

Automatic Registration for UK Elections

Westminster Hall Debate

29 June 2016

Introduction

This briefing sets out the Electoral Commission's views on automatic electoral registration ahead of the Westminster Hall Debate on 29 June, moved by Mr Owen Thompson MP. It covers:

- Background to automatic registration
- Our views on how automatic registration might work in practice

The Electoral Commission is an independent body established in 2000. We regulate party and election finance and set standards for well-run elections and referendums. We work to support a healthy democracy, where elections and referendums are based on our principles of trust, participation and no undue influence.

Background

[Previous research on electoral registration](#) has consistently identified that some groups are significantly less likely to be registered than others, including young people, recent home movers and people living in private rented accommodation.

Several countries have already implemented forms of automatic electoral registration to help meet similar challenges, including [Australia](#), [Canada](#) and [various US states](#). These systems enable those with responsibility for maintaining the electoral register to register electors automatically using reliable and trusted information from other public sources, or to update their details when they move without the elector having to “re-register” at their new address. This latter approach is sometimes referred to as “portable” registration.

How might automatic registration work?

Several options for implementing a more direct approach to electoral registration in Great Britain could be explored, including:

Automatic registration of 16- and 17-year-old attainers

Currently, National Insurance numbers (NINos) are allocated automatically just before eligible people turn 16, and a letter containing details of the NINo are sent to individuals at the address held by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. This information could be shared with Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), enabling 16 year olds who have been issued with a NINo to be added to electoral registers as attainers (who are not able to vote until they are 18), provided that the ERO is satisfied that the individual is eligible and meets the residence requirements for registration.

Updating home-movers' details

The majority of home-movers move within the same local authority (59% in 2011), which suggests that there may be potential for an ERO to be able to use other local or national sources of data to identify where there are changes (or no changes) required to the register. People will interact with a wide range of services when they move home in order to update their address details. This update could be used by the ERO to change the details on the register.

Confirmation matching

The experience of confirmation matching during the transition to individual electoral registration in Great Britain also highlights the potential to simplify the potential by which electors' identities are verified before being added to the register. The extent to which information about potentially eligible electors collected during the canvass could be matched against data held by the Department for Work and Pensions could be explored in more detail.

Further work

We have highlighted in [previous electoral registration research and analysis reports](#) our support for further work to explore how automatic or more direct methods of registration could improve the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers and the efficiency of the registration process, without increasing the risk of fraud.

We remain ready to support and help the Government to explore how these ideas might operate in practice and what legislation might be required.

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