

## **Statement from the Electoral Commission**

The Electoral Commission – the independent elections watchdog – has welcomed the opportunity to scrutinise the Government’s plans for a fundamental change to the way we register to vote.

Great Britain currently uses a system of ‘household registration’ – where the ‘head of household’ can decide who to register in a property – that dates back to the beginning of the last century.

The Commission believes that changing the way we register to vote is important in our modern society because it gives individuals responsibility for their own right to vote (rather than leaving this to a ‘head of household’). It should also make the electoral register more secure, by making it easier to check the identity of people who register.

But this is a significant change, and the Government needs to design the transition carefully to ensure that people do not lose out on the opportunity to register and vote.

Since 2003, the Commission has been calling for the Government to change to a system where individuals are responsible for registering their own vote, and it welcomed Parliament’s decision in 2009 to make this change. In May 2010 the new Government announced its decision to accelerate the change. The White Paper published today sets out the proposed steps involved in the change.

Peter Wardle, Chief Executive of the Electoral Commission, said:

“This is the biggest change to the way we register people to vote since the introduction of the universal franchise. It needs to be managed carefully, and we welcome the fact that the Government have published this White Paper and draft legislation now, so that everyone with an interest in the electoral process has time to study the plans and ensure the change is implemented in a way that puts voters first. We will scrutinise the White Paper in detail and response to it formally in the autumn.”

“We hope this will help Parliament in its pre-legislative scrutiny.

“We are also keen for others representing the interests of voters – for example accessibility groups, community groups and political parties – to take part in the debate.

“We will be talking to them and encouraging them to consider these proposed changes, and make their views known to us and the Government.”

The Government also announced today that it is funding the Electoral Commission to carry out research across Great Britain into the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register.

As the independent expert body, The Commission will also develop and deliver a programme of research which will assess the impact of the changes to our registration system.

## Ends

For more information call  
Office hours: 020 7271 0704  
Out of office hours: 07789 920414  
Follow us on Twitter @ElectoralCommUK

## Notes to editors

1. The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. Our aim is integrity and public confidence in the UK's democratic process. We regulate party and election finance, set standards for well-run elections and are responsible for the conduct and regulations of referendums held under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (2000).
2. The Cabinet Office's White paper is available here:  
<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/individual-electoral-reform.pdf>
3. The Commission 2010 report *The completeness and accuracy of electoral register in Great Britain* is available here:  
[http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0018/87111/The-completeness-and-accuracy-of-electoral-registers-in-Great-Britain.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/87111/The-completeness-and-accuracy-of-electoral-registers-in-Great-Britain.pdf)
4. In 2005 the Commission found that between around 3.5 million people (or 8-9 percent of the eligible population) were missing from the register.