

## Analysis of 1 December 2015 Registers in Great Britain

24 February 2016

### Overview

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The Electoral Commission has published a report today on our analysis of the December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain and our assessment of the Individual Electoral Registration (IER) activities carried out by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) during the annual canvass. This forms part of our planned programme for monitoring the transition to IER.

EROs were required by law to publish their revised register by 1 December 2015 except in cases where there was 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 could have been postponed until up to 1 February 2016.

The size of the parliamentary electorate in Great Britain on 1 December 2015 was 43,478,635. This represents a decrease of approximately 1% since December 2014/March 2015, and by 3% since February/March 2014, when the last revised registers compiled under the old system were published.

It is important to note that the 1 December publication date represents a snapshot of the registers that 1.3 million applications to register have been made since this date, following significant registration activity across the UK in advance of the elections in May 2016. We will also run a national public awareness campaign, supported by a range of partners.

### Retained entries removed at the end of transition

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In June 2015, the Commission reported that 1.9 million entries on the May 2015 electoral registers had been retained from the previous household registers. Following a significant amount of work by EROs and their staff since then, including

a comprehensive household canvass, the number removed from the registers at the end of the transition period was reduced to approximately 770,000, although this does not include data from the London Borough of Hackney as they were unable to provide an accurate figure. This represented 1.7% of the electorate overall, although this varies considerably by local authority. Our report analyses this in more detail.

It is not possible to estimate the number of eligible electors who were removed from the registers. However, it is likely that some of the entries that were removed related to electors that were eligible to remain registered to vote. We know that of the 1.9 million entries that were being retained in May 2015, 24% clearly related to eligible electors still resident at their address as approximately 450,000 of them registered under IER by responding (between May and November 2015) to their local ERO's invitation to provide personal identifiers (or through the exception/attestation process).

Although there was no legal requirement for EROs to write to those removed from the revised register, our guidance to EROs has previously recommended that EROs do so given the important elections taking place across Great Britain in May 2016.

We note that a small number of EROs may have left unconfirmed electors on their registers when published on 1 December and we are looking into these further with the Cabinet Office.

## Attainers

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We have reported that there remains an issue with the number of registered attainers in particular. There were 276,185 attainers on the December 2015 parliamentary registers, which represents a fall of 40% in the number of registered attainers since February/March 2014. This decline would indicate that the requirement for attainers to register individually under IER, rather than be registered by a parent or guardian, is having a negative impact on the number registered.

The Commission sets out a number of options for reversing this decline in the report, including automatic registration with the allocation of National Insurance numbers, and focussing EROs' resources further on targeting currently under-registered groups.

## Ongoing Work to Maximise Registration

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EROs, the Commission and many others have already undertaken significant activity since publication of the revised registers, and this will continue ahead of the significant elections taking place in May across Great Britain. For example, many EROs have confirmed that they will again be undertaking an audit of their registers through the use of household notification letters.

Additionally, the Commission is running a national public awareness campaign ahead of the 18 April registration deadline, and we will also be distributing a booklet explaining how to register to vote, the different methods of casting a vote and how to mark the ballot papers to every household in Wales and Scotland from 4 April.

When the early date for the end of the transition to IER was confirmed, we increased the budget for our public awareness campaign to do more to reach groups most likely to be affected by this decision, including students and people who have recently moved home. To this end [we are working in partnership with Channel 4](#) to produce an ad in the style of and using some of the cast members from the TV show, Hollyoaks. In addition, in Scotland and Wales we are running more advertising than we had originally planned, also to reach students and people who have recently moved home.

Our public awareness work also includes providing template resources for EROs to use locally as part of their public engagement work, and using as many other media opportunities as we can to boost the message nationally. [We are also working with a range of partners](#) to get the registration message out and have produced a range of resources to support them in this work. There will be different versions of the resources with specific messages depending on which elections are taking place in each area, and these can be adapted with local messaging.

## How You Can Help

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There are some very practical steps you and your offices can take to support the campaign and increase the number of people registered to vote.

**Below are five ideas for how you and your offices can get involved:**

- **Add a link to your website** - Something as simple as adding a link to the online registration page to your website is a good way of encouraging your constituents to register.
- **Include an e-mail banner** – Adding an e-banner with a link to the online registration page to your e-mails is a good way to raise awareness. This can be set up in your automated responses, for example.
- **Put up a poster** - It is quick and easy to put up a poster in your constituency office or other advice surgery venues. Posters - including those tailored at audiences such as students and home-movers - can be downloaded from our website.
- **Raise at local meetings** – It is also worth highlighting registration through any forums or partnerships that meet in your local community. For example, you could add registering to vote as an item on a future agenda
- **Include an article in your e-newsletter** – Information on registration could be dropped into an e-bulletin or newsletter.

## Data Issues Affecting Reporting

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The Commission notes that it has encountered several issues in obtaining accurate register data and key headline statistics from Cabinet Office and Electoral Management Software (EMS) suppliers.

The Commission specifically identified errors in the headline electorate figures for 1 December 2015 that were reported to Cabinet Office by customers of two of the software suppliers. As a result, when quoting national electorate figures, the Commission has used the electorate statistics collected by the national statistical agencies as part of their official electoral statistics collection.

For the other data presented in this report the Commission has used the data supplied to Cabinet Office and confirmed the figures with the relevant EROs. The Commission is confident that the national-level aggregated data provide an accurate picture of the overall state of the December 2015 registers in Great Britain.

However, given the late receipt of much of the data requested, the remaining problems with some data and concerns raised by some EROs, there are significant limitations on the analysis of specific data and at a local authority level in general.

The transition to IER is now complete, but being able to collect accurate and useful registration data from EROs will be an ongoing requirement for the Commission, and it is also important for each individual ERO to be able to call on this data to assess their own activities. The Commission intends to continue working closely with Cabinet Office and the EMS suppliers in the future in order to help improve the data produced by their systems.

## Looking Ahead

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Overall the transition to IER in Great Britain between July 2014 and December 2015 has been managed well by Electoral Registration Officers. Nevertheless, significant challenges remain which we believe will continue to have a significant impact on the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers in future. Our report identifies and describes the most significant of these challenges and highlights the opportunities we think can be taken to ensure they are appropriately addressed in the future.

We have already highlighted in previous reports our own recommendations of areas for improvement, and we support the Government's commitment to further modernisation and transformation of electoral registration. We want to work with the Cabinet Office and the Electoral Advisory Board to ensure there is a shared practical understanding of the challenges that must be met if this ambitious vision can be delivered, and help inform the Government's plan to take this to the next stage. We have set out more details on what we believe are some of the key areas for future consideration in our report.

We will release our final report on the transition to IER when we publish a full accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 registers. The findings from the study will be assessed against comparable data on the last revised registers compiled under household registration in February/March 2014, when we estimated the Great Britain registers to be 87% accurate and 85% complete.