

The  
Electoral  
Commission

# Assessment of December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain

End of transition to Individual Electoral  
Registration

February 2016

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# Acknowledgements

The Electoral Commission would like to thank Electoral Registration Officers and their staff for their time and help in sending and checking the electoral registration figures, and for all their work throughout the transition to Individual Electoral Registration.

# Executive summary

The publication of the revised registers in Great Britain on 1 December 2015 marked the end of the transition from household registration to the new system of Individual Electoral Registration (IER).<sup>12</sup>

At the end of the transition, any entries for electors (other than special category electors) who had not been individually registered had to be removed from the registers.<sup>3</sup>

The transition to IER in Great Britain was originally scheduled to end with publication of the revised registers in December 2016. Legislation allowed the UK Government to make an Order – during a specified three-month period between June and August 2015 – which would end the transition 12 months earlier, in December 2015. In our interim assessment on the transition published in June 2015, the Commission recommended that Ministers should not bring forward the end of the transition to IER because there was no accurate data available at that time to assess the impact of this decision.<sup>4</sup>

However, the UK Government decided to make an Order which was agreed by parliament and the transition ended one year earlier than originally scheduled.

We recognise there are changes that can be made to the current system to further improve the electoral registration process across the UK. The Minister for Constitutional Reform has set out a vision for the future of electoral registration. The Commission supports the ambition of continuing to improve the system of registration, delivering a better service for electors and making it more efficient. We have been working with Government officials as specific work stemming from the vision is developed.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) were required by law to publish their revised register by 1 December 2015 except in cases where there had been a by-election in their area during the period of the canvass, in which case they had the discretion to delay publication to up to 1 February 2016.

<sup>2</sup> EROs were required by law to publish their revised register by 1 December 2015 except in cases where there had been a by-election in their area during the period of the canvass, in which case they had the discretion to delay publication to up to 1 February 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Special Category Electors are members of the Armed Forces, Crown servants, British Council employees, anonymous electors and individuals registered through a declaration of local connection.

<sup>4</sup> The Electoral Commission, [Assessment of progress with the transition to Individual Electoral Registration](#) (June 2015).

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/vision-for-electoral-registration-speech-by-john-penrose>

## This report

This report provides a partial assessment of the state of the registers in Great Britain published in December 2015 and an evaluation of the activities undertaken by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) during the canvass against our performance standards.<sup>6</sup>

Our assessment is informed by data collected by the Cabinet Office from EROs across Great Britain and information gathered by our performance standards, regional and devolved teams.

This report forms part of our planned programme for monitoring the transition to IER. We have so far reported after all key milestones in the process, from the conclusion of the Confirmation Live Run exercise to the publication of the registers in use for the May 2015 elections.<sup>7</sup>

We will complete our planned monitoring programme in summer 2016 when we publish a report on the accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 registers. The findings from this study will be assessed against comparable data on the last revised registers compiled under household registration (February and March 2014) when we estimated the Great Britain registers to be 87% accurate and 85% complete.<sup>8</sup>

## Data issues affecting reporting

### Background

There is no single electoral register in Great Britain but one for each local authority in England, Scotland and Wales.

Each Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) in Great Britain has their own Electoral Management Software (EMS) system that they use to manage their register. There are four EMS systems in Great Britain that serve 373 local authorities while seven local authority registers in Scotland are managed through in-house software.

This structure presents challenges to ensuring consistency in the management of processes and information across different electoral registers. This complexity has been exacerbated by the changes introduced by IER which required amendments to the coding and processes within all EMS systems.

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<sup>6</sup> Throughout this report reference is made to “the canvass” to reflect the ongoing nature of such activity under IER rather than a piece of work that takes place principally over the summer and autumn months.

<sup>7</sup> All our reports on progress with the transition to IER are available on our website: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/our-research/electoral-registration-research>

<sup>8</sup> The Electoral Commission, *The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain* (July 2014). Figures are for the local government registers.

The Cabinet Office contracted directly with the four EMS suppliers and the Valuation Joint Boards (VJBs) to carry out the development work necessary to ensure their software was able to deliver all aspects of the new IER system. The Electoral Commission committed to a research programme to monitor the transition to IER and worked with the Cabinet Office from an early stage to agree a series of data reports with consistent data fields.

We were pleased that Cabinet Office made funds available to allow for the development of new management information system within these EMS systems.<sup>9</sup>

However, as highlighted in previous reports on the transition to IER, at each stage we have experienced a number of challenges in conducting comprehensive assessments.<sup>10</sup> This is unfortunately also the case in relation to this report and our analysis of the December 2015 registers is therefore limited.

### **Data collection for this report**

For this report, the two main issues were the late delivery of the data reports function by all EMS suppliers (albeit to varying degrees) and, in all cases, errors in the first versions of these reports which then needed to be corrected and the reports re-issued. This all caused severe delays with our data-collection which we only completed on 12 February 2016.

The data errors varied between suppliers and, as with the late delivery, some suppliers were better than others at working with Cabinet Office and the Commission to fix errors and quickly re-issue their reports.

For two suppliers we specifically identified errors in the headline electorate figures for 1 December 2015 that were reported to Cabinet Office. For many local authorities, these errors were small but in several cases, particularly for those using one of the suppliers, they were significant. As a result, when quoting national electorate figures, we have used the electorate statistics collected by the national statistical agencies as part of their official electoral statistics collection.<sup>11</sup>

For the other data presented in this report we have used the data supplied to Cabinet Office. The figures reported in this report have been confirmed with the EROs and we are confident that the national level aggregated data shown

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<sup>9</sup> Management information development funding was made available to the VJB in-house systems for several of the phases of data collection during the transition period although not for the most recent phase. For this phase, we worked with the VJBs to collect as much comparable data as possible.

<sup>10</sup> The Electoral Commission, [Analysis of the December 2014 electoral registers in England and Wales](#) (February 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Official electoral statistics are collected by statistical agencies from a form called RPF29. Data on this form is generated through the local authority's Electoral Management Software system. It is the national statistical agency's data that will be used by the Boundary Commissions for the review of UK parliamentary boundaries.

in this report provides 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, remaining problems with some data fields and concerns raised by some EROs we have been limited in the scope of our analysis of particular fields and at local authority level in general.

### Next steps

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. We use this data to provide context to our performance assessments of EROs as well as to inform our policy positions on the future of the registration system. EROs also need to be able to easily and accurately see the impact of their activities through data.

While producing accurate data on the electoral registers is a complex process, which needs to take account of variations in franchise, registration practices locally and how effectively electoral administrators use their EMS systems, we believe it is both possible and necessary to make data more easily available and more reliable.

In addition, the transfer of the production of the official electoral statistics to the Electoral Commission is being considered by the ONS and the Electoral Commission. We are keen to take on this role and will continue to work with them to explore when and how any transfer is best conducted.

The Commission is the body primarily interested in collecting and analysing this data. During the transition to IER, managing this data collection through the Cabinet Office has worked less well than when we have engaged regularly and directly with the EMS suppliers. **We therefore intend to work more directly with the EMS suppliers in the future in order to help improve the data produced by the systems.**

We will also conduct a review of the figures received during this data collection and we aim to report in more detail on the data for the December 2015 registers in our report on the accuracy and completeness of these registers, to be published in summer 2016.

## December 2015 registers

- The **number of entries on the local government registers in December 2015 was 44,934,029**. This is a decrease of approximately 1% since December 2014/March 2015 and 3% since February/March 2014, when the last revised registers compiled under the old system were published.
- The **number of entries on the parliamentary registers in December 2015 was 43,478,635**. Similarly to the local government registers, there are fewer entries on the parliamentary registers than in December 2014/March 2015 (-1%) and February/March 2014 (-3%).

- Since the introduction of IER, the electorate in Wales decreased more than in the rest of Great Britain: 5% against 3% in England and 2% in Scotland.
- There are significant variations across local authorities: when compared to December 2014/March 2015, changes range from -12% to +5%, while against the February/March 2014 figures the range is -14% to +11%.<sup>12</sup>
- The **number of attainers** on the local government registers was approximately **278,586**, while the parliamentary registers contained **276,185**. This is a reduction of 11% and 10% respectively since December 2014/March 2015 and 41% and 40% respectively since February/March 2014. Due to issues with this data, we have not been able to conduct regional and local analysis on attainers.

The data collected for this report does not allow for an assessment of the current level of accuracy and completeness of the registers or any changes since the start of IER. The Commission will publish an assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 registers in July 2016.

The table below shows figures for the local government and parliamentary registers in Great Britain.

**Table ES.1: Total number of register entries in Great Britain: February/March 2014 to December 2015.**

Month/Year of publication	Local government registers	+/-	Parliamentary registers	+/-
February/March 2014	46,450,773	-3%	44,921,574	-3%
December 2014 / March 2015	45,561,419	-1%	44,092,696	-1%
<b>December 2015</b>	<b>44,934,029</b>		<b>43,478,635</b>	

+/- Figures indicate the variation between the number of entries in December 2015 and the previous number of entries.

There are significant variations across local authorities: when compared to December 2014/March 2015, changes range from -12% to +5%, while against the February/March 2014 figures the range is -14% to +11%.<sup>13</sup>

Local authorities with high concentration of students appear to have been more affected by IER as their registers decreased more significantly than the

<sup>12</sup> Patterns of local variation were also similar between the local government and parliamentary electorates.

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average. However, these authorities also recorded very high level of additions in the months preceding the May 2015 elections.

## Retained entries removed at the end of transition

Overall, approximately **770,000 entries were removed** on publication of the 1 December registers because of the end of IER transitional arrangements. This equates to around 1.7% of the total 1 December electorate.

This figure does not include data for Hackney which in May 2015 had the highest level of entries retained in the country (23%, approximately 43,000).

Overall, this means that 12% of the 6.1 million entries unmatched during the July-October 2014 Confirmation Live Run could not be resolved and had to be removed at the end of transition.

There has been a significant reduction in the 1.9 million entries which were being retained on the registers in May 2015. In our June 2015 report we anticipated that the comprehensive household canvass activity carried out by EROs, designed to identify who is resident at an address and eligible to be registered, would help to reduce the number of entries which would be removed at the end of transition.

However, we do not know how many of these entries removed on 1 December related to electors still resident at that address and how many were redundant entries for electors who had, for example, moved house.

It is however notable that 24% of the 1.9 million entries retained in May clearly related to eligible electors still resident at their address as approximately 450,000 of them registered under IER by responding to their local ERO's invitation. Anecdotal evidence from local authorities indicates that some of the entries removed were for individuals still resident at the address the entry refers to as they applied to register individually but their identity had not been verified by the time the revised registers were published.

There was no legal requirement to write to those electors who were removed from the revised registers on publication. However, in view of the elections taking place across Great Britain in May 2016, we recommended in our guidance that EROs write to these electors

### Variation

There is variation between local authorities also in the proportion of entries removed due to the end of the transition. Data suggests that urban local authorities did have higher volumes of retained entries removed than rural ones. However, there is little discernible pattern as authorities with similar characteristics returned different results. It is therefore clear that while the demographics of a local population have played a significant role in determining the levels of retained electors in an area, local electoral practices have also had an impact.

In particular the use and timing of the registration review processes has been important in reducing the number of retained entries before the revised registers were published.<sup>14</sup> This involves writing to the elector in question to tell them that the ERO does not believe they are entitled to be registered (for example because they no longer live at the address). An elector then has 14 days from the date on the letter to request a hearing. Once that period has passed, and if no hearing has been requested, the ERO can determine whether they are still entitled to be registered. Additional funding was made available by Government for EROs to carry out these reviews before the revised registers were published.

## The first IER canvass

The data collected for this report does not allow for an assessment of the current level of accuracy or completeness of the registers. However, the level of additions to and deletions from, the registers are important indicators for both. Deletions should remove redundant entries (maintaining the accuracy of the registers) while additions put new eligible electors on the registers (maintaining or improving completeness).

The data indicates that levels of additions and deletions during the canvass appear to be lower under IER than under the old system. It is possible that this is partly due to the two-stage canvassing approach required under IER which appears to have generated a lower response rate, especially to the second form (Invitation to Register, ITR).<sup>15</sup> The overall response rate to the first form – the Household Enquiry Form, HEF – was 84% (compared to a 94% response to the old canvass form in 2013/14) with paper response to the ITR around 42% (although this is an underestimate as it does not include online responses to ITRs).<sup>16</sup> Moreover, under IER, EROs may have not completed all of their planned canvassing activities by 1 December.

On the other hand, figures show a much higher level of additions and deletions outside the canvass period than in the past. The UK general elections in May 2015 was likely to be the main element that motivated people to register to vote – all our studies found a strong link between registration

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<sup>14</sup> Where an ERO does not have the required two different sources of information to demonstrate that an elector is no longer entitled to remain registered, but they have reason to believe that a person's entitlement to remain registered may have ceased, they should carry out a review.

<sup>15</sup> Under IER, EROs are required to send a Household Enquiry Form (HEF) to all properties. Where returned HEFs include new (i.e. unregistered) electors, a second form (an Invitation to Register (or ITR)) is sent out for the individuals to complete. It is this form which asks for the person's national insurance form and date of birth and which allows them to become registered. If no response was received to either the HEF or ITR, EROs were required to take specified steps – including issuing two reminders and at least one personal visit – to follow up with any non-responders.

<sup>16</sup> This is because ITRs are issued locally but the online registration process is managed centrally. It is not possible to track online responses to specific ITRs through the data collected.

and voting – but new IER provisions such as online registration have also made it more convenient to register outside the canvass period (in more immediate response to public awareness activities for example).<sup>17</sup>

## Performance standards

EROs have played a critical role in ensuring that the transition to IER was delivered effectively, undertaking considerable work in preparation for and delivery of the transition. We have been monitoring ERO performance against our IER performance standards. These were designed to support EROs in preparing for and delivering the transition to IER and the report provides our assessment of ERO performance in delivering IER.

In September 2013, following a period of consultation, we published a new performance standards framework designed to support EROs in planning for and delivering the transition to IER. The framework reflects what we, and the UK Electoral Advisory Board, agreed EROs need to do in order to ensure a successful transition to IER.

The objective of performance standard 1 was to ensure that all EROs had in place a local public engagement strategy. This needed to reflect their own specific challenges, taking into account their confirmation dry run results, and an implementation plan setting out how they planned to deliver the transition as a whole.

Following review of all the local public engagement strategies together with the risk registers and implementation plans of 25% of EROs as part of our risk-based approach to monitoring, we reported in March 2014 that we were confident that all EROs were meeting the first of the two performance standards.

The objective of performance standard 2 was to ensure that EROs delivered their strategies and plans, using available data to monitor progress and make amendments where necessary to ensure they remained appropriate. This included EROs' work with entries relating to electors not registered individually, as well as their work to identify and target potential new electors and under-registered groups.

Following our reporting on performance against standard 1 in March 2014, the transition to IER involved a number of key stages of registration activity. These were carried out by EROs between July 2014 – December 2015, and we have been monitoring the performance of EROs in delivering each of these key stages:

- The write-out
- Maximising registration activity in advance of May 2015 polls.
- 2015 canvass

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<sup>17</sup> All our electoral registration studies [are available on our website](#).

There have been some instances where we identified potential performance issues and the relevant EROs have been asked to confirm our understanding of the issue and to provide us with relevant additional information.

When making a final assessment of ERO performance against performance standard 2 our main consideration is the impact of the issue on the ability of people to register easily or confidence in the electoral registration service provided.

The process for reaching a final assessment incorporates a review by a panel made up of representatives from the EAB, and so far we have assessed one ERO as having failed to meet performance standard 2. Due to the delays already highlighted in the provision of accurate data, the assessment process continues past the publication of this report and will be updated once concluded and published in the summer 2016 alongside the accuracy and completeness study.

## Maximising registration

The 1 December 2015 registers provided a snapshot of how the registers stood at that date, but work has and will continue to be done to ensure as many people as possible are registered to vote in advance of the May 2016 polls.

EROs, the Commission and many others have already undertaken significant activity since publication of the revised registers, with National Voter Registration Drive, which ran across the UK from 1 to 7 February 2016 and saw a range of events taking place to promote voter registration, a good example of concerted effort across a range of organisations to encourage those not currently registered to do so.

### **ERO activity to promote registration**

To help maximise the number of people included on the electoral registers in the period leading up to the May 2016 polls, many EROs have confirmed that they will again be undertaking an audit of their registers through the use of 'household notification letters' (HNL). In Wales, Welsh Government wrote to all local authorities in February to notify EROs of an additional £330k being made available to carry out an additional HNL exercise ahead of the elections in Wales. Local EROs are currently working on plans to determine how this funding will be most effectively used.

HNL activity has a number of clear benefits, all of which can contribute to helping EROs ensure that their registers are as accurate and complete as possible ahead of the May 2016 polls:

- Prompting those who have not yet registered to do so
- Helping to pick up those who have recently moved within or into the registration area
- Giving residents an opportunity to check their details on the register are

accurate

### **The Commission's public awareness campaign**

The Commission is also running a national public awareness campaign, with the objective of encouraging people to register to vote. The digital aspect of the campaign began on 2 February across the UK and our TV and catch-up TV advertising will run from 14 March until the 18 April deadline.

The campaign will reach all adults, with a focus on groups that our research has identified as being less likely to be registered to vote, such as students, young people, those who have recently moved home, people who rent their home, and people from some black and minority ethnic communities. This involves ensuring that our ad is shown on certain TV stations at specific times and that our digital advertising appears on websites that members of these target groups are likely to access.

We updated our plans in light of the early date for the end of the transition to IER being confirmed and 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.

### **Partnership working**

During the transition to IER we began forming partnerships with a range of corporate, public and voluntary organisations, to use their communication channels to extend our reach into groups we have identified as being typically under-registered. We built on this further in the run-up to the May 2015 polls and partnership working is now an important part of our public awareness campaigns.

We have more than 60 partners including organisations such as NUS, RNIB, Shelter, and Citizens' Advice Bureau, undertaking various activities in different areas across the UK to promote registration and provide people with the information they need to take part in the elections.

Taken together, the activity being carried out across the electoral community – by EROs, the Commission and many others – will go a long way towards helping to ensure that as many people as possible register before the 18 April deadline so that they are able to participate in the May 2016 polls.

## **Looking ahead**

### **Challenges for electoral registration in Great Britain**

The experience of EROs delivering the canvass under the new system highlighted a number of significant challenges. Some of these (for example, population movement within and between local authorities; pressures on local authority budgets and the timing of the canvass) are continuations of challenges which existed under the previous system of household registration, but which may have been intensified by the new system; others (for instance, the new two-stage canvass process and the registration of attainders) are new

challenges which may have been created by the design and operation of the new system.

Taking into account these continuing and new challenges for electoral registration in Great Britain, we are concerned that the current approach to registration, including the annual canvass of households, is unlikely to be sustainable in the medium- to long-term future.

The transition to individual electoral registration has, however, highlighted the potential for further opportunities both to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of the registration process and also to reduce costs and improve efficiency of EROs' activities.

### **Opportunities for improving electoral registration in Great Britain**

While we exist in an increasingly digital world, much of electoral registration law and practice remains based on physical contact with electors, whether by post or using staff to canvass properties. Following the 2015 UK General Election, the UK Government Minister for Constitutional Reform launched his vision for electoral registration and how it can be modernised so that it meets the demands and expectations of 21st century voters.

We want to work with the Cabinet Office and the UK 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.

The UK Government intends to explore through pilot schemes options to improve the efficiency of delivering electoral registration under IER so that associated costs can be reduced while simultaneously having an equivalent or improved effect on the accuracy and completeness of the register. We support the principle of testing alternative approaches through piloting and will evaluate the schemes, as required under the legislation.

The UK Government and EROs in Great Britain can continue to learn from the experience of electoral registration in Northern Ireland, which has delivered a system of individual electoral registration since 2003, and continuous registration (with no canvass of households) since 2006 and from the experience of other comparable democracies which are addressing similar challenges.

### **An ambitious plan for delivering an electoral registration system for the future**

We have already started to discuss the potential scope of a plan to deliver a more convenient, effective and efficient electoral registration process with the UK Electoral Advisory Board.

Key issues which need to be addressed in order to define and deliver this plan include:

### **Year-round activity to maintain accurate and complete registers**

- Whether the current requirement for annual household canvass activity could be replaced with more efficient processes for maintaining the accuracy and completeness of registers – for example, by carrying out household registration activity at different times of the year, or by moving to a system of continuous registration.
- Whether EROs could use data from other sources to identify population movement more effectively and efficiently all year round and what infrastructure might be required to deliver this. What changes to procedures would need to be made to enable people to apply to register to vote at the same time as accessing other public services?
- The extent to which there is potential for a system of direct registration to significantly improve the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers. Direct registration could mean that EROs would be able to add an elector to their registers without requiring an individual application form to be completed, provided they were satisfied that the individual was eligible and met the residence requirements for registration. This could enable 16-year olds who have been issued with a National Insurance number to be added to the electoral register.

### **Pre-election activity to encourage new and updated registrations**

- A plan for delivering a more effective registration process should consider whether pro-active work by EROs could be more effective if it were focused during the period leading up to electoral events (whether scheduled events or by-elections).
- Should EROs focus their resources on targeting currently under-registered groups?
- Currently in Great Britain, registration applications must be received 12 working days before an election or referendum, after which identity verification checks are carried out before names can be added to the register for the election. What would it take to allow same-day registration in the UK, enabling citizens to register and cast their vote on the same day, including on polling day itself.

### **Other uses of the electoral registers after polling day**

- While the primary purpose of electoral registers is to ensure that all those who are entitled to vote in an election can do so (and those who are not entitled to vote cannot), electoral registers in the UK are also used for other purposes. Some of these are directly connected with elections, including conducting boundary reviews and constituency allocations.
- Should the UK's Parliamentary boundary commissions continue to use the number of entries included in registers published on 1 December as the basis for their constituency allocation and boundary review work?

## Accuracy and completeness study

We are currently conducting our planned study into the accuracy and completeness of the first full IER registers published on 1 December. The findings from this study will be compared with the findings from the one conducted on the last registers published under household registration.

We intend to report in July 2016 and the report will include accuracy and completeness estimates for:

- Great Britain;
- England, Scotland and Wales;
- a range of demographic groups at Great Britain level.

It will also set out what progress has been made towards developing an ambitious plan for the future of electoral registration to meet the challenges we have identified.

## Conclusions

In June we said a maximum of 1.9 million register entries could be removed at the end of the transition to IER and that this number was likely to decrease by December 2015. We were pleased to see a significant reduction although it is still likely that some of the 770,000 entries removed were for eligible electors still resident at their address.

We will publish a study into the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers in summer 2016. This will provide headline levels of accuracy and completeness for Great Britain as well as for England, Scotland and Wales. It will also show how levels of completeness vary across different socio-demographic groups. This study will conclude our planned programme of research monitoring the transition to IER and will be compared with a similar study we conducted in 2014 on the last registers to be published under household registration.

While we are therefore unable to assess the accuracy and completeness of the registers at this stage, some of the data collected for this report, such as the numbers being added to and deleted from the registers, suggests a negative impact on their accuracy and completeness. However, we cannot, at this stage, quantify that impact and the lower levels during the traditional canvass period need to be considered in light of the higher levels in the months preceding the UK Parliamentary general election.

Since the publication of the December 2015 registers and up until the elections in May 2016, all EROs in Great Britain, working with local groups in their areas and supported by the Electoral Commission will continue with activities to maximise registration and ensure people can take part in the many polls taking place.

# 1 Introduction

## Background

1.1 We first recommended in 2003 that Great Britain should move to a system of Individual Electoral Registration (IER). In January 2013 the UK Parliament passed legislation to allow for the change to IER in Great Britain.

1.2 In England and Wales, the transition to IER began in June 2014 while in Scotland it started in September 2014, immediately after the independence referendum.

1.3 The transition was originally scheduled to end with publication of the revised registers in December 2016 but the legislation allowed the UK Government to make an Order – during a specified three-month period between June and August 2015 – which would end the transition 12 months earlier, in December 2015.

1.4 The Commission has committed to a programme of research to monitor the introduction of IER and we reported at all the key stages during the transition.<sup>18</sup> In our last assessment - published in June 2015 - we recommended that Ministers should not bring forward the end of the transition to IER.<sup>19</sup> However, Government decided to make an Order which parliament approved and the transition ended one year earlier than originally scheduled.

1.5 We recognise there are changes that can be made to the current system to further improve the electoral registration process across the UK. The Minister for Constitutional Reform has set out a vision for the future of electoral registration. The Commission supports the ambition of continuing to improve the system of registration, delivering a better service for electors and making it more efficient. We have been working with Government officials as specific work stemming from the vision is developed.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> IER reports and electoral registration studies [are available online](#).

<sup>19</sup> The Electoral Commission, [Assessment of progress with the transition to Individual Electoral Registration](#) (June 2015).

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/vision-for-electoral-registration-speech-by-john-penrose>

# The transition to IER

1.6 The last full revised electoral registers compiled under the old household registration system were published in February 2014 in England and in March 2014 in Wales and Scotland.<sup>21</sup>

1.7 As part of our IER monitoring programme, we conducted a study on the quality of these registers and found them to be 87% accurate and 85% complete.<sup>22</sup>

1.8 The transition then started in June 2014 in England and Wales and in September in Scotland. Figure 1.1 shows the timeline for the transition with key stages marked.

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<sup>21</sup> Fully revised registers are published in December each year at the end of the autumn canvass. The 2013 canvass was postponed to bring the publication closer to the CLR stage.

<sup>22</sup> The Electoral Commission, [The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain](#) (July 2014). Figures are for Great Britain local government registers.



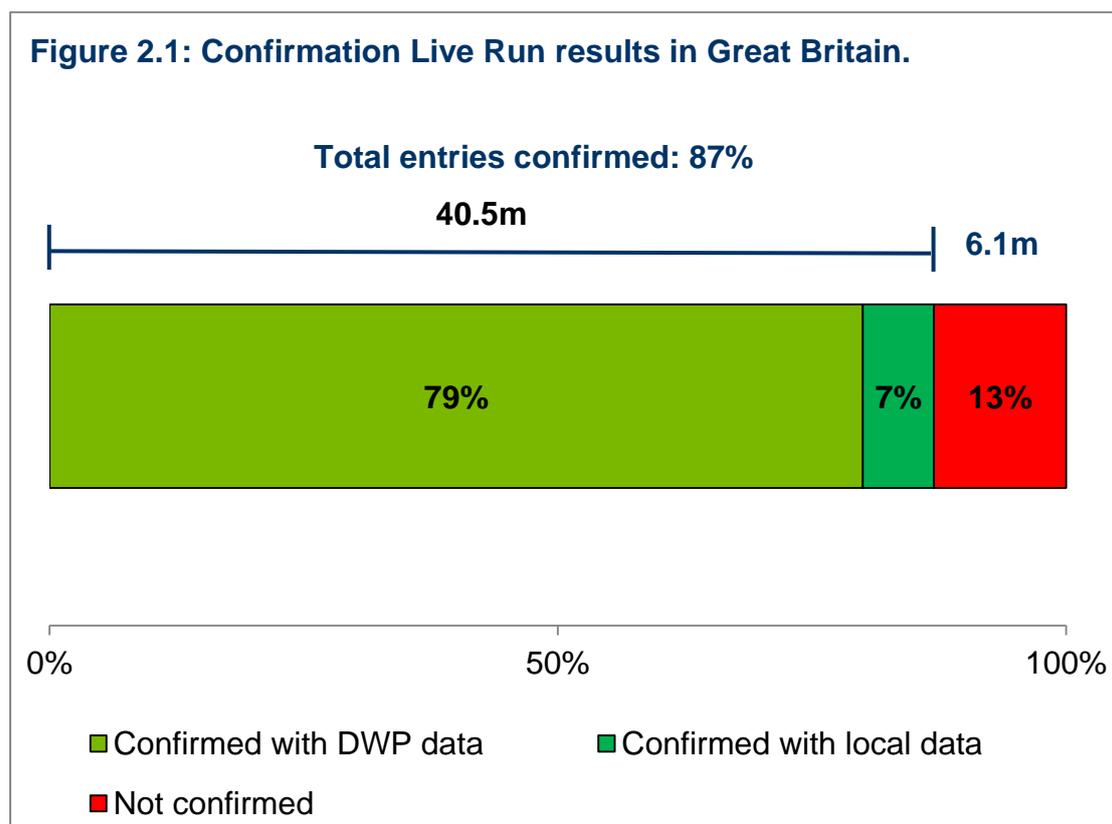
## Confirmation Live Run

1.9 The first stage of the transition was the 'Confirmation Live Run' (CLR) which took place in June 2014 in England and Wales and in September 2014 in Scotland.

1.10 This involved matching existing register entries against the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) database and locally held data in order to identify which electors could be automatically transferred to the new IER registers.

1.11 Based on the CLR data matching:

- **87% of records – equivalent to 40.5 million register entries – were positively matched.** These electors were transferred directly to the new IER register;
- **13% of records – approximately 6.1 million entries – could not be matched.** Individuals whose entry could not be matched were written to by their local Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) and asked to provide personal identifiers: National Insurance Number (NINO) and date of birth.



1.12 The scale of the challenge facing EROs varied across local authorities in Great Britain, ranging from only 59% of entries confirmed in Hackney to 97% in Epping Forest.

1.13 Our analysis on the CLR results – carried out at ward level using demographic data associated with low level of registration - found that areas with higher concentration of private renters, young people, students and people not born in the UK had a lower match rate.<sup>23</sup>

## Write-out and first IER registers

1.14 Following the CLR, a ‘write-out’ exercise was conducted which involved contacting all electors whose entry was sent for matching. In 2014. The ‘write-out’ replaced the traditional full annual canvass which generally takes place in autumn.

1.15 Those electors that were matched received a letter informing them their entry had been automatically transferred to the new registers and needed to take no action.

1.16 At the same time those who were not successfully data-matched in the CLR process were informed that they needed to re-register by providing personal identifiers.<sup>24</sup>

1.17 If the local ERO did not obtain the necessary information from an unmatched elector and could not find enough evidence that the individual had moved, the **entry could be retained on the register until the end of the transitional period to the new IER system.** At the end of the transition, entries that were still retained would be removed.

1.18 As a result of the write out, **the number of register entries being ‘retained’ reduced from 6.1 million after the CLR stage to 2.8 million.**

1.19 However, the lack of comprehensive household canvass activity also resulted in a reduction in register entries. The first revised registers published under IER in December 2014 contained fewer entries (-2%) than the ones published in February/March 2014.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> The Electoral Commission, [Confirmation Live Run 2014 \(CLR\) in England and Wales: report and analysis](#) (October 2014); [Confirmation Live Run 2014 \(CLR\) in Scotland: report and analysis](#) (November 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Anyone who could not provide the required information – National Insurance Number and date of birth – could use an exceptions or attestation process in order to become individually registered. The *exceptions* process is used by EROs when an elector cannot be matched against DWP records or using local data sources, or where the applicant cannot provide some or all of the required personal identifiers required to register. It involves asking the applicant to provide documentary evidence to prove their identity. Where the applicant cannot be matched and cannot provide the required personal identifiers or documentary evidence, the *attestation* process is used. This involves a ‘person of good standing’ on the electoral register verifying the identity of the applicant. Further information on both processes is available in [Part 4 of our guidance for Electoral Registration Officers](#).

<sup>25</sup> The Electoral Commission, [Analysis of the December 2014 registers in England and Wales](#) (February 2015).

## May 2015 elections

1.20 We collected electoral data for the registers in use at the elections that took place in May 2015. Figures showed a notable increase since December 2014/March 2015 (+3%) and February/March 2014 (+1%) as a result of the interest generated by the May 2015 elections.

1.21 Data indicated that online registration proved to be a successful new provision introduced by IER as 77% of all applications made between December 2014 and May 2015 were made online

1.22 Activities undertaken by EROs in the build-up to the elections - most notably the Household Notification Letter (HNL) sent to all households<sup>26</sup> - and our public awareness campaign also had a substantial impact.

1.23 However, the data also showed that approximately **1.9 million register entries were still being retained in May 2015** (4% of all entries). Retained entries as a percentage of total register entries varied by local authority, ranging from 0% to 23%.<sup>27</sup>

### Our recommendation on the end of the transition

1.24 The Commission's report in June 2015 set out our recommendation to the UK Government on the timing of the end of the transition – the point at which EROs would be required to remove all retained entries.

1.25 We anticipated that the annual canvass of households in 2015 would significantly reduce the 1.9 million entries we identified in May 2015.

1.26 We recommended that the transition end date should remain as 1 December 2016 as any decision to bring it forward would need to be taken before the outcome of the annual canvass was known. This meant acting without reliable information on how many redundant entries would be removed on 1 December and how many eligible electors would need to re-register to be able to vote in the May 2016 elections.

1.27 The elections due to take place on 5 May 2016 include elections for the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales, Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales, the London Assembly and Mayor of London, and local authorities and mayors in many parts of England.

1.28 A Government Order to bring forward the end of the transition to IER from December 2016 to December 2015 was made and passed by Parliament, meaning that electors who were being retained on the registers

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<sup>26</sup> All EROs in England and Wales confirmed that they carried out HNL activity or other comprehensive activity to address the issues identified by our analysis of the 1 December registers data.

<sup>27</sup> The Electoral Commission, [Assessment of progress with the transition to Individual Electoral Registration](#) (June 2015).

under the transitional provisions on 1 December 2015 were to be removed upon publication of the revised registers.

## 2015 canvass and the revised registers

1.29 From 1 July 2015, EROs across Great Britain carried out comprehensive household canvass activity which, unlike in 2014/15, involved sending Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) – designed to identify who is resident at an address and eligible to be registered – to all properties.

1.30 As part of the canvass, any new potential electors identified by each ERO were sent an invitation to register and a registration application form. If no response was received, EROs were required to take specified steps – including issuing two reminders and at least one personal visit – to follow up with any non-responders.

1.31 This exercise, coupled with other registration activity, also assisted EROs with identifying redundant register entries, including those relating to existing electors who were registered individually. For example, a response to a HEF with the name of an existing elector crossed out acted as a prompt for the ERO to check that person's entitlement to remain registered and, where appropriate, to trigger statutory processes to remove any redundant entries from the register.

1.32 Additionally, for those retained entries where the ERO believed the elector was still resident and eligible to remain registered at that address, there were specified steps in law that EROs were required to go through to try to ensure that the individual successfully completed an individual registration application, including sending an invitation to register to that individual and following up any non-responses with two reminders and at least one personal visit.

1.33 The only circumstances in which this was not the case were where, from checking any records available to the ERO, they had reason to believe that the person is no longer resident at that address (in which case they would take steps to remove the entry from the register), or if they had made an application to register.

1.34 All this work was supported by local engagement activity, with a particular focus on typically under-registered groups and those electors not currently registered individually. For example, students were previously able to register to vote through block registration at their halls of residence. Through IER, this was no longer the case, and some universities have undertaken targeted registration activity to ensure that students registered to vote individually.

1.35 EROs were required to publish their revised registers by 1 December 2015.<sup>28</sup> As set out above, all remaining entries relating to electors who were not registered individually were to be removed at this point.

1.36 These registers will form the basis of the registers to be used for the May 2016 polls although there will be ongoing registration activity between 1 December and the registration deadline for May 2016. Publication of the revised registers in December 2015 is therefore a key milestone - not least because it is the point in time when the Boundary Commissions will use data for the review of UK parliamentary boundaries - but not the conclusion of a process.

## Accuracy and completeness

1.37 This report does not provide an assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the 1 December registers. The Commission is currently conducting a study on these registers which will provide such an estimate and we intend to publish the findings in July 2016.

1.38 This will provide headline levels of accuracy and completeness for Great Britain as well as for England, Scotland and Wales. It will also show how levels of completeness vary across different socio-demographic groups. This study will conclude our planned programme of research monitoring the transition to IER and will be compared with a similar study we conducted in 2014 on the last registers to be published under household registration.

## Data issues affecting reporting

### Background

1.39 There is no single electoral register in Great Britain but one for each local authority in England, Scotland and Wales.

1.40 Each Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) in Great Britain has their own Electoral Management Software (EMS) system that they use to manage their register. There are four EMS systems in Great Britain that serve 373 local authorities while seven local authority registers in Scotland are managed through in-house software.

1.41 This structure presents challenges to ensuring consistency in the management of processes and information across different electoral registers. This complexity has been exacerbated by the changes introduced by IER

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<sup>28</sup> EROs were required by law to publish their revised register by 1 December 2015 except in cases where there is 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 be postponed until up to 1 February 2016.

which required amendments to the coding and processes within all EMS systems.

1.42 The Cabinet Office contracted directly with the four EMS suppliers and the Valuation Joint Boards (VJBs) to carry out the development work necessary to ensure their software was able to deliver all aspects of the new IER system. The Electoral Commission committed to a research programme to monitor the transition to IER and worked with the Cabinet Office from an early stage to agree a series of data reports with consistent data fields.

1.43 We were pleased that Cabinet Office made funds available to allow for the development of new management information system within these EMS systems.<sup>29</sup>

1.44 However, as highlighted in previous reports on the transition to IER, at each stage we have experienced a number of challenges in conducting comprehensive assessments.<sup>30</sup> This is unfortunately also the case in relation to this report and our analysis of the December 2015 registers is therefore limited.

## Data collection for this report

1.45 For this report, the two main issues were the late delivery of the data reports function by all EMS suppliers (albeit to varying degrees) and, in all cases, errors in the first versions of these reports which then needed to be corrected and the reports re-issued. This all caused severe delays with our data-collection which we only completed on 12 February 2016.

1.46 The data errors varied between suppliers and, as with the late delivery, some suppliers were better than others at working with Cabinet Office and the Commission to fix errors and at quickly re-issuing their reports.

1.47 We also identified discrepancies between our figures and the ones collected by national statistical agencies as part of their official electorate statistics collection. It is the national statistical agencies' data that will be used by the Boundary Commissions for the review of UK parliamentary boundaries.<sup>31</sup>

1.48 For two suppliers we specifically identified errors in the headline electorate figures for 1 December 2015 that were reported to Cabinet Office.

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<sup>29</sup> Management information development funding was made available to the VJB in-house systems for several of the phases of data collection during the transition period although not for the most recent phase. For this phase, we worked with the VJBs to collect as much comparable data as possible.

<sup>30</sup> The Electoral Commission, [Analysis of the December 2014 electoral registers in England and Wales](#) (February 2015).

<sup>31</sup> Official electoral statistics are collected by statistical agencies from a form called RPF29. Data on this form is generated through the local authority's Electoral Management Software system.

For many local authorities these errors were small but in several cases, particular for those using one of the suppliers, they were significant. As a result, when quoting national electorate figures, we have used the electorate statistics collected by the national statistical agencies as part of their official electoral statistics collection.<sup>32</sup>

1.49 For the other data presented in this report we have used the data supplied to Cabinet Office. The figures reported in this report have been confirmed with the EROs and we are confident that the national level aggregated data shown in this report provides an accurate picture of the overall state of the December 2015 registers in Great Britain.

1.50 However, given the late receipt of much of the data requested, remaining problems with some data fields and concerns raised by some EROs we have been limited in the scope of our analysis of particular fields and at local authority level in general.

## Next steps

1.51 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. We use this data to provide context to our performance assessments of EROs as well as to inform our policy positions on the future of the registration system. EROs also need to be able to easily and accurately see the impact of their activities through data.

1.52 While producing accurate data on the electoral registers is a complex process, which needs to take account of variations in franchise, registration practices locally and how effectively electoral administrators use the systems, we believe it is both possible and necessary to make data more easily available and more reliable.

1.53 In addition, the transfer of the production of the official electoral statistics to the Electoral Commission is being considered by the ONS and the Electoral Commission. We are keen to take on this role and will continue to work with them to explore when and how any transfer is best conducted.

1.54 The Commission is the body primarily interested in collecting and analysing this data. During the transition to IER, managing this data collection through the Cabinet Office has worked less well than when we have engaged regularly and directly with the EMS suppliers. **We therefore intend to work more directly with the EMS suppliers in the future in order to help improve the data produced by the systems.**

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<sup>32</sup> Official electoral statistics are collected by statistical agencies from a form called RPF29. Data on this form is generated through the local authority's Electoral Management Software system. It is the national statistical agency's data that will be used by the Boundary Commissions for the review of UK parliamentary boundaries.

1.55 We will also conduct a review of the figures received during this data collection and we aim to report in more detail on the data for the December 2015 registers in our report on the accuracy and completeness of these registers, to be published in summer 2016.

## This report

1.56 This report provides our assessment of the December 2015 electoral registers, and sets out what can be done to further improve the electoral registration process across the UK.

1.57 **Chapter 2** sets out data on the December 2015 electoral registers including headline electorates and the number of electors removed due to the end of the transition period.

1.58 **Chapter 3** provides an initial assessment on the mechanics of the first full canvass under Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

1.59 **Chapter 4** provides our assessment of ERO performance in planning for and delivering IER.

1.60 **Chapter 5** sets out the work has and will continue to be done to ensure as many people as possible are registered to vote in advance of the May 2016 polls.

1.61 **Chapter 6** identifies and describes the most significant of those challenges, and highlights the opportunities we think can be taken to ensure they are appropriately addressed in the future.

## 2 December 2015 electoral registration data

2.1 In this chapter, we present data for the electoral registers in Great Britain which were published on 1 December 2015.<sup>33</sup> It includes an analysis of entries retained under the Individual Electoral Registration (IER) transitional arrangements (see previous chapter for more information).

2.2 Our analysis of data presented in this chapter also considers comparable data at the key milestones of the transition to IER:

- **February/March 2014:** the last revised registers compiled under the previous system of 'head-of-the-household' registration were published in February 2014 (England) and March 2014 (Scotland and Wales).<sup>34 35</sup>
- **December 2014/March 2015:** first fully revised IER registers were published in December 2014 (England and Wales) and March 2015 (Scotland).
- **May 2015:** the registers published in Great Britain on 29 April 2015 and in force at the May 2015 elections.
- **December 2015:** the transition to IER ended on 1 December 2015 with the publication of the annually revised registers on 1 December 2015.

2.3 Due to data issues - set out in the previous chapter - we have limited our analysis at a local authority level to those areas and data fields where we are confident in the accuracy of the data received.

2.4 In Scotland, the change to the franchise for the local government register means that comparison with historic data – as well against the figures for England and Wales – has to take into account the extension of voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds.

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<sup>33</sup> This includes data for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) that delayed the publication of their register due to by-elections taking place in their area.

<sup>34</sup> To facilitate the transition to IER, the 2013 canvass and the publication of the revised registers were postponed. The registers were published at the beginning In February/March 2014 instead of December 2013.

<sup>35</sup> Our most recent assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the registers was conducted on these registers and the findings are the baseline measure for assessing the impact of IER on the quality of the registers.

# Electoral register entries

## Great Britain's electorate

- The **number of entries on the local government registers in December 2015 was 44,934,029**. This is a decrease of approximately 1% since December 2014/March 2015 and 3% since February/March 2014, when the last revised registers compiled under the old system were published.
- The **number of entries on the parliamentary registers in December 2015 was 43,478,635**. Similarly to the local government registers, there are fewer entries on the parliamentary registers than in December 2014/March 2015 (-1%) and February/March 2014 (-3%).
- Since the introduction of IER, the electorate in Wales decreased more than in the rest of Great Britain: 5% against 3% in England and 2% in Scotland.
- There are significant variations across local authorities: when compared to December 2014/March 2015, changes range from -12% to +5%, while against the February/March 2014 figures the range is -14% to +11%.<sup>36</sup>
- The **number of attainers** on the local government registers was approximately **278,586**, while the parliamentary registers contained **276,185**. This is a reduction of 11% and 10% respectively since December 2014/March 2015 and 41% and 40% respectively since February/March 2014. Due to issues with this data, we have not been able to conduct regional and local analysis on attainers.

**Table 2.1: Total number of register entries in Great Britain - February/March 2014 to December 2015.**

Month/Year of publication	Local government registers	+/-	Parliamentary registers	+/-
February/March 2014	46,450,773	-3%	44,921,574	-3%
December 2014 / March 2015	45,561,419	-1%	44,092,696	-1%
<b>December 2015</b>	<b>44,934,029</b>		<b>43,478,635</b>	

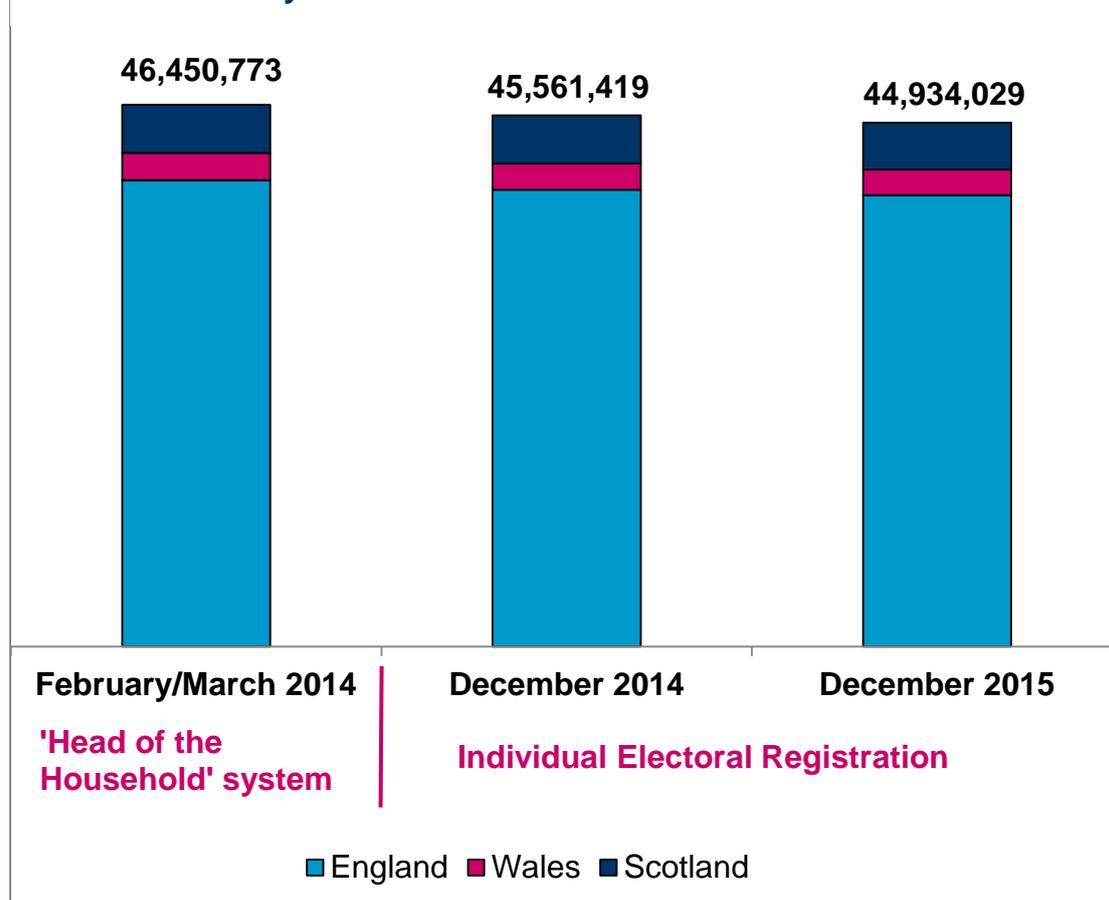
+/- Figures indicate the variation between the number of entries in December 2015 and the previous number of entries.

2.5 The data collected for this report does not allow for an assessment of the current level of accuracy and completeness of the registers or any changes

<sup>36</sup> Patterns of local variation were also similar between the local government and parliamentary electorates.

since the start of IER. The Commission will publish an assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 registers in July 2016.

**Figure 2.1: Total number of local government electoral register entries - February/March 2014 to December 2015.**



## Retained entries removed at end of transition

2.6 Overall, approximately **770,000 entries were removed** on publication of the 1 December registers because of the end of IER transitional arrangements (see previous chapter for more information on ‘retained’ entries). This equates to around 1.7% of the total 1 December electorate.

2.7 However, this figure does not include data for Hackney which in May 2015 had the highest level of entries retained in the country (23%, approximately 43,000). More information on Hackney is set out in Chapter 4.

2.8 Overall, this means that 12% of the 6.1 million entries originally unmatched during the July-October 2014 Confirmation Live Run could not be resolved by the end of transition and had to be removed.

2.9 Entries for ‘Special category electors’ – such as members of the Armed Forces and Crown servants – still not individually registered can potentially be retained until December 2019.<sup>37</sup> Data shows that on 1 December 2015 the registers contained approximately just over 30,000 retained entries for these electors.

2.10 There has been a significant reduction on the 1.9 million entries which were being retained on the registers in May 2015. In our June 2015 report we anticipated that the comprehensive household canvass activity carried out by EROs, designed to identify who is resident at an address and eligible to be registered, would help to reduce the number of entries which would be removed at the end of transition.

2.11 There was no legal requirement to write to those electors who were removed from the revised registers on publication. However, in view of the elections taking place across Great Britain in May 2016, we recommended in our guidance that EROs write to these electors. We suggested that EROs explain what it is they need to do to re-register, with a reference to the online registration process. Any elector who was removed and is still resident at the same address would therefore be notified and be able to re-register immediately.

2.12 Chart 2.2 below illustrates how, at each stage in the transition process, the number of electors not individually registered (‘Unconfirmed/retained’) has steadily decreased. Up to the end of the transition these entries could be ‘resolved’ in three ways – become IER-registered, be deleted or be retained on the registers. The table below shows how during each period building up to a key milestone of the transition to IER the number of entries retained has changed as a result of activities undertaken by EROs.

2.13 The chart shows how during the write-out (July 2014/October 2014 to end of November 2014/February 2015) and after the May 2015 elections throughout the canvass, EROs focussed on resolving retained entries and managed to resolve the majority of these entries (52% between July/October and November 2014/February 2015 and 58% between May and November 2015). In contrast, in the build-up to the May 2015 elections – when EROs’ focus was on managing high volumes of applications to register to vote – the number of retained entries did not decrease at the same rate.<sup>38</sup>

2.14 In the months preceding the publication of the December 2015 registers - from May to the end of November 2015 – the majority of retained entries

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<sup>37</sup> This is registration for these electors lasts for 5 years which means, depending on their registration expiration date, that they may not need to register individually until 2019. In addition, in Scotland, due to the Scottish Independence Referendum, the transitional period for special category electors ran up until 18 December 2014. This means that in some cases it would have been possible for a special category elector to renew their registration under the old system and be retained on the registers published on 1 December 2015.

<sup>38</sup> Electors not IER-registered in May 2015 (‘retained electors’) could still vote at the 2015 elections.

were resolved by EROs: 1.1 million, corresponding to 58% of entries retained in May 2015. The remaining 790,000 were either removed because of the end of IER transitional arrangements (770,000) or are still retained as they are for special category electors (30,000).

2.15 However, we do not know how exactly how many of these entries removed on 1 December related to electors still resident at that address and how many were redundant entries for electors who had, for example, moved house.<sup>39</sup>

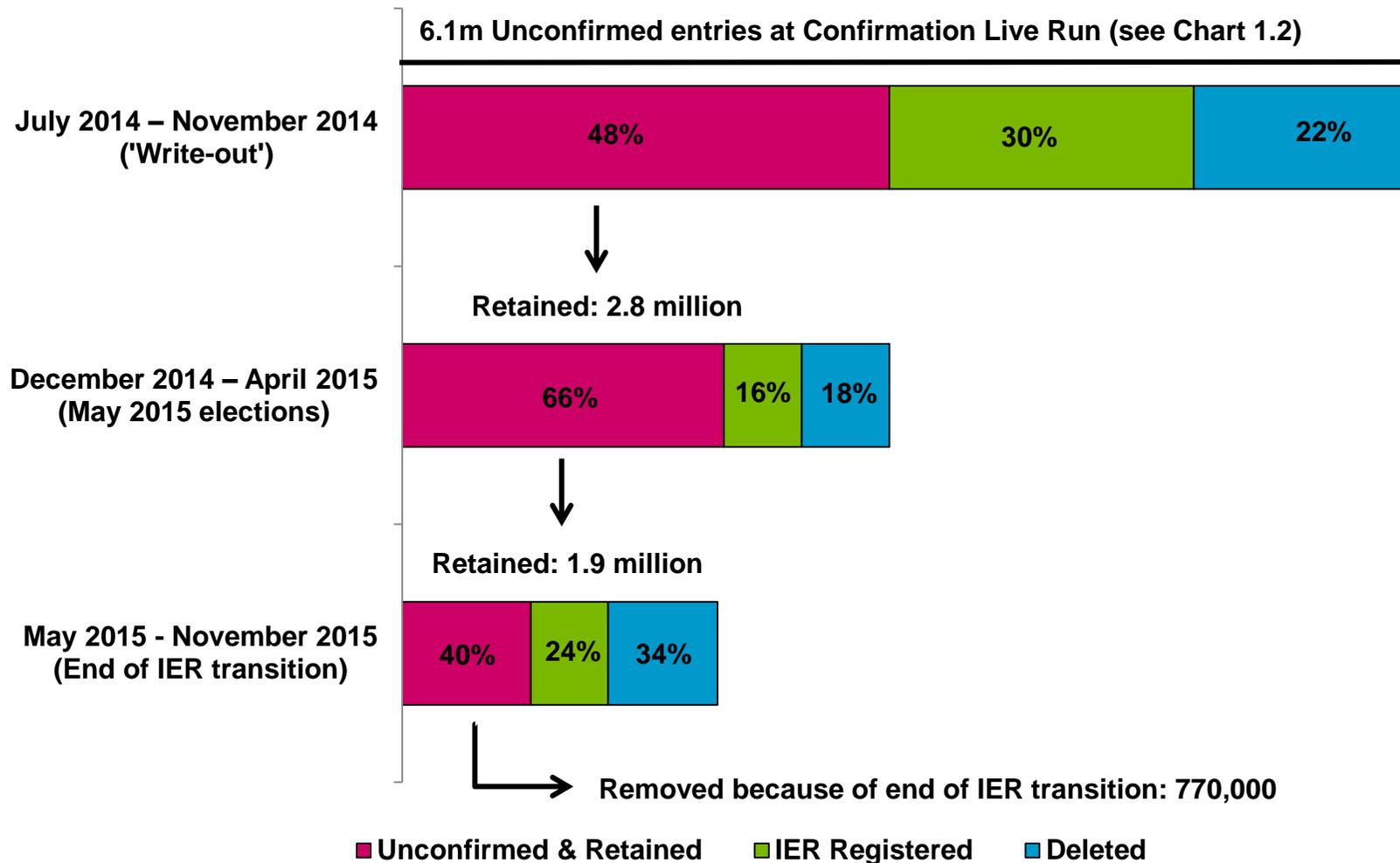
2.16 It is however notable that 24% of the 1.9 million entries retained in May clearly related to eligible electors still resident at their address as approximately 450,000 of them registered under IER by responding (between May and November) to their local ERO's invitation to provide personal identifiers (or through the exception/attestation process).

2.17 Anecdotal evidence from local authorities also indicates that some of these entries were for individuals still resident at the same address as the elector had applied to re-register. For example in Hammersmith, approximately 10% of the 2,228 entries removed applied to register individually before their entry was deleted but their identity had not been verified in time.

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<sup>39</sup> The Commission originally intended to conduct a study on these removals in order to assess how many related to eligible electors. However, there were legal issues with obtaining access to the required data as well as practical problems and we no longer plan to conduct this work.

**Figure 2.2: Entries retained on the registers from July 2014 (Confirmation Live Run process) to December 2015 (end of IER transitional arrangements).**



Transition timetable in Scotland was different due to the Scottish Independence referendum. The CLR stage took place in September 2014 and the write-out between November 2014 and February 2015. The full revised registers were then published in March 2015.

# Geographical variations

2.18 Data for England, Scotland and Wales as well as their constituent local authorities is presented below.

## Electorate

2.19 Below we present figures for both parliamentary and local government registers across Great Britain.

2.20 Table 2.2 shows the number of entries on the December 2015 parliamentary registers in England, Scotland and Wales as well as the change from previous years.

2.21 It shows that the number of entries in Scotland has dropped more significantly than in England and Wales since last year, December 2014.

2.22 However, figures indicate that the electorate decreased more in Wales than in the rest of Great Britain since IER was introduced and the last registers compiled under the old system were published (February/March 2014). We cannot at this stage provide an exhaustive explanation of the reasons behind this but it is notable that a significant reduction in two authorities (Cardiff and Swansea) accounts for almost half of the reduction in the total number of entries in Wales.

**Table 2.2: Total number of entries on the parliamentary registers – February/March 2014 to December 2015.**

Month/Year of Publication	England	+/-	Scotland	+/-	Wales	+/-
February/March 2014	38,597,137	-3%	4,027,187	-3%	2,297,250	-5%
December 2014 / March 2015	37,831,553	-1%	4,035,394	-3%	2,225,749	-2%
<b>December 2015</b>	<b>37,399,942</b>		<b>3,896,852</b>		<b>2,181,841</b>	

+/- Figures indicate the variation between December 2015 and the previous number of entries.

2.23 The pattern is similar for the local government electorate although data for Scotland cannot be compared directly to data from previous years as the new franchise for the local government register has extended the entitlement to be on the registers to 'young voters' (16 and 17 years old).

2.24 Analysis by English regions shows that the change since December 2014 has been more or less uniform across areas (between -1% and -1.6%) with the South East and London recording the largest drop (-1.6%). The North East shows the largest drop since the last registers published under the household system: -3.6% since February 2014.

**Table 2.3: Total number of entries on the local government registers – February/March 2014 to December 2015.**

Month/Year of Publication	England	+/-	Scotland	+/-	Wales	+/-
<b>February/March 2014</b>	40,001,780	-3%	4,120,494	-2%	2,328,499	-5%
<b>December 2014 / March 2015</b>	39,175,274	-1%	4,131,926	-2%	2,254,219	-2%
<b>December 2015</b>	<b>38,696,091</b>		<b>4,029,958</b>		<b>2,207,980</b>	

+/- Figures indicate the variation between December 2015 and the previous number of entries.

### **Local authority level**

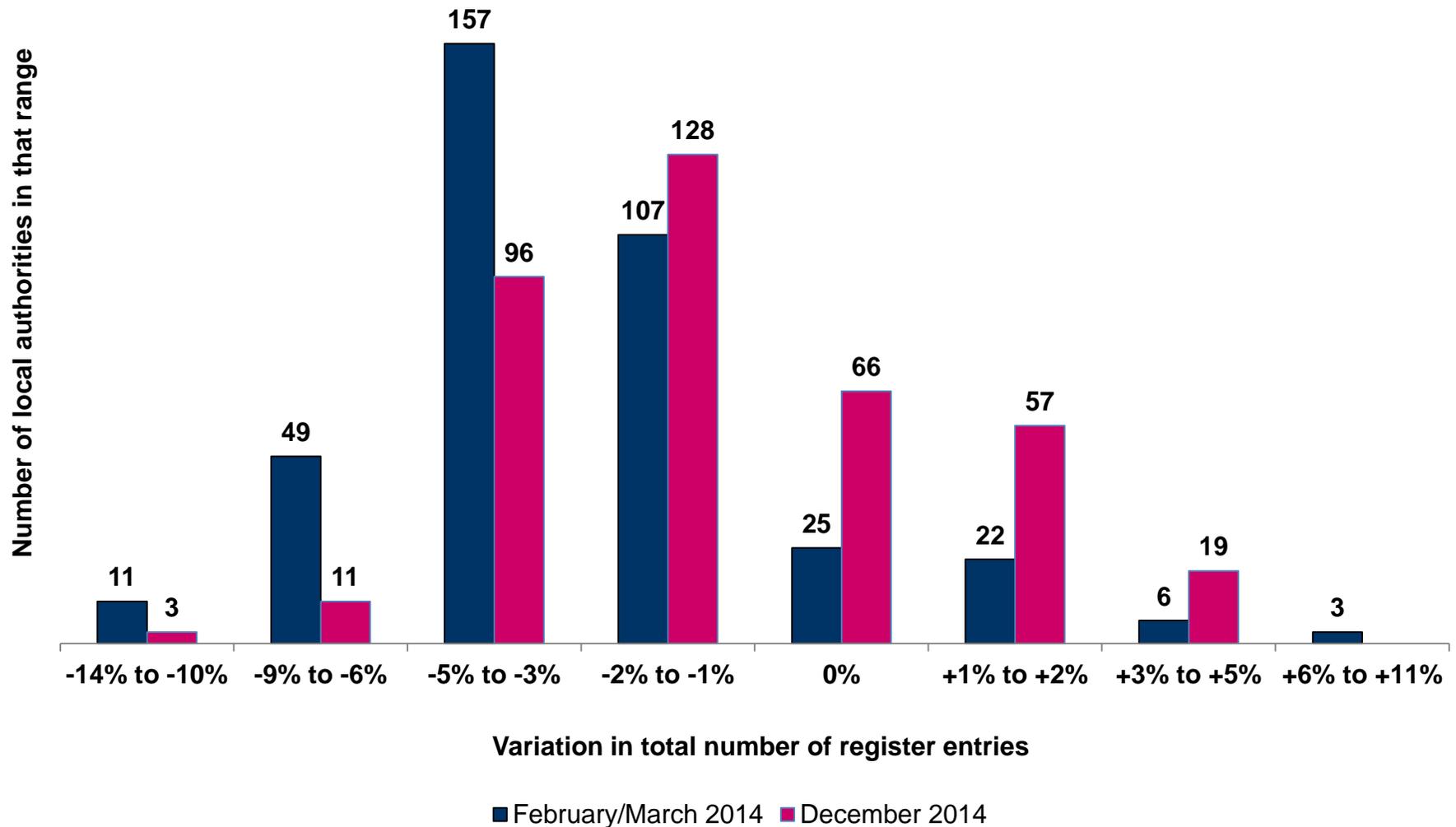
2.25 While the total number of parliamentary register entries in Great Britain decreased by 3% compared to February/March 2014, the variation at local level ranges from -14% (Oxford and Cambridge) to +11% (East Devon).

2.26 Compared to December 2014, changes vary from -12% to +5% with Cambridge and East Devon again at the opposite ends of the spectrum.

2.27 The chart below presents the percentage difference in total number of register entries between December 2015 against February/March 2014 and December 2014 and the number of authorities falling into each range.

2.28 We have previously explained that a reduction in the number of entries does not necessarily correspond to a reduction in the completeness of the registers – and vice versa. For example, a register that increases in size may be due to effective registration practices taking account of population increases but may equally be a result of a poorly managed register which has become inflated with inaccurate entries.

**Figure 2.3: Variations (percentage) in number of local government register entries in December 2015 by number of authorities in that range.**



2.29 It is notable that the two authorities that reported the largest drop in the number of register entries are the two areas with the highest concentration of students.<sup>40</sup> Table 2.4 below shows the ten local authorities with the largest number of full time students in proportion to their total population and the change in electorate size since the last registers compiled under the old system were published (February/March 2014). It shows that – except for Nottingham, Manchester and Newham – these areas recorded larger drops in electorate (between -8% and -14%) than in Great Britain overall (-3%).

2.30 In fact, as highlighted in previous reports, figures and anecdotal evidence from local authorities suggest that student areas have been particularly affected by the transition, partly due to lower levels of matching (to automatically move entries to the new system) for students and partly because of specific new IER provisions, for example the removal of ERO’s ability to ‘block’ register students in halls of residence

**Table 2.4: Changes to electoral register entries in the ten local authorities with the highest concentration of students.**

<b>Local Authority (ordered by student concentration)</b>	<b>Change in number of register entries December 2015- February/March 2014</b>	<b>Additions made to the register between December 2014 and May 2015</b>
Oxford	-14%	17%
Cambridge	-14%	16%
Nottingham	-3%	15%
Manchester	-3%	14%
Newcastle Upon Tyne	-9%	12%
Newham	+2%	12%
Ceredigion	-11%	10%
Canterbury	-10%	11%
Exeter	-8%	14%
Southampton	-10%	12%
Great Britain overall	-3%	8%

Data for local government registers.

<sup>40</sup> Students can be registered at their home address and at their time address.

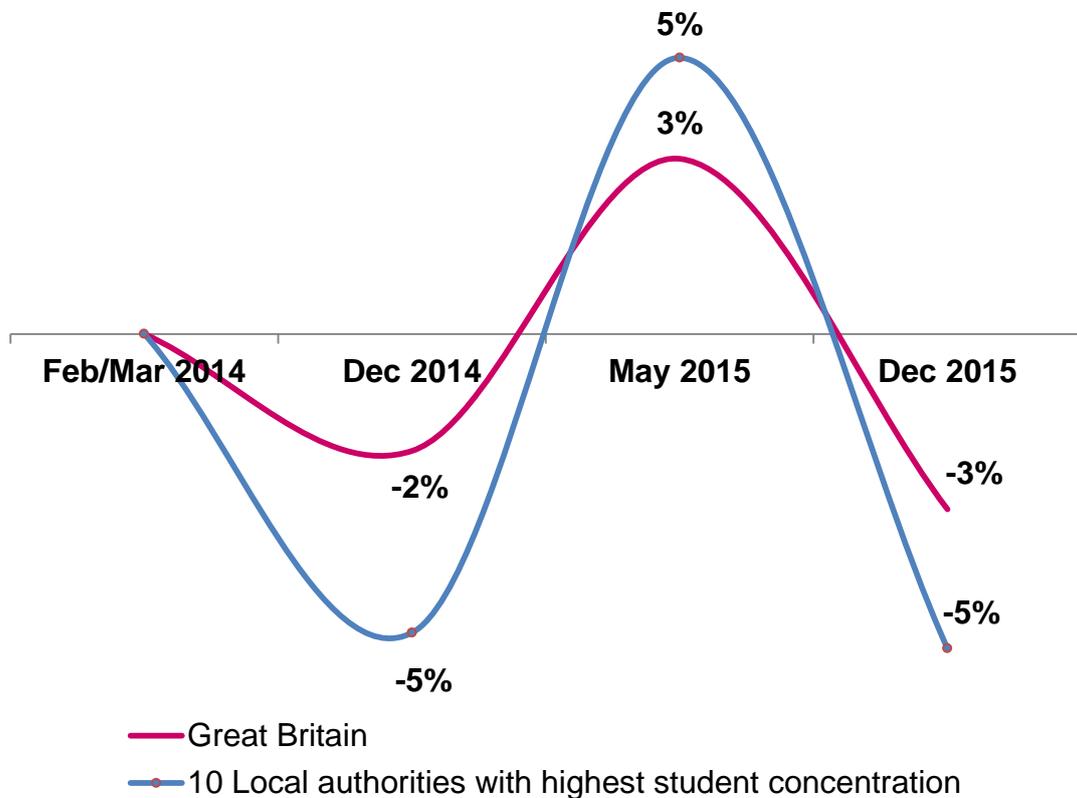
2.31 As the table above also shows these students areas also reported higher levels of additions in the build-up to the UK general election (between 10% and 17%) than Great Britain overall (8%) and as a result their registers in May 2015 increased more significantly (+5%) against December 2014 than in Great Britain (+3%).

2.32 Levels of additions and deletions are discussed further below but in this case the higher levels may be largely due to the timing of the canvass and university term times. Both Canterbury and Cambridge have indicated that because students are not usually resident until late September (for Canterbury) or early October (for Cambridge) the registration activities designed to target them were not finished by the time the revised registers were published. In both cases activities to encourage student registration have therefore been ongoing since 1 December 2015.

2.33 This would also have been the case ahead of the December 2014 register publication and would at least partly explain the higher levels of additions following the December register publication. Particularly in a year with a UK Parliamentary general election and now with the introduction of online registration (see Chapter 3 for further discussion of this).

2.34 Figures 2.4 also supports this in that it shows that areas with a higher concentration of students see the number of register entries fluctuating more prominently than overall Great Britain during the transition: entries decreased more significantly before the publication of the full revised registers (December) but increased above national average before the elections.

**Figure 2.4: Variations in number of register entries during the transition - Comparison between the ten local authorities with highest concentration of students against Great Britain average.**



The chart uses February/March 2014 registers - the last ones compiled under the old system - as reference.

2.35 This all suggests that while students may present a particular challenge for the IER canvass due to timing as well as the two-stage process of Household Enquiry Form (HEF) and Invitation to Register (ITR), other new IER provisions such as online registration have made registering at any point during the year easier.

2.36 The 1 December registers were always a snapshot under the household registration system: studies conducted on the registers in Great Britain found that historically the December registers were the most accurate ones as they were published right after the canvass, when most changes to the registers used to occur. However, that single date is now even less relevant to the overall maintenance of the registers.

2.37 Nevertheless, these registers, as published on 1 December, continue to hold particular significance in that they are used by Boundary Commissions when conducting parliamentary boundary reviews.

## Removed at end of transition

2.38 The table below shows the approximate number and proportion of register entries removed due to the end of the transition period in England, Scotland and Wales.

2.39 It shows the level of retained entries in Scotland at the end of the transition was slightly higher than in England and Wales, possibly due to the shorter time available to EROs in Scotland to contact these individuals (the transition in Scotland started later than in the rest of Great Britain, please see Figure 1.1).

2.40 However, our analysis shows that the level of retained entries decreased more significantly in Scotland between May and December 2015 (-3.7%) than in England (-2.2%) and Wales (-1.5%).

**Table 2.5: Entries removed because of end of IER transitional arrangements.**

Country	Number of register entries removed due to end of transition	Retained entries as percentage of December 2015 register
England	660,000	1.7%
Scotland	73,000	1.8%
Wales	33,000	1.5%

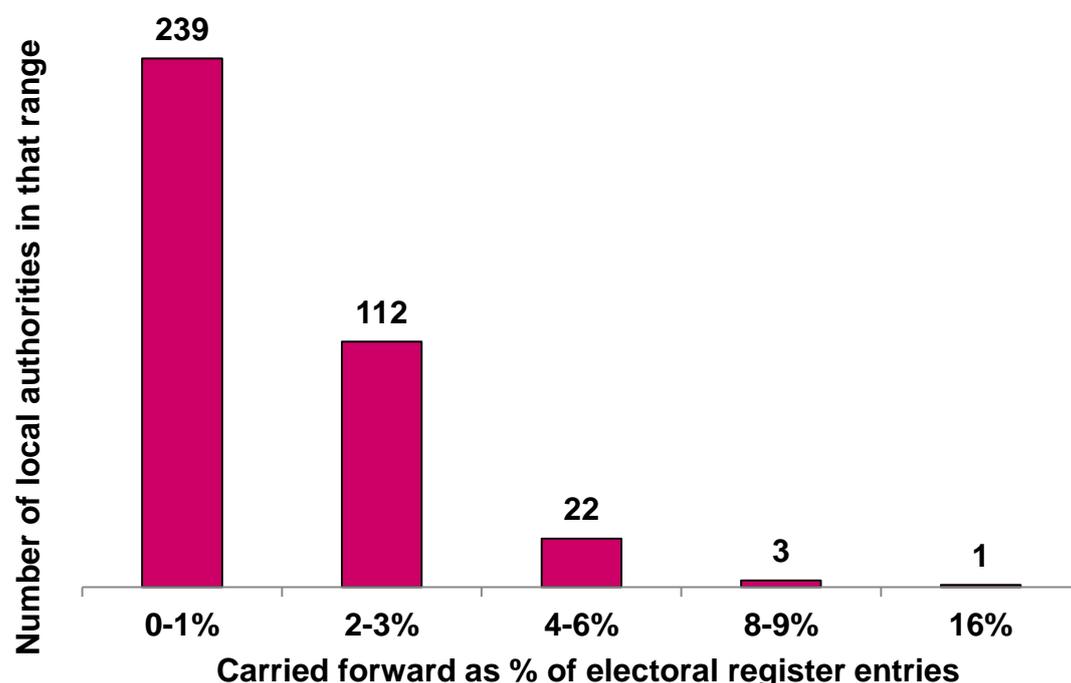
Figures are rounded due to issues with the data reported in previous chapters. Retained entries as percentage of the registers are calculated against the local government register.

2.41 There was also significant variation at a local authority level in the proportion of electors deleted due to the end of the transition as the chart below illustrates.

2.42 Figure 2.5 below shows the level of retained entries – expressed as a percentage – on all registers in Great Britain. It shows that the majority of local authority areas had retained entries on 30 November 2015 between 0-1% (239) and 2-3% (112). However, three authorities had to remove 8-9% of entries because the end of the transition while one – Cambridge - removed a number of entries equal to 16% of entries of the current register.

2.43 In May 2015 Hackney had the highest level of entries retained in the Great Britain: approximately 43,000, equalling to 23% of their total entries. Hackney was unable to submit their figures for December 2015 so we are unable to assess how many entries were removed because of the end of IER transitional arrangements. More information on Hackney is available in Chapter 4.

**Figure 2.5: Entries retained and removed as a percentage of the total number of register entries and number of local authority in that range.**



The base is this table is 376 because the EMS system used by two Valuation Joint Boards (VJB) could only report on aggregated data for the VJB and not for each authority falling within it. Data for one authority - Hackney - is missing.

2.44 During the transition we said the volume of retained entries on an ERO's register was associated with demographic characteristics also linked to lower levels of registration: levels of private renting in an area, younger age groups and the proportion of students. Data collected for this report continues to support that as local authorities in urban areas, especially in London, had higher levels of entries removed due to the end of the transition.

2.45 Many London Boroughs appear among the authorities with the highest percentage of entries removed due to the end of the transition. These are Kensington and Chelsea (9%), Newham and Redbridge (8%), Waltham Forest and Barnet (6%). Overall, the level of retained entries removed in London was 3.1%, significantly higher than the in the rest of England (1.4% when figures of London authorities are excluded) but with a notable reduction since May 2015 (7%). As we have set out above, the London figures do not include Hackney.

2.46 However, as we said in our June report on the state of the registers at the May 2015 elections, electoral registration practices also have a notable impact. In May 2015, local authorities presenting similar characteristics showed significant variations in terms of entries retained as percentage of the size of their register and this also appears to be the case in December 2015.

2.47 For example, while Cambridge records a large proportion of electors removed due to the end of the transition (16%), in Oxford it was nearer to 4%.

Several big cities like Leeds, Manchester and Newcastle removed around 3-4% due to the end of the transition but other big cities recorded different results, including Southampton (0%), Cardiff (1%), Edinburgh (1%) and Durham (0%).

2.48 It is clear that while the demographics of a local population have played a significant role in determining the levels of retained electors in an area, local electoral practices have also had a clear impact.

2.49 The use of formal reviews have been important in reducing the number of electors retained and additional Government funding was made available to allow reviews to be carried out by EROs.<sup>41</sup>

2.50 In addition, the timing of these reviews and other activities explain some of the variation in the levels of retained electors removed at the end of the transition period. In some areas, earlier action helped to reduce the number of entries still being retained during the 2015 canvass and therefore the number removed at the end of transition.

## Conclusions

2.51 The total number of register entries has decreased since December 2014/March 2015 (-1%) and February/March 2014 (-3%). However, as noted above, the 1 December publication date represents a snapshot of the registers and, importantly for the polls taking place in May 2016, activities to encourage registration have continued after the revised registers were published.

2.52 Local authorities with high concentration of students appear to have been more affected overall by the introduction of IER. On the other hand, these areas did see their registers increase more significantly than Great Britain as a whole in the build-up to the May 2015 elections partly thanks to new IER provisions such as online registration.

2.53 We will report on the registration activity which is currently taking place as well as polling day electorates when we publish our reports on the various elections taking place on 5 May 2016.

2.54 The data collected for this report clearly shows that the number of attainers on the registers continues to decrease from the levels under household registration. This is a concerning trend and we make recommendations in this report for how the decline might be reversed.

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<sup>41</sup> This involves writing to the elector in question to tell them that the ERO does not believe they are entitled to be registered (for example because they no longer live at the address). An elector then has 14 days from the date on the letter to request a hearing. Once that period has passed, and if no hearing has been requested, the ERO can determine whether they are still entitled to be registered.

2.55 Approximately 770,000 entries were removed from the electoral registers, due to the end of the IER transition period, before the revised registers were published. As we anticipated in our previous report this is a significantly smaller number than the total being retained on the registers in May 2015.

2.56 The canvassing activity carried out across Great Britain between July and December included significant activity intended to identify which of these entries were redundant, and could be removed, and which related to electors who needed to re-register individually.

2.57 We do not know how many of the entries which were finally removed related to still eligible electors resident at the same address but 24% of the 1.9 million entries being retained in May clearly related to eligible electors still resident at their address as approximately 450,000 of them registered under IER by responding to their local ERO's invitation during the canvass.

2.58 For any eligible electors removed at the end of the transition there will be many opportunities for anyone who needs to re-register to do so ahead of the elections on 5 May 2016 and we detail activities designed to encourage registration during this period in a later chapter.

## 3 Emerging findings on the first 'IER canvass'

3.1 This chapter provides an initial assessment on the mechanics of the first full canvass under Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

3.2 The data issues discussed in previous chapters limit the level of analysis we can conduct. However, we believe these are the key issues to have emerged from the canvass. We will also continue to work with this data with the aim of publishing full canvass datasets. Any further analysis will be included with the findings from the accuracy and completeness study that will be published later in 2016.

### Levels of change on the registers

3.3 One important measure of how effectively a canvass, or any other registration activity, has been carried out is the degree of change on the registers as a result. An electoral register aims to contain the details of all eligible individuals at their current addresses. The quality of the information on a register is therefore undermined by ongoing population mobility and it is primarily kept up to date by adding and deleting entries of home-movers (as well as removing the entries for those who have died and adding entries for those newly eligible to register).

3.4 Data on additions and deletions to the registers does not allow us to measure accuracy and completeness but are important indicators for both. Deletions should remove redundant entries (maintaining the accuracy of the registers) while additions put new eligible electors on the registers (maintaining or improving completeness).

3.5 The Commission has historically collected data on volumes of additions and deletions as important indicators of the state of a local authority's register: areas with higher levels of population churn – metropolitan, urban and student towns – are therefore expected to have higher levels of register turnover than those in more rural regions.

3.6 Under the household registration system, most additions and deletions took place during the annual canvass period. As the table below shows, the data collected for this report suggests that the first full IER canvass did not result in the same levels of additions and deletions as previous household registration canvasses.

3.7 However, a greater proportion of changes than usual were recorded outside of that traditional canvass period. There are several possible reasons for that. Firstly the UK Parliamentary general election in May 2015 which generated significant interest in registration with 1.6 million additions to the registers in the final five weeks before polling day.

3.8 However, the figures for 2010 do not show a similar pattern suggesting that the change can't be attributed to the election alone. The introduction of online registration is therefore also likely to have played a role in increasing registrations outside of the canvass period – by making the process quicker and easier to complete. Between December 2014 and May 2015, EROs also sent out Household Notification Letters (HNLs) to all households and evidence indicates this also had a positive impact.

**Table 3.1: Additions and deletions during and outside annual canvass.**

Year	Canvass period		Outside canvass period		Total	
	Added	Deleted	Added	Deleted	Added	Deleted
<b>2010</b>	10%	10%	3%	2%	<b>13%</b>	<b>12%</b>
<b>2013/14</b>	12%	12%	3%	3%	<b>15%</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>2015</b>	6%	6%	9%	9%	<b>15%</b>	<b>15%</b>

Base: 316 local authorities for which data is available for all three periods. The table compares data for the last year (2015), the last full household canvass conducted under the old system (2013/14) and the year of the previous UK general election (2010).

3.9 As previously set out, it is also more likely under IER that EROs will not have completed all of their planned canvassing activities by 1 December. This is likely to reduce the levels of additions and deletions within the traditional canvass period. However, as we explain further below, the degree of difference between levels under the household system and those achieved in this canvass are unlikely to be explained by this change alone.

## Local variation

3.10 At individual local authority level there has been a significant change in volumes of additions and deletions compared to previous canvasses. There has always been a wide range in proportionate levels of additions and deletions: local authorities with more mobile populations, such as London boroughs and areas with high concentration of students, have traditionally reported higher volumes of changes to their registers.

3.11 In the final household canvass the percentage of new electors added to the registers ranged from 0.4% to 29%. Nearly 150 local authority areas recorded levels of additions greater than 12%. However, in 2015 12% was the highest level of additions recorded in any authority.

3.12 Manchester added just over 100,000 electors in the last household registration canvass (equivalent to approximately 26% of all their entries) while in 2015 they added around 45,000 (12%). Similarly, Oxford added around 32,000 electors in the last household canvass (29% of all entries) and just under 10,000 in 2015 (10%).

3.13 . However, as highlighted in the previous chapter, these two authorities also recorded a higher than average level of additions in the months preceding the May 2015 elections: 12% in Manchester and 10% in Oxford against 8% in Great Britain overall.

3.14 If we compare deletions made throughout the year pre-IER (2013-2014) and in the last twelve months, we see a smaller decline in the volume of additions. In Manchester, the volume of additions was 29% in 2013-14 and 26% in 2015, in Oxford 32% and 30% respectively. Deletions show a similar pattern

3.15 Indeed this is the trend across many local authority areas. For example, in London, additions during the canvass decreased from 15% in 2013/14 to 6% in 2015 while additions made to the registers in London before the elections (10%) was higher than in previous years. This is not only an urban trend though with areas classed as significantly rural also showing similar results.

3.16 Whether the data for 2015 trend is indicative of a trend which will be sustained is not clear. The UK Parliamentary general election will have played a significant role in driving interest in registering outside the canvass and it remains to be seen what levels of change on the registers would look like in a year with elections where turnout is lower. However, we might expect 2016 to show a similar pattern with the significant May 2016 polls and the EU Referendum driving interest.

## Responses to forms

3.17 One possible reason for the significantly lower levels of additions and deletions in the 2015 canvass is the new two-stage canvassing approach under IER. EROs are required to send a Household Enquiry Form (HEF) to all properties (and follow-up non-responders). Where returned HEFs include new (i.e. unregistered) electors a second form (an Invitation to Register, ITR) is sent out for the individuals to complete. It is this form which asks for the person's national insurance number and date of birth and which allows them to become registered. Individuals can register directly online without completing either form.<sup>42</sup>

3.18 Anecdotal evidence from EROs during the canvass suggested a reasonable response rate (compared to previous canvasses) to the HEF forms being issued but a significantly lower response rate to the second form. Some EROs attributed this to electors' assumption that they had registered by completing the first form (as was previously the case) leading them to disregard the second form.

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<sup>42</sup> Individuals unable to provide personal identifiers can register by going through the exception or attestation route.

3.19 Unfortunately, the data we have collected for this report is inconclusive on this point. It shows that the overall response rate to the HEF in 2015 was around 84% (compared to a 94% response to the old canvass form in 2013/14) with paper based response to the ITR around 42%. However, this is likely to be a significant underestimation of the level of response to the ITR as it does not include responses from those electors who, having received an ITR, chose to register online.<sup>43</sup>

3.20 The statistics provided by the online registration portal indicate that between 1 August and 20 November 2015 (the last date for applications in England and Wales) 61% of all applications were made online.<sup>44</sup> While some of these applications will be generated not by individuals but by local electoral administration teams using the online portal to submit applications this still suggests a significant level of online response.<sup>45</sup>

3.21 Given this it is not possible to use the data collected for this report to clearly demonstrate that there is a systematic problem with the two stage canvassing process and further data collection and analysis would be needed.

## Implications

3.22 It is possible that the lower levels of additions and deletions will have had a negative impact on the accuracy and completeness of the registers on 1 December. However, we cannot at this stage quantify that impact and the lower levels during the traditional canvass period need to be considered in light of the higher levels in the months preceding the UK Parliamentary general election. We will report on accuracy and completeness levels in summer 2016.

3.23 The high levels of registrations ahead of the May 2015 elections is important as it suggests that encouraging registration closer to an election and without full canvassing can be more effective with the advent of online registration than it was before when electors still needed to complete a paper form. However, more analysis is needed here before any changes could confidently be made to the current canvass timings.

3.24 The data on response rates does suggest an issue with the two stage canvassing process under IER. Although some caution is needed here because this was the first IER canvass and problems may stem from the public's lack of familiarity with the process rather than significant systematic

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<sup>43</sup> This is because ITRs are issued locally but the online registration process is managed centrally. It is not possible to track online responses to specific ITRs through the data collected.

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/performance/register-to-vote/registrations-breakdown#from=2015-08-01T00:00:00Z&to=2015-12-01T00:00:00Z>

<sup>45</sup> EROs can send applications through the central digital service directly from their EMS systems but they might also chose to enter the application information they receive directly via the registration portal. In the user statistics the latter will simply appear as an individual choosing to register to vote online.

problems. The potential for future changes to the current registration processes and the Commission's view on the risks and issues are discussed in the following chapter.

## Conclusions

3.25 Data collected for this report does not allow an assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the registers at the end of the transition to IER. Such assessment requires a specific study: this is currently being conducted and we will report its findings in summer 2016.

3.26 Data presented provides an initial indication of how well the new IER provisions are working and a sense of their impact on the quality of the registers. However, we are unable to draw clear conclusions on several points and further work is required. For example, the two-stage canvass process under IER may have had a negative impact on EROs' ability to maintain their register up-to-date with population changes but this is not definitively shown through the data collected.

3.27 More positively, online registration (in combination with public awareness activity and HNLs) appears to be effective at capturing population movement outside the traditional autumn canvass period. However, the data is for a year featuring a UK Parliamentary general election, when people are more motivated to register to vote. The efficacy of this system outside a high turnout elections year is to be verified.

3.28 Chapter 6 below sets out what we believe are now the key issues and challenges for the system of electoral registration.

## 4 Performance of EROs: delivering IER

4.1 EROs have played a critical role in ensuring that the transition to IER was delivered effectively, undertaking considerable work in preparation for and delivery of the transition. We have been monitoring ERO performance against our IER performance standards – designed to support EROs in delivering the transition to IER – and this section of the report provides our assessment of ERO performance in planning for and delivering IER.

### IER performance standards

4.2 In September 2013, following a period of consultation, we published a new performance standards framework which was designed to support EROs in planning for and delivering the transition to IER. The framework reflects what we and the UK Electoral Advisory Board<sup>46</sup> agreed that EROs need to do in order to ensure a successful transition to IER.

4.3 The standards were developed around the key challenges facing EROs in the transition, with a focus on what EROs would need to do and know in order to effectively deliver the transition and to determine whether these challenges were being met. There are two standards: the first covering the planning phase and the second covering the delivery phase.

#### Performance standard 1

4.4 The objective of performance standard 1 was to ensure that all EROs had in place a local public engagement strategy reflecting their own specific challenges, taking into account their confirmation dry run results, and an implementation plan which set out how they planned to deliver the transition as a whole.

4.5 In October 2013, all EROs were required to submit a copy of their local public engagement strategy and, through our risk-based monitoring, 25% of EROs were also required to submit copies of their implementation plan and risk register. Reviewing EROs' strategies and plans at this stage gave us an early indication of the progress being made by EROs in planning for IER and enabled us to identify where additional support might be needed, and the nature of that support, so that this could be provided in a timely way.

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<sup>46</sup> The UK Electoral Advisory Board (EAB) is an advisory group convened by the Electoral Commission consisting of senior Electoral Registration and Returning Officers, and with representation from SOLACE (the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives) and the AEA (the Association of Electoral Administrators). The EAB gives the Commission strategic advice about matters relating to elections, referendums and electoral registration.

4.6 Following our work with those whose strategies, as initially submitted, demonstrated that further work was required, we reported in March 2014 that we were confident that all EROs were meeting the first of the two performance standards.

## Performance standard 2

4.7 The objective of performance standard 2 is to ensure that EROs deliver their strategies and plans, using available data to monitor progress and make amendments where necessary to ensure they remain appropriate. This includes EROs' work with entries which relate to electors who are not registered individually, as well as their work to identify and target potential new electors and under-registered groups.

4.8 Following our reporting on performance against standard 1 in March 2014, the transition to IER involved a number of key stages of registration activity carried out by EROs between July 2014 – December 2015, and we have been monitoring the performance of EROs in delivering each of these key stages.

### The write-out

4.9 It was important that EROs maintained a clear audit trail to demonstrate that the write-out and canvass was carried out in accordance with the legislation and this should have been reflected in implementation plans. In particular, the timing of the write-out and canvass was key to ensuring that it had the greatest impact. Our guidance set out the legislative requirements with regard to timing, it also highlighted that the write-out should be conducted in a shorter period so that the write-out and any local public engagement activity was co-ordinated with the Commission's wider public awareness campaign.

### Maximising registration activity in advance of May 2015 polls

4.10 Considerable work was undertaken by EROs ahead of the registration deadline for the May 2015 polls in order to ensure that as many people as possible were able to participate. In December 2014 we strongly recommended that EROs across Great Britain undertake an audit of their registers and write to all households – regardless of whether or not they had any registered electors – in early 2015, in good time before the May polls. All EROs in carried out this work – EROs in England and Wales in January/February following publication of the revised registers in December 2014 and EROs in Scotland throughout February and March 2015.

### 2015 canvass

4.11 EROs needed to continue to ensure their plans remain appropriate during the canvass, using available data to monitor progress and keep them under review. In advance of the 2015 canvass, EROs identified as forming part of our risk-based monitoring were required to submit a copy of their planning documentation. Reviewing EROs' plans enabled us to identify where additional support might be needed, and the nature of that support, so that this could be provided in a timely way.

4.12 We also asked all EROs to provide us with an update on progress with the canvass and follow-up processes in October 2015. This involved asking all EROs to complete a short survey, with questions designed to enable us to understand how the canvass was progressing in each area, demonstrating what work has already been completed, what the impact of this work has been and what remaining actions are still to be carried out.

#### **Publication of December 2015 registers<sup>47</sup>**

4.13 The data collected following the conclusion of the canvass and publication of revised registers by 1 December 2015 helps us to understand the progress made over the period of the transition and will enable us to make a better-informed assessment of each ERO's performance against standard 2.

4.14 As highlighted previously in this report, we encountered issues with the management information functionality of some Electoral Management Software (EMS) systems which EROs use to manage their electoral register. We therefore did not receive a full dataset from all EROs to enable us to conduct a thorough assessment of activities undertaken by all EROs during the 2015 canvass. Given the issues encountered, our detailed analysis of this data, which will inform our assessment of ERO performance, has also been delayed and is therefore still ongoing. Our data analysis and subsequent follow up may identify some EROs whose registration activity did not, in practice, meet all of the elements of performance standard 2. Our summary of performance assessment below is therefore based on the information currently available to us, and may be amended once we have completed our detailed analysis of the data.

4.15 We will keep working with the Cabinet Office – responsible for managing the work of EMS suppliers in support of IER – to have a complete and reliable set of data for our final assessment and we will publish the set in the summer once we have concluded our analysis, along with our final assessments of EROs' performance against the standards.

## **Summary of performance**

4.16 There have been a small number of instances where we have identified potential performance issues and we are in contact with the relevant EROs to confirm our understanding of the issue, and to invite them to provide us with any relevant additional information. This includes a small number of EROs who may not yet have completed a personal canvass for all non-responders as well as a small number of EROs who may not have removed all of the retained entries prior to publication of their revised register on 1 December.

4.17 Given the issues encountered with data as highlighted above, the assessment process is continuing past the publication of this report, once the process is concluded an update will be published in the summer 2016

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<sup>47</sup> A detailed analysis of this data can be found in Chapter 2.

alongside the accuracy and completeness study. We have however reached a final assessment in relation to one ERO which was not reliant upon the submission of December register data and details of this are provided below.

4.18 When making a final assessment of ERO performance our main consideration is the impact of the issue on the ability of people to register easily or confidence in the electoral registration service provided. Through an assessment process incorporating a review by a panel made up of representatives from the EAB, we have currently assessed one ERO (Hackney) as having not met performance standard 2.

### **Hackney**

4.19 In Hackney a number of issues arose during the period of monitoring against standard 2; we have assessed that the ERO did not meet elements of the performance standards with regards to the following issues:

- Because of problems with the electoral management system and a lack of ability to process data in a timely manner, 1300 electors, who had made valid registration applications, were not properly added onto the register in time for the May 2015 polls<sup>48</sup>. There was a further occasion where a number of electors could not be properly added to the register in time for the January 2016 update<sup>49</sup>.
- Unreliability of data on unconfirmed electors – we understand that there have been differing figures in circulation during the transition and, importantly, during the 2015 canvass, which was separate to the more widespread data issues experienced in relation to the provision of December register data. This lack of confidence in the data being correct led to a lack of understanding of both the scope and scale of the challenges and what progress had been made in response to these
- Lack of effective local data matching – whilst this has now been introduced and local data is being used, there was a delay to this being carried out which led to the register potentially retaining a large number of inaccurate elector details into the May 2015 elections and 2015 canvass

4.20 We concluded that the ERO did not meet elements of performance standard 2 because of the problems experienced with both the ability of people to register easily and overall confidence in the electoral registration service provided. We have also considered the processes that the ERO had in place and the actions that were taken throughout the period of monitoring against performance standard 2. As the issues encountered affected the

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<sup>48</sup> As included in our *Report on the administration of the 7 May 2015 elections, including the UK Parliamentary elections*, we provided the ERO for Hackney with advice about whether these electors could be added to the register under legal provisions which allow EROs to correct clerical errors. Hackney took steps to issue a communication alerting electors to the problem and to provide polling stations with lists of the affected electors so that they would be able to vote if they attended their polling station.

<sup>49</sup> We were told that this was as a result of the implementation of a new Election Management System in December 2015 and that the issues were resolved promptly in January 2016.

ability of people to successfully register in advance of a set of scheduled polls and demonstrated an inability to successfully monitor the progress of the delivery of the implementation plan, we believe that the impact was significant.

4.21 We have met with the ERO at Hackney to discuss the issues and we recognise the steps being taken to improve the electoral registration service. This includes a thorough strategic review of the service and re-organisation of the staffing structure. We also recognise that, as well as changes to key staff, plans have been set in place to utilise data held within the authority, both in terms of data mining and data matching, and that a number of positive actions have been introduced in terms of engaging with electors. We will continue to support the ERO and his staff to help them to put arrangements in place to ensure the provision of a well-run electoral registration service.

## New performance standards for EROs

4.22 We have developed a new set of standards for EROs which aim to support them in planning for and delivering well-run electoral registration services in 2016 and beyond, but at the same time recognising, and being flexible enough to reflect, the changing landscape and vision for electoral registration services as they develop.

4.23 The new framework has been developed around key outcomes from the perspective of ensuring that all eligible people are able to participate in the electoral process, should they wish to do so, and of achieving electoral registers that are as accurate and complete as possible. The new standards focus on the following two key areas:

- Framework for the delivery of registration activity
- Delivery of registration activity to maintain accurate and complete registers

4.24 We will continue to collect data from all EROs as in previous years. The new performance standards set out the type of data which we would expect to collect to help us to understand the scope and scale of the challenges facing each ERO and what progress is being made in response to these.

4.25 Our consultation on the proposed new standards closed on Friday 15 January and we are currently reviewing the responses received. We will then consult with the EAB on any amendments or revisions before publication of the new performance standards for EROs in March 2016.

# 5 Maximising registration from 1 December to May 2016

5.1 The 1 December 2015 registers provided a snapshot of how the registers stood at that date, but work has and will continue to be done to ensure as many people as possible are registered to vote in advance of the May 2016 polls.

5.2 EROs, the Commission and many others have already undertaken significant activity since publication of the revised registers and details of this can be found below.

## ERO activity to promote registration

5.3 To help maximise the number of people included on the electoral registers in the period leading up to the May 2016 polls, many EROs have confirmed that they will again be undertaking an audit of their registers through the use of 'household notification letters' (HNL). In Wales, Welsh Government wrote to all local authorities in February to notify EROs of an additional £330k being made available to carry out an additional HNL exercise ahead of the elections in Wales. Local EROs are currently working on plans to determine how this funding will be most effectively used

5.4 Our guidance for EROs on how to maintain electoral registers throughout the year, supports EROs in preparing for and carrying out this registration activity. The HNL shows who is registered to vote at that particular address and prompts anyone who is not yet registered to do so.

5.5 This approach has a number of clear benefits, all of which can contribute to helping EROs ensure that their registers are as accurate and complete as possible ahead of the May 2016 polls:

- Prompting those who have not yet registered to do so
- Helping to pick up those who have recently moved within or into the registration area
- Giving residents an opportunity to check their details on the register are accurate

## National Voter Registration Drive

5.6 National Voter Registration Drive (NVRD) is an initiative run by Bite The Ballot to encourage voter registration and it ran across the UK from 1 to 7 February 2016.

5.7 NVRD saw a range of events taking place to promote voter registration such as an event held at the Senedd in Cardiff and run by the National Assembly for Wales in partnership with the Commission, NUS Wales, Youth Cymru and Bite The Ballot. Around 150 people attended the event and it received media coverage in BBC News, BBC Wales Today and ITV Wales 'The Sharp End'.

5.8 To support NVRD, the Commission created a number of resources – including: template press releases, social media posts and letters to schools, colleges and universities – for EROs to use in their promotional work on this day, highlight the need to register to vote.

5.9 In preparation for the expected referendum on membership of the EU, the Commission launched Overseas Voter Registration Day on 4 February to boost the numbers of UK residents overseas who are registered to vote in the UK.

## The Commission's public awareness campaign

5.10 The Commission is running a national public awareness campaign with the objective of encouraging people to register to vote ahead of the 18 April deadline.

5.11 The campaign will reach all adults, with a focus on groups that our research has identified as being less likely to be registered to vote, such as students, young people, those who have recently moved home, people who rent their home, and people from some black and minority ethnic communities. This involves ensuring that our ad is shown on certain TV stations at specific times and that our digital advertising appears on websites that members of these target groups are likely to access.

5.12 We started online advertising across the UK on 2 February and this will continue until the registration deadline. Throughout February we are testing different versions of our online ads to see which are the most effective at encouraging people to visit the online registration site in Great Britain (or our about my vote website in Northern Ireland). We are running some specific ads targeting young people, students and people who have recently moved home. With the different versions of our ads we are testing two behavioural insights; 'loss aversion' which suggests people are more motivated to act if they're avoiding a loss as opposed to acquiring a gain, and 'social norming' which is about presenting a type of behaviour as 'normal' and encouraging others to take on that behaviour. At the end of February, we will discontinue the least successful ads and we will run more of the better performing ads from when our TV advertising starts.

5.13 We will start radio advertising in Northern Ireland from mid-February and then in Scotland and Wales from mid-March. Our TV and catch-up TV advertising will run from 14 March across the UK.

5.14 We are 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.

5.15 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. The ad will look like a typical scene from Hollyoaks with some of the characters discussing that they're registered to vote, how easy it was and how you need to register not to miss out on voting. The ad will air during breaks around Hollyoaks and other programmes on Channel 4 and E4 that have a similar audience, from 21 March. In addition, in Scotland and Wales we are running more advertising than we had originally planned to reach students and people who have recently moved home.

5.16 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. 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.

5.17 To assess the performance of our campaign we will do independent tracking research before the start and towards the end of the campaign. To measure the amount of entries on the electoral registers added during our campaign, we will compile data from completed applications and cross-reference this with data we will collect from EROs after the May polls.

## Partnership working

5.18 During the transition to IER we began forming partnerships with a range of corporate, public and voluntary organisations, to use their communication channels to extend our reach into groups we have identified as being typically under-registered. We built on this further in the run-up to the May 2015 polls and partnership working is now an important part of our public awareness campaigns to complement our advertising and public relations activities. A list of the [partners we are working with](#) in the lead up to the May 2016 elections is on our website.

5.19 We have more than 60 partners including organisations such as NUS, RNIB, Shelter, and Citizens' Advice Bureau, undertaking various activities to promote registration and provide people with the information they need to take part in the elections.

5.20 We have produced a set of [resources for partners](#) to use including guides with activity suggestions and top tips, posters, infographics and website banners and buttons. In partnership with Mencap and Enable

Scotland we have also produced specific factsheets for voters with learning disabilities.

5.21 In Scotland we launched a joint campaign with Shelter to promote voter registration to those living in rented or temporary accommodation and the homeless, to make them aware of their right to vote on 5 May and this received wide media coverage across Scotland.

5.22 Across the UK we are working with NUS, Operation Black Vote and other youth-focussed organisations to run our #RegAFriend campaign from 25 February. The idea is to get young people who are registered to vote to encourage their non-registered friends to do the same by sharing messages via social media.

5.23 To encourage 15-17 year olds in Scotland to register we are working with the Electoral Management Board, SOLACE and councils to invite schools to sign up to run registration drives throughout March, under the event name #ReadytoVote. So far more than 130 schools have signed up and we have provided them with a [toolkit of resources](#) to help facilitate their drives. To help promote the drives, Skills Development Scotland will send a text message to more than 38,000 young people.

# 6 Looking ahead

6.1 As the earlier chapters of this report set out, overall the transition to individual electoral registration 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.

6.2 This final chapter identifies and describes the most significant of those challenges, and highlights the opportunities we think can be taken to ensure they are appropriately addressed in the future.

## Challenges for electoral registration in Great Britain

6.3 The annual canvass which took place in Great Britain in 2015 was the first full canvass of households under the new system of individual electoral registration. The experience of EROs delivering the canvass under the new system highlighted a number of significant challenges. Some of these are continuations of challenges which existed under the previous system of household registration, but which may have been intensified by the new system; others are new challenges which may have been created by the design and operation of the new system.

### Continuing challenges for electoral registration

6.4 Population movement within and between local authorities continues to have a significant impact on the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers. EROs have been required by law to use the annual canvass of households, carried out in the late summer and autumn each year, to identify local population movement and to update electoral registers.

6.5 The rate of population movement in Great Britain has increased over time, however, and there are also significant differences between different local authority areas in the rate of population movement locally.<sup>50</sup> As we have noted previously, evidence from our research and performance standards assessments suggests that EROs are working harder, and at greater cost, simply to maintain current levels of accuracy and completeness.

6.6 At the same time, local authority budgets, which fund the majority of electoral registration activities, have been significantly reduced and local

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<sup>50</sup> See for example Office for National Statistics (June 2015) [Internal migration, England and Wales, year ending June 2014](#)

authorities and EROs must consider and justify funding for electoral registration against a range of other important statutory duties. We understand the Cabinet Office will continue to provide central funding to cover the additional cost burden of individual electoral registration.

6.7 The timing of the canvass has also been identified by some EROs as increasingly challenging. Engaging people with what might appear to be a bureaucratic exercise is likely to be much harder during a period when there is normally very little electoral activity to prompt or motivate people to respond to the household enquiry form or apply directly to register to vote. This challenge may also have been exacerbated by confusion about the new canvass process, as described below, although we do not have any empirical data to identify or measure the likely impact.

## New challenges for electoral registration

6.8 Anecdotal feedback from EROs also suggests that the new two-stage canvass process (the completion and return of a household enquiry form to identify who is living at each address, followed by the completion of individual electoral registration applications for any new residents at the property) may have caused some confusion, and could have had a negative impact on the number of applications made during the canvass period.

6.9 Analysis presented in Chapter 3 suggests that response rates to the household enquiry form may have been higher than for the individual application forms which were subsequently issued, but the data provided to us does not include online responses and so the real picture is not clear. The data also does not tell us what the reason(s) may be for any difference in response rates.

6.10 We have also highlighted in Chapter 2 that the requirement for attainers aged 16 or 17 to register themselves (rather than be registered by a parent or guardian via a household canvass form, as was previously allowed) may have contributed to a reduction in the number of attainers included in the registers compared with the registers published in February and March 2014. It may be too soon to assess whether this is a long-term effect which continues in future years, but it appears already to have had a significant impact on an age group which was already less likely to be registered than other groups.

6.11 EROs have also expressed concerns about the efficiency of some of the steps and processes which they are required by law to carry out during the canvass. These requirements – which are intended to ensure that residents in every property are given the opportunity to confirm or update their registration details – have resulted in an increased workload for EROs under the new individual electoral registration system, principally because of the need to send invitations to register to potential new electors and to send confirmation of any new additions made as a result of all applications, including those made during the canvass period.

6.12 In Scotland, the change to extend the franchise for local government and Scottish Parliamentary elections to include 16- and 17-year-olds means that EROs will need to revise their plans and strategies for encouraging registration among young people, to include plans for targeting 14- and 15-year-olds.

## Is the current approach to electoral registration in Great Britain sustainable?

6.13 Taking into account these continuing and new challenges for electoral registration in Great Britain, we are concerned that the current approach to registration, including the annual canvass of households, is unlikely to be sustainable in the medium- to long-term future.

6.14 The transition to individual electoral registration has, however, highlighted the potential for further opportunities both to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of the registration process and also to reduce costs and improve efficiency of EROs' activities.

6.15 Online registration, for example, has been an effective new tool for quickly capturing population movement outside the household canvass period. This has been at relatively low cost, particularly in combination with public awareness activity ahead of a high-profile electoral event such as the May 2015 UK Parliamentary general election.

6.16 In the period immediately before polling day for the May 2015 elections (11 March to 28 April 2015) an average of 1.1 million additions per month were made to the registers, compared with an average of 244,000 additions per month in the period between 10 June and 30 November 2014, and an average of 544,000 additions per month in the period between 1 December 2014 and 10 March 2015.<sup>51</sup>

6.17 The confirmation process which was carried out by EROs in summer 2014 demonstrated the value of matching the register against other data sets as part of the range of tools which could help EROs identify potential changes to their registers.<sup>52</sup>

6.18 Further significant changes to current electoral registration processes, including to the annual canvass process, will be required to support improved services for electors and continued transformation of electoral registration in Great Britain. The next section sets out our views on the opportunities for improving electoral registration in Great Britain, and poses some challenging questions for the UK Government and EROs.

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<sup>51</sup> Electoral Commission (June 2015) [\*Assessment of progress with the transition to Individual Electoral Registration: May 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain\*](#)

<sup>52</sup> The transition to IER in England and Wales began in June 2014 with a data matching exercise to compare existing electors' details with the details held on the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) database, referred to as a 'confirmation process'.

# Opportunities for improving electoral registration in Great Britain

6.19 While we exist in an increasingly digital world, much of electoral registration law and practice remains based on physical contact with electors, whether by post or using staff to canvass properties. Following the 2015 UK General Election, the UK Government Minister for Constitutional Reform launched his vision for electoral registration and how it can be modernised so that it meets the demands and expectations of 21st century voters.<sup>53</sup>

6.20 We have already highlighted in previous reports our own recommendations of areas for improvement, and we support the Minister's commitment to further modernisation and transformation of electoral registration. We want to work with the Cabinet Office and the EAB 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.

## Pilot schemes

6.21 The UK Government intends to explore options to improve the efficiency of delivering electoral registration under IER so that associated costs can be reduced while simultaneously having an equivalent or improved effect on the accuracy and completeness of the register. Options under consideration include more effective use of local and national data to capture population churn and amending the annual canvass process by removing certain stages (e.g. the requirement to send a second reminder), or encouraging online responses.

6.22 The UK Government is considering the extent to which these and other ideas might be tested through pilot schemes (using piloting powers provided for in the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 and by displaying certain steps by Statutory Instrument) to be run by a selection of local authorities during the 2016 annual canvass.

6.23 We support the principle of testing alternative approaches through piloting and will evaluate the schemes, as required under the legislation. The aims and objectives of the schemes must be well-defined and clearly stated, and include clear evaluation criteria to enable a proper assessment of their impact on the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register; the convenience of electoral registration for electors; and the costs of the electoral registration process. It will be important to build a coherent strategic framework of pilot schemes, and minimise the risk of uncoordinated schemes which deliver little by way of evidence and learning.

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<sup>53</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/vision-for-electoral-registration-speech-by-john-penrose>

## Evidence and experience from elsewhere

6.24 The UK Government and EROs in Great Britain can continue to learn from the experience of electoral registration in Northern Ireland, which has delivered a system of individual electoral registration since 2003, and continuous registration (with no canvass of households) since 2006. Electoral registration data from Northern Ireland, which we have analysed and reported, should help to inform the development of new solutions for registration in the rest of the UK. Similarly, the successful implementation of online electoral registration in Great Britain should be extended to Northern Ireland, and we are pleased that the Chief Electoral Officer and the Northern Ireland Office are taking steps to make the necessary administrative and legislative changes.

6.25 The UK can also benefit from the experience of other comparable democracies which are addressing similar challenges. Evidence about the impact of using monthly updates from national data holders in Canada, for example, directly registering electors where there is sufficient evidence of their eligibility in Australia, or allowing registration on polling day in Canada and several US states, should all be taken into account by policymakers in the UK.

## Looking ahead: an ambitious plan for delivering an electoral registration system for the future

6.26 This chapter has set out some significant challenges for maintaining accurate and complete electoral registers, but also has highlighted important opportunities for further modernisation and improvement. We will respond positively to these challenges and opportunities. We will encourage and work with UK Government Ministers and the UK Electoral Advisory Board to develop a robust and detailed plan for delivering an electoral registration system that better meets the needs of people in the twenty-first century.

6.27 This plan must be ambitious. Simple process change – reducing the size or number of forms sent to houses during the canvass, for example – is unlikely to be sufficient to meet the changing needs of voters or EROs. This means that the UK Government, EROs, campaigners and the Commission need to think openly and be prepared to challenge assumptions and existing ways of working.

6.28 Planning for an improved and modernised electoral registration system should also recognise and take advantage of the distinct phases of activity which now characterise the yearly cycle of work involved in maintaining accurate and complete electoral registers.

6.29 We have already started to discuss the potential scope of a plan to deliver a more convenient, effective and efficient electoral registration process

with the UK Electoral Advisory Board (which comprises senior EROs from across the UK together with representatives of the Association of Electoral Administrators). We set out below the key questions which need to be addressed in order to define and deliver this plan. We are also considering many of these issues as part of the strategic review the Commission is undertaking in relation to its future work.

## Year-round activity to maintain accurate and complete registers

6.30 Maintaining accurate and complete electoral registers is a year-round responsibility for EROs, but the current statutory framework requires them to carry out most of their intensive and expensive work (canvassing households) almost immediately after scheduled polls, rather than just before them.

6.31 A plan for delivering a more effective registration process should consider whether the current requirement for annual household canvass activity could be replaced with more efficient processes for maintaining the accuracy and completeness of registers.

### **Should EROs in Great Britain continue to hold an annual canvass of electors? Is there a better time of year to carry out household registration activities?**

Encouraging people to engage with household canvass activity is likely to be much harder during a period (July to December) when there is normally very little electoral activity to prompt or motivate people to respond to the household enquiry form or apply directly to register to vote, compared with the period immediately prior to scheduled polls.

Since 2006, Northern Ireland has operated a system of continuous registration. The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland (CEONI) is not required to conduct a fresh canvass of electors every year, and the names of electors are retained on the register until the CEONI is notified of a change of name or address.

Could a system similar to that adopted in Northern Ireland be implemented, and how could the challenges experienced in Northern Ireland when moving away from an annual canvass requirement be avoided? Could canvass resources be targeted more effectively – for example, by using them to encourage registration among hard to reach groups?

In February and March 2015, ahead of the May 2015 UK Parliamentary general election, EROs across Great Britain sent household notification letters (HNLs) showing who was registered to vote at that address and prompting anyone who was not yet registered to do so. We have highlighted below the potential role and benefits of incorporating the HNL process as a regular and continuing part of the electoral registration framework.

**How could EROs use data from other sources to identify population movement more effectively and efficiently all year round? What infrastructure might be required to help EROs make best use of local or national data on population movement?**

Citizens already have many interactions with a wide range of public services – for example, when accessing the benefits and tax systems, the NHS, or when applying for or updating a driving license or passport. These interactions could be used to prompt people to register to vote, or to enable EROs to update their registration details directly.

In Northern Ireland the CEONI and his office have access to specified data sources to assist him in maintaining the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers, including the Business Services Organisation (providing data from general practitioner lists), the Department of Work and Pensions, schools and the Registrar General.

What changes to procedures would need to be made to enable people to apply to register to vote at the same time as accessing other public services? Which data sources would be most useful for EROs to access to help identify both newly eligible electors and people who may have moved address?

Confirmation matching was used successfully during the transition to IER to identify which records could be automatically transferred to the IER registers.

To what extent could confirmation matching be used to simplify the process by which elector's identities are verified before being added to the register? Could information about potentially eligible electors collected during the canvass be matched against data held by DWP, for example? Do large institutions such as universities and colleges hold sufficient information about the eligibility and residence of students to enable EROs to add them to electoral registers more easily?

**How much positive action should be required from each individual in order to be entered on a register? Could that be different for a local change of address?**

At present every individual is responsible for completing their own electoral registration application and ensuring that their registration details are up to date if and when they move. But the experience of confirmation matching (using data to verify the identity of potential electors without requiring them to provide additional information) highlights the potential for more direct registration to significantly improve the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers.

Direct registration could mean that EROs would be able to add an elector to their registers without requiring an individual application form to be completed, provided they were satisfied that the individual was eligible and met the residence requirements for registration. This would require reliable and robust data about the identity and residence of new electors or electors who have

moved between local authority areas. This approach is currently used by federal and state-level Electoral Commissions in Australia, for example.

Another option could involve people being required to provide their NINo and data of birth when registering initially, but not being asked for these personal identifiers again when moving. Under this approach, EROs might be able to share trusted records of electors with one another (e.g. nationally and/or regionally), enabling applicants' details to be verified without the need for them to supply these details a second time and on subsequent occasions.

What practical changes would be necessary to make a direct registration system workable in the UK? Are there any compelling reasons (either of principle or practical) not to pursue a direct registration approach in the UK?

Could a system requiring people to register initially with a NINo and date of birth, but without the need to provide these details on subsequent occasions (i.e. when moving) be workable?

### **Could direct registration be used to improve registration rates specifically among attainers?**

The analysis presented earlier in this report has highlighted a possible trend of declining registration rates among 16- and 17-year-old attainers. It is likely that the requirement for attainers to complete their own individual application to register will have had a negative impact on the numbers included in the registers published in December 2015.

Currently, National Insurance numbers 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.<sup>54</sup>

Could data about 16-year-olds who have been issued with a National Insurance number be provided to EROs to enable them to be added to the electoral register at the same time, particularly given that the NINo is used as a fundamental part of the identity verification process?

## **Pre-election activity to encourage new and updated registrations**

6.32 Promotional awareness raising activity, including campaigns by political parties and candidates as well as the Electoral Commission, tends to be concentrated in the two months before scheduled polls when interest and

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<sup>54</sup> The automatic issuing of NINOs is based on the receipt of child benefit. When a claim for Child Benefit is made, the child is allocated a Child Reference Number (CRN). When the child reaches 15 years 9 months, this information is passed over to the NI recording system, the CRN is converted into that person's NINO, which HMRC sends to them. Source: House of Commons Library Briefing Paper Number 04281, 8 September 2015 [National Insurance numbers \(NINOs\)](#)

motivation to participate is likely to be much stronger than during the July-December canvass period. Now that it is possible for people to apply to register to vote online simply and quickly, concentrated promotional activity in the period leading up to scheduled polls is likely to result in an increased workload for EROs in addition to the household activity required during the canvass period.

6.33 A plan for delivering a more effective registration process should also consider whether pro-active work by EROs could be more effective if it were focused during the period leading up to electoral events (whether scheduled events or by-elections).

#### **Should a household notification letter process be incorporated as a regular and continuing part of the electoral registration framework?**

Ahead of the May 2015 UK Parliamentary general election, sending a letter to all households listing who was registered to vote at that particular address was identified as a key activity which could contribute to helping EROs ensure that their registers were as accurate and complete as possible ahead of the May polls. This 'household notification letter' (HNL) showed who was registered to vote at that address and prompted anyone who was not yet registered to do so. The Cabinet Office made £6.8m available to EROs across England, Scotland and Wales to support activity to maximise registration, and many EROs used their share to fund sending out HNLs.

This approach had a number of clear benefits, all of which contributed to helping EROs to ensure that their registers were as accurate and complete as possible, including: prompting those who had not yet registered to do so, helping to register those who had recently moved within or into the registration area, and giving residents an opportunity to check that their details on the register were accurate.

If EROs were no longer required to carry out a canvass of households between July and December each year, would a requirement to send a household notification letter in the period directly ahead of scheduled polls provide a more cost-effective prompt to update registration details for electors at those polls?

#### **Should EROs focus their resources on targeting currently under-registered groups?**

Our previous research on electoral registration has consistently identified that some specific groups are significantly less likely to be registered than others. The evidence and analysis provided in this report has identified that the number of attainers included in the December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain has declined significantly compared with those published in February and March 2014.

We recognise that attainers are a particularly challenging group to encourage to register to vote: they may be less likely to be engaged with politics and

voting, particularly as they would not previously have had any opportunity to vote. They may also be more dependent on their parents or carers to help facilitate bureaucratic processes such as registering to vote.

Our current guidance for EROs on running electoral registration highlights that building relationships with schools and colleges is important in tackling this issue:

- Our research into the progress of the transition to IER has shown that the registration of young people and, in particular, attainers, remains a challenge for EROs and that new attainers are not being added at the same rate as in previous years. Working with schools and colleges in your area to target these potential electors should therefore be a key area of your public engagement activity.<sup>55</sup>

The experience of lowering the voting age in Scotland to 16 for the September 2014 Scottish independence referendum demonstrates that registration rates can be significantly improved where young people are actively engaged and encouraged by focussed registration initiatives. Our report on the referendum describes the significant range of activities carried out by EROs, campaigners, civic groups and the Commission to achieve that improvement, which included local and national public awareness campaigns and substantial work by EROs directly in and with Scottish schools and colleges.<sup>56</sup>

What lessons can EROs elsewhere in the UK learn from the experience of their counterparts in Scotland? What resources were required to deliver those improvements? Have the improvements in registration by attainers been sustained beyond the referendum? Is it realistic to expect EROs to carry out significant targeted work ahead of scheduled elections if they are still required to commit substantial resources to carry out a full canvass of households each year?

### **Why shouldn't people be able to register to vote closer to polling day – or on polling day itself?**

Same-day registration would allow eligible citizens to register and cast their vote on the same day, including on polling day itself. This is offered as an option in Canada<sup>57</sup> and several US states, and has the advantage of allowing people to register at the point when they may become interested and engaged with an election, e.g. during the few days before polling day, or on polling day itself.

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<sup>55</sup> [http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0006/157335/Part-1-Preparing-for-IER.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/157335/Part-1-Preparing-for-IER.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> Electoral Commission (2014) [Scottish Independence Referendum: Report on the referendum held on 18 September 2014](#)

<sup>57</sup> Elections Canada website [Registration at the Polls](#)  
<http://www.elections.ca/content.aspx?section=vot&dir=bkg&document=ec90525&lang=e>

Currently in Great Britain, registration applications must be received 12 working days before an election or referendum, after which identity verification checks are carried out before names can be added to the register for the election.

What would it take to allow same-day registration in the UK? What proof of identity and eligibility (including nationality, age and residence) would be required? What are the practical and administrative challenges that would need to be overcome? Would it be feasible to offer same-day registration at any polling station, or could it only be offered at selected locations, such as the ERO's office for example?

## Other uses of the electoral register after polling day

6.34 While the primary purpose of electoral registers is to ensure that all those who are entitled to vote in an election can do so (and those who are not entitled to vote cannot), electoral registers in the UK are also used for other purposes. Some of these are directly connected with elections, including conducting boundary reviews and constituency allocations.

6.35 Other purposes, however, have no direct connection with elections, including crime prevention, law enforcement and credit reference checking. An edited version of the electoral register – which does not include the names of people who have specifically requested that they are not included – is also available, and EROs are required to sell copies of the edited register to individuals, businesses or charities for a prescribed fee.

### **Should the UK's Parliamentary boundary commissions continue to use the number of entries included in registers published on 1 December as the basis for their constituency allocation and boundary review work?**

The registers used for this important purpose also need to be as accurate and complete as possible at the point they are required. If EROs were no longer required to carry out a household canvass between July and December each year, would it be better to use the number of entries included in the registers for the most recent UK Parliamentary general elections as the basis for their work?

It may be that the organisations responsible for boundary reviews and constituency allocations need to reconsider whether the registers published on 1 December each year are the most appropriate for those purposes. The former UK Parliament Political and Constitutional Affairs Select Committee recommended in March 2015 that the Government should commission research into how other data (including population data) could be used as the basis for reviewing parliamentary constituency boundaries in future.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> House of Commons Political and Constitutional Reform Committee (2015) [What next on the redrawing of parliamentary constituency boundaries? Eighth Report of Session 2014–15](#)

The Government response to the Committee's recommendation made clear that it is satisfied that the current system of using electorate data continues to offer the most effective basis for the distribution of Parliamentary constituencies, but did not specifically address the question of whether the registers used for UK Parliamentary general elections could be used instead of those published on 1 December.

## Accuracy and completeness study

6.36 As set out in Chapter 1, we are currently conducting our planned study into the accuracy and completeness of the first full IER registers published on 1 December. The findings from this study will be compared with the findings from the one conducted on the last registers published under household registration.

6.37 We intend to report in July 2016 and the report will include accuracy and completeness estimates for:

- Great Britain
- England, Scotland and Wales
- a range of demographic groups at Great Britain level

6.38 Our report will include any further relevant analysis of the data collected on 1 December registers which we have been unable to include here due to issues with the data collection. It will also set out what progress has been made towards developing an ambitious plan for the future of electoral registration to meet the challenges highlighted in this chapter.