

Priority	High
Event specific	2010 UK Parliamentary general election
Action required	No
Area	GB
Retain	Until replaced
Circular reference	EC12/2010

6 May 2010 UK Parliamentary general election

6 April 2010

For the attention of:

The Returning Officer

Parliamentary constituencies in Scotland

The Acting Returning Officer

Parliamentary constituencies in England and Wales

The Electoral Registration Officer

District, metropolitan borough and London borough authorities in England

Unitary authorities in England and Wales

Unitary authorities and joint boards in Scotland

Introduction

1. The Prime Minister has announced that a UK Parliamentary general election will be held on Thursday 6 May 2010. It is expected that the UK Parliament will be dissolved and the Clerk of the Crown will issue writs of election on Monday 12 April 2010. An election timetable is included at **Appendix A**.
2. This circular provides details of the services available from the Commission during the election period, as well as other information on our activities.

Guidance

3. We have produced a range of guidance and resources to support (Acting) Returning Officers in the conduct of the election. Guidance manuals for (Acting) Returning Officers, guidance for candidates and agents and polling station handbooks have all been distributed. Copies are also available for download from our website, along with a variety of additional briefing materials including polling station and count support products. Please refer to our website for a full list of available materials:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/uk-parliamentary-elections.

4. There is also guidance material for political parties available on our website at:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-those-we-regulate.

Timing of counts

5. Further to Circular EC08(2010) on the Commission's draft guidance on the timing of counts at UK Parliamentary elections, the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill is still before the UK Parliament. If Clause 90 of that Bill, which would place (Acting) Returning Officers under a duty to take reasonable steps to begin counting the votes on ballot papers for UK Parliamentary elections as soon as practicable within four hours of the close of poll, does become law, the Commission will issue formal guidance on this new duty as soon as the Bill receives Royal Assent.
6. As you will be aware, the Commission has previously asked (Acting) Returning Officers for information regarding when they intend to commence the counting of votes at the UK Parliamentary general election, and we have produced a table of information summarising the responses we have received to date, which is available on our website at:
<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/upcoming-elections-and-referendums/uk/general-election>.
7. If any (Acting) Returning Officers have yet to notify us of their plans or have changed their plans from the information provided to us previously, we would ask that they contact their local Commission office as soon as possible with information on when they intend to commence the counting of votes.

Combination of polls

8. Local government elections are scheduled to take place in parts of England on Thursday 6 May. We have again produced a range of guidance and resources designed to support Returning Officers facing combined polls, including specific sections on combined polls in Parts G of both the UK Parliamentary and local government election guidance manuals for Returning Officers. We have distributed these guidance manuals and also polling station handbooks and quick guides tailored specifically to running a combined poll to those Returning Officers with scheduled local elections on 6 May 2010. Copies are

also available for download from our website, along with a variety of other local government election and combined poll support products:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/local-elections/local-government-elections-in-england

9. The announcement that the UK Parliamentary election will take place on Thursday 6 May means that the poll at all contested parish council elections in England and community council elections in Wales will be postponed for 3 weeks until Thursday 27 May. We have already circulated guidance with Alert 137 on how postponement would affect the timetable and administration of parish and community elections, and this can be downloaded from our website:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/data/assets/electoral_commission_pdf_file/0017/87020/Postponement-parish-and-community-elections-FINAL.pdf

Contact from the Commission

10. If it becomes necessary to issue any additional guidance or information during the election period, this will be forwarded to names on our existing distribution lists. This includes any urgent communications, which will be distributed as appropriate via either a Circular or Alert. If you would like to request circulation to additional e-mail addressees in your office during the election period in order to ensure that any necessary information is received promptly, please contact Gennoria Miles at gmiles@electoralcommission.org.uk.

Electoral administration advice

11. We will offer a comprehensive advice service during the election period through staff based in Cardiff, Edinburgh, York, Coventry, London and Exeter. This service will be staffed from 8:30am to 5:30 pm from Tuesday 6 April until Friday 7 May. After hours assistance for urgent enquiries is also available until 10.00pm on weekdays and from 10.00am until 5.00pm at weekends and on bank holidays until Monday 10 May. Please see **Appendix B** for contact names and numbers.

Register of political parties

12. Further to paragraph 4.6 of Part C of *Managing a UK Parliamentary election: guidance for (Acting) Returning Officers*, the Commission can now confirm the deadlines for registering political parties and for making changes to political parties' registered details, and how changes made to the register of political parties throughout the election period will appear on the Commission's website.
13. Our deadline for receipt of applications for the election is **Monday 12 April 2010**. We will try to process any applications received after the deadline, but we cannot guarantee that these applications will result in changes being made to the registers in time to contest the election.

14. Please note that the register of political parties will be frozen on **Friday 16 April 2010**. Thereafter, no changes will be made to the register until after the election. Please refer to our registers page for more information:

<http://registers.electoralcommission.org.uk/regulatory-issues/regpoliticalparties.cfm>

15. Any enquiries about the register of political parties should be directed to:

- In England, Martin Carr on 0207 271 0513 or mcarr@electoralcommission.org.uk.
- In Scotland, Mark Nicholls on 0131 225 0211 or mnicholls@electoralcommission.org.uk.
- In Wales, contact David Beacock on 029 2034 6806 or dbeacock@electoralcommission.org.uk.

Electoral integrity

16. We have issued a variety of materials to promote the integrity of elections and to assist in the prevention and detection of malpractice, developed in conjunction with a variety of partners. We have worked with the Association of Chief Police Officers in England and Wales, and the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, to produce a full guidance document for use by local police forces in Great Britain. This guidance has also been circulated to Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers and is designed to assist those who may receive any allegations of malpractice or the commission of offences.
17. The Commission is able to advise on steps (Acting) Returning Officers may wish to take should they receive any allegations. It would also be appreciated if the Commission could be advised of any allegations referred to the police in order to facilitate accurate recording of the level of such allegations.

Electoral observers

18. The deadline for applications for accredited observers to be able to observe at the 6 May 2010 elections is Friday 30 April. More information, and the registers of accredited observers, can be found at:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk/elections/observers.cfm.

19. Please contact Jennifer Martin-Kohlmorgen with any enquiries at jkohlmorgen@electoralcommission.org.uk or on 020 7271 0698.

Reporting on the election

20. The Commission has a statutory duty to report on a UK Parliamentary general election, and we have made arrangements to gather information to support us in this process. These arrangements include visits to selected constituencies and areas throughout the election period by Commission staff, public opinion surveys, post-election seminars and feedback meetings, meetings with groups

with particular interests, monitoring of enquiries and various other data-gathering activities. Your local Commission office will be in contact shortly regarding the details of post-election feedback events in your area.

21. Our circular EC04/2010, issued on 1 March, gave information about our electoral data collection and feedback requests in respect of the UK Parliamentary election and the scheduled English local government elections. Please note that this information is required to be returned by **Friday 28 May**.

22. The forms for the data can be found on the Commission's website at:

For the UK Parliamentary election

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/uk-parliamentary-elections>

For local elections in England

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/local-elections/local-government-elections-in-england>

23. The forms should be returned to the LGC Elections Centre at Plymouth University:

By email to: elections@plymouth.ac.uk

By post to: Brian Cheal, Local Government Chronicle Elections Centre, University of Plymouth, Plymouth, PL4 8AA

By fax to: 01752 232785

24. We are also collecting feedback from Electoral Registration Officers, (Acting) Returning Officers and local government Returning Officers in England on their experience of administering these elections. The feedback forms include questions on; the planning process, nomination process, absent voting, polling, the verification and count, and the integrity of elections.

25. The feedback form can be downloaded from the Commission's website at:

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/uk-parliamentary-elections>

26. Please return completed forms as soon as possible after polling day and no later than **Friday 28 May** to the relevant Commission office.

27. We have also directed (Acting) Returning Officers to report against performance standards in circular EC07/2010. The self-assessment form must be returned by **Friday 28 May**, following which we will undertake a verification exercise and publish an assessment of performance against the standards.

Public awareness

28. We published full details of our proposed public awareness activity and available materials to support (Acting) Returning Officers and Electoral

Registration Officers in meeting their duty to promote participation in Circular EC02/2010.

29. The Commission's public awareness campaign will launch on Thursday 1 April and will run up until Tuesday 19 April, the day before the registration deadline. The Great Britain campaign will be in the same style as about the 2009 England and Wales campaign, "if you want to vote, don't let anything stop you". The campaign will consist of TV, radio, press and online advertising and will be supported by interviews in press and on the radio. The advertising will direct people for more information to the Commission's freephone telephone helpline – 0800 3 280 280, (open 8am to 8pm weekdays, and at weekends) and our website, aboutmyvote.co.uk.
30. Information and resources, including translated registration and postal vote application forms, are available to download from our website www.dopolitics.org.uk. Hard copies can be ordered from our warehouse on 0845 8500 501.
31. We will also make available three further template news releases you can adapt and use to encourage residents to register to vote by 20 April, and which contain details about the different ways of voting. These will be available to download from the Commission's Do Politics website by 5pm today. Although the templates may be adapted, we'd be grateful if the 'About My Vote' mention and preferably the Electoral Commission quote were retained in the release, as that means that we can monitor media coverage.
32. We are also publishing handbooks for the media on rules relating to the conduct of elections, which you may find of interest. These will be available to download from the Electoral Commission website, www.electoralcommission.org.uk, in the 'Media resources' section. You will also find a range of election related photographs there which journalists can use free of charge.

This circular was approved by Andrew Scallan, Director of Electoral Administration.