and Wales were required to publish their revised registers by 1 December 2014 and EROs in Scotland were required to do so by 2 March 2015.¹³

1 December 2014 electoral registers in England and Wales

2.30 The Commission reported in February 2015 on the 1 December 2014 registers in England and Wales. Our report highlighted that we had encountered some issues with the management information functionality of the EMS systems which had an impact on the quality of the data we received. We reported that these data issues not only had a significant impact on our ability to report on progress with implementing the transition to date; they also raised a real risk that we would not have sufficient information to be able to make a robust, evidence-based assessment and recommendation to inform the UK Government's decision on whether to make an Order that the end of the transition to IER should be brought forward to December 2015.

2.31 The report made clear that unless the data issues were resolved, it would be highly unlikely that the Commission would be able to recommend

¹³ EROs were required by law to publish their revised register by 1 December 2014 except in cases where there was a by-election in their area during the period of the canvass (1 July – 1 December 2014), in which case the publication of the register could be postponed until up to 1 February 2015.

that the end of the transition be brought forward to December 2015 in any circumstances.

2.32 Since the publication of our February report, the Cabinet Office have been working with us and the EMS suppliers in a different way in order to ensure that the data collected relating to the registers in force for the May 2015 elections was more accurate and reliable. In particular, there were regular meetings to ensure there was a clear and shared understanding of what each piece of requested data was intended to cover.

2.33 The December registers contained approximately 920,000 fewer entries than the registers published in February/March 2014 following the 2013 canvass, which indicated a decrease of approximately 2%. Results ranged widely, e.g. in Ceredigion (-12%), Cardiff (-11%) and Oxford (-11%) the register reduced in size, while in other areas, like Wellingborough (+6%) and East Devon (+5%), there was an increase.

2.34 The overall decrease in the electorate size between February/March 2014 and December 2014 was likely to be the result of the lack of comprehensive household canvass activity in 2014. Our analysis also identified particular challenges in registering three traditionally under-registered groups – home movers, students and attainers.

2.35 Estimates based on the data available (339 authorities) indicated there were 266,144 attainers on the electoral registers in England and Wales in December 2014. When compared against the figures from the same authorities, this suggested a reduction of approximately 33% from February/March 2014, equating to roughly 132,000 fewer attainers. This fall in the number of attainers did not necessarily mean that those who were previously included on the register as attainers had been removed: attainers on the February/March 2014 register would, in many cases, have reached voting age since they were first included on the register and so would have been shown on the revised register as ordinary electors. However, it did demonstrate that new attainers were not being added at the same rate as in previous years.

2.36 The December registers also illustrated a specific challenge in registering students at their term-time address, adding to our previous research which had already identified students as a typically under-registered group.

2.37 The report identified urgent actions for the Commission, EROs and others to maximise registration in advance of the May 2015 polls. Information on these actions and how they were taken forward can be found in 'Maximising registration activity' below.

March 2015 electoral registers in Scotland

2.38 In April 2015 the Commission reported on the 2 March 2015 registers in Scotland. The report identified similar issues to those we encountered in relation to the collection of data in England and Wales, resulting in not all

EROs being able to provide the accurate management information data that we expected. While we had been working with Cabinet Office and EMS suppliers to resolve the data issues we identified following publication of the revised registers in England and Wales, this work had focused on improving data collected around the May 2015 registers, and it had not been possible to improve the process in time to collect data on the revised registers in Scotland.

2.39 There was an increase in the number of register entries year on year with the March 2015 registers containing 18,000 more entries than the March 2014 registers, an increase of 0.4%.

2.40 However, there were 145,593 fewer entries on the revised registers than were registered to vote at the referendum in September 2014, which indicated a decrease of approximately 3.4%. The number of those registered to vote at the referendum included all those eligible to vote in the referendum, including 16 and 17 year olds, some of whom would not have been eligible to be included on the March 2015 registers because of their age. This meant that comparing the total electorate at the referendum with the total electorate in March 2015 risked overstating the level of the decrease. Nevertheless, the analysis found that the number of register entries for those aged 18 and over had fallen by 1.8% (or 76,592 register entries) between September 2014 and March 2015.

2.41 The decrease in the electorate size between September 2014 and March 2015 was likely to be the result of the lack of comprehensive household canvass activity since the end of the 2013 canvass. This meant that recent home movers had not been captured as effectively as they would have been during a typical annual canvass and was the same issue we identified in our report on the England and Wales December 2014 electoral registers. Additionally, high levels of public engagement in the referendum meant that a significant volume of registration applications were made shortly before polling day impacting on the number of entries on the register. However, because when an elector was registered at a new address there was often a lag before their register entry at their previous address was removed this may not have been reflected in the registers at the referendum.

Maximising registration activity

2.42 Considerable work was undertaken by EROs, the Commission and many others following the publication of the revised registers to maximise registration ahead of 20 April – the registration deadline for the May 2015 polls – in order to ensure that as many people as possible were able to participate in the May 2015 polls.

Household notification letters

2.43 For all EROs, the period leading up to the May 2015 polls provided an opportunity to:

- encourage those people missing from the register to apply
- check that there were no inaccurate entries in the register

2.44 Sending a letter to all households showing who was registered to vote at that particular address was identified as a key activity which could contribute to helping EROs to ensure that their registers were as accurate and complete as possible ahead of the May polls.

2.45 In December 2014 we strongly recommended that EROs across Great Britain undertake an audit of their registers and **write to all households** – regardless of whether or not they had any registered electors – in early 2015, in good time before the May polls.

2.46 We provided detailed guidance to support EROs in preparing for and carrying out this registration activity and a template letter for this purpose. This ‘household notification letter’ (HNL) showed who was registered to vote at that particular address and prompted anyone who was not yet registered to do so.

2.47 Cabinet Office made available £6.8m to EROs across Great Britain to support activity to maximise registration – many EROs used their share to fund sending out HNLs.

2.48 This approach had a number of clear benefits, all of which could contribute to helping EROs to ensure that their registers were as accurate and complete as possible ahead of the May polls:

- Prompting those who had not yet registered to do so
- Helping to pick up those who had recently moved within or into the registration area
- Giving residents an opportunity to check their details on the register were accurate

2.49 EROs in England and Wales carried out this work in January/February following publication of the revised registers in December 2014. EROs in Scotland carried out this activity throughout February and March 2015.

2.50 The data we collected following publication of the registers to be used for the May 2015 polls helps to illustrate the impact of this and other activity, showing the changes since the publication of the revised registers in December 2014 in England and Wales and March 2015 in Scotland. A detailed analysis of this data can be found in Chapter 3 of this report.

Partnership work to target typically under-registered groups

2.51 Partnership working has proved to be an important strand of national and local engagement activity, building on, promoting and complementing other work to help to ensure that as many people as possible are registered to vote. In preparing for and delivering the transition to IER, EROs have benefitted from developing effective partnerships: working across and beyond their local authority, with local groups including political parties and campaigners, to encourage people to take the action they needed to be registered under IER.

2.52 EROs have undertaken significant work to boost registration locally. For example, a large number of EROs worked in partnership with Operation Black Vote to arrange for their registration bus to visit their area to help to encourage BME residents to register to vote. Additionally, in key university towns, EROs built on partnerships with local universities, the National Union of Students (NUS) and other youth organisations to host registration events to maximise registration amongst students and young people.

2.53 As part of the Commission's public awareness activity to support the write-out process in 2014, we began forming partnerships with a wide range of corporate, public and voluntary organisations to use their established communication channels to help extend our reach into groups we identified as being typically under-registered. [A full list of our partners is available on our website.](#)

2.54 We have since worked closely with national partners such as the NUS, the Association of Colleges, Citizens Advice Bureau, Operation Black Vote, the Learner Driving Centre (a major driving instruction provider) and Mencap to draw on their experiences and to target messages at various groups and encourage voter registration amongst their key target audiences, which include groups who are typically under-registered. Such organisations have far greater reach into under registered groups than any single national body could achieve by itself, while they also help to explain the message in a way that resonates with voters in different contexts.

2.55 In December 2014, we created a partnership pack filled with resources that EROs and organisations could use to run their own registration drives. We also carried out a number of different streams of work with our partner organisations, for example, providing blog posts for Which? and assisting Operation Black Vote with materials for their registration bus. We also provided a host of resources for use by partners, including infographics for movers/renters and young people for use across social media platforms, and posters, web banners and web buttons with messaging tailored to specific groups such as students. We are aware that EROs utilised these resources to run local leaflet, poster, press and social media campaigns in their areas.

2.56 Additionally, we issued a fortnightly e-bulletin to our partners to share ideas and update them on the progress of the campaign. Also, on 5 February, National Voter Registration Day – which was initiated by campaign organisation Bite the Ballot – took place, with many organisations using social media to spread the registration message. We published a number of template materials to assist them with this – including tweets, social media

posts, a press release and a blog – and worked with Facebook to provide a post in people’s news feeds on the day to prompt online registrations.

The Commission’s public awareness campaign

2.57 In the period leading up to the May 2015 polls, the Commission ran a public awareness campaign to support the work being carried out by EROs locally.

2.58 On 16 March, the Commission launched a national public awareness campaign which included television, catch-up TV and online advertising. The objective of the campaign was to encourage people to register to vote ahead of the 20 April deadline. The advertising was targeted to reach all adults, but with a focus on groups that our research had identified as being less likely to be registered to vote – including some Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities, students, people who have recently moved home, people who rent and young people. This involved ensuring that our advert was shown on certain TV stations at specific times to capture our target audiences and that our digital advertising appeared on a range of websites that are known to be accessed by members of these target groups.

2.59 As a result of the issues we identified in our reports on the revised registers relating to registration figures amongst students and young people, we established specific streams of online and mobile advertising targeting students and attainers. Additionally, we worked in partnership with Facebook to create posts and digital adverts aimed at attainers and students, and worked in partnership with UCAS who provided us with free online advertising on their websites.

2.60 As part of our work to encourage registration by young people and students we also worked with Channel 4 to produce advertising using the cast and production style of their hit show Gogglebox. This is the biggest show on Channel 4 performing particularly well with a young audience. The advert was shot to look like a segment of the show and was aired during the show itself, as well as at other targeted spot times. The advert proved to have a big impact: after the advert aired during the show on Friday 10 April, visitors to gov.uk/register-to-vote peaked at 4,995, compared to around 700 in the minutes before our advert was shown.

2.61 Our public relations work also included asking media companies responsible for broadcasting leaders’ debates to promote voter registration during these and other key election programmes. Both ITV and the BBC highlighted the online registration site specifically in their leaders’ debate programmes, with clear spikes in visits to the registration site being recorded on these occasions: when the registration site was highlighted in the BBC debate that aired on 16 April the number of people visiting the site in the immediate moments afterwards peaked at almost 25,000, one of the single largest spikes in activity throughout the campaign.

2.62 Our public awareness work also included providing template resources and tools for EROs and ROs to use locally as part of their public engagement work, and using as many other media opportunities as we could to boost the message nationally.

2.63 To assess the performance of our campaign we undertook independent tracking research before the start and towards the end of the campaign period. 81% of people across the UK reported having seen an element of the campaign against a target of 60-70%.

2.64 To measure the amount of additional entries on the electoral registers added during our campaign, we have compiled data from completed applications and cross-referenced this with data we have collected from EROs relating to the registers in force at the May 2015 election.

2.65 Our evaluation report on the effectiveness of our campaign will be published in July 2015.

May 2015 election registers

2.66 The registration deadline for the May 2015 polls was 20 April, and the final election notice of alteration was published on 29 April.

2.67 Electors who were not registered individually but who had been retained on the register under the IER transitional provisions were still able to participate in the May 2015 polls. However only those electors who were registered individually could be granted an absent vote: existing electors who were not registered individually could only vote in person at their allocated polling station.

2.68 The Commission collected data from all EROs relating to these election registers. The data we have received shows that the local government registers in May 2015 contained 46,814,081 entries. This is an increase of 1% since February/March 2014, when the last registers were published under the household registration system. The parliamentary registers contained 45,336,013 entries. This is an increase of 3% since February/March 2014. A detailed analysis of this data can be found in Chapter 3 of this report.

2015 canvass

2.69 From 1 July 2015, EROs across Great Britain will be carrying out comprehensive household canvass activity which, unlike in 2014/15, will involve sending Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) – which are designed to identify who is resident at an address and eligible to be registered – to all properties. As part of the canvass, any new potential electors identified by each ERO will be sent an invitation to register and a registration application form. If no response is received, EROs must take specified steps – including issuing two reminders and at least one personal visit – to follow up with any non-responders.

2.70 This exercise, coupled with other registration activity, will also assist EROs with identifying redundant register entries, including those relating to existing electors who are registered individually. For example, a response to a HEF with the name of an existing elector crossed out will act as a prompt for the ERO to check that person's entitlement to remain registered and, where appropriate, to trigger statutory processes to remove any redundant entries from the register.

2.71 Additionally, for those retained entries where the ERO believes the elector is still resident and eligible to remain registered at that address, there are specified steps in law that EROs must go through to try to ensure that the individual successfully completes an individual registration application, including sending an invitation to register to that individual and following up any non-responses with two reminders and at least one personal visit. The only circumstances in which this would not be the case are where, from checking any records available to the ERO, they have reason to believe that the person is no longer resident at that address (in which case they will take steps to remove the entry from the register), or if they have made an application to register.

2.72 All this work will be supported by local engagement activity, with a particular focus on typically under-registered groups and those electors not currently registered individually.

2.73 All EROs should be updating their local public engagement strategies ahead of the 2015 canvass, reflecting the activity they intend to carry out to target under-registered groups, such as attainees. All EROs will need to ensure that their engagement strategies reflect the activity they will carry out to maximise the number of attainees who are registered, and working with schools and colleges within their area is a key area of activity we will expect all EROs to explore. Through our performance standards work, we will continue to support EROs in the process of updating their engagement strategies and subsequently with delivering the activities identified within them.

2.74 In Scotland, potential changes to the franchise will likely see this activity extended to cover 14/15 year olds. Following the publication of the Smith Commission proposals on further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament, an order was tabled in the UK and Scottish Parliaments on 20 January modifying the Scotland Act 1998: this order has now been passed, and as such transfers powers to the Scottish Parliament to enable it to extend the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds in time for the 2016 Scottish Parliament election and the council elections scheduled for May 2017.

2.75 The Scottish Government has now published a bill which would enable this; the bill is expected to pass all stages in the Scottish Parliament by summer recess in late June 2015. We will continue to work with Scottish Government officials to ensure that the franchise is extended in a way that ensures 16 and 17 year olds can participate fully. We will also continue to work with EROs to ensure that their registration plans, including their wider public engagement strategies, reflect the additional work that will be involved

to target information at those 16 and 17 year olds who will be eligible to vote, and those 14 and 15 year olds who will be eligible to register. The Commission will be supporting the local activity of EROs with a public awareness campaign targeting 15, 16 and 17 year olds.

2.76 Revised registers must be published by 1 December 2015 on conclusion of the canvass.¹⁴ These registers will form the basis of the registers to be used for the May 2016 polls. Who is or is not included will depend in part on whether the transition ends in December 2015 or continues to December 2016. If the transition does end in December 2015, all remaining entries relating to electors who are not registered individually will be removed on publication of the revised registers.

2.77 We will continue to monitor EROs' preparations for and delivery of the 2015 canvass through our performance standards framework. Our risk-based approach to monitoring will enable us to target our support to EROs where it is most needed. We will use the data we collect from EROs after publication of the revised registers to inform our final assessments of performance, which we will publish in spring 2016.

¹⁴ EROs are required by law to publish their revised register by 1 December 2015 except in cases where there is a by-election in their area during the period of the canvass (1 July – 1 December 2015), in which case the publication of the register can be postponed until up to 1 February 2016.

3 May 2015 electoral registers data

3.1 In this chapter, we present data for the electoral registers in Great Britain which were published on 29 April 2015 and in force at the May 2015 polls. This data illustrates the state of the registers at that point and the changes made to the electoral registers since the publication of the revised registers in December 2014 in England and Wales and in March 2015 in Scotland.

3.2 Historic data as well as evidence from previous research conducted by the Electoral Commission on the quality of the electoral registers are presented throughout the chapter to provide an assessment of the registers during the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

3.3 In particular, we look at data at specific points relevant to the IER transition:

- **February/March 2014:** the last registers compiled under the previous system of household registration were published in February 2014 (England) and March 2014 (Scotland and Wales). Our most recent assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the registers was conducted on these registers, and this is our baseline measure for assessing the impact of IER on accuracy and completeness.
- **December 2014/March 2015:** publication of the first revised registers since the introduction of IER were published in December 2014 (England and Wales) and in March 2015 (Scotland).
- **May 2015:** the registers that were published across Great Britain on 29 April 2015 and which were in force at the May 2015 elections.

Headline figures and summary

3.4 Data collected from all 380 Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in Great Britain shows that:

- The **number of entries on the local government registers in May 2015 was 46,814,081**. The total number of entries increased by 3% since December 2014/March 2015 and by 1% since February/March 2014, when the last registers were published under the household registration system.
- There are significant variations across Great Britain: when compared to December 2014, changes range from -2% to +11%, while against the February/March 2014 figures the range is -8% to +10%.
- The **parliamentary registers contained 45,336,013 entries**. This is an increase of 3% since December 2014 and 1% since February/March 2014.

- **Approximately 1.9 million register entries on the local government registers are for electors who are not registered individually and so are being retained under the IER transitional arrangements.** This represents 4% of all register entries. Retained entries as a percentage of total register entries vary by local authority and range from just over 0% to 23%%, and all of these areas will have at least one election in May 2016. Between December 2014 and May 2015, fewer retained entries were ‘resolved’ than during the first six months of IER.¹⁵

3.5 The increased number of entries has been achieved through a high level of additions to the registers, significantly higher than in the first six months of IER, as people applied to register to vote at the May 2015 elections.

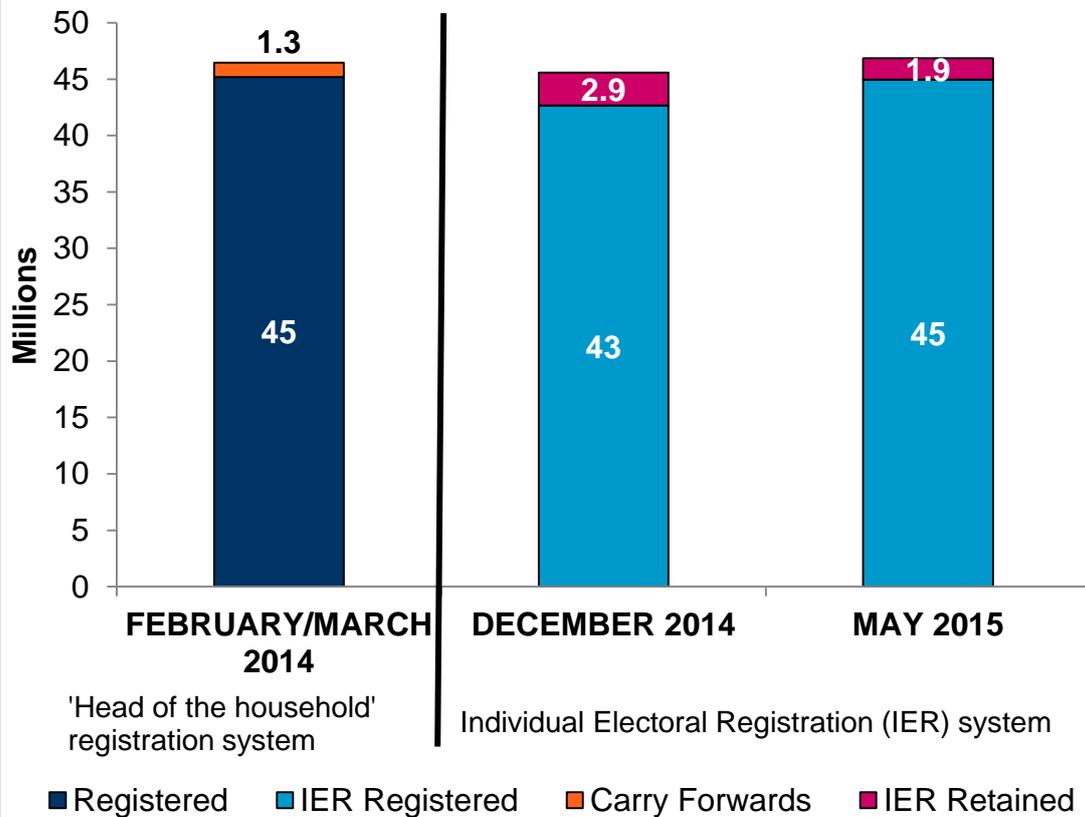
Registration-focused activities taking place in the run up to the May 2015 elections including the household notification letters (HNL), online registration and public awareness work also had a positive impact by providing prompts and processes to facilitate registration. Entries were also being deleted at a lower rate than under the household registration system.

3.6 The data collected for this report does not allow for an assessment of the current level of accuracy and completeness of the registers or any changes since the start of IER. There are factors that could have both improved and deteriorated their quality.

3.7 The chart below illustrates the size and composition of the registers, for the whole of Great Britain, at several key points.

¹⁵ Under the IER transitional arrangements, EROs can retain entries relating to electors who were not confirmed through the CLR process and have not successfully completed an individual registration application. Such electors will be removed from the register published at the end of the transition. Retained entries are ‘resolved’ where either the elector makes a successful application to be registered individually or where the ERO removes the entry from the register as they are no longer satisfied that the individual is entitled to remain registered. Further information on the circumstances in which EROs can remove entries from the register can be found in Part 4: Maintaining the register throughout the year of our guidance for EROs, which is available on our website at http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/162578/Part-4-Maintaining-the-register-throughout-the-year.pdf.

Figure 3.1: Total number of entries on the local government register and entries carried forward during the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER).



The February/March 2014 registers were the last ones compiled under the previous system. Under the household system, EROs could 'carry forward' individuals in who had not responded to the canvass but where the ERO did not have sufficient information to remove that entry.

Data and limits to the analysis

3.8 There is not a single electoral register in Great Britain but one for each local authority area in England, Scotland and Wales. Each of the 380 EROs in Great Britain has their own electoral management software (EMS) system that they use to manage their registers. There are four EMS suppliers who serve EROs in Great Britain, and there are also three EROs in Scotland, representing seven local councils, who have in-house EMS systems.¹⁶

¹⁶ The Cabinet Office contracted directly with the four EMS suppliers and the authorities with in-house systems to ensure they carried out the development work which was needed to ensure the software was able to deliver all aspects of IER. This work included the automated management information reporting functionality which would provide the data to inform our assessments of progress with the transition.

3.9 During the transition, we have previously reported on some issues encountered with the management information reporting functionality of these systems.¹⁷

3.10 Since the publication of our February report, the Cabinet Office have been working with us and the EMS suppliers in a different way in order to ensure that the data collected relating to the registers in force for the May 2015 elections was more accurate and reliable. In particular, there were regular meetings to ensure there was a clear and shared understanding of what each piece of requested data was intended to cover.

3.11 However, some problems remained, for example with the definition of some data fields in particular EMS systems. Also, some EROs still expressed concerns over the accuracy of some the figures in their data reports. Although we are confident that the aggregated data provides an accurate picture of the state of the May 2015 registers in Great Britain, detailed analysis at local authority level should be treated with caution.

Electoral register entries

3.12 Based on the data collected from all 380 EROs in Great Britain, the total number of entries on the **May 2015 local government registers** was **46,814,081**.¹⁸

3.13 Compared to the December 2014 electoral registers – the first revised registers published under IER – there has been an increase of approximately **1.25 million** entries, or **+3%**.¹⁹

3.14 The May 2015 registers also contain approximately **360,000** more entries (**+1%**) than the last registers published under the household system of registration in February/March 2014.

¹⁷ In our February report, we reported severe limits to the data analysis that could be conducted on the England and Wales December 2014 register data. As a result, we could not provide a comprehensive picture of the state of the register, most notably on the number of electors who had been retained on the register under the IER transitional arrangements. As these entries will be removed from the registers at the end of the transition to IER, this and other information contained in the EMS reporting facility is fundamental to being able to provide an evidence-based recommendation on when to end the transition.

¹⁸ EROs maintain different electoral registers based on the franchise for different election types. The parliamentary register, used for UK Parliamentary general elections, includes entries for UK, Commonwealth and Irish citizens; the local government register also includes citizens of the European Union. Subject to a small number of exceptions (such as overseas electors, who are only entitled to be on the parliamentary register, and Peers, who are only on the local government register), the parliamentary register is effectively a subset of the local government register, so in this report we present data referring to the local government register as it represents the wider franchise.

¹⁹ Due to the Scottish independence referendum, the publication of the registers in Scotland was postponed to March 2015.

3.15 The total number of electors on the **May 2015 parliamentary registers** was **45,336,013**, which is over 1.2 million more entries than in December 2014 (**+3%**). The May 2015 parliamentary registers were 1% larger (414,000 more entries) than those published in February/March 2014.

3.16 Table 3.1 below shows the total number of entries in Great Britain between December 2010 and May 2015 for the parliamentary and local government registers. In summary, this shows that:

- The registers in Great Britain increased on average by 1% year on year between 2004 and February/March 2014.
- In February/March 2014, when EROs published the last registers under the household registration system, some EROs started preparing for the transition by removing entries that were carried forward on the register as a result of non-response to the annual canvass.²⁰ This was because these entries could not subsequently be confirmed and automatically transferred onto the new IER registers under the data matching arrangements used during IER transition. This resulted in a slight reduction of the total electoral register size (-0.1%).²¹
- With the publication of the first revised registers under IER, in December 2014 in England and Wales and in March 2015 in Scotland, the number of entries decreased by 2% from February/March 2014. In our previous reports, we concluded that this decrease was mainly due to the lack of a full household canvass during 2014.²²
- Based on the data collected, both local government and parliamentary registers recorded their highest number of entries in May 2015.

Table 3.1: Total number of register entries in Great Britain: December 2010 - May 2015.

Month of publication	Local government		Parliamentary	
	Entries (incl. attainers)	+/-	Entries (incl. attainers)	+/-
December 2010	45,765,439	+1%	44,654,056	1%
December 2011	46,156,378	+1%	44,894,185	1%

²⁰ Under the household registration system, the 'carry forward' was a mechanism which enabled EROs to retain entries of individuals in households who had not responded to the canvass but where the ERO did not have sufficient information to remove the electors currently registered at an address.

²¹ In our assessment of the last annual canvass under the household registration system, [Analysis of electoral registration data for Great Britain](#) (June 2014), we concluded that the decrease in register entries was due to the removal of carried forward electors in preparation for the transition to IER.

²² The Electoral Commission, [Analysis of the December 2014 electoral registers in England and Wales](#) (February 2015), [Analysis of the revised electoral registers in Scotland](#) (April 2014).

December 2012	46,501,577	+1%	45,123,674	1%
February/March 2014 (last registers under the household registration system)	46,450,773	0%	44,921,574	0%
December 2014 (first revised registers under IER)	45,561,419	-2%	44,092,696	-2%
April 2015 (registers in force at the May 2015 elections)	46,814,081	+3%	45,336,013	3%

Source: Office for National Statistics (2010-2014); the Electoral Commission (2015).²³

Geographical analysis

3.17 While the total number of entries on the registers increased by 3% since December 2014, the variation has not been consistent across Great Britain.

3.18 Table 3.2 shows the trend for England (and English regions), Wales and Scotland between December 2010 and May 2015. The figures show:

- The size of the registers in England is 40,280,863, +3% since December 2014 and +1% since February 2014. The registers in the North East recorded the largest decrease in December 2014 (-4%) and are still smaller in size than before the start of the transition to IER (-2%). All other areas show an increase against both February and December 2014 with London presenting the largest increase (+5% against December 2014).
- Wales saw an increase of 2% since December 2014 but the registers are still smaller in size than before IER (-1%). The changes are mainly determined by variations in Cardiff and Ceredigion.
- In Scotland the number of register entries increased considerably before the independence referendum in September 2014 (+4% between March and September 2014) and then dropped before the publication of the revised registers in March 2015 (-3% between September 2014 and March 2015). The May 2015 registers contained 2% more entries than in March 2015 and 3% more than in March 2014, before the start of the transition to IER (and -1.4% than in September 2014).²⁴

²³ Update October 2015: figure for May 2015 parliamentary register corrected, error due to typo.

²⁴ It is important to note that the number of those registered at the Scottish Independence Referendum includes all those eligible to vote in the referendum, including 16 and 17 year olds, some of whom would have not been eligible to be included on the March 2015 registers because of their age. If 16 and 17 year olds are excluded from the total number of entries in September 2014, the change against the March 2015 registers would be -1.8%.

Table 3.2: Total number of electoral register entries (including attainers) in England, Scotland and Wales: December 2010 - May 2015.

Electoral register entries (including attainers)	December 2010		December 2011		December 2012		February/March 2014		December 2014		May 2015	
England	39,477,978	39,825,843	1%	40,110,036	1%	40,001,780	0%	39,175,274	-2%	40,280,863	3%	
East	4,385,930	4,437,363	1%	4,483,344	1%	4,498,930	0%	4,427,092	-2%	4,530,235	2%	
East Midlands	3,428,913	3,460,372	1%	3,479,324	1%	3,453,109	-1%	3,373,630	-2%	3,475,183	3%	
London	5,715,418	5,796,259	1%	5,839,495	1%	5,876,329	1%	5,738,498	-2%	6,000,745	5%	
North East	1,984,352	2,002,295	1%	2,009,748	0%	1,988,732	-1%	1,913,864	-4%	1,949,647	2%	
North West	5,319,218	5,331,089	0%	5,351,672	0%	5,358,051	0%	5,228,076	-2%	5,340,128	2%	
South East	6,453,819	6,524,324	1%	6,582,962	1%	6,596,590	0%	6,459,179	-2%	6,641,253	3%	
South West	4,107,965	4,131,272	1%	4,159,694	1%	4,120,440	-1%	4,066,898	-1%	4,184,089	3%	
West Midlands	4,180,455	4,217,573	1%	4,241,192	1%	4,178,531	-1%	4,141,641	-1%	4,218,886	2%	
Yorkshire and the Humber	3,901,908	3,925,296	1%	3,962,605	1%	3,931,068	-1%	3,832,332	-3%	3,940,697	3%	
Scotland²⁵	3,985,161	4,008,411	1%	4,063,206	1%	4,120,494	1%	4,131,926	0%	4,223,725	2%	
Wales	2,302,300	2,322,124	1%	2,328,335	0%	2,328,499	0%	2,254,219	-3%	2,309,493	2%	
TOTAL	45,765,439	46,156,378	1%	46,501,577	1%	46,450,773	0%	45,561,419	-2%	46,814,081	3%	

Source: Office for National Statistics (2010-14); the Electoral Commission (2015). Percentages next to the total number of entries show the variations from the previous year.

²⁵ In Scotland the number of register entries increased by 4% between March 2014 and September 2014 and dropped by 3% between September 2014 and March 2015 (-1.8% if 16/17 year olds are excluded – see footnote 23).

Local variations

3.19 The variation at local authority level is greater than at regional/national level. In December 2014/March 2015, changes in the total size of the registers, compared to February/March 2014, ranged from -12% (Ceredigion) to +7% (Wellingborough). We found that local authorities with a high percentage of entries carried forward in previous years and/or with a high concentration of students suffered the biggest drops.²⁶

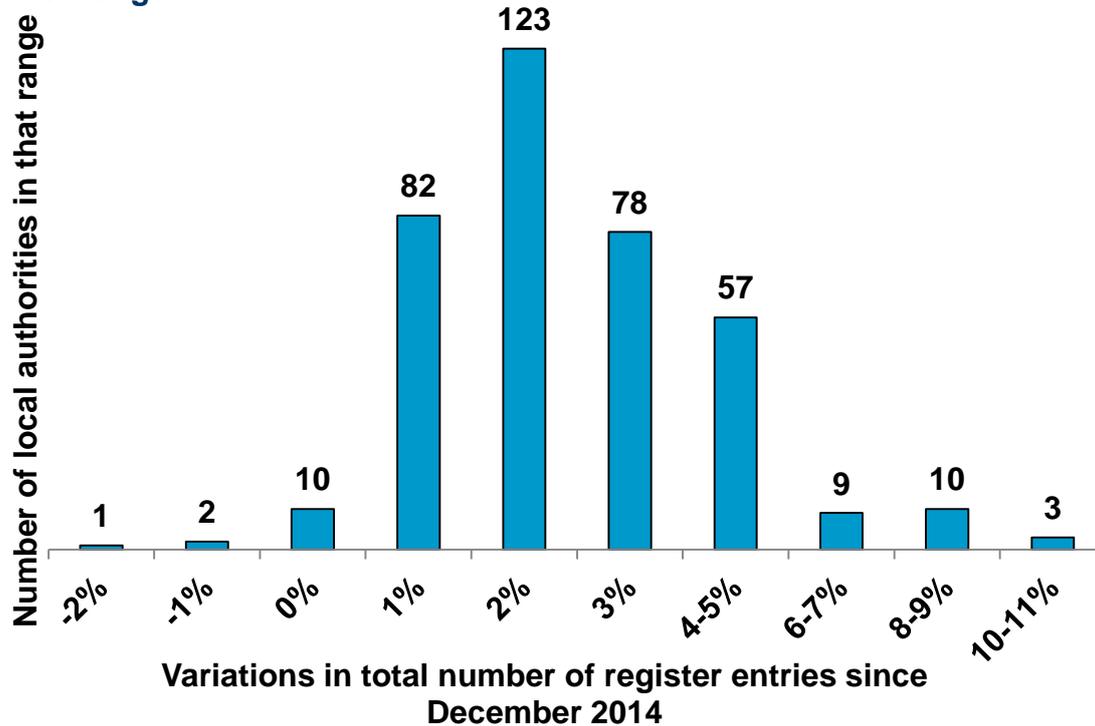
3.20 In May 2015, the difference against the December 2014 register ranges from -2% in Northumberland to +11% in Brighton and Hove and Cambridge. In terms of absolute numbers, Northumberland reported the largest drop in number of entries (more than 5,300) while Leeds sits at the opposite end with an increase of over 24,400 entries (+5%).

3.21 Figure 3.2 below presents the percentage difference in total number of register entries between December 2014 and May 2015 and the number of authorities falling in that range.

3.22 It shows that in May 2015 five local authorities saw the number of register entries decreasing, 10 had almost no variation since December 2014 and all other local authorities - 362 (96%) - recorded an increase.

²⁶ The Electoral Commission, [Analysis of the December 2014 electoral registers in England and Wales](#) (February 2015), [Analysis of the revised electoral registers in Scotland](#) (April 2014).

Figure 3.2: Variations (percentage) in number of register entries between December 2014 and May 2015 by number of authorities in that range.



The base is this table is 375 because the EMS system used by two Valuation Joint Boards (VJB) could only report on aggregated data for the VJB and not for each authority falling within it.

3.23 Comparing the May 2015 registers to the last household registers we see that there is also wide variation from a decrease of 8% in Ceredigion to an increase of 10% in Hackney. Overall, 234 local authority registers are larger than they were before the start of the transition to IER, although for 76 of these the change is less than 1%.

Explaining the increase

3.24 In our reports on the state of the December 2014 registers in England and Wales and March 2015 registers in Scotland, we concluded that the reduction in number of entries was due to changes in the levels of additions and deletions, likely as a result of the lack of comprehensive household canvass activity 2014. Levels of both had dropped but crucially, and unusually, the level of deletions exceeded the level of additions.

3.25 The increase seen in May 2015 is the result of the high volume of electors added since the publication of the revised registers: the number of additions made in this period (December 2014/March 2015 to May 2015) is

equals to approximately 8% of the total number of the May 2015 register entries.²⁷

3.26 The equivalent figure in December 2014 was lower (3%) despite covering a longer period: six months (between 10 June to the end of November 2014) rather than five (from December 2014 to April 2015). Unlike in December 2014, the May 2015 data shows that additions also exceeded deletions (estimated at approximately 5% of the previous registers).

3.27 All our previous studies on the electoral registers have suggested that there is a strong link between participation in elections and referendums and registration: the greater the interest in the election, the higher the level of registrations.²⁸

3.28 Table 3.3 and Figure 3.3 below show how additions increased significantly close to the elections (and the registration deadline of 20 April 2015).

3.29 Table 3.4 below presents the number of additions per month during the write-out period (June to November 2014), the first three and a half months after the publication of the revised registers (December 2014 and 10 March 2015) and between the deadline for applications to be included on the April monthly register update and the publication of the registers in force at the May 2015 elections (11 March 2015 and 29 April 2015). The table shows that registrations (including those for home-movers) were 360% higher in the last month and half before the elections than during the first six months of IER.

Table 3.3: Additions to the register per month since the introduction of IER

Period	Additions per month
10 June – 30 November 2014	244,177
1 December 2014 - 10 March 2015	567,553
11 March 2015 - 28 April 2015	1,123,899

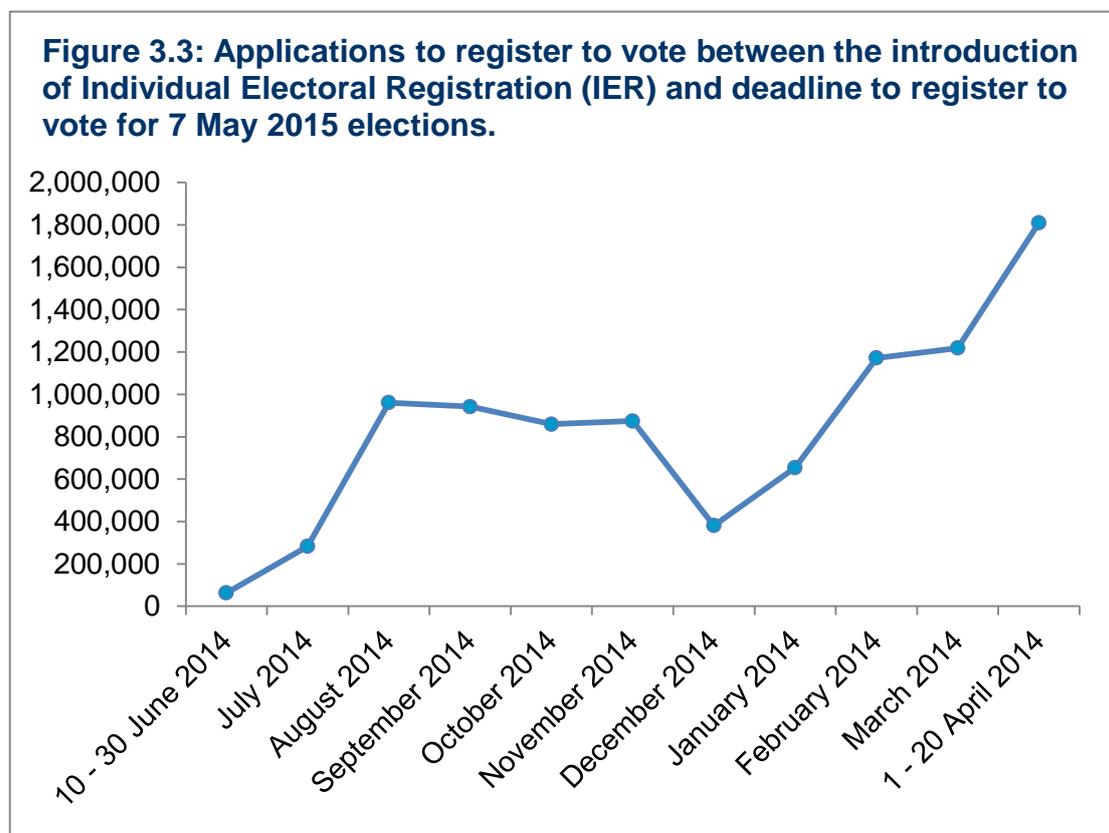
Notes: The figure for June – November 2014 is an estimate based on data from 275 local authorities.

3.30 Figure 3.3 presents the monthly number of applications between the introduction of IER (10 June 2014) and the deadline for registering to vote at

²⁷ The full registers in England and Wales were published in December 2014, in Scotland in March 2015. The data therefore covers a longer period in England and Wales and additions hence additions are higher (8% and 6% respectively) than in Scotland (4%) where the registers were published in March 2015.

²⁸ In our 2014 study on the quality of the register we found that those who regard voting as a duty are significantly more likely to be registered (90%) than those who think 'it's not worth it' (76%) (The Electoral Commission, [The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain](#), July 2014). Also, in Scotland, the size of its registers increased to the highest point ever in September 2014, just before the independence referendum which recorded the highest turnout in more than 50 years.

the May 2015 elections (20 April 2015). One third of all applications made to register to vote were submitted in the last month before the elections alone.



3.31 Anecdotal evidence from some EROs indicates that the **Household Notification Letter (HNL)** helped boost additions and the accuracy of the registers.

3.32 **Online registration** also proved effective, with 77% of all applications made since the introduction of IER having been made online. The service has also been particularly popular among some of those groups who are typically under-registered, such as overseas voters and young people.

3.33 Finally, another positive factor was the public engagement and awareness activity undertaken by EROs, the Commission and many others ahead of the 20 April 2015 registration deadline for the May 2015 elections.

Categories of electors

3.34 In this section we present data for particular categories of electors on the electoral registers.

Attainers

3.35 Based on data collected from 380 EROs, the number of entries for attainers on the May 2015 registers was **247,705**.²⁹

3.36 This indicates that the number has fallen further since December 2014 (-21%), when we reported a drop of approximately 33% since the publication of the register in February/March 2014. This equates to a 47% drop overall between February/March 2014 and May 2015.

Table 3.4: Total number of attainers on the local government registers in Great Britain: December 2010 - May 2015

Publication	Total number of attainers	Variation
December 2010	479,147	-10%
December 2011	474,048	-1%
December 2012	465,616	-2%
February/March 2014 (last registers under the household registration system)	470,398	+1%
December 2014 (first revised registers published under IER)	307,027	-33%
April 2015 (registers in force at the May 2015 elections)	247,705	-21%

Source: Office for National Statistics (2010-2014); the Electoral Commission (2015).

3.37 In our previous reports we noted that the fall in the number of attainers does not mean that those who were previously included on the register as attainers have been removed: attainers on the February/March 2014 register will, in most cases, have reached voting age since they were first included on the revised register and so will now be shown as ordinary electors. However, it does mean that new attainers are not being added at the same rate as in previous years.

3.38 We believe that this decline is largely attributable to the lack of comprehensive household canvass activity in 2014. Household enquiry forms (HEFs) – which are designed to identify who is living at a property and eligible to register so that the ERO can invite them to register to vote – were only required to be sent to properties where no electors were registered, or where the ERO believed there may still be other people living at the address who were not registered. The processes followed in 2014 were unique in this regard; canvass activity in 2015 and all subsequent years will involve sending household enquiry forms to **all** properties to check who is resident at an

²⁹ Attainers are those who are not yet old enough to vote but will turn 18 (i.e. attain voting age) within the twelve month period starting on the 1 December after they make their application.

address and to identify new electors who can subsequently be invited to register, and carrying out follow up activity as required.

3.39 While household notification letters (HNLs) – which were designed to show who was registered to vote at that particular address and to prompt anyone who was not yet registered to do so – were sent in early 2015, they do not appear to have been as effective at prompting attainers to register as they were in getting other electors to either register or update their details. This may have been because the focus at that stage was on registering in order to be able to vote in the May 2015 elections, which the majority of attainers would not have been able to do.

3.40 It is also possible that a lower level of engagement with traditional politics among young people, combined with the shift away from responsibility for attainers resting commonly with parents and guardians, has had some impact.³⁰

3.41 Comprehensive household canvass activity will take place from 1 July 2015 and will involve sending HEFs to all properties. Where no response is received to a HEF, EROs are required to follow up with two reminders and at least one personal visit. Invitations to register will be sent to all attainers identified through this process and again EROs are required to follow up on non-responses with two reminders and at least one personal visit.

3.42 In addition, all EROs should be updating their local public engagement strategies ahead of the 2015 canvass, reflecting the activity they intend to carry out to target under-registered groups, such as attainers. All EROs will need to ensure that their engagement strategies reflect the activity they will carry out to maximise the number of attainers who are registered, and working with schools and colleges within their area is a key area of activity we will expect all EROs to explore. Through our performance standards work, we will continue to support EROs in the process of updating their engagement strategies and subsequently with delivering the activities identified within them.

3.43 We will be collecting further data from EROs on the conclusion of the 2015 canvass, including on the number of attainers, which we will report on in spring 2016.

Overseas

³⁰ Our latest study on the quality of the electoral registers in Great Britain showed registration is significantly lower among those who think 'it's not really worth voting' (The Electoral Commission, *The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain – July 2014*) and turnout among young people (18-34) is lower than among all other age groups (Ipsos MORI, *How Britain voted in 2010*, <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2613/How-Britain-Voted-in>).

3.44 British citizens living abroad can vote in UK Parliamentary general elections and European Parliamentary elections but cannot vote in local elections or in elections to devolved bodies such as the Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales or Greater London Authority.³¹

3.45 Table 3.8 below shows the number of registered overseas electors in the year of the last two UK Parliamentary general elections (December 2010 and May 2015) as well as on the last register published under the household registration system (February/March 2014) and the first revised register published under IER (December 2014).

3.46 **The number of overseas electors in May 2015 was 105,845.** This represents a significant increase since December 2014 (+75%) and February/March 2014 (+570%). The number of registered overseas voters is also significantly higher than in December 2010.³²

3.47 This increase is likely to be due to the new online registration system, also promoted by our campaign, which has made it easier for those living abroad to apply to register to vote.

Table 3.5: Total number of overseas electors between December 2010 and May 2015.

Publication	Total number of overseas electors
December 2010	32,685
February/March 2014	15,818
December 2014	26,884
May 2015	105,845

Postal voters

3.48 Any existing elector who was not registered individually by the time of publication of the revised register in December 2014 in England and Wales and in March 2015 in Scotland lost their absent vote entitlement. While these electors could be retained on the register under the IER transitional arrangements and were still able to vote in person at their allocated polling station, they would only have been able to vote by post at the 7 May 2015 elections if they applied to register individually and re-applied for a postal vote before 5pm on 21 April 2015. This meant that all postal voters at the May

³¹ British citizens living abroad for more than 15 years are not eligible to register to vote in any UK elections.

³² Historically, figures on overseas electors have been published by the Office for National Statistics in December of every year, when the full registers are published. Although the figure for 2010 does not refer to the registers in use at the 2010 UK Parliamentary general elections, the number in 2015 is significantly higher, indicating that UK citizens overseas have registered in greater numbers in 2015 than in 2010.

2015 elections would have had their identity verified through matching with DWP records or local data, or through the exceptions or attestation process.³³

3.49 The number of electors with a postal vote in May 2015 was **7,732,509**.

3.50 Compared to the number of electors with a postal vote in May 2010, this shows an increase of more than 10%. However, differences in the data specification mean that the data is not entirely comparable.³⁴

3.51 We will publish more detailed data on postal voters in August 2015 as part of our statutory collection of electoral data but initial data suggests that a similar proportion of the electorate held a postal vote in 2015 compared to 2010.

Table 3.6: Total number of electors with a postal vote in Great Britain in May 2010 and May 2015

Publication	Total number of electors with a postal vote
May 2010	6,980,005
May 2015	7,732,509

The number of electors with a postal vote in May 2015 refers to all elections while the number in 2010 is for the UK Parliamentary general election only.

Implications for the quality of the registers

3.52 Data collected for this report does not allow us to estimate levels of accuracy and completeness of the registers, neither was it intended to. In order to do that we would need to undertake a dedicated study, similar to those we have carried out in recent years.³⁵

³³ The *exceptions* process is used by EROs when an elector cannot be matched against DWP records or using local data sources and where the applicant cannot provide some or all of the required personal identifiers required to register. It involves asking the applicant to provide documentary evidence to prove their identity. Where the applicant cannot be matched and cannot provide the required personal identifiers or documentary evidence, the *attestation* process is used. This involves a 'person of good standing' on the electoral register verifying the identity of the applicant. Further information on both processes is available in Part 4 of our guidance for Electoral Registration Officers.

³⁴ The 2015 data refers to postal voters for all elections whereas the data for May 2010 is for postal voters at the UK Parliamentary general election only and therefore captures a smaller number of electors.

³⁵ There are various methods to assess the quality of the registers, the most reliable ones are: matching Census records against the electoral registers; using large scale national surveys. The first method can be used only in the year the Census is conducted (every 10 years) and the last study was conducted on the December 2010 registers (published in July 2014). The

3.53 Since our last such study, on the February/March 2014 registers, some activities will have had a positive impact on accuracy and completeness, including the introduction of online registration, HNLs and work to promote and encourage registration in the period leading up to the May 2015 elections. However, it is clear that other elements will have had a negative effect, such as the lack of comprehensive household canvassing activity in 2014.

3.54 The Commission will continue to monitor the transition to IER and will collect further data from EROs focusing on the 2015 canvass and the December 2015 registers. Our work will also include further studies on the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers.

3.55 However, while an analysis of the total number of register entries is not sufficient to assess the accuracy and completeness of the registers, other data does tell us something about how the quality of the registers can change over time.

3.56 A register entry may not correspond to an actual resident at that address as the registers contain redundant and duplicate entries. For instance, when an elector moves home, the old register entries may not be removed immediately and would remain on the register until the local ERO receives notification that the elector has moved or otherwise obtains sufficient evidence to trigger processes to remove the entry. These duplicate entries count towards inaccuracy on the registers.

3.57 Our last study on the quality of the electoral registers found that 14% of all entries on the February/March 2014 registers were inaccurate. More specifically, 11% of all entries were for individuals who were not resident at that address: this represents more than 5.5 million entries.³⁶

3.58 The same study also found that the local government registers were 85% complete, which meant that approximately 7.5 million individuals eligible to vote were not correctly registered at their current address.

3.59 The February/March 2014 registers contained 46.5 million entries: 5.5 million of these are inaccurate entries which should be removed, and 7.5 million entries should be added. It is important to note that the 5.5 million and the 7.5 million will include many of the same people. This implies that the registers should be larger by approximately 2 million entries in order to be 100% accurate and complete.³⁷

second method was used to assess the quality of the April 2011 registers and February/March 2014 registers.

³⁶ Source: The Electoral Commission, *The quality of the 2014 electoral register in Great Britain* (July 2014). Figures refer to the local government registers.

³⁷ It is important to note that the research was not designed to calculate the total number of individuals missing but to estimate the percentage of completeness. The absolute number is calculated using the ONS population estimates and is therefore based on the combination of

3.60 Figure 3.3 presents the trend from 1999 to 2015 in the total number of register entries on the local government registers, population aged 16+ and estimates of accuracy and completeness.³⁸

3.61 It shows that when the gap between entries and population increased, completeness decreased. Our previous studies found that completeness is likely to have dropped in the first half of the 2000s due to changes in registration practices – which resulted in a drop in entries between 2001 and 2006 visible in Figure 3.3 - and a lower level of participation (e.g. turnout at the May 2005 elections).³⁹

3.62 The figure shows that despite the drop in entries in December 2014 – likely to have had a significant impact on completeness – the trend line suggests that the total number of entries returned to roughly the expected level, in May 2015. This is positive for completeness.

two estimates (the percentage of accuracy/completeness and the population). Any figure is therefore approximate and is indicative only.

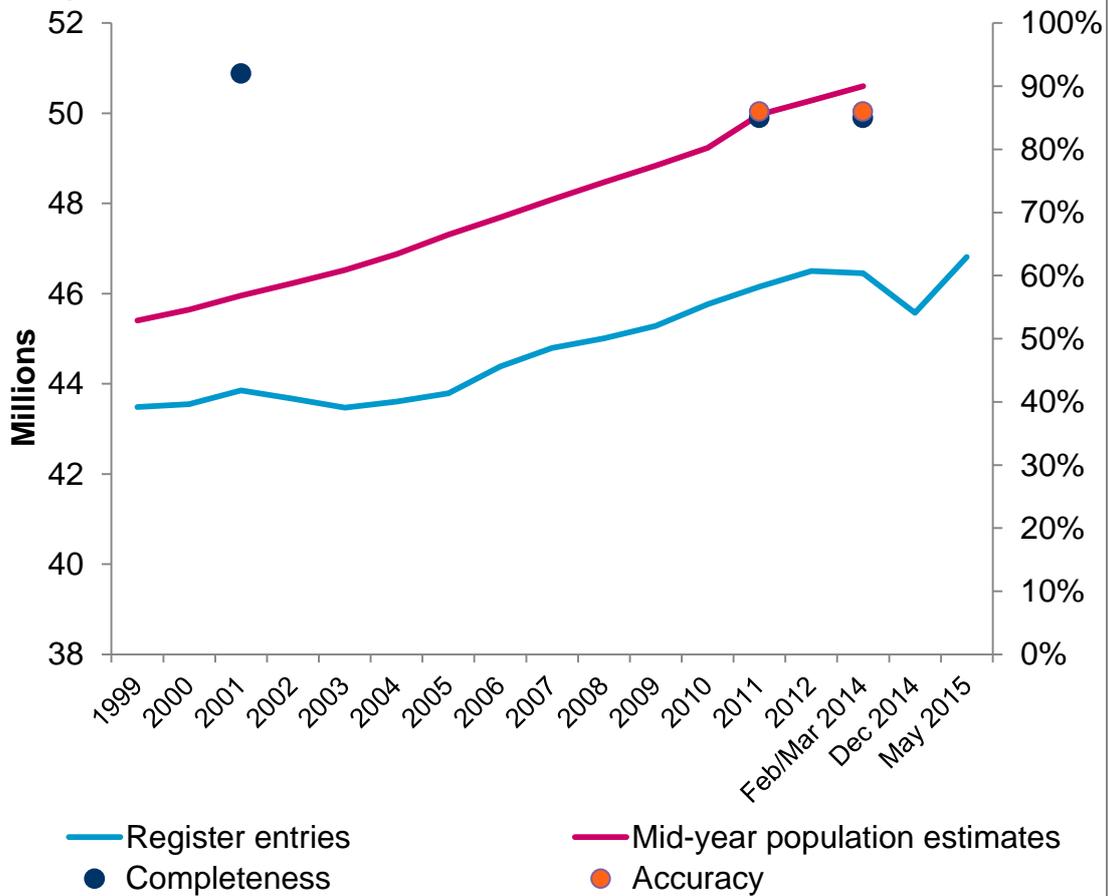
³⁸ Trend line for the population estimates include individuals not eligible to be on the register because of nationality, etc.

³⁹ The Electoral Commission, *Great Britain's electoral registers 2011* (December 2011).

In this study on the quality of the registers we argued that the drop in completeness between 2001 and 2011 was closely linked to the fall in canvass response rate which was affected by changes in practices such use of personal canvassers and the number of reminder stages.

Encouragingly, since 2010 the proportion of EROs reporting response rates below 90% has starting to fall and so has the number of EROs failing to meet the Commission's performance standard 3 on conducting house-to-house enquiries.

Figure 3.4: Total number of register entries, estimated population aged 16+ and level of accuracy and completeness between 1999 and May 2015.



Notes: Mid-year population estimates for 2014 and 2015 are not yet available. Figures for the total number of register entries refer to the local government registers.
Source: Office for National Statistics, Electoral Commission.

3.63 However, the fact that there are 360,000 more register entries in May 2015 than in February/March 2014 – when we last assessed the accuracy and completeness of the registers – does not necessarily mean there has been an improvement in completeness since then. As explained above, the number of register entries also includes duplicate and redundant entries (inaccuracy) which do not count towards completeness (i.e. they do not represent an elector correctly registered to vote).

3.64 Data on deletions collected for this and previous reports on IER shows that before the publication of the revised registers (in December 2014 in England and Wales and in March 2015 in Scotland) and the registers in force for the May 2015 polls, the level of entries removed from the registers was considerably lower than in the past.

3.65 While the 2012 and 2013 canvasses resulted in deletions to the register of approximately 12% (consistent with previous years), in 2014 the corresponding figure was 5%.⁴⁰

Table 3.7: Additions and deletions as a percentage of the total number of register entries on the local government registers in Great Britain: December 2010 - May 2015.

Additions/ Deletions	February/ March 2014	December 2014	May 2015
Additions as % of the electoral register	12%	3%	8%
Deletions as % of the electoral register	12%	5%	5%

3.66 In our previous studies on the quality of the registers we found that areas with high population mobility are presented with more challenges in maintaining highly accurate and complete registers because of the need to constantly update the entries based on population movement, adding new electors as well as deleting those who are no longer resident at the property to which the entry refers.⁴¹

3.67 Anecdotal evidence from some EROs in rural areas suggests that their register is now highly accurate and complete, but the status of the registers in metropolitan and urban areas is much more difficult to assess.

3.68 For example, in inner London, where completeness is at its lowest in Great Britain, areas like Hackney present opposing signs. On one hand we have positive data showing that the register increased by 10% during IER with a high level of additions (13% between December 2014 and May 2015); on the other hand the register contains 23% of entries which have been retained under the IER transitional arrangements and only 4% of entries have been deleted between December 2014 and May 2015. The increment in number of entries may have therefore been inflated by a high volume of inaccurate entries.⁴²

3.69 While these figures do not allow us to say specifically how accuracy and completeness levels have changed since February/March 2014, they do serve as a reminder that an increase in the total number of register entries does not necessarily cleanly equal an increase in completeness and that changes in

⁴⁰ The 2013 canvass was conducted between the end of 2013 and the beginning of 2014, and the publication of the registers was delayed until February 2014 in England and March 2014 in Scotland and Wales.

⁴¹ This is clear from this data as well, with the level of additions in England and Wales between December 2014 and May 2015 ranging from 4% in South Tyneside to 18% in Bristol. The level of deletions ranged from 3% in Fenland to 15% in Manchester.

⁴² The Electoral Commission, [Electoral registration in 2011](#) (July 2014).

accuracy and completeness levels could vary significantly between local authority areas.

Conclusions

3.70 Although the data currently available does not allow us to estimate the quality of the current registers, we can look at a number of factors which may have had an impact on accuracy and completeness:

- **September 2014 Scottish referendum and May 2015 elections across Great Britain:** IER places emphasis on each individual's ownership of their own registration status and is linked to the desire of that person to be on the register and to vote. Interest in the independence referendum in Scotland and in the recent UK general election generated high levels of new registrations. Taken on their own, these registrations will have had a positive effect on completeness. However, we have limited evidence about how the system will work outside an election period.
- **Online registration:** this facility has made registration more straightforward for many and has proved particularly popular with some typically hard to reach groups including young people and overseas voters. This also has a positive effect on completeness.
- **Comprehensive household canvass activity:** as set out in our reports on the revised registers published in England and Wales in December 2014 and in Scotland in March 2015, comprehensive household canvass activity remains an important mechanism to support the maintenance of accurate and complete registers. Household enquiry forms (HEFs) – which are designed to identify who is living at a property and eligible to register so that the ERO can invite them to register to vote - will be sent to all properties across Great Britain for the first time during the 2015 canvass. Data from the 2015 canvass will allow us to evaluate the efficacy of the system.
- **Verification of entries:** the identity of all applicants is now verified against the DWP database or local data, or through an exceptions or attestation process. This is positive for the accuracy of new entries.
- **Entries retained under the IER transitional arrangements:** entries for existing electors who are not registered individually – that is, those who have not either been confirmed or successfully made individual applications to register to vote – will be retained on the register until the end of the transition to IER unless the ERO identifies that an entry is redundant or inaccurate and takes statutory steps to remove them from the register. Retained entries are expected to have a negative impact on accuracy as some or many of these entries are likely to be for electors no longer resident at the property. However, although the volume of retained entries on the current registers (4%) is slightly higher than the average rate of electors who were carried forward under household registration in the event of non-response to the canvass (around 3%), it

is unlikely that this difference has had a significant impact on levels of accuracy. Chapter 4 provides further analysis of retained entries.⁴³

- **Lower level of deletions:** since the start of IER, deletions have decreased considerably. Some EROs have told us that under IER it is more difficult to delete an entry than in the past because in most cases they are now required to either have two forms of evidence that the elector is no longer resident at that address or carry out a review of an elector’s entitlement to remain registered before they can delete an entry.

3.71 The table below summarises how these factors could affect accuracy and completeness. However, we cannot quantify their impact and therefore cannot know how factors balance out against each other and what the overall impact is on accuracy and completeness.

Table 3.8: Factors that are expected to have had an impact on the quality of the registers in Great Britain since the introduction of IER.

Quality of the register	Positive	Negative
Completeness	Electoral events with high turnout (UK Parliamentary general election and Scottish independence referendum) Online registration	Lack of comprehensive household canvass activity in autumn 2014 'Ownership of registration' for attainers
Accuracy	Verification of identity of applicants with DWP and local data	Difficulties in obtaining second form of evidence to delete inaccurate entries Retained entries Lack of comprehensive household canvass activity in 2014

⁴³ Under the household registration system, the 'carry forward' was a mechanism which enabled EROs to retain entries of individuals in households who had not responded to the canvass but where the ERO did not have sufficient information to remove the electors currently registered at an address.

4 Recommendation on whether to bring forward the end of the transition

Decision on ending the transition to IER

4.1 Under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (ERA), the transition to IER is due to end in December 2016. At that point, any entries for electors who are not registered individually – that is, those who have not either been confirmed or successfully made individual applications to register to vote – and who are currently being retained on the registers under the IER transitional arrangements, will be removed from the registers.

4.2 However, the ERA allows Ministers to make an Order – during a specified three-month period between June and August 2015 – which would end the transition 12 months earlier, in December 2015. A statutory instrument containing such an Order would not need to be debated by Parliament, but could be annulled by a resolution of either House of Parliament.

Risks and benefits of bringing forward the end of the transition to IER

4.3 It is important to consider the potential risks and benefits of changing the current timetable specified in legislation for the end of the transition to IER.

4.4 If the transition ends in December 2015, there is a potential **benefit** to the accuracy of the register – with any retained entries which are redundant or inaccurate being removed – but also a **risk** to the completeness of the register and to participation, with retained entries relating to eligible electors being removed. Any individuals removed from the register as a result would need to make a successful registration application in order to re-register and so to be able to vote in any polls held after December 2015.

4.5 In contrast, if the transition continues to December 2016, the main **benefit** relates to completeness – with entries for any eligible electors who are not registered individually retained on the registers – with the potential **risk** being to accuracy, with retained entries which may be redundant or inaccurate being kept on the register for a further year unless the ERO takes steps to review or remove them.

4.6 In terms of managing these risks, the earlier timetable puts the greater onus on electors as they will need to take action in order to ensure they are able to remain registered and so can participate in the May 2016 polls. By contrast, the later timetable puts the greater responsibility on EROs to identify and take steps to remove redundant or inaccurate entries.

Limits of the data and our analysis

4.7 While the data outlined in this report helps to illustrate the overall number and scale of entries which could be removed at the end of the transition, it is not able to predict the likely impact on electors: we do not know how many of these entries are redundant, and how many relate to electors who are still resident and remain eligible to be registered to vote. We also do not know how this balance might vary across different local authorities and types of area.

4.8 From 1 July 2015, EROs across Great Britain will be carrying out comprehensive household canvass activity which, unlike in 2014/15, will involve sending Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) – which are designed to identify who is resident at an address and eligible to be registered - to all properties.

4.9 This exercise, coupled with other registration activity, will assist EROs with identifying redundant register entries, including those relating to someone who is not registered individually. For example, a response to a HEF with the name of an existing elector crossed out will act as a prompt for the ERO to check that person's entitlement to remain registered and, where appropriate, to trigger statutory processes to remove any redundant entries from the register.

4.10 Also, for those retained entries where the ERO believes the elector is still resident and eligible to remain registered at that address, there are specified steps in law that EROs must go through to try to ensure that the individual successfully completes an individual registration application, including sending an invitation to register to that individual and following up any non-responses with two reminders and at least one personal visit.

4.11 While EROs will be carrying out this and other public engagement activity over the canvass period, we cannot, at this point, know what the impact of that activity will be, and so cannot state with any certainty what this will do to the current volume of retained register entries.

4.12 While ERO activity over the canvass period should enable redundant entries to be identified and removed, there are risks relating to the completeness of the registers and to participation if entries for eligible electors are removed.

4.13 Given the fact that any Order to bring forward the end of the transition must be made during the three-month period specified in law – between June and August 2015 – the decision on the timing of the end of the transition will therefore need to be taken in the absence of this vital information. It means

that Ministers would need to ask Parliament to approve an important decision with no reliable information about how many redundant entries would be removed from the December 2015 registers and how many otherwise eligible electors would need to re-register individually in order to be able to participate in the 2016 polls.

Our assessment and recommendation

Assessment

4.14 At the end of the confirmation live run (CLR) process, 13% of electors in Great Britain – approximately 6 million entries – could not be directly confirmed on the registers and were retained on the registers under the IER transitional arrangements.⁴⁴

4.15 During the write-out – between July and November 2014 in England and Wales and October 2014 and February 2015 in Scotland – EROs contacted all existing electors who were not confirmed and invited them to register individually.

4.16 At the end of the write-out, in December 2014/March 2015, retained entries made up approximately 5-6% of the overall size of the registers, down from 13% at the end of the CLR.⁴⁵

4.17 In May 2015, based on data collected from all 380 EROs, approximately **1.9 million** electoral register entries are being retained under the IER transitional arrangements. This represents **4%** of all entries on the registers. This means that since the end of the CLR, the number of electors being retained has decreased by two-thirds, from approximately 6 million to 2 million.

Table 4.1: Entries retained on the registers since the start of the transition to IER.

Electoral registers	Percentage (and number) of entries retained on the register
July/September 2014 End of CLR	13% (6.1 million)
December 2014/March 2015 First register published under	5-6% (2.9 million) ⁴⁶

⁴⁴ The CLR process took place in June/July 2014 in England and Wales and in September 2014 in Scotland (after the independence referendum).

⁴⁵ Figures for December 2014 in our February report were estimates based on data from 158 local authorities in England and Wales - all using the same EMS system – and had not been weighted. Estimates have then been re-adjusted with data from May 2015.

⁴⁶ Figures for December 2014 are estimates based on data from 158 local authorities in England and Wales - all using the same EMS system – and had not been weighted.

IER	
April 2015 Registers in force for the May 2015 elections	4% (1.9 million)

4.18 The data shows that, since the end of the write-out, EROs have been able to 'resolve' proportionately fewer retained entries.⁴⁷ Between June and December 2014/March 2015, 52% of retained entries were resolved: 28% became IER registered and 24% were removed, taking the volume of retained entries down from 6 million to 2.9 million.⁴⁸

4.19 The results were significantly different during the period between December 2014/March 2015 and May 2015: 34% of retained entries were resolved, with 16% becoming IER registered and 18% being removed, taking the volume of retained entries down from 2.9 million to 1.9 million.

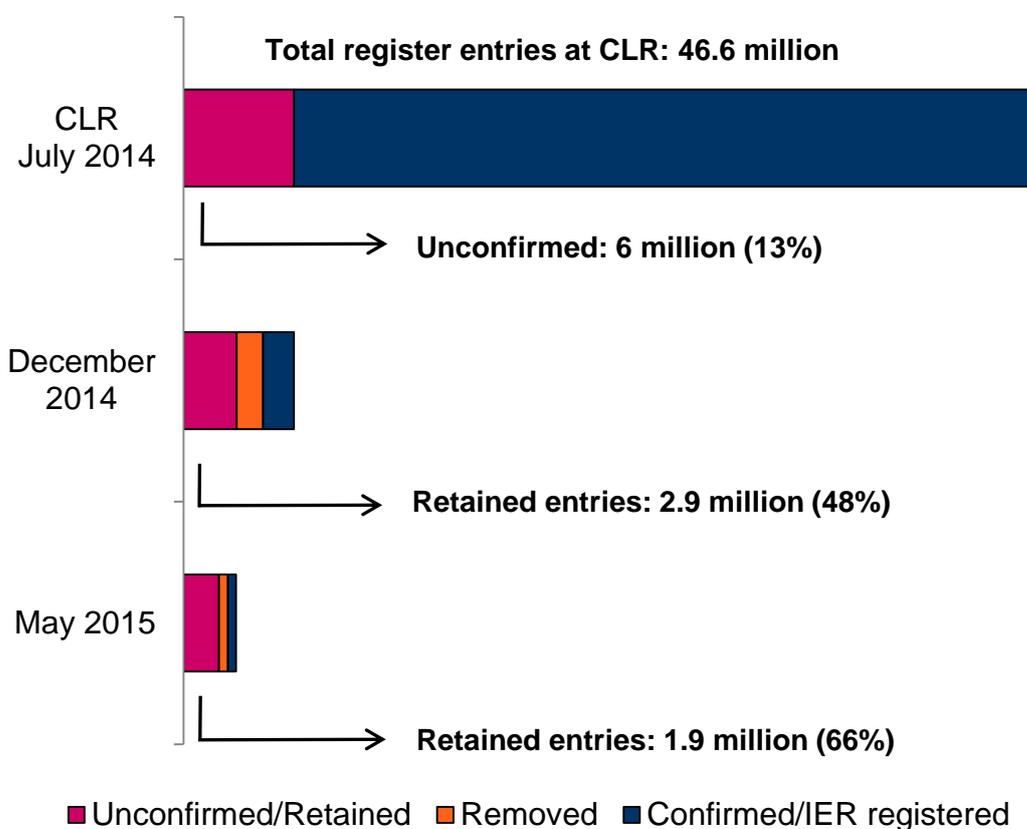
4.20 This 'slowing' in the conversion rate is likely to be due to:

- Diminishing returns because a greater proportion of these electors are no longer resident at that address (compared to immediately following the CLR).
- Difficulties for EROs in finding the two sources of evidence which are needed to delete an entry without a review if an elector has moved home.
- A change in EROs' focus in the period leading up to the May 2015 elections, which shifted from contacting those existing electors who were not registered individually to targeting people not included on the register at all.
- The fact that some existing electors who are not registered individually but are still resident at that address are from the typically hard-to-reach groups, who are less likely to be engaged with voting and to respond to communication from local authorities.

⁴⁷ Entries are 'resolved' where either the elector makes a successful application to be registered individually or where the ERO removes the entry from the register as they are no longer satisfied that the individual is entitled to remain registered. Additionally, on publication of the revised registers in December 2014 in England and Wales and in March 2015 in Scotland, EROs were required by law to remove any entries for electors who did not respond to the 2013 canvass, were carried forward on to the February/March 2014 registers and had not subsequently responded to the EROs' enquiries.

⁴⁸ Figures originally presented in our report on the state of the December 2014 registers in England and Wales were estimated from data from 158 local authorities in England and Wales, and have been adjusted as a result of the data received from Scotland and further checks conducted on the data.

Figure 4.1: Electoral register carried forward under 'IER transitional arrangements' from the Confirmation Live Run (CLR) in July 2014 (September 2014 in Scotland) to May 2015.



Figures for December 2014 are estimates based on data from 158 local authorities in England and Wales and have not been weighted. CLR in Scotland took place in September 2014.

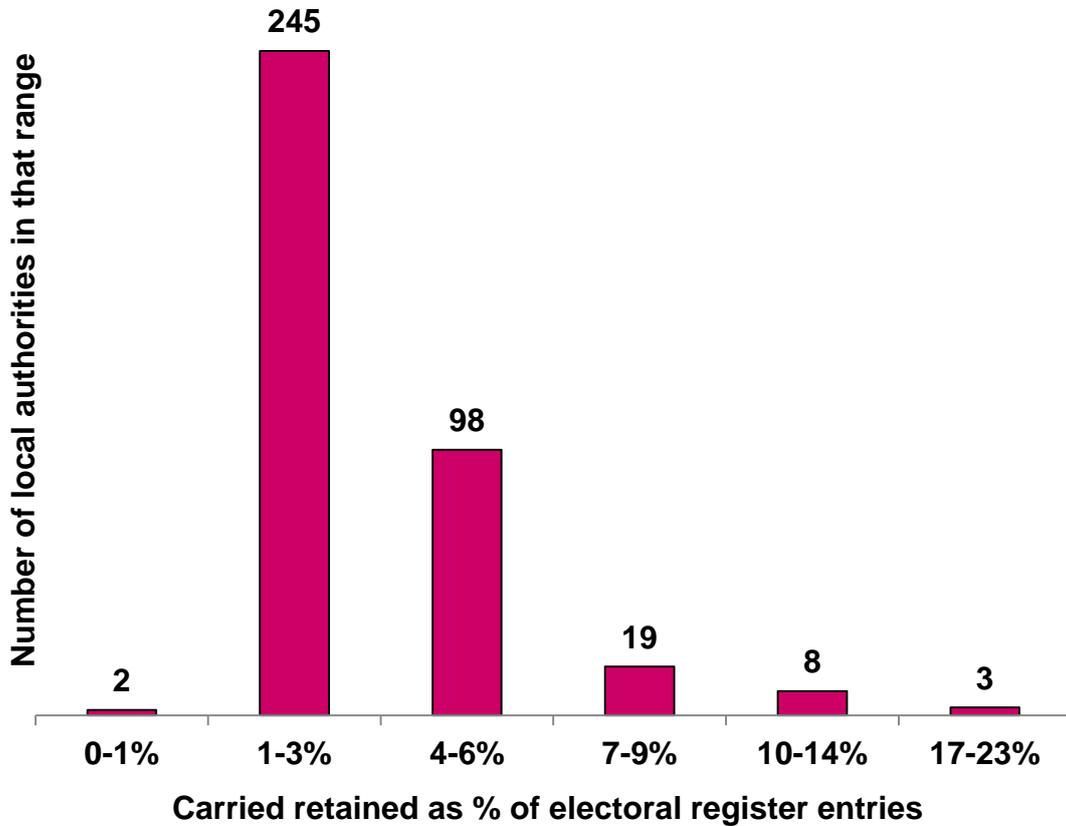
Local variations

4.21 Across Great Britain as a whole, the total number of retained entries corresponds to 4% of the total size of the registers, but this varies significantly across local authorities. Some authorities reported retained entries as being less than 1% of the total number of register entries, with Epping Forest showing the lowest level (0.4%).

4.22 However, there are also a number of local authority areas with retained entries making up 10% or over of all register entries. These authorities are in urban areas with a high student concentration (Glasgow, Cambridge) or London boroughs (Brent, Hackney, Haringey, Lambeth, Kensington and Chelsea, Redbridge). Hackney has the highest level, with 23% of their total register being retained.

4.23 The number of London boroughs with high proportions of retained entries further underlines the importance of considering the transition end date in relation to the polls scheduled for May 2016 – which includes elections to the Greater London Assembly and for London Mayor.

Figure 4.2: Entries retained as a percentage of the total number of register entries and number of local authority in that range.



The base of this table is 375 because the EMS system used by two Valuation Joint Boards (VJB) could only report on aggregated data for the VJB and not for each authority falling within it.

4.24 Our analysis of the CLR results found that wards presenting demographics associated with high population mobility (tenure, age and students) returned lower level of electors confirmed.⁴⁹

4.25 In December 2014 we saw that in metropolitan areas the level of retained entries was significantly higher than in areas with a more stable population. While this is also generally the case in May 2015, not all metropolitan authorities and big cities have high levels of retained electors.⁵⁰

4.26 In fact, areas like Ealing (3%) and Liverpool (4%) have relatively low levels despite presenting demographic characteristics associated with high population mobility and unconfirmed electors.

⁴⁹ The Electoral Commission, [Analysis of the Confirmation Live Run in England and Wales](#) (October 2014).

⁵⁰ Correlation analysis conducted between entries carried forward and demographics previously associated with high level of electors not confirmed did not return a strong r2 for both people aged 18-34 (0.3153) and private renters (0.3723).

4.27 This indicates that demographics are not the only factors in determining the percentage of entries retained on the registers in different areas. The data suggests that EROs' activities such as canvassing and data-matching, as well as turnout in the May 2015 elections, have had an impact too.

Recommendation

4.28 The data we have collected from EROs tells us that if the transition ended now, the registers would decrease in size by 1.9 million entries, with some registers decreasing significantly more than others. While there is still work to be done between now and December 2015 which we expect will reduce this number, it does provide an indication of the maximum potential impact of ending the transition this year.

4.29 It is likely that many of the entries that would be removed from the register when transition ends will be redundant (i.e. they relate to people who are no longer resident at that address). However, at this time, we **cannot tell** how many are in fact for electors who are still resident and eligible to be registered to vote but who were not confirmed and who have not yet registered individually. We also **cannot tell** how this balance between redundant entries and those for individuals who are still resident and eligible to remain registered at that particular address varies across and within different local authority areas.

4.30 The Commission believes that there should be a compelling case for bringing forward the end of the transition. On balance, we believe that it is preferable to retain entries which may be redundant rather than remove now an unknown number of entries which relate to electors who are correctly registered and would otherwise have remained on the register. Retaining redundant entries on the registers does clearly have a negative impact on their accuracy. However, the volume of retained entries is not substantially greater than the volume of entries which were previously carried forward on household registers in the event of non-response to the annual canvass,⁵¹ and we do not believe that these entries represent an unacceptable risk in terms of their fraudulent use. This is because ERO activity over the canvass period is designed to enable redundant entries to be identified and removed.

4.31 Revised registers must be published by 1 December 2015.⁵² These registers will form the basis of the registers to be used for the May 2016 polls. Who is or is not included will depend in part on whether the transition ends in December 2015 or continues to December 2016. If the transition does end in

⁵¹ Under the household registration system, the 'carry forward' was a mechanism which enabled EROs to retain entries of individuals in households who had not responded to the canvass but where the ERO did not have sufficient information to remove the electors currently registered at an address.

⁵² EROs are required by law to publish their revised register by 1 December 2015 except in cases where there is a by-election in their area during the period of the canvass (1 July – 1 December 2015), in which case the publication of the register can be postponed until up to 1 February 2016.

December 2015, all remaining entries relating to electors who are not registered individually will be removed on publication of the revised registers. This creates a risk relating to the completeness of the registers and to participation if entries for eligible electors are removed at this point.

4.32 A significant number and range of polls are scheduled to take place across Great Britain in May 2016: elections to the Scottish Parliament; the National Assembly for Wales; the Mayor of London and London Assembly; Police and Crime Commissioners across England (except in London) and Wales; and local government elections in many areas of England.

4.33 The European Union Referendum Bill, which specifies that a referendum on the UK's continued membership of the European Union must be held by no later than 31 December 2017, is also currently being considered by the UK Parliament. It is therefore possible that a UK-wide referendum could also be held at some point in 2016.

4.34 Electoral registers are also used for other purposes, in particular determining the distribution and boundaries of parliamentary constituencies and other electoral areas. The registers published in December 2015 will be used as the basis for calculating the size of constituencies as part of the next scheduled UK Parliamentary boundary review. However, we have consistently stated that the Commission's focus is that the electoral registers support and enable effective participation in elections and referendums by all those who want to take part.

Taking into account the data and evidence which is available to us at this point and the significant polls which are scheduled for May 2016, we recommend that Ministers should not make an order to bring forward the end of the transition to IER. We recommend that the end date for IER transition should remain, as currently provided for in law, December 2016.

Continuing focus on accurate and complete registers

4.35 Regardless of when the transition ends, whether in December 2015 or December 2016, it is essential that focus is maintained on ensuring that electoral registers are as accurate and complete as possible.

4.36 As in December 2014 in England and Wales and March 2015 in Scotland, publication of the revised registers in December 2015 will be a key milestone but work will need to continue beyond this to ensure that as many people as possible are registered to vote in respect of the correct address in advance of the May 2016 polls

4.37 Throughout the period leading up to the May 2016 polls, EROs, the Commission and others will need to build on the significant work undertaken since the start of the transition to maximise registration.

4.38 Positive feedback from EROs on the impact of the HNL exercise in early 2015 suggests that similar activity in 2016 could play an important role in ensuring the registers are as accurate and complete as possible by the time of the May 2016 elections. In 2015, Cabinet Office made available £6.8m to EROs across Great Britain to support activity to maximise registration, and we know that many EROs used their share to fund sending out HNLs. We continue to support and encourage such audits of the register in advance of scheduled polls, but recognise the challenges for EROs in resourcing such activity.

4.39 The Commission will once again run a public awareness campaign in advance of the May 2016 polls, a central objective of which will be to promote and encourage registering to vote.

Accuracy and completeness study

4.40 Data collected for this report does not allow us to estimate levels of accuracy and completeness of the registers, neither was it intended to. In order to do that we would need to undertake a dedicated study, similar to those we have carried out in recent years.

4.41 Since our last such study, on the February/March 2014 registers, some activities will have had a positive impact on accuracy and completeness, including the introduction of online registration, HNLs and work to promote and encourage registration in the period leading up to the May 2015 elections. However, it is clear that other elements will have had a negative effect, such as the lack of comprehensive household canvassing activity in 2014.

4.42 The Commission will continue to monitor the transition to IER and will collect further data from EROs focusing on the 2015 canvass and the December 2015 registers. Our work will also include further studies on the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers.

Further improvements to the system

4.43 Regardless of when the transition ends, there remains more that can be done to further improve the electoral registration process across the UK.

4.44 We will continue to explore options for further improvements; and others with an interest in ensuring accurate and complete electoral registers, including EROs, political parties and elected representatives, will also expect and seek further improvements to current processes. The UK Government will therefore need to ensure that it retains the capacity to focus on and manage further change to electoral registration policy and legislation in the medium and long term.

4.45 Our research on the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers in the UK has shown that there is still significant scope for further improvements to the electoral registration process. We found that 14-15% of potentially eligible electors in Great Britain were not registered to vote at their

current address in April 2014, and 27-29% of potentially eligible electors in Northern Ireland were not registered to vote at their current address in April 2012.

4.46 The confirmation matching process resulted in 87% of entries for electors being successfully matched and directly transferred to the new IER register without having to provide additional personal identifiers. While the primary function of confirmation has been to support the transition to IER, we believe that there may be scope to use similar confirmation matching processes to simplify the registration process beyond this initial stage. For example, matching information about potentially eligible electors collected during the canvass against data held by DWP could significantly reduce the number of people who need to provide their date of birth and National Insurance number in order for EROs to be able to verify their identity.

4.47 There is also potential to build on the many interactions citizens already have with a wide range of public services to help increase both the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers. We will encourage and work with Governments and EROs to develop workable proposals for prompting people to register to vote or update their registration details at key points when they use other public services, such as applying for or receiving benefits or tax credits, changing their GP, applying for a driving license or renewing their passport. This will, however, depend heavily on securing strong inter- and cross-Government commitments to make the necessary changes to agency-wide processes, forms and websites.

4.48 The experience of using data to verify the identity of potential electors without requiring them to provide additional information also highlights the potential for direct registration to significantly improve the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers. For example, federal and state-level Electoral Commissions in Australia are already moving towards direct registration, using trusted information supplied by other government and public agencies to directly enrol electors or update their details on the electoral register. Electors are not required to complete a registration application form, but an information notice is sent to their registered address setting out how to correct any errors.⁵³

4.49 While the data matching and data mining pilot schemes carried out by EROs in 2012 and 2013 have not yet successfully identified a workable model for using data from central government departments and agencies to identify potentially eligible electors, we will continue to support and encourage the UK Government to develop and test proposals for new tools, including using trusted local data, to help EROs meet their statutory duties.

4.50 UK Government Ministers also have powers to make an Order (subject to approval by Parliament) to abolish the requirement for EROs to carry out an

⁵³ See http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/research/direct.htm for more information about direct registration in Australia.

annual canvass of households. This would be a significant change to the model for electoral registration in Great Britain, and we would expect to see robust evidence of workable, effective alternative methods for capturing population movement before we would be comfortable endorsing any such change, particularly in light of the evidence contained in our February and April 2015 reports on the impact of a lack of comprehensive household canvass activity in 2014/15.

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