

# The Electoral Commission

## **Media Handbook**

### **UK Parliamentary General Election (UKPGE) – Northern Ireland**

**Thursday 8 June 2017**

**May 2017**

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**Note: [A separate media handbook](#) for Great Britain has been produced**

## Websites

[www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

The Commission's website has a dedicated section for journalists featuring the Electoral Commission's news and views – including our press releases and statements. Our website has information on political party donations in the run-up to the election and has a 'Guidance' area with information for candidates and those administering the election.

[www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk)

The website of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland provides information on how to register to vote, absent voting, how to find your polling station and electoral identification requirements.

[www.yourvotematters.co.uk](http://www.yourvotematters.co.uk)

This website, run by the Commission, is where voters can easily find information on registering to vote and voting. It includes frequently asked questions and Information on how to vote.

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# 1 Who's who at the UKPGE and their responsibilities?

## 1.1 The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

The Chief Electoral Officer, Virginia McVea, administers elections and compiles the register of electors in Northern Ireland. She has responsibility for the organisation and conduct of the election – including nominations, distribution of poll cards and postal ballots, the conduct of the poll and the counting of votes. The Chief Electoral Officer is supported in her duties by the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

## 1.2 . The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) aims to ensure the smooth running of elections and referendums in Northern Ireland while maintaining an impartial independent electoral service.

EONI comprises a headquarters in Belfast and five area electoral offices across Northern Ireland. Area Electoral Officers act under the supervision of the Chief Electoral Officer.

EONI recognises the important role that the media provide in communicating with the wider public and getting key messages out to voters.

## 1.3 Deputy Returning Officer

For the UKPGE the Chief Electoral Officer has appointed nine Deputy Returning Officers (DROs) to assist her in the conduct of the election.

## 1.4 Presiding Officers

The Chief Electoral Officer appoints Presiding Officers to run polling stations. Duties include organising the layout of the polling station, supervising poll clerks, checking photographic ID, issuing ballot papers, assisting voters and ensuring that ballot boxes are transported securely to the count venue.

## 1.5 The Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK. At the election, we are responsible for:

- producing guidance for candidates standing for election and their agents
- producing guidance for parties that are campaigning at the election
- producing guidance for non-party campaigners that are campaigning at the election
- registering political parties
- publishing details of how political parties spend their money.
- promoting public awareness of the election and how to take part in it; and
- reporting to the UK Parliament on the conduct of the election

## 2 UK Parliamentary General Election 2017 timetable

<b>Event</b>	<b>Date</b>
Regulated period for campaign spending by political parties begins	Thursday 9 June 2016
Regulated period for campaign spending by non-party campaigners begins	Thursday 9 June 2016
<b>Dissolution of Parliament</b>	<b>Wednesday 3 May 2017</b>
Start of 'short campaign' regulated period for candidate spending	Thursday 4 May
Receipt of writ	Thursday 4 May
Last day for publication of notice of election	4pm, Monday 8 May
Delivery of nomination papers	Between 10am and 4pm on Monday 8 May, Tuesday 9 May, Wednesday 10 May and Thursday 11 May
Deadline for delivery of nomination papers	4pm, Thursday 11 May
Deadline for candidates to withdraw	4pm, Thursday 11 May
Publication of statement of persons nominated	In most cases, 5pm, Thursday 11 May. If objections to nominations have been made, no later than 4pm, Friday 12 May. Postal votes cannot be issued before this time
Deadline for first weekly pre-poll donation and loan report by political parties and non-party campaigners to the Electoral Commission	Tuesday 16 May. Electoral Commission to publish information on Thursday 18 May
Deadline for applying for a postal vote	5pm, Thursday 18 May
Deadline for applying for a proxy vote (except for emergency proxies)	5pm, Thursday 18 May
Deadline for second pre-poll donation and loan report to the Electoral Commission	Tuesday 23 May. Electoral Commission to publish information on Thursday 25 May
<b>Deadline to apply to register to vote</b>	<b>Monday 22 May</b>
Deadline for third pre-poll donation and loan report to the Electoral Commission	Tuesday 30 May. Electoral Commission to publish information on Thursday 1 June
Deadline for fourth pre-poll donation and loan report to the Electoral Commission	Tuesday 6 June. Electoral Commission to publish information on Wednesday 7 June
<b>Polling day</b>	<b>7am to 10pm, Thursday 8 June</b>
<b>Election count</b>	<b>To start as soon as practicable after 10pm, Thursday 8 June,</b>

	<b>with results expected to be announced on Friday 9 June</b>
Deadline for fifth pre-poll donation and loan report to the Electoral Commission	Tuesday 13 June. Electoral Commission to publish information on Thursday 15 June
Deadline for sixth and final pre-poll donation and loan report to the Electoral Commission	Thursday 15 June. Electoral Commission to publish information on Tuesday 20 June
Last day for submission of candidate spending returns	Thursday 13 July if result declared on Thursday 8 June. Friday 14 July for results declared on Friday 9 June
Deadline for political parties and non-party campaigners that have spent £250,000 or under to submit campaign spending returns to the Electoral Commission	Friday 8 September
Deadline for political parties and non-party campaigners that have spent over £250,000 to submit campaign spending returns to the Electoral Commission	Friday 8 December

# SECTION A – Candidates

## 3 Becoming a candidate

### 3.1 Who can become a candidate?

Anyone who wants to stand at the UKPGE must, on the day of their nomination and on polling day, be:

- at least 18 years old; and
- a British citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland or a qualifying Commonwealth citizen

A candidate at the general election is not required to be registered to vote, or to live in the Parliamentary constituency in which they wish to stand.

### 3.2 Are there any rules barring a candidate from standing?

A candidate is barred from standing to become a Member of Parliament if, at the time of nomination and on polling day:

- they are civil servants, members of police forces or members of the armed forces
- they are the subject of a bankruptcy restrictions order made by a court in England, Wales or Northern Ireland (though bankruptcy in itself does not bar them from standing); or, their estate has been sequestered by a court in Scotland and they have not been discharged
- they have been convicted of an imprisonable offence and are detained for more than a year
- they have been found or reported guilty of a corrupt or an illegal electoral practice within the past five or three years respectively

For more detailed guidance on what disqualifies someone from standing to be a Member of Parliament, see the Electoral Commission's guidance for candidates and agents, Part 1, pages 3 – 5  
[http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/179939/UKPGE-Part-1-Can-you-stand-for-election-NI.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/179939/UKPGE-Part-1-Can-you-stand-for-election-NI.pdf)

### 3.3 How does someone become a candidate?

Candidates can choose to stand for election as a Member of Parliament either as a 'party candidate' or as an 'independent candidate'.

The earliest date that someone can officially become a candidate is on the day that the UK Parliament is dissolved – which was **Wednesday 3 May**. However, prospective candidates can be selected by their party, or announce their intention to stand before this date.

A candidate's nomination papers, together with their £500 deposit, must be submitted to the Deputy Returning Officer by 4pm, Thursday 11 May in order to stand.

### **3.4 What does someone who wants to stand as a party candidate in the UKPGE have to do?**

Prospective party candidates must submit to their Deputy Returning Officer:

- completed nomination form containing
  - the signatures of 10 registered electors from the constituency supporting the nomination
  - completed home address form
  - completed consent to nomination
- a deposit of £500
- a certificate from the political party authorising the use of the party name or a party description as registered by the Electoral Commission
- a written request to use one of the party's registered emblems (optional)

Candidates standing for a political party can request the use of a party name or description on the ballot paper, but they cannot request both.

### **3.5 What does someone who wants to stand as an independent candidate in the UKPGE have to do?**

Prospective independent candidates must submit the following to their Deputy Returning officers:

- completed nomination form containing
  - the signatures of 10 registered electors from the constituency supporting the nomination
  - completed home address form
  - completed consent to nomination
- a deposit of £500.

Independent candidates may only use the word 'Independent' as their description on the ballot paper; or they can choose not to have a description.

### **3.6 How can we know who all of the candidates are?**

The relevant Deputy Returning Officer will publish the full list of candidates standing. This will happen in most cases by 5pm on Thursday 11 May. Alternatively, if objections to nominations have been made, they will publish the list no later than 4pm, Friday 12 May. To find out how and where they will publish this list, contact them directly.



## **4 Campaigning at the election**

### **4.1 What can candidates say about one another during the campaign?**

As at all elections, it is illegal to make a false statement about the personal character of a candidate in order to affect their election. Rules about defamation also apply to election materials.

The police may investigate allegations of the specific electoral offence of making a false statement. Defamation issues are a matter for the civil courts.

As with all elections, the Electoral Commission does not have any regulatory role in relation to the content of campaign material or what candidates say about each other.

### **4.2 Are there any electoral rules regarding campaign materials?**

Yes, by law, candidates must use “imprints” on all their printed campaign material.

### **4.3 What is an “imprint”?**

All printed material (i.e. posters, placards and leaflets) must include the name and address of the printer and promoter (the person who authorised the material to be printed). This is so that people can be clear about the source of the campaign material. It is an offence not to include an imprint on election material.

The Electoral Commission also recommends that candidates, wherever possible, place an imprint on their electronic materials (i.e. websites, emails and social media platforms), but this is not a legal requirement.

### **4.4 Can candidates see the electoral register?**

Yes. Candidates (once they officially become one) are entitled to receive, free of charge, a copy of the full electoral register and the lists of people voting by post or proxy (the absent voters’ lists) for the constituency that they are contesting.

Candidates can only use the full electoral register to help them campaign and to check that donations they receive come from a permissible source.

### **4.5 Do candidates get free delivery of leaflets?**

Yes, candidates are entitled to one free postage to electors in the constituency. This can include:

- one unaddressed election communication of up to 60 grams to every postal address, or
- one election communication of up to 60 grams addressed to each elector

Candidates contact [Royal Mail](#) directly to make the arrangements for their leaflets.

## 5 Campaign spending limits and rules on accepting donations

### 5.1 How much can candidates spend on their election campaign?

For the 2015 general election, there were two regulated periods for candidates known as the 'long campaign' and 'short campaign', during which spending limits applied. For the election on 8 June 2017, there is **only** a short campaign.

According to the Representation of the People Act, the long campaign occurs when a UK Parliamentary General Election has been called and Parliament has already been sitting for 55 months. In the case of the 2017 UKPGE, Parliament has sat for less than 55 months.

The spending limits for each candidate are calculated by adding together a base amount and a variable top up that takes into account the number of registered electors in the constituency that is being contested.

### 5.2 What are the spending limits?

Regulated period dates	Fixed amount	Variable amounts
Thursday 4 May until polling day, Thursday 8 June	£8,700	6p per registered parliamentary elector in a borough constituency (the four Belfast constituencies) <b>or</b> 9p per registered parliamentary elector in a county constituency (all other constituencies in Northern Ireland)

\*The regulated period for the UKPGE begins **the day after the date** you officially become a candidate, and ends on polling day, 8 June 2017. The earliest date you can officially become a candidate is the day after the UK Parliament is dissolved. Parliament will be dissolved on 3 May 2017.

If an individual's intention to stand as a candidate is not announced before 3 May, the short campaign will begin on either the day that they do announce their intention, or the date that they are nominated as a candidate, whichever is the earlier.

### 5.3 How do candidates know how many people live in the constituency they are standing in?

The number of Parliamentary electors in a particular constituency is based on the electoral register as it stands on the last date for publication of the notice of election (4pm, Monday 8 May).

Candidates can contact the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland to request the most up-to-date number of electors to help them plan their spending during the campaign.

#### **5.4 What activities count towards the spending limit?**

Candidate spending includes any expenses incurred, whether on goods, services, property or facilities, for the purposes of the candidate's election during the regulated period. These activities include:

- advertising of any kind - for example, posters, newspaper adverts, websites or YouTube videos
- unsolicited materials sent to voters - for example, letters or leaflets
- transport costs
- public meetings
- staff costs - for example, an agent's salary
- accommodation - for example, the campaign office
- administrative costs - for example, telephone bills, stationery and photocopying.

#### **5.5 Are there any activities that don't count towards the spending limit?**

Yes. Activities that do not count include:

- payment of a candidate's deposit
- anything (except adverts) appearing in a newspaper or on a licensed broadcast channel
- facilities you use because you are entitled to do so as a candidate, such as a public room for a meeting
- volunteer time including time spent by your staff that you do not pay them for
- use of someone's main residence
- use of someone's personal car or other means of transport
- general computer equipment bought for personal use

#### **5.6 Does campaign spending by a political party in a particular constituency count towards a candidate's spending limit?**

Sometimes. Spending does not need to be counted against both the candidate's and the party's spending limit. An item of spending will generally fall into one category or the other:

- spending on activity that promotes the candidate is likely to count towards the candidate's spending limit – for example, a letter sent to electors introducing the candidate and their local policies
- spending on activity that promotes the party and not the candidate is likely to be covered by the rules on party campaign expenditure – for example, a local newspaper advertisement that features the party's national policies and logo, but does not mention the local candidate or specifically targeted local issues

Where a political party spends money promoting a particular candidate, then that spend will count towards the candidate's spending limit.

## 5.7 What rules apply to hustings?

Hustings can be organised by anyone, and are events designed to give the public an opportunity to hear from the candidates or parties standing for election in their constituency.

There is no legal requirement for the person or organising a hustings to invite all candidates or parties standing in a constituency. However, spending on hustings may be regulated depending on how it is organised. This may happen where the organiser selectively invites or excludes candidates or parties

The Electoral Commission has produced guidance on Hustings here [http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0010/169480/sp-hustings-npc-ukpge.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/169480/sp-hustings-npc-ukpge.pdf)

## 5.8 Is there a limit on donations a candidate can accept in the UKPGE?

No. However, candidates can only accept donations of money, items or services worth more than £50 towards their campaign spending from a permissible source (see section 5.9).

All donations worth more than £50 must be published in the candidate's spending return. They do not need to declare donations with a value of £50 or less.

## 5.9 Who can make donations to candidates?

Anyone can make a donation worth less than £50 to candidates.

Candidates must ensure they only accept donations of more than £50 from a permissible source. Donations that are not from a permissible source must be returned to the donor within 30 days. After that, the donation may be forfeited.

Permissible donors in the UK are defined as:

- an individual on a UK electoral register
- a UK registered company which is incorporated within the EU and carries on business in the UK
- a UK registered trade union
- a UK registered building society
- a UK registered limited liability partnership
- a UK registered friendly society
- a UK based unincorporated association

For an overview of the rules and more detail on what counts as a donation and accepting donations, see Electoral Commission guidance for candidates and agents, Part 3 Section B:

[http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/224943/Candidate-guidance-UKPGE-2017-Northern-Ireland.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/224943/Candidate-guidance-UKPGE-2017-Northern-Ireland.pdf)

## 5.10 What are the rules on crowdfunding?

Candidates and parties may accept donations using crowdfunding websites, often managed by third party providers, which pass the donations to the candidate or party minus a fee.

Crowdfunding pages should make donors aware of the rules covering permissibility and declarations of donations and the possibility that donors names may be made public at some point in the future in Northern Ireland. It is also the responsibility of the candidate to ensure that they collect sufficient information to properly complete their reporting obligations including your obligations as to how donations from impermissible donors have been dealt with.

For reporting purposes, the date of receipt of a donation is the date on which the funds are received from the third party crowdfunding site. If a donation received in this way is from an impermissible source it must be returned within 30 days.

For more information on crowdfunding for candidates and political parties, see our guidance factsheet:  
[http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/184236/Factsheet-Crowdfunding-UKPGE-2015-.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/184236/Factsheet-Crowdfunding-UKPGE-2015-.pdf)

## 5.11 To what extent can political parties fund their candidates?

Many political parties run a local 'fighting fund' for their candidate. If the fund is managed and controlled by the party and not the candidate, then donations to the fund are usually treated as having been made to the party.

However, during the regulated period, any donations made by the party to a candidate above £50 must be reported in the candidate's spending return.

## 5.12 Who do candidates report their regulated spending to and when?

Candidates standing to be a Member of Parliament (or their agents) must submit their campaign spending returns to the Chief Electoral Officer within **35 days of the election result being declared**.

The return should include details of donations and spending during the 'short' campaign.

If no spending is incurred, a nil return must be submitted by the candidate or their agent.

### **5.13 What happens if a candidate exceeds their spending limit?**

Allegations relating to the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983, including candidate spending, are generally made to the PSNI to consider.

Whilst the Electoral Commission does have a statutory duty to monitor compliance with parts of the RPA relating to candidates and agents' expenses, it is not legally empowered to investigate and impose sanctions for offences under the RPA.

## SECTION B – Political parties

### 6 Campaign spending limits, donations and what must be reported

#### 6.1 What is the maximum that a political party can spend on campaigning?

The spending limit is £30,000 x the number of seats the party is contesting. There are 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland.

If a party is contesting each of the 18 Parliamentary constituencies across Northern Ireland then it would be: £30,000 x 18 = £540,000.

To see how spending limits could vary, depending on the number of constituencies they are contesting, see our Guidance to political parties, pages 6 – 7:  
[http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/224810/UKPGE-2017-Political-Parties-guidance.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/224810/UKPGE-2017-Political-Parties-guidance.pdf)

The limits apply to any spending incurred during the regulated period (see 6.2). The limits also apply to spending that took place before the regulated period on things (such as leaflets) which are then used during the regulated period.

#### 6.2 When is the regulated period?

The regulated period for political parties began on Thursday 9 June 2016 and ends on the day of the poll, Thursday 8 June 2017.

To see how the regulated periods for the different elections that have taken place in 2017 affect parties' spending, see our Guidance to political parties, pages 4 – 5:  
[http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0017/224810/UKPGE-2017-Political-Parties-guidance.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/224810/UKPGE-2017-Political-Parties-guidance.pdf)

#### 6.3 What activities count towards the spending limit?

Party spending is defined as items, facilities and services that are used to promote the party itself, or to criticise other parties, during the regulated period.

These activities include:

- party advertising of any kind – eg. street banners, websites and videos
- unsolicited material sent to voters - for example, letters or leaflets
- the manifesto and other documents setting out the party's policies
- market research to find out how people intend to vote
- party press conferences
- party rallies and events, including the cost of people's attendance and any goods, services or facilities provided
- transport in connection with publicising the campaign

## 6.4 Are there any activities that don't count towards the spending limit?

Yes. Activities that do not count include:

- permanent, fixed term or temporary staff costs where the staff member has a direct employment contract with the party
- volunteer time
- office running costs, except costs that are higher than usual because of campaigning, such as telephone bills
- people's travel, food and accommodation costs while they campaign, unless you reimburse them
- expenses met out of public funds. For example, security costs for VIP visits
- material sent only to your members
- Party conferences
- Local newsletters about elected representatives or prospective candidates
- anything which a candidate declares on their spending return

For more information on political party campaigning at the 2017 UK Parliamentary General Election, see our guidance:

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/media/guidance/party-campaigners/to-campaign-spend-rp.pdf>

## 6.5 When do political parties report their regulated spending?

The deadline for registered political parties that have spent £250,000 or under to submit their return to the Electoral Commission is **8 September 2017**.

The deadline for registered political parties that have spent over £250,000 to submit their return to the Electoral Commission is **8 December 2017**.

## 6.6 Is there a limit on donations that a political party can accept in the run-up to the UKPGE?

No. However, political parties in Northern Ireland can only accept donations worth more than £500 towards their campaign from a permissible source. More information on this is available in our guidance on reporting donations and loans in Northern Ireland: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/party-or-campaigner/guidance-for-political-parties/reporting-donations-and-loans-northern-ireland>



## 6.7 When will the political parties report their donations to the Electoral Commission?

Political parties central HQs must continue to report any donations they receive on a quarterly basis that total over £7,500 to the Electoral Commission. Local accounting units must report donations that total over £1,500.

**After 3 May and up until the end of polling day, political parties central HQs must submit weekly donation and loan reports which will be published by the Electoral Commission.**

## 6.8 What are the weekly donation and loan reports publication dates?

Political parties central HQs must submit weekly donation and loan reports setting out what donations and loans they have received over £7,500 after 3 May up until polling day. As required by law the Commission does not publish this information.

<b>Reporting period</b>	<b>Deadline to submit report</b>
3 May to 9 May	16 May 2017
10 May to 16 May	23 May 2017
17 May to 23 May	30 May 2017
24 May to 30 May	6 June 2017
31 May to 6 June	13 June 2017
7 June to 8 June	15 June 2017

## SECTION C – Non-party campaigners

### 7 Rules for non-party campaigners at the UKPGE

#### 7.1 What are ‘non-party campaigners’?

Non-party campaigners are individuals or organisations that campaign in the run-up to elections, but are not standing as political parties or candidates.

A non-party campaigner may, for example, be a campaigning organisation, a trade union, a charity, a faith group, a company or an individual. As at previous UKPGEs, non-party campaigners can campaign even though they are not standing as a political party or candidate.

Any non-party campaigner that intends to spend £20,000 in England or £10,000 in any of Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland on regulated campaign activity during the regulated period (9 June 2016 – 8 June 2017) must register with the Electoral Commission and follow the rules on campaigning as set out in legislation.

To see which non-party campaigners have so far registered with the Electoral Commission, visit: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/political-parties-campaigning-and-donations/non-party-campaign-spending-and-donations-at-elections/register-of-non-party-campaigners>

#### 7.2 How are non-party campaigners affected by the “Lobbying Act”?

Non-party campaigners that spend money on certain campaigning activities that can be reasonably regarded as intended to influence voters in the run-up to an election have been regulated since rules were first put in place in 2000.

The Transparency of Lobbying, Non Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Act 2014 (the “Lobbying Act”) has changed the rules that are set out in PPERA and means that:

- a wider range of campaigning activities are subject to new rules on spending.
- there are lower national spending limits
- there are increased reporting requirements for registered campaigners
- higher registration thresholds

You can read Lord Hodgson’s report on the impact of the “Lobbying Act” during the 2015 General Election [here](#). Our response to the report is [here](#).

### **7.3 What activities are covered by this legislation?**

In the past, spending on election material was regulated. The new rules now cover spending on election material and:

- public rallies and other public events
- press conferences and media events
- canvassing or market research - for example, using phone banks to encourage people to vote a certain way
- transport in connection with publicising a campaign

### **7.4 How much can registered non-party campaigners spend at the UKPGE?**

Once a campaigner has registered with the Electoral Commission, the amount that they can spend during the regulated period is:

- £46,100 in Northern Ireland

There were also limits on spending in place for the regulated period for elections in Northern Ireland on 2 March 2017. The regulated period for the 2017 UKPGE covers the time that these spending limits were in place.

The Northern Ireland spending limit in the table above is therefore the total of the spending limit for the 2017 Northern Ireland Assembly election and the spending limit for the 2017 UKPGE.

In addition, non-party campaigners are limited to spending a maximum of £9,750 per constituency.

### **7.5 Do non-party campaigners have to report donations to the Electoral Commission?**

Like political party central HQs, registered non-party campaigners can only accept donations over £500 from a permissible source and must report any donations that total over £7,500 to the Electoral Commission.

The legislation also introduced new pre-poll reporting requirements for registered non-party campaigners.

## 7.6 What are the pre-poll reporting requirements for non-party campaigners?

Before the 2017 UKPGE was called, there was no regulated period or spending limit in operation for general campaigning in the elections in England, Scotland and Wales in 2017.

There is an overlap between the regulated period for the UKPGE on 8 June 2017 and the regulated period for the elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly held on 2 March 2017.

Now that the UKPGE has been called, the 365 days prior to the date of the election (9 June 2016 – 8 June 2017) falls within the regulated period for the UKPGE. Any spending on regulated activity that met the public and purpose tests at elections in England, Scotland or Wales in that period will now count towards the non-party campaigner's spending limit in the relevant part of the UK in the UKPGE. This includes spending at any by-elections in the regulated period.

Any regulated spending reported for the Northern Ireland Assembly Elections does not need to be reported again, but will count towards the UKPGE spending limits.

For more information and a definition of the 'public and purpose tests', see our guidance on page 4 here: [http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0009/224955/UKPGE-2017-Overview-of-non-party-regulated-campaign-activity.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/224955/UKPGE-2017-Overview-of-non-party-regulated-campaign-activity.pdf)

Registered non-party campaigners must report donations received during the regulated period over a certain value to the Electoral Commission **before** the date of the poll. This is called 'pre-poll reporting'.

Registered non-party campaigners must submit weekly donation reports setting out what donations they have received over £7,500 after 3 May up until polling day.

The dates for when these must be submitted and when they will be published are the same as outlined for political parties central HQs in **Section 6.8**.

## 7.7 When must non-party campaigners report their spending to the Electoral Commission?

The deadline for registered non-party campaigners that have spent £250,000 or under to submit their return to the Electoral Commission is **8 September 2017**.

The deadline for registered non-party campaigners that have spent over £250,000 to submit their return to the Electoral Commission is **8 December 2017**.

To see the guidance that the Electoral Commission has produced for non-party campaigners, visit: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/party-or-campaigner/non-party-campaigners/2017-elections>

## **7.8 What support has the Electoral Commission provided non-party campaigners to help them comply with these rules?**

The Electoral Commission has produced [guidance](#) to help non-party campaigners comply with the rules.

The Commission has also published [specific guidance](#) for non-party campaigners which sets out the spending limits, regulated period and reporting deadlines for the UK Parliamentary general election (UKPGE) in 2017.

## **7.9 How has the Electoral Commission worked with the voluntary sector specifically?**

The Electoral Commission produced [guidance](#) specifically aimed for charities in collaboration the Charity Commission for Northern Ireland.

The Electoral Commission has produced additional [factsheets on common campaigning techniques](#) on its website to help support charities and others as they plan their campaigning activities.

Non-party campaigners are vital to a healthy democracy and the Electoral Commission encourages their active participation in the campaign period ahead of the general election. Where a significant amount of money is being spent on campaigning, it's right that voters can see whose spending that money and what outcome they are campaigning for.

# SECTION D – The election campaign

## 8 Party election broadcasts

### 8.1 How many election broadcasts are political parties entitled to in the run up to the UKPGE?

The decision on how many broadcasts to allocate to political parties is for the broadcasters to decide.

The political parties pay for and produce the content of the party election broadcasts (PEBs), which must observe the law – for example on copyright, defamation, contempt, obscenity and incitement to racial hatred or violence. They must comply with the Ofcom Broadcasting Code or the BBC Editorial Guidelines that relate to harm and offence and fairness and privacy.

More information about how PEBs are allocated will be available from the Broadcasters' Liaison Group, the group of broadcasters that discusses the allocation of PEBs, visit [www.broadcastersliaisongroup.org.uk](http://www.broadcastersliaisongroup.org.uk).

The BBC's draft criteria for PEBs can be found at:  
[http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/our\\_work/editorial\\_standards/party\\_political\\_broadcasts.html](http://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/our_work/editorial_standards/party_political_broadcasts.html)

Ofcom's rules on PEBs can be found at:  
<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/about-ofcom/how-ofcom-is-run/committees/election-committee>

### 8.2 Are there rules on impartiality for the media during the UKPGE?

News reports, features and editorials in print or online media are not subject to electoral law, and the law does not require them to be impartial. Political impartiality in broadcast media is covered by the editorial guidelines relevant to that broadcaster:

- The BBC's editorial guidelines on broadcasting during the UKPGE can be found at <http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/2017juneelection.pdf>
- Commercial broadcasters are subject to the Ofcom Broadcasting Code, which can be found at <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-codes/broadcast-code>

- Ofcom's statement on changes to the rules on due impartiality, due accuracy, elections and referendums is at <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/consultations-and-statements/category-2/broadcast-impartiality-accuracy-and-elections-rules-review>

TV, radio and online debates between party leaders are also a matter for the relevant broadcasters and newspapers. The Electoral Commission has no regulatory role in relation to debates between party leaders.

## 9 Electoral fraud

The Representation of the People Act 1983 specifies a number of criminal offences relating to electoral fraud. The relevant police force for the area in which the election is taking place would investigate any allegations that an offence may have taken place.

The PSNI has designated a Single Point of Contact officer (known as a SPOC) to lead on election-related crime, who will give advice to local police officers. Anyone making an allegation should be prepared to give the police a statement and substantiate their concerns. People can also choose to contact Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

**Anyone, including candidates, politicians and members of the public, who has evidence of electoral fraud taking place should report it to the police immediately, using the 101 non-emergency number unless there is a crime in progress**

### 9.1 What are the different types of voting offences?

Offences include:

#### **Personation**

This is where an individual votes as someone else (whether that person is living or dead or is a fictitious person), either by post or at a polling station, in person or as a proxy.

#### **Undue influence / Intimidation**

A person is guilty of undue influence if they directly or indirectly make use of or threaten to make use of force, violence or restraint, or inflict or threaten to inflict injury, damage, loss or harm, in order to induce or compel any voter to vote or refrain from voting.

## **Bribery**

A person is guilty of bribery if they directly or indirectly give any money or procure any office to or for any voter, in order to induce that voter to vote or not vote.

## **Multiple voting and proxy voting offences**

There are various offences regarding multiple voting and proxy voting, including voting (whether in person, by post or by proxy) when subject to a legal incapacity to vote and voting more than once in the same election.

## **False registration information**

It is an offence to supply false registration information to an Electoral Registration Officer. It is also an offence to supply false information in connection with an application for a postal or proxy vote. False information includes a false signature.

## **Treating**

A person is guilty of treating if either before, during or after an election they directly or indirectly give or provide any food, drink, entertainment or provision to corruptly influence any voter to vote or refrain from voting. Treating requires a corrupt intent - it does not apply to ordinary hospitality.

## **False statements about a candidate's personal character or conduct**

It is an offence to make or publish a false statement of fact about the personal character or conduct of a candidate in order to affect the return of a candidate at an election.

False statements that are not about a candidate's personal character or conduct are not illegal under electoral law, but could be considered as libel or slander.

It is also an illegal practice to make a false statement of a candidate's withdrawal in order to promote or procure the election of another candidate.

## **False statements in nomination papers**

It is an offence for a candidate to provide a false statement on a nomination paper, that they know to be false. For example, if they know they are disqualified from election they must not sign the consent to nomination.

## **Campaign publicity material**

Certain offences relate specifically to election campaign publicity material. Printed election campaign publicity material must contain an imprint, not resemble a poll card and not contain a false statement of fact as to the personal character or conduct of a candidate.



## SECTION E – The voter

### 10 Registering to vote

#### 10.1 Who can register to vote at the UKPGE?

A person can apply to register to vote in the UKPGE if they are aged 18 or over on polling day; and are:

- a British citizen
- a citizen of the Republic of Ireland resident in the UK; or
- a qualifying Commonwealth citizen resident in the UK

A qualifying Commonwealth citizen is someone who has leave to enter or remain in the UK, or does not require such leave. The definition of a 'Commonwealth' citizen includes citizens of British Crown Dependencies and British Overseas Territories.

A list of the Commonwealth countries whose citizens may be eligible to vote is available at <https://www.yourvotematters.co.uk/can-i-vote/who-can-register-to-vote>

#### 10.2 How can someone register to vote?

People can register to vote by contacting the Electoral Office helpline on 0800 4320 712 or by downloading a registration form from [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk) or [www.yourvotematters.co.uk](http://www.yourvotematters.co.uk). The form must be completed and returned to the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland by Monday 22 May.

In this period of registration you may be required to provide documentation in support of your application and the type of original documentation accepted is prescribed in legislation. The list of acceptable documentation is available on the Electoral Officer website: <http://www.eoni.org.uk/getmedia/e36a65e4-9554-415f-b709-5dde5b2cd745/LATE-Registration-Evidence-Requirements>

The Electoral Commission's aim is to make sure everyone who is eligible and wants to vote is able to do so. The registration deadline is **Monday 22 May 2017**. Anyone who is not registered should visit [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk)

**It would be helpful for any relevant stories you run to highlight this deadline and a link to the EONI website or [www.yourvotematters.co.uk](http://www.yourvotematters.co.uk)**  
**If a person voted in Northern Ireland Assembly election on 2 March 2017 and their circumstances have not changed – for example, they have not moved home – they will already be registered for the UKPGE and do not need to re-register**

### **10.3 How can overseas voters register and vote?**

British and/or Irish citizens (who were born in Northern Ireland and were registered to vote in Northern Ireland in the last 15 years) living abroad can register to vote online as an 'Overseas Voter' if they have been registered to vote in the UK in the last 15 years.

Citizens registered to vote in Northern Ireland as an overseas voter are unable to vote by post as ballot papers cannot be sent to an address outside of the UK. They can register to vote by proxy.

To find out more about how to register as an overseas voter and to download an overseas registration form visit [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk)

### **10.4 How do members of the armed services register and vote?**

Service personnel and their families that are based in the UK and unlikely to change address or be posted overseas this year can apply to register online as ordinary electors.

Service personnel and their spouse or civil partner can also register as 'Service Voters'. Service personnel can apply to register online as a 'Service Voter' at <http://www.eoni.org.uk/Register-To-Vote/Special-Category-Registration>.

### **10.5 What support is offered to people with a learning disability to help them to register to vote?**

People with a disability can receive assistance from someone else to complete an application but the person who wants to register to vote has to make the declaration. If the person registering is unable to sign the form then a witness must sign their form and provide their name and address.

### **10.6 What is the deadline to register to vote?**

A person must apply to register by midnight on **Monday 22 May** for the polls on Thursday 8 June. However, we are encouraging everyone to register as soon as possible rather than wait for the deadline.

### **10.7 Can someone register at two different addresses?**

Yes. A person can register at more than one address, as long as they are resident at each address. However, they can only vote once in an election. For example, students can register if they wish at both their home and their term time address but it is an offence to vote more than once in the same election.

## 10.8 What is the deadline for applying for postal and proxy voting?

Only a person who is (or will be) registered qualifies to vote by post or proxy.

- The deadline for applying for a postal vote at the UKPGE is **5pm, Thursday 18 May**.
- The deadline for applying for a proxy vote, except in the case of emergency, is **5pm Thursday 18 May**.

## 10.9 Can prisoners vote?

Remand prisoners (those who have not been convicted and sentenced) may vote. Convicted prisoners detained because of their sentence cannot.

## 10.10 How can organisations help encourage people to register to vote at the UKPGE?

The Electoral Commission runs a voter registration newsletter, [Roll Call](#), that organisations can sign up to receive support, advice and resources to raise awareness among their networks about registering to vote.

The Electoral Commission is producing a range of resources that organisations can use and share online. The Electoral Commission has worked [with a range of partner organisations](#) – from the corporate, public and voluntary sectors – to try and reach traditionally under-registered voters and encourage them to register to vote. A list of our partner organisations can be found [here](#).

Information on partnerships and links to the resources for promoting voter registration are online here: <a href="http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/electoral-registration">http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/electoral-registration</a>
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## 10.11 What is the Electoral Commission doing to encourage people to register to vote at the UKPGE?

The Electoral Commission launched its UK public awareness campaign on 8 May, encouraging people to register to vote by the deadline of 22 May. Advertising is running across radio, online, outdoor and in print in Northern Ireland.

## 10.12 Overseas voters

The Electoral Commission is committed to getting as many UK citizens that are now living overseas but remain eligible to vote registered as part of its public awareness activity. To support this objective the Commission:

- is running an online advertising campaign to target as many expats as possible and encourage them to register to vote
- Is using its social media channels to encourage expats who are eligible to vote to register and also register for a proxy vote.
- provided template resources for partner organisations with links to the expat community

## 10.13 Service Personnel

Every year the Ministry of Defence (MOD), with the support of the Electoral Commission, run a campaign to encourage service personnel to register to vote or to update their registration details. The campaign took place ahead of the local elections on 4 May. This included a register to vote reminder appearing in the pay packets of all MoD employees in March.

Ahead of this General Election, the Electoral Commission:

- is running online advertising targeting armed forces personnel based overseas
- is working with the MOD internal communications channels to get registration messages to service personnel
- is using social media to encourage its partners with links to the service community to spread registration messages
- will provide a toolkit of resources to Unit Registration Officers (UROs)

# 11 The voting process

## 11.1 When will polling stations be open?

Polling starts at 7am and closes at 10pm. The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland will send a poll card to each elector giving the location of their polling station. It is not necessary for voters to bring their poll card when they vote.

The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland will also be able to tell voters where their polling station is and a postcode search facility is available at [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk) or call the helpline on 0800 4320 712

## 11.2 What happens if someone is still queuing to vote at polling station at 10pm?

Any voter who arrives at the polling station before 10pm and is still waiting to vote at 10pm **will be able to vote**.

Legislation was changed by the UK Government in 2013 to allow this to happen following a recommendation by the Electoral Commission.

## 11.3 What different ways are there for someone to vote?

Most voters in Northern Ireland will vote in person at polling station. However if a person is unable to make it to the polling station then they may be able to apply to vote by post or proxy.

### 11.4 In person

- Registered voters can visit their local **polling station** between 7am and 10pm on 8 June to cast their votes. Before polling day, voters will be sent a 'poll card' which includes details of where their polling station is.
- Voters can only vote at their allocated polling station as stated on this card.
- Polling station staff will be on hand to explain the ballot paper and how to vote.

Voters must present photographic identification at their polling station to confirm their identity. Voters must present one of the following to poll staff before they can be issued with a ballot paper:

- a UK or Irish passport
- a photographic Northern Ireland, Great Britain, Irish or EEA driving licence
- a Translink Senior Smartpass
- a Translink 60+ Smartpass
- a Translink War Disabled Smartpass
- a Translink Blind Person's Smartpass
- an Electoral Identity Card

The identification does not need to be 'current' but the presiding officer must be satisfied that the photograph matches that of the person intending to vote.

## 11.5 By post

Voters in Northern Ireland can apply for a postal vote but must provide a valid reason for their application such as:

- inability to attend due to illness
- blindness or other disability
- absence on the day of poll due to work commitments
- holiday arrangements

Postal and proxy vote application forms are available from area electoral offices or [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk) or by calling the helpline on 0800 4320 712. To vote by **post**, voters will need to apply for a postal vote before the postal application deadline of 5pm, Thursday 18 May.

- Postal ballot papers will be sent directly to voters before polling day.
- Voters should complete their ballot paper and provide their signature and date of birth on their postal voting statement, and return these to their Area Electoral Office before 10pm on 8 June. Voters cannot return their postal ballot papers to a polling station.
- Votes arriving after 10pm on 8 June will not be counted.

## 11.6 By proxy

Voters can also apply to vote by proxy. This is where they ask someone they trust to vote on their behalf, such as a spouse or other family member. However, only a person who is (or will be) registered qualifies for a proxy vote. The person acting as proxy will also need to be registered.

The criteria for applying for a proxy vote are the same as that for a postal vote.

**The deadline for applying for a postal or proxy vote for the UKPGE is 5pm on Thursday 18 May 2017.** **11.7 How should voters complete their ballot paper?**

At the UKPGE, voters should mark their ballot paper with a single 'X' in the box next to the candidate they wish to be their Member of Parliament for their constituency.

## 11.8 Should voters use pencils or pens to cast their vote?

In the UK, pencils are traditionally used for the purposes of marking ballot papers and are made available inside polling stations for voters to use. However, there is nothing to stop a voter from using a pen to mark their vote – there is no legal requirement for ballot papers to be marked with a pencil.

The reason that pencils are traditionally used is partly for historical and practical reasons: with ink pens there is always a risk that they may dry out or spill. Also, ink may cause some transfer of the mark the voter has made on the ballot paper when

they fold it, thus potentially leading to a rejection as it may look like they have voted for more options than they are entitled to.

The use of pencils does not in itself increase the likelihood of electoral fraud. Legislation has built specific safeguards into the process, such as the requirement for seals to be attached to ballot boxes at the close of poll. By law, referendum campaigners are also entitled to be present at that stage and to attach their own seals if they wish. At the start of the count, they can then observe those same seals being broken.

Tampering with ballot papers is a serious offence and if anyone has evidence that ballot papers are being tampered with, they should report this to the police.

### **11.9 What are the rules about taking photographs of ballot papers?**

The law relating to obtaining information in polling stations and disclosing such information is complex. Given the risk that someone taking a photo inside a polling station may be in breach of the law, whether intentionally or not, the Electoral Commission's advice is against taking any photos inside polling stations.

Offences relating to the photography of ballot papers also concern the type of ballot paper. Postal ballot papers are treated differently in electoral law, compared to polling station ballot papers. A postal voter may take a picture of their own postal ballot paper and publicise it (including via social media).

However, while the postal voter themselves may publicise the information, if someone else persuades or induces them to make this information available, they would be committing an offence. If there are any suggestions or allegations that this could be happening, the person making the complaint should be advised to report the matter to the police.

### **11.10 What advice does the Electoral Commission provide for people with a learning or access disability at the polling station?**

The following facilities are available at polling stations to assist voters with disabilities:

- a polling booth with a shelf at a height suitable for people in wheelchairs
- a polling booth with extra lighting
- a large print version of the ballot paper (for reference purposes only)
- a device with Braille (known as a selector device) to help voters mark their ballot paper

If a voter cannot mark the ballot paper themselves due to a disability, they can have it marked by a companion or by the Presiding Officer.

The Presiding Officer and poll clerks will be aware of what support they can offer.

## SECTION F – The Count

### 12 How the UKPGE count works and the declaration of results

#### 13.1 Who is responsible for the count?

The Chief Electoral Officer and his Deputy Returning Officers have overall responsibility for the counting of the votes. This includes ensuring Presiding Officers transport ballot boxes from polling stations to the count venue in a secure and timely manner; and that those recruited to count ballot papers have been well trained in how to carry out their duties.

#### 12.2 When will the count start?

The [Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010](#) states that “The returning officer shall take reasonable steps to begin counting the votes given on the ballot papers as soon as practicable within the period of **four hours** starting with the close of the poll”. Polls close at 10pm.

#### 12.3 How will I know when the count will start in different Parliamentary constituencies?

The Electoral Commission has asked all Deputy Returning Officers across the UK to provide the Commission with information about what time they expect to start verifying ballot papers; and what time they expect to start counting the votes.

The Commission will make this information publicly available closer to the election and will send a note to journalists when the information is on its website.

#### 12.4 Who is entitled to attend the count?

The following people are entitled by law to attend the count:

- the Deputy Returning Officer and their staff
- candidates and one guest
- election agents (or a sub agent on their behalf)
- counting agents
- Electoral Commission representatives
- accredited observers
- any other person permitted to attend by the Deputy Returning Officer

Members of the media and photographers who want to attend a count must obtain media accreditation on advance by completing the online accreditation form at [www.eoni.org.uk/Elections/Media-Centre](http://www.eoni.org.uk/Elections/Media-Centre)



## **12.5 How are the votes counted and the results announced?**

There are four stages to the count process.

### 1) Receipt of ballot boxes

- Postal ballot boxes and ballot boxes from the polling stations arrive at the count venue and are checked in.

### 2) Verification

- Staff count the postal ballot papers and verify that the number of ballot papers in postal ballot boxes matches the numbers recorded by the Deputy Returning Officer.
- Staff also count the ballot papers from each polling station. They verify that the number of ballot papers matches the number of papers issued, as recorded on the Presiding Officer's ballot paper accounts.
- The Deputy Returning Officer produces a statement showing how many ballot papers have been received against how many ballot papers were expected.

### 3) Counting of the votes

- Staff sort ballot papers by candidate.
- Staff then count the number of votes cast for each candidate.
- The Deputy Returning Officer will share the provisional result with candidates and their agents. At this point, a candidate or their agent can ask for a recount of the votes. The Deputy Returning Officer can refuse the request if they think it's unreasonable.

### 4) Declaration of the result

- The Deputy Returning Officer will declare the number of votes cast for each candidate and will then announce the name of the candidate with the most votes as the elected Member of Parliament for the constituency.

## **12.6 How does the opening of postal votes fit into this process?**

It's likely that several postal vote opening sessions will take place before polling day, as well as on polling day itself.

The Deputy Returning Officer must give candidates at least 48 hours' notice of when and where the sessions will take place. At each opening session, the Deputy Returning Officer will decide whether or not the date of birth and signatures provided by electors on their postal voting statements match the signature and date of birth previously provided and held on record. If the Deputy Returning Officer is not satisfied that they match, the vote is rejected.

Candidates can observe the process or appoint a postal voting agent to do so. Anyone attending an opening session must not attempt to look at identifying marks

or numbers on ballot papers, disclose how any particular ballot paper has been marked or pass on any such information gained from the session.

All valid ballot papers are placed into ballot boxes and stored securely before being delivered to the count venue for counting after the close of poll.

### **12.7 What happens with spoiled ballot papers?**

Once the verification phase of the count is complete, ballot papers will be sorted by candidate and any doubtful ballot papers will be identified. The Deputy Returning Officer will adjudicate any doubtful ballot papers in the presence of candidates and agents and the Commission has provided guidance to help them do this.

Spoilt ballot papers are sealed separately to other ballot papers and the the Deputy Returning Officer will announce how many ballot papers were rejected after they have announced who has been elected as a Member of Parliament.

### **12.8 Can the result be challenged after it has been announced?**

An election petition can be issued if someone wants to challenge a result. In most cases it must be presented within 21 days of the declaration of the result.

For more information on how a candidate could challenge the result of an election, see our Guidance for candidates and agents, Part 6, pages 5 – 6:  
[http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/179944/UKPGE-Part-6-After-the-declaration-of-results-NI.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/179944/UKPGE-Part-6-After-the-declaration-of-results-NI.pdf)