

The
Electoral
Commission

The December 2015 electoral register in Northern Ireland

Accuracy and completeness of the
register in Northern Ireland

September 2016

Translations and other formats

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Foreword

This is our third report on the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register in Northern Ireland. It provides a snapshot of the health of the electoral register as it stood in December 2015. Our previous report in 2012 found that there had been a significant and worrying decline in both the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register in Northern Ireland. At the time we called for immediate and sustained action to address this problem in order to ensure that people would be able to participate effectively in elections.

It's encouraging and pleasing to report that both the accuracy and completeness of the registers in Northern Ireland have improved since our previous study in 2012. A full canvass of electors took place in autumn 2013 and the Chief Electoral Officer has made improvements in how he handles and uses data available to him to manage the electoral register. This is all to be welcomed.

However this report also highlights that there is still considerable work to be done to ensure that the registers are as up to date and complete as possible particularly for the next set of planned elections in 2019. While changes to the management of the register have improved some of the processes involved in continuous registration, as currently operated by the Electoral Office, it is still struggling to keep up with the pace of population movement.

Our research shows that there has been a decline in the completeness of 16 and 17 year old attainers on the register since 2012. This appears to be due to the reduced resources available for the schools initiative. However, our analysis also indicates that our previous estimate of attainer completeness in Northern Ireland was too high. While this suggests that the schools initiative is not as effective as we previously believed, under individual registration and in the absence of an annual canvass it does still seem to be one of the most effective and currently available ways to engage with potential attainers. We have made recommendations for changes in both the short and the longer term to assist with the registration of attainers.

This report also shows that in Northern Ireland, as with the rest of the UK, there are particular challenges in maintaining high levels of accuracy and completeness under a system of individual registration at a time of relatively low turnouts at elections.

We are pleased that both the Chief Electoral Officer and the UK Government are committed to extending online electoral registration to Northern Ireland by late 2016. Its introduction in Great Britain in 2014 has been successful, with high levels of applications made online ahead of elections in 2015 and 2016 and ahead of the EU referendum in June 2016. The extension of online registration to Northern Ireland should assist in improving the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register particularly amongst our younger

voters.

However, online registration on its own will not be the solution to improving the management of the electoral register. The absence of an annual canvass in Northern Ireland means that the challenge is different to that in Great Britain but we believe the long term solution could be the same: the development of more automatic or direct enrolment processes which could have the potential to deliver more accurate and complete electoral registers more efficiently and with fewer resources.

Our vision of a modern electoral register is one which uses trusted available public data to keep itself accurate and complete throughout the year without relying solely on action by individuals; and makes it as easy as possible for electors to ensure their own registration record is accurate and complete, particularly ahead of elections and referendums.

The Commission is currently undertaking a strategic review of its future work and focus, and we intend to publish the outcome of that review by the end of 2016. The thinking set out in this report is directly relevant to Northern Ireland but we hope that this and our strategic review will help to inform and support the UK Government's own work to deliver a modern electoral register for all parts of the UK.

Anna Carragher
Electoral Commissioner
September 2016

Executive summary

Background

The Chief Electoral Officer is responsible for maintaining the electoral register in Northern Ireland. The system of individual electoral registration is well established having been introduced in the autumn of 2002 as part of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. In 2006 the annual canvass was abolished and replaced with a process of continuous registration. Under this system once an eligible elector has registered, they do not have to re-register unless their details have changed (for example if they have changed their name and/or address).

Defining accuracy and completeness

The quality of the registers is considered in two main ways: their accuracy and their completeness.

By **accuracy** we mean that *'there are no false entries on the electoral registers'*. Accuracy is therefore the measure of the percentage of entries on the registers which relate to verified and eligible voters who are resident at that address. Inaccurate register entries may relate to entries which have become redundant (for example, due to home movement), which are ineligible and have been included unintentionally, or which are fraudulent.

By **completeness**, we mean that *'every person who is entitled to have an entry on an electoral register is registered'*. Completeness refers to the percentage of eligible people who are registered at their current address. The proportion of eligible people who are not included on the register at their current address constitutes the rate of under-registration.

Methodology

There are two main methods used to assess the quality of the electoral registers: one uses census data (which can only take place following each census) and the other one using house-to-house survey data.

The methodology used for this study was a house-to-house survey.

Headline findings

Data collected from our house-to-house survey, checked against the December 2015 registers indicates that overall:

- the local government registers were 87% accurate and 79% complete

- the parliamentary registers were 87% accurate and 81% complete;¹

This means that both the accuracy and completeness of the register in Northern Ireland have improved since our previous study in 2012. However, both remain below the level recorded in Great Britain for the December 2015 registers.

Table ES.1: Accuracy and completeness of the register in Northern Ireland - April 2012 and December 2015.

Quality indicator	Register	April 2012	December 2015
Accuracy	Parliamentary	78%	87%
	Local government	78%	87%
Completeness	Parliamentary	73%	81%
	Local government	71%	79%

Completeness

As in previous studies levels of completeness vary across different groups as set out below.

Socio-demographic variation

The study found that the main drivers of completeness are age (with young people aged between 18 and 34 significantly less likely to be registered), recent home movement and whether someone rents their home from a private landlord. These factors underpin many of the other variations by socio-demographic group explored in the report:

- **Length of residence:** those who have lived at their address for less than a year are substantially less likely to be registered (10%) than those who have been resident for longer periods (2-5 years, 70% complete). Since 2012, the completeness of people resident for at least two years

¹Parliamentary register: this is the list of electors used for UK Parliamentary elections; Local government register: used for Northern Ireland Assembly, local government and European Parliamentary elections. Different eligibility rules apply to each.

has increased more than for those resident for less time, indicating that the 2013 canvass had a significant impact.

- **Age:** younger people are less likely to be registered than older people (71% of 20-24s are registered compared to 87% of 45-54s), although most younger age groups do show notable increases in completeness since 2012. The level of attainer (16-17 year old) registration has fallen notably since 2012 although the small sample size of the survey makes a precise estimate of completeness difficult.
- **Gender:** women are slightly more likely to be registered than men.
- **Nationality:** European Union and Commonwealth citizens (41%) are significantly less likely to be registered than UK and Irish citizens (81%).
- **Disability:** people with a physical disability are more likely to be registered (91%) than those without (78%) while those with a mental disability are less likely (72%).
- **Socio-economic group:** ABs are more likely to be registered (84% and 80%) than C2s and DEs (76% and 77%) although all groups have shown notable increases in completeness since 2012.
- **Tenure:** homeowners (93%, if owned outright) were found again to be the most likely to be registered with private renters the least (50%).
- **Highest qualification:** highest levels of completeness are recorded among those with no qualification and those with a degree (81% and 87% respectively) and the lowest among people with GCSE / A-levels (74% and 76%).
- **Number of adults in the household:** completeness is lower among single person households (74%) than 2-5 person household (80%) or 6+ (88%).

Attitudes towards registration and voting

We previously argued that mobility alone cannot account for the lower level of registration of people more likely to move home. Low levels of completeness among these groups, especially young people, are strongly linked to voting. As part of our survey, we asked respondents about their views on electoral registration and voting. The figures below are for respondents only and therefore are not nationally representative.

- **Electoral registration:** there is a clear correlation between completeness and attitude towards electoral registration. Those who feel they have a duty to register to vote are far more likely to be registered than those who think it is not worth it (88% against 70%), or those that think it is only worth registering if they care who wins an election (58%), or to secure a better credit reference (53%).
- **Voting:** similarly, those who feel it is not worth voting are less likely to be registered (64%) than those who see it as a duty (88%).
- **Voting at the 2015 general election:** Those who claimed to have voted in 2015 are also more likely to be registered (91%) than those who say they did not vote (63%).

Accuracy

Both local government and parliamentary registers were found to be 87% accurate in December 2015.

The most common 'major error' continues to relate to register entries that refer to individuals that no longer live at the property (12% of all entries).² There has been however a decline in this type of error since 2012 (when it was 22%) which accounts for much of the overall improvement in accuracy.

As the majority of errors are for individuals no longer resident at the address, it is not possible to collect demographic information about this group and the analysis we can conduct is limited.

Analysis and recommendations

The levels of accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 register in Northern Ireland are a significant improvement on our previous estimates for 2012. Since our previous study a full canvass has been conducted (in 2013) and the Chief Electoral Officer has made changes to some of the processes involved in the continuous registration system including reviewing the data sharing agreements in place, revising the letters issued to electors and improving the efficiency of data matching processes.

Continuous registration

The impact of the 2013 canvass, which we have previously said was successful, is clear with electors resident at the same property at the time of the canvass much more likely to be registered than those who were not. However, while the changes made by the Chief Electoral Officer are likely to have improved the efficiency of the processes followed by the Electoral Office, the data set out in this report (particularly in relation to the level of changes on the register from year to year) suggest that the continuous registration system, as currently operated, still struggles to deal with population movement in a way that maximises the accuracy and completeness of the register.

Population movement in Northern Ireland requires, annually, 7-8% of the register to be added or deleted just in order to maintain completeness and accuracy. If the same level of deletions from the register are recorded in the next two years as have been recorded for the previous two (c. 5%) that will lead to an increasingly inaccurate register as redundant entries will build up

² We classify as 'major errors' those for redundant entries (people who moved home), those that may prevent an individual casting their vote at a polling station (e.g.: wrong surname) or those that would allow someone ineligible to vote (e.g.: incorrect date of birth for someone under 18). 'Minor errors' are those which would not prevent someone from casting their vote such as an entry with a spelling error.

faster than they are removed. A similar issue applies to completeness where too few electors will be added (whether that is an existing elector added at a new address or an entirely new elector being added).

The introduction of online registration will be a positive development and it is possible that it will, for example, increase the level of response to the letters issued to potential new electors (and therefore the volume of changes on the register). It will be important that the Chief Electoral Officer sets out, in his annual reports following the introduction of online registration, a clear analysis of its impact. However, it is unlikely to be a solution in isolation and in the short to medium term we have recommended actions designed to better identify required register changes and encourage new registrations:

- **A programme of household registration activity should be established by the Chief Electoral Officer with the aim of improving the register ahead of the next set of planned elections in Northern Ireland in 2019.** This should use the approach adopted in Great Britain of sending Household Notification Letters to properties. These letters, which make clear what names appear on the register for each property, have proved effective in Great Britain at generating responses from households where changes need to be made – particularly if used in collaboration with the option of registering online. In addition, the resource requirements are much smaller than those of a full canvass as a household does not need to respond to the form if there is no change to make. HNLs could be used annually either across Northern Ireland or in particular areas more likely to experience population movement. As a minimum there should be activity in early 2019 ahead of the elections in May 2019.
- **The Chief Electoral Officer should consider how targeted household canvassing could be incorporated into outgoing registration activities, e.g. as a follow up to letters issued based on information from one of his data-sharing organisations.**
- **When revising the forms and letters used in Northern Ireland to reflect the introduction of online registration, the Chief Electoral Officer should take the opportunity to carry out a full review of all these materials to ensure they are as effective as possible at encouraging response.** Recent learning from the Electoral Commission’s re-design of forms and letters in Great Britain, to facilitate the introduction of individual registration, should be considered as part of this work. We will discuss with the Chief Electoral Officer how we can most effectively share the findings from the work in Great Britain.

The accuracy and completeness findings set out in this report are not only the result of the issues with the operation of continuous registration. Any action to maximise accuracy and completeness in Northern Ireland needs to also take a wider view and address the challenges inherent in the system of individual registration.

Individual registration

As we have recently noted in relation to Great Britain, one of the most fundamental elements of individual registration is the inability of one person at each property to register or de-register all residents at that property. This has had both positive and negative effects in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

We have always found a strong link between attitude towards registration and attitude to voting - with voters much more likely to be registered than non-voters or those who don't see voting as a duty. If you are not interested in voting, you are less likely to register and under individual registration no-one else can do it for you. The latter point suggests a closer relationship between people's attitude and their behaviour (or rather the outcome of their behaviour – where if they do not act, they do not become registered). This is most starkly seen in the number of registered attainers in both Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

In Great Britain the full implications, for the overall accuracy and completeness of the registers, of the closer relationship between registration and voting under IER may have been at least partly offset by the recent high turnout polls, in 2015 and 2016, as well as the availability of online registration.

However, Northern Ireland does not yet have online registration and also tends to have lower levels of turnout than Great Britain at the same election.

It is therefore likely that three factors in combination broadly explain the lower accuracy and completeness results for Northern Ireland compared to Great Britain:

- Ongoing issues with the effectiveness of the operation of the continuous registration system;
- The impact of individual ownership of registration at a time of relative low turnout;
- The absence of online registration in Northern Ireland.

Our recommendations above address the first bullet and the planned introduction of online registration addresses the third. In relation to the second bullet, we repeat the recommendation we have made in relation to the modernisation of the registration system in Great Britain although the starting point in Northern Ireland is different.³ While in Great Britain a key issue is the efficiency and resource intensive nature of the current annual canvass, the issue in Northern Ireland is how to effectively manage registration in the absence of a regular canvass. However, the potential solution could be the same and we recommend:

³ The Electoral Commission, [The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain](#) (July 2016).

- **Moving away from a system which relies on electors taking steps to register themselves, and instead developing automatic or direct enrolment processes which have the potential to deliver more accurate and complete electoral registers more efficiently.**

Our vision of a modern electoral register is one which:

- Uses trusted available public data to keep itself accurate and complete throughout the year without relying solely on action by individuals; and
- Makes it as easy as possible for electors to ensure their own registration record is accurate and complete, particularly ahead of elections and referendums.

While our previous report focused on Great Britain, our recommendation was UK wide, and is set out in the box below.

Recommendation

The Government should be open to new ways of thinking about how to improve the registration of electors in the UK, drawing on ideas from the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO)/Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and their teams, civil society groups and campaigners, and building on evidence about approaches used by comparable democracies elsewhere in the world.

We have previously suggested a range of areas for further exploration in our reports on the transition to IER in Great Britain, and we have welcomed the continued engagement of UK Government Ministers in this debate with the Electoral Commission, EROs and other civic groups such as the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Democratic Participation.

We now want to see positive action to develop new ways of compiling and maintaining electoral registers in the UK, in particular to enable the CEO/EROs to make better use of available, trusted data to keep registers up to date. We believe it is time to move away from a system which relies on electors taking steps to register themselves, and instead develop automatic or direct enrolment processes which have the potential to deliver more accurate and complete electoral registers more efficiently than current resource intensive canvass processes.

Developing any form of automated registration will require detailed planning and our Great Britain report outlines a number of obvious areas where work could begin.

Attainers

The registration of attainers under individual registration is a significant challenge, as we have also recently seen in Great Britain. Many will lack the motivation to register because they cannot vote but no-one else is able to do it for them (unlike under household registration).

Our analysis in this report suggests our previous estimate of attainer completeness in Northern Ireland was too high. This also suggests that the Schools Initiative is not as effective as we previously believed, but under individual registration and in the absence of an annual canvass it is still likely to be one of the most effective, currently available ways to engage with potential attainers. However, it is resource intensive and does not deliver high levels of completeness. Online registration may provide a partial solution here as it would allow schools to encourage pupils directly to register online without necessarily requiring EONI staff to visit schools to provide and collect hard-copy forms. We recommend that:

- **Alongside the introduction of online registration the Chief Electoral Officer should consider whether a less resource intensive version of the schools initiative could be set up, working with schools and colleges to encourage pupils to register online.**

However, for the longer term, it is also worth repeating here the recommendation previously set out in our report on Great Britain's accuracy and completeness for one of the possible starting points in developing more automatic registration:

- **Automatic registration of 16- and 17-year-old attainers:** currently, National Insurance Numbers (NINOs) are allocated automatically just before eligible people turn 16, and a letter containing details of the NINO is sent to individuals at the address held by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. This information could be shared with the CEO/EROs, enabling 16 year olds who have been issued with a NINO to be added to electoral registers as attainers (who are not able to vote in elections until they are 18), provided that the CEO/ERO is satisfied that the individual is eligible and meets the residence requirements for registration.

Other uses of the register

In relation to Great Britain we noted that the challenges, under IER, in ensuring accurate and complete registers at a time when there are no elections raise a question about the continued usefulness of the 1 December register publication date for both electoral statistics and boundary reviews.

This also applies to Northern Ireland. In line with our Great Britain recommendations, we recommend that:

- **Parliament should consider whether it would be more appropriate in future (ahead of the next scheduled review of UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries which will use the December 2020 registers) to base constituency and boundary reviews on electorate data taken from the registers used for elections instead.**

Performance standards

Since 2008 the Electoral Commission has set standards, monitored and reported on the performance of Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers in Great Britain. During this time we have made the case that these standards should also be applied to the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland so that they can provide a benchmark on the delivery of electoral services and support the sharing of good practice.

In March 2016 we published a new set of standards for Electoral Registration Officers which aim to support them in planning for and delivering well-run electoral registration services under individual electoral registration. The Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 gives the Secretary of State the power to extend the performance standards framework to Northern Ireland. In line with the introduction of online registration by the end of 2016, we recommend that:

- **In line with the introduction of online registration by the end of 2016, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should introduce an Order to extend the performance standards framework to Northern Ireland**, with the Chief Electoral Officer then reporting to the Commission within this performance standards framework.

Our future research programme

Our next study on the accuracy and completeness of the registers in Northern Ireland is currently planned for the registers published in spring 2018. As with this study, this would be carried out in conjunction with a Great Britain wide study. However, this is dependent on the effective implementation of recommendations in this report and whether we believe there has been an improvement in accuracy and completeness ahead of the planned 2019 elections. Otherwise we may choose to undertake an earlier study in order to assess the registers well in advance of the 2019 elections.

1 Introduction

1.1 The Chief Electoral Officer is responsible for maintaining the electoral register in Northern Ireland. The system of individual electoral registration is well established having been introduced in the autumn of 2002 as part of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. In 2006 the annual canvass was abolished and replaced with a process of continuous registration. Under this system once an eligible elector has registered, they do not have to re-register unless their details have changed (for example if they have changed their name and/or address). However, under the provisions of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006, the Chief Electoral Officer can recommend to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that a canvass take place in any given year if they believe it is needed.

1.2 The system is therefore different to that in operation in Great Britain. While individual registration is now in operation across the UK, Great Britain retains an annual canvass of households as a significant element in the process of maintaining the registers. People in Great Britain can also (since June 2014 in England and Wales and September 2014 in Scotland) register online – this is being introduced in Northern Ireland but is not currently available.

1.3 To assist the Chief Electoral Officer in managing the continuous registration process he has access to specified data sources to assist him in maintaining the register. These data sources include the Business Services Organisation (who provide data from General Practitioner lists and other medical services in Northern Ireland), the Department for Work and Pensions, schools and the Registrar General.⁴

1.4 This is our report on the electoral register in Northern Ireland. Our first report in 2008 looked at the register after the first full year of continuous registration. Our second report in 2012 also analysed the state of the electoral register under continuous registration in light of the data sources available to the Chief Electoral Officer.

The electoral register

1.5 The electoral register is a record of names and addresses of people eligible to vote in elections and referendums. The register is the foundation of the voting process: it provides the list of those who are eligible to vote and

⁴ The Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 amended the Representation of the People Act 1983 and conferred on the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland a power to make regulations for the provision of information to the Chief Electoral Officer by specified public bodies. These bodies are set out in Regulation 42 of The Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2008 and in The Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2010.

those not included on the register cannot take part in elections and referendums.

1.6 The registers are also used for other public purposes such as:

- **Boundary reviews:** the Boundary Commissions use the registers to calculate electoral quotas when they review parliamentary and local government boundaries.
- **Jury service:** they are used as the basis for selecting people to undertake jury service.
- **Law enforcement:** the police can use the register for security, enforcing the law and preventing crime.
- **Credit ratings:** credit reference agencies can purchase copies of the registers to confirm names and addresses of people applying for credit and to prevent and detect money laundering.
- **Marketing:** the 'open register', an edited version of the register containing only details of those who have not opted out of appearing on it, is available to anyone who wants to buy a copy. Everyone can opt out of this register. The Commission has a long established view that the open register should be abolished.

The parliamentary and local government registers

1.7 Not every resident in the Northern Ireland can register to vote. The entitlement to register varies according to the type of election. This means that the Chief Electoral Officer is required to keep:⁵

- **Parliamentary register:** this is the list of electors used for UK Parliamentary elections;
- **Local government register:** used for Northern Ireland Assembly, local government and European Parliamentary elections

1.8 To be on both these registers, a resident is required to have British, Irish or Commonwealth citizenship.⁶ Additionally, since 1999, European Union (EU) citizens resident in the UK have been eligible to vote at local, devolved and European Parliamentary elections and are entitled to be on the local government registers (they must then complete an additional form to be registered to vote in the European Parliament elections in the UK rather than their home country). As they are not eligible to vote at UK Parliamentary elections they are not entitled to be on the parliamentary registers.

1.9 Table 1.1 sets out entitlement to vote by citizenship. There are a small number of specific exceptions to these general rules. For instance, all

⁵ He must also keep a register of relevant citizens of the European Union entitled to vote at European Parliamentary elections and a register of those peers living outside the UK who have made a declaration to vote at European Parliamentary elections.

⁶ Commonwealth citizens must also have leave to remain in the UK or not require such leave to remain in order to be eligible.

convicted prisoners currently lose their right to vote while they are imprisoned. Anyone convicted of electoral offences will also be disqualified from voting for a specific period.

Table 1.1: Franchise for citizenship and elections.⁷

Citizenship	Elections			Register
	UK Parliament	EU Parliament	Local government	
British	√	√	√	Parliamentary and local government
Irish	√	√	√	
Commonwealth*	√	√	√	
European Union	×	√	√	Local government

Notes: * Citizens resident in Northern Ireland who either have leave to remain or do not require such leave.

1.10 In Northern Ireland the age at which citizens become entitled to vote is 18, but the electoral registers also include records of ‘attainers’ – 16 and 17 year olds who will turn 18 within the twelve month period starting on the 1 December after they make their application.

The system for compiling the register

1.11 The electoral register is a property based database and each register entry is linked to a property. This means that the accuracy of its information is undermined by ongoing population mobility and the Chief Electoral Officer has to keep it up to date by adding and deleting records for home-movers as well as removing entries for those who have died and adding entries for newly eligible electors.

1.12 Unlike the rest of the UK, online registration is not available in Northern Ireland. Instead a person must complete and return an electoral registration form to their local area electoral office. Forms are processed at the eight Area Electoral Offices across Northern Ireland.

1.13 The Chief Electoral Officer and the UK Government (through the Northern Ireland Office - NIO) have confirmed that digital registration will be extended to Northern Ireland by the end of 2016. We consider the potential impact of online registration in Northern Ireland, in light of the findings set out in this report, in chapter 3.

1.14 As part of this change the Chief Electoral Officer is reviewing the structure of the Electoral Office and how it delivers its functions. As part of this

⁷ British citizens living abroad who have appeared on a UK electoral register in the last 15 years are also entitled to be on the register as overseas electors and can vote at European Parliamentary and UK Parliamentary elections.

process he has confirmed that two Area Electoral Offices (in Ballymena and Newtownards) will be closed in the latter end of 2016.

Our research programme

1.15 Since 2004, we have become the principal body in the UK undertaking research into electoral registration.

Defining accuracy and completeness

1.16 The quality of the registers is considered in two main ways: their accuracy and their completeness.

Accuracy

1.17 By **accuracy** we mean that '*there are no false entries on the electoral registers*'.⁸

1.18 The accuracy of the electoral register is therefore the measure of the percentage of entries on the registers which relate to verified and eligible voters who are resident at that address. Inaccurate register entries may relate to entries which have become redundant (for example, due to home movement), which are ineligible and have been included unintentionally, or which are fraudulent.

Completeness

1.19 By **completeness**, we mean that '*every person who is entitled to have an entry on an electoral register is registered*'.

1.20 The completeness of the electoral register therefore refers to the percentage of eligible people who are registered at their current address. The proportion of eligible people who are not included on the register at their current address constitutes the rate of under-registration.

1.21 There are various methods used to assess the quality of the electoral registers which differ mainly by the frequency with which they can be used and the reliability of the results. More information on the methods available to measure accuracy and completeness is available in Appendix A.

This report

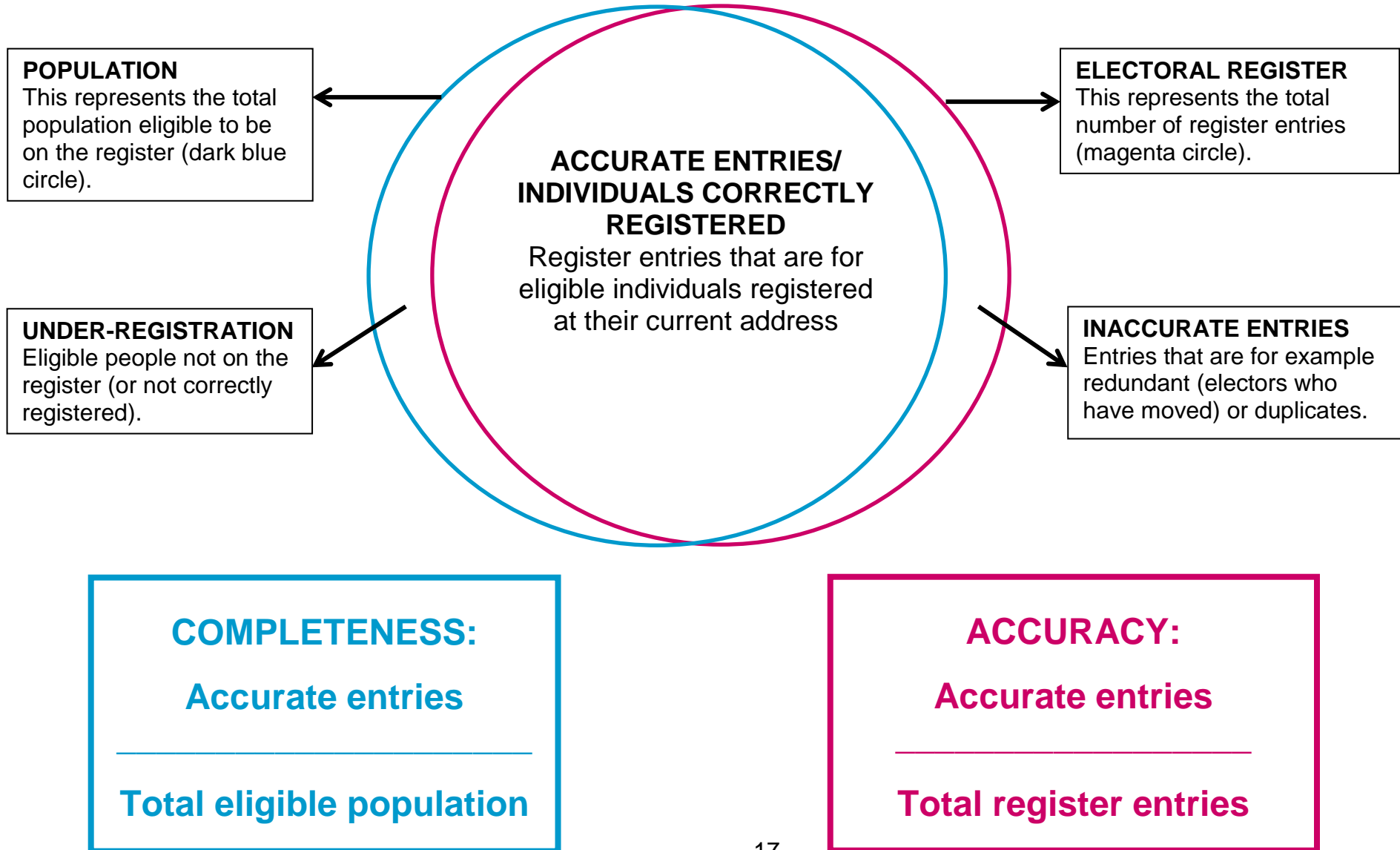
1.22 The report is structured as follow:

- **Chapter 2** outlines the findings for accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 registers;

⁸ Our definition of accuracy excludes minor errors, such as misspelling of an elector's name which would not prevent an eligible elector from being able to vote.

- **Chapter 3** provides an analysis of the findings and sets out our recommendations for the future

Figure 1.1: How are accuracy and completeness calculated?



2 Accuracy and completeness estimates

2.1 This chapter sets out the findings of the research conducted in Northern Ireland in order to estimate the accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 electoral registers. It compares the findings of the current study with previous research undertaken in Northern Ireland, primarily the accuracy and completeness estimates published in 2012 and where relevant those published in 2008.

2.2 This chapter also compares the estimates for Northern Ireland with those produced for the December 2015 registers in Great Britain (published in July 2016).

Methodology

2.3 The approach taken to this research builds on a number of previous studies undertaken by the Commission both in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain, most recently *'The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain'* published in July 2014 and *'Continuous electoral registration in Northern Ireland'* published in November 2012.

2.4 As with those studies the findings presented here are based on a house-to-house survey conducted by trained interviewers with the aim of gathering information from residents which is then cross-checked against details held on the electoral registers.

Our previous reports can be found on [The Electoral Commission website](#)

2.5 This study involved fieldwork across Northern Ireland with interviews at 1,015 addresses. Of these 1,015 households, 994 were surveyed face-to-face. A small number of postal questionnaires (197) were issued in an attempt to reach those addresses where a face-to-face interview was not achieved, and of these 21 were returned.⁹

2.6 Further information on methodology, including survey response rate, confidence intervals and weighting can be found in Appendix C.

2.7 Any estimate of accuracy and completeness represents a 'snapshot' at a particular moment in the lifecycle of the register. This study was conducted on

⁹ Fieldwork was conducted simultaneously across Great Britain to inform our separate report on the electoral registers at the end of the transition to individual electoral registration.

the December 2015 register: as in the rest of the United Kingdom, in Northern Ireland, this register will be used to review constituencies and boundaries. In Great Britain these were also the first registers published at the end of the transition to the new system of Individual Electoral Registration.

Context

Previous accuracy and completeness estimates

2.8 The Commission has undertaken research into the Northern Ireland registers in December 2007 and April 2012.¹⁰

2.9 The 2007 study estimated the register to be **83% complete and 94% accurate**. However, while the methodology employed to calculate these estimates was similar to that used for this and the 2012 study, the definitions of accuracy and completeness used in the 2008 report were different.¹¹

2.10 Therefore the estimates for the April 2012 registers will be used as the main point of comparison with the findings for December 2015 throughout this chapter. These estimates suggested that:

- The **April 2012 parliamentary register** was 73% complete and 78% accurate while
- The **local government register** was found to be 71% complete and 78% accurate.

2.11 While the comparison is being made between two different points in the year, this is less of an issue in the Northern Ireland context than it would be for Great Britain. Under the system of continuous registration, and with no annual canvass, the December registers are not substantially different from those compiled at other points in the year. Therefore we do not believe there are any significant issues with making this comparison.

2.12 The current definitions of accuracy and completeness in Northern Ireland also match those which we use for Great Britain. It is therefore also possible to draw comparisons between Northern Ireland and Great Britain.

2.13 However, in comparing the different levels of accuracy and completeness between Great Britain and Northern Ireland it is worth noting that there has been significant additional funding for electoral registration

¹⁰ The Electoral Commission, PriceWaterhouseCooper, *Electoral Registration in Northern Ireland* (September 2008).

¹¹ For the research on December 2007 register, the term comprehensiveness is used instead of completeness. Unlike the definition of completeness, with comprehensiveness a person's entry was not considered to be an error if they remained on the register at a previous address. On top of this, in the previous research, only address inaccuracies were measured. The other accuracy errors which we record in this research, for instance an incorrect name or eligibility marker were not measured.

activities in Great Britain in recent years due to the introduction of individual electoral registration. This may play a role, which we cannot quantify, in the differences in accuracy and completeness observed.

2013 canvass

2.14 In our report in 2012 we recommended that some form of household registration activity took place in order to improve the register. In response, the Chief Electoral Officer recommended to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that a full canvass of electors take place in autumn 2013. In addition to this he also conducted a review of the data matching processes used within the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.

2.15 On 2 December 2013 a new electoral register was published containing a total of 1,241,079 names. At the time we considered the canvass to be successful in meeting its objectives. However we did not undertake a full assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the register using our preferred methodology of house to house surveying. Therefore we could not say what the accuracy and completeness of the post-canvass register was compared to the levels found in our 2012 report. As such for the purposes of the report comparisons will be made with findings in 2012.

Accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 registers in Northern Ireland

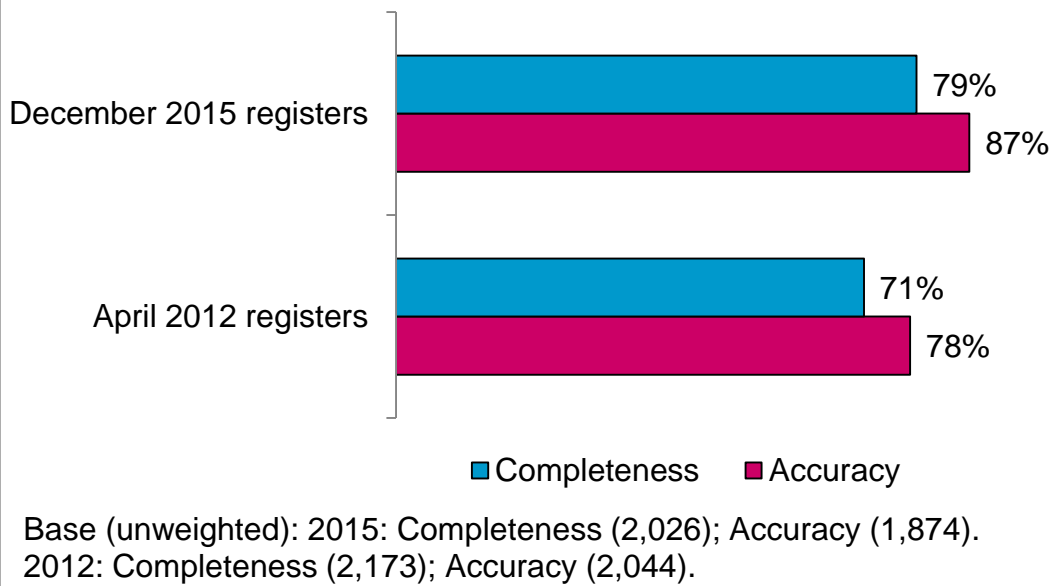
2.16 The results show that the Northern Ireland **December 2015**:

- **Parliamentary register** was 81% complete and 87% accurate;
- **Local government register** was 79% complete and 87% accurate.

2.17 This suggests that there has been a significant improvement in both accuracy and completeness in Northern Ireland since 2012. Completeness has increased by 8 percentage points while accuracy has increased by 9 percentage points.

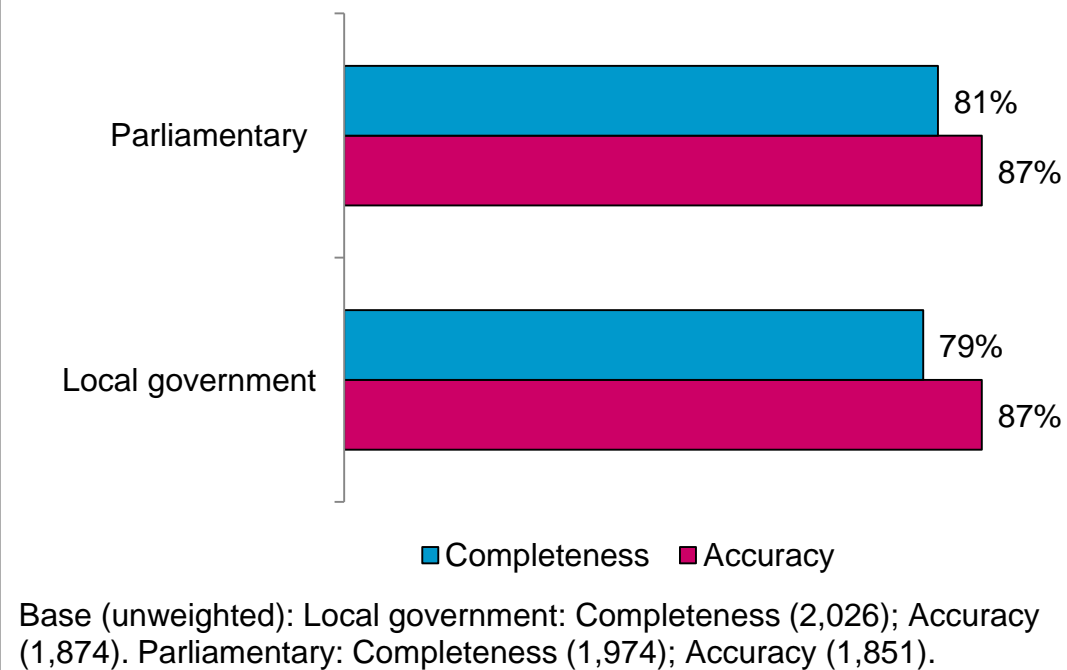
2.18 The equivalent research on the December 2015 registers in Great Britain, published in *The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain*, July 2016, found the parliamentary registers to be 85% complete and 91% accurate and local government registers to be 84% complete and 91% accurate. While it is clear that accuracy and completeness remain lower in Northern Ireland in comparison, the difference between Northern Ireland and Great Britain has narrowed, for accuracy in particular.

Figure 2.1: Completeness and accuracy of the electoral registers in Northern Ireland April 2012 and December 2015 - local government registers.



2.19 Figure 2.2 below shows the levels of accuracy and completeness for the local government and parliamentary December 2015 registers in Northern Ireland.

Figure 2.2: Completeness and accuracy of the December 2015 registers in Northern Ireland.



2.20 As the chart shows, while accuracy is consistent, the local government register is slightly less complete (79%) than the parliamentary register (81%).

This is in line with the findings from 2012 when we estimated that the local government register was 71% complete compared with 73% for the parliamentary register.

2.21 As in 2012, the key reason for the lower level of completeness of the local government register is the lower than average level of registration among the EU citizens entitled to appear on it.¹² This also corresponds with what we have found in Great Britain where a similar pattern can be observed. Registration trends by nationality are explored in greater detail in paragraph 2.43 below.

2.22 Given the similarity, except where stated, this chapter outlines the figures as they relate to the local government registers as they include the larger proportion of the electorate (see Table 1.1 for further detail on the differences between the two registers).

Completeness

2.23 The December 2015 **local government** register for Northern Ireland was found to be **79% complete** while the **parliamentary register** was found to be **81% complete**.

2.24 The sections below set out how completeness varies according to geographic, demographic and socio-economic factors and also between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Overall patterns of registration are the same between Northern Ireland and Great Britain unless noted otherwise.

Population mobility

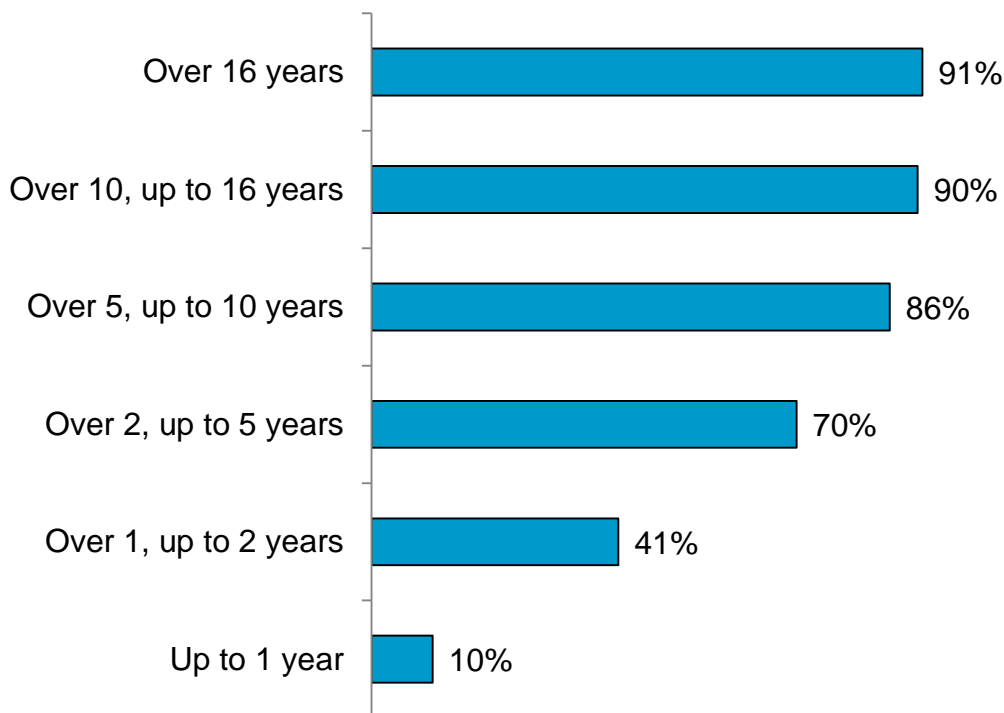
Length of residence

2.25 Our previous research into electoral registration has found a clear connection between home movement and completeness. As the register is a property-based database, greater mobility is associated with lower levels of completeness while the longer an individual has been resident at their property, the more likely they are to appear on the electoral register.

2.26 This is true of the December 2015 registers, as Figure 2.3 below shows. Completeness among those who have lived at their address for up to a year is 10% compared to 91% among those that have lived at their address for over 16 years. There is a statistically significant difference between every category up to 'over 5, up to 10 years' and also between those that have lived at their address for over 16 years and between 5 and 10 years, indicating a clear improvement in completeness the longer that an individual lives at their address.

¹² EU citizens are eligible to appear on the local government register but not the parliamentary register (see table 1.1 above) and are significantly less likely to be registered than UK/Irish citizens (see paragraph 2.43 below).

Figure 2.3: Completeness by length of residence - December 2015 (local government registers).

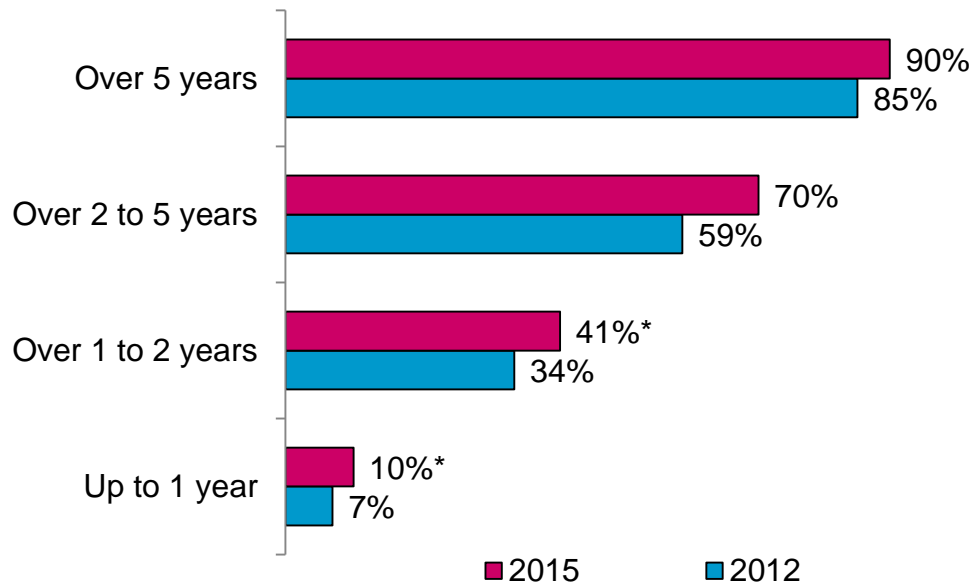


Base (unweighted): Completeness, Local government (2,012)

2.27 The relationship between completeness and length of residence in Northern Ireland is the same as that found in Great Britain although completeness is higher in Great Britain: for instance completeness among those who have lived at their address for less than one year is 27% in Great Britain compared to 10% in Northern Ireland and completeness among those who have lived at their address for between 1 and 2 years is 69% in Great Britain compared with 41% in Northern Ireland. This suggests, as we said in 2012, that the use of household canvassing in Great Britain is more effective in picking up home movers. In Northern Ireland the time it takes to get onto the register, after moving home, is substantially longer on average.

2.28 The figure below compares the estimates by length of residence in 2012 with the corresponding figure for 2015. This indicates an improvement in the proportion of residents registered across the board. However, the only statistically significant differences are among those that have lived at their address for 2 to 5 years and for over 5 years, i.e. mainly those who would have been found at their current address as the time of the 2013 canvass. This suggests that the most recent movers (those that have lived at their address for less than 2 years), continue to present a significant challenge in the continuous registration system.

Figure 2.4: Completeness by length of residence - December 2015 and April 2012 (local government registers).



Base (unweighted): 2015 (2,012), 2012 (2,117)

Note: *Difference against 2012 estimate not statistically significant.

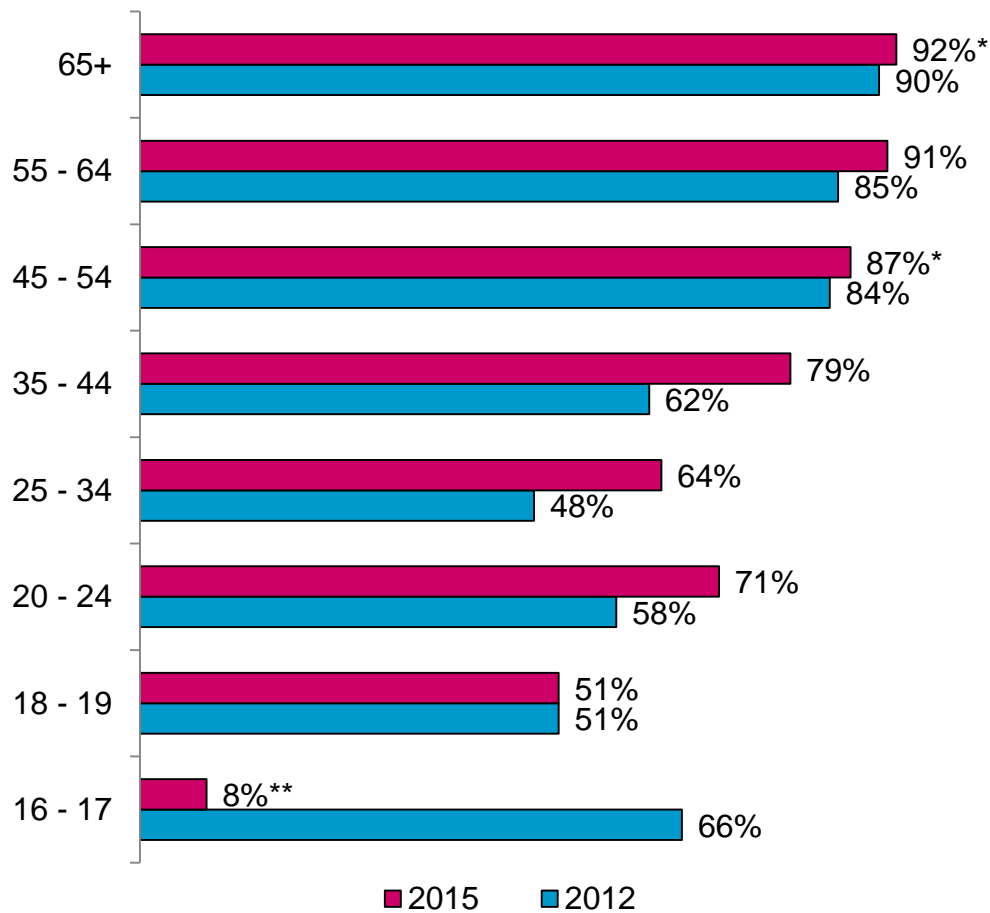
Demographic characteristics

Age

2.29 As in our previous research, the findings indicate a strong correlation between age and registration. Older age groups are far more likely to be registered than their younger counterparts. This pattern is shown in Figure 2.5 below. The highest level of completeness is seen for those aged 65+ (92%).

2.30 As the chart shows, there has been a significant improvement among 20-24s, 25-34s, 35s-44s and 55-64s. The pattern of registration by age generally follows that observed in 2012 with 25-34s less likely to be registered than any of the older age groups and the 20-24s (although the difference between 20-24s and 25-34s is not statistically significant).

Figure 2.5: Completeness by age- December 2015 and April 2012 (local government registers).



Base (unweighted): 2015 (2,020), 2012 (2,173)

Note: * Difference against 2012 estimate not statistically significant.

** Low base size (28 in both 2012 and 2015), as a result these figures are ineligible for significance testing

2.31 In 2012 we highlighted completeness among 25-34s as particularly low in comparison with the equivalent group in Great Britain (48% compared with 72%).¹³ While the difference in completeness for this age group in Northern Ireland (64%) and Great Britain (70%) continues to be statistically significant the improvement in completeness in Northern Ireland since 2012 has narrowed this gap.

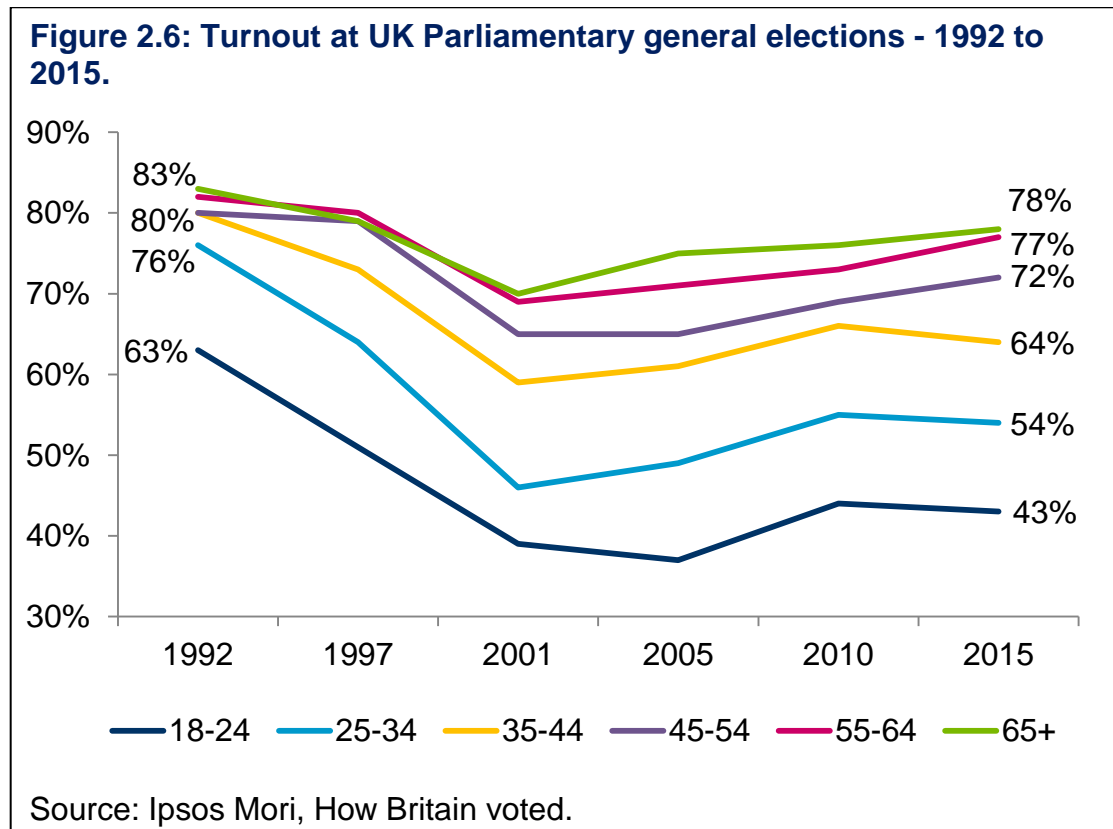
2.32 In our previous reports on registration, both in Northern Ireland and in Great Britain, we have made the connection between age and mobility. In *Continuous electoral registration in Northern Ireland* we stated that one of the factors underlying the lower levels of registration among younger age groups,

¹³ The Electoral Commission, *Continuous electoral registration in Northern Ireland* (November 2012), page 37. This report compared the estimates produced for the April 2012 electoral registers in Northern Ireland with those produced on the April 2011 registers in Great Britain.

in particular 25-34s, is the fact that they are more likely to be renting from a private landlord and to move home frequently than 20-24 year olds (more of whom may still live with parents) and those in the older age categories.¹⁴

2.33 Mobility and tenure are explored in greater detail below (para 2.51 to 2.56). However, as we have also previously argued, mobility alone does not account for lower levels of registration among young people. In 2012 we argued that a likely explanation is the failure of the system in Northern Ireland to pick up address movers as effectively as in Great Britain. While the analysis above on length of residence (para 2.25 – 2.28) suggests that it is likely that this continues to be the case, the data also suggests that engagement with politics and voting are also a relevant factor.

2.34 Figure 2.7 shows voter turnout at the previous six UK general elections by age, illustrating the decline in election participation among all ages since 1992, and indicates that the decline has been most severe among those under 35.



2.35 While reliable turnout estimates by age group for Northern Ireland are hard to come by, data collected in this study suggest that the trend visible at the overall UK level holds true for Northern Ireland. As part of the house-to-house survey conducted to produce these estimates of accuracy and

¹⁴ The Electoral Commission, [Continuous electoral registration in Northern Ireland](#), (November 2012)

completeness we asked respondents if they voted at the 2015 UK Parliamentary general election. The results of this question show significant variation between age group: 43% of 25-34s say that they voted, compared with 78% of those over 65.¹⁵ This variation by age group is also visible in the responses to questions about attitudes towards voting and registration: 53% of 25-34s believe that it is everyone's duty to register to vote compared with 84% of over 65s.

Attainers¹⁶

2.36 In contrast to this improvement across the 18+ population is the level of completeness among attainers. In 2012 we reported that the rate of registration among attainers was higher than that in Great Britain (66% compared with 55%)¹⁷. This was attributed to the target work done with this age group through the Schools Initiative. However at 8% the level of completeness among attainers for the December 2015 registers appears to be as low as we observed in 2007 (8%)¹⁸.

2.37 However, all survey results are subject to margins of error in the sense that the 'true' value may differ from the survey finding by a defined range, eg plus or minus five percentage points. In addition, the small number of 16-17 year olds in our sample, both in 2012 and in 2015 means that the results for this age group are not eligible for significance testing and we cannot therefore say how big the margin of error is for either the 2012 or 2015 completeness estimate.

2.38 It is not therefore possible to say definitively how great the decline in completeness among this age group has been because both the 2012 figure and the 2015 figure could be significant under or over-estimates (and not necessarily in the same direction, i.e. one could be an under estimate and one an over estimate).

2.39 This being said, the absolute numbers of attainers recorded as appearing on the December registers between 2007 and 2015 (shown in figure 2.6 below) do suggest that completeness has fallen since 2012, although not necessarily to the levels first recorded in 2007.

2.40 There is no robust figure for the total number of people eligible to register as attainers. However, if we assume that all 16 and 17 year olds are eligible there would be, based on the most recent population estimates, around 50,000 eligible to register as attainers in Northern Ireland. In 2012 there were around 11,500 attainers registered which equates to an approximate 23% registration rate (suggesting that our 2012 estimate was too

¹⁵ These results are for respondents only. Base = 1,011.

¹⁶ Attainers are 16 and 17 year olds who will turn 18 within the twelve month period starting on the 1 December after they make their application.

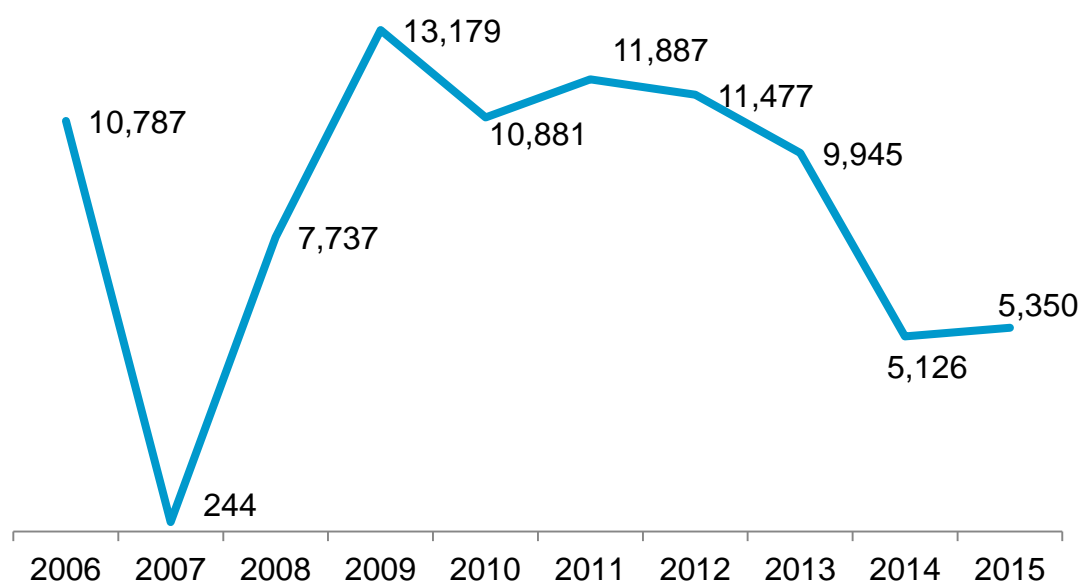
¹⁷ Note, the base size for 16 and 17 year olds was small in both studies (28).

¹⁸ The Electoral Commission, PriceWaterhouseCoopers, [Electoral registration in Northern Ireland: accuracy and comprehensiveness](#) (September 2008).

high). In 2015 there were just over 5,000 registered which equates to an, again approximate, 11% registration rate.

2.41 Therefore while the small sample size in our study makes the exact estimate of completeness unreliable, the overall trend suggested by the findings from the 2012 and 2015 studies appears accurate – completeness among attainers has gone down. The likely reasons for this decline and the implications are set out in chapter 3.

Figure 2.7: Number of attainers on the December local government registers in Northern Ireland.



Source: Office for National Statistics.

Gender

2.42 The difference in completeness by gender is not statistically significant (81% for women compared with 78% for men). However, a regression analysis conducted on the results of the study shows that men are less likely to appear on the registers than women.¹⁹

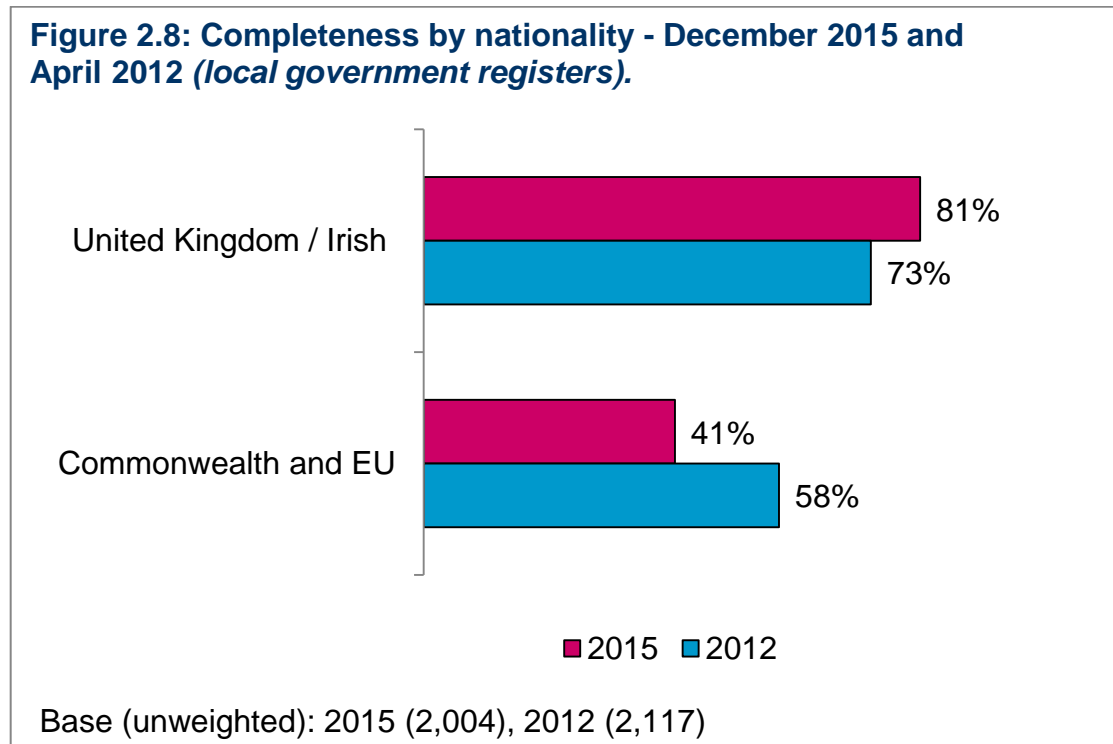
Nationality

2.43 Previous research has shown that registration rates are lower among eligible non-UK nationals than among UK and Irish nationals. Again, the results of this study demonstrate that this is true: European Union and Commonwealth citizens are considerably less likely to be registered than UK and Irish citizens.

2.44 In line with our headline finding that overall completeness has improved, completeness among UK/Irish citizens has increased from 73% in 2012 to

¹⁹ See Appendix B

81%. In contrast completeness among Commonwealth and EU citizens appears to have declined.



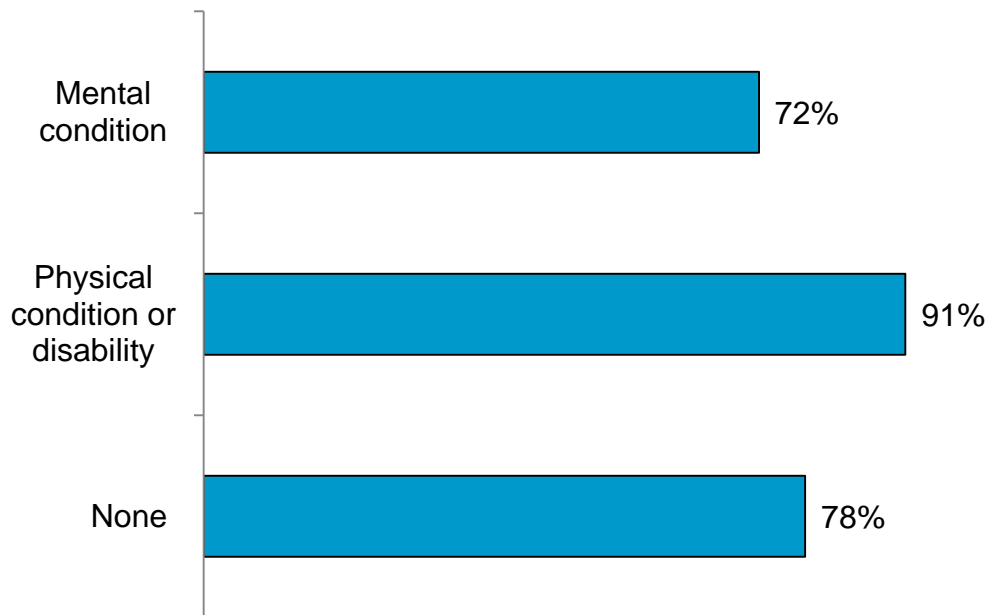
Note: In 2012 the category was defined as 'non-UK/ROI' rather than Commonwealth and EU so included some 'other' eligible nationalities.

Disability

2.45 We reported on levels of completeness by disability for the first time in 2014 for Great Britain and as such we have no comparable figures for Northern Ireland for 2012. In 2015, people with a long standing physical condition or disability are more likely to be registered (91%) than those without a disability (78%), while those with a longstanding mental condition are less likely (72%).²⁰

²⁰ Note small sample size for 'Mental condition' (53).

Figure 2.9: Completeness by disability - December 2015 (local government registers).



Base (unweighted): 2015 – 2,018

2.46 As we observe with age, it is possible that this difference in the levels of registration is connected to length of residency. Data collected through this survey suggests that people with a physical disability are less likely to move home than the general population (overall 42% of those surveyed have lived at their address for over 16 years; this figure rises to 61% among those who report having a physical disability).

Social and economic conditions

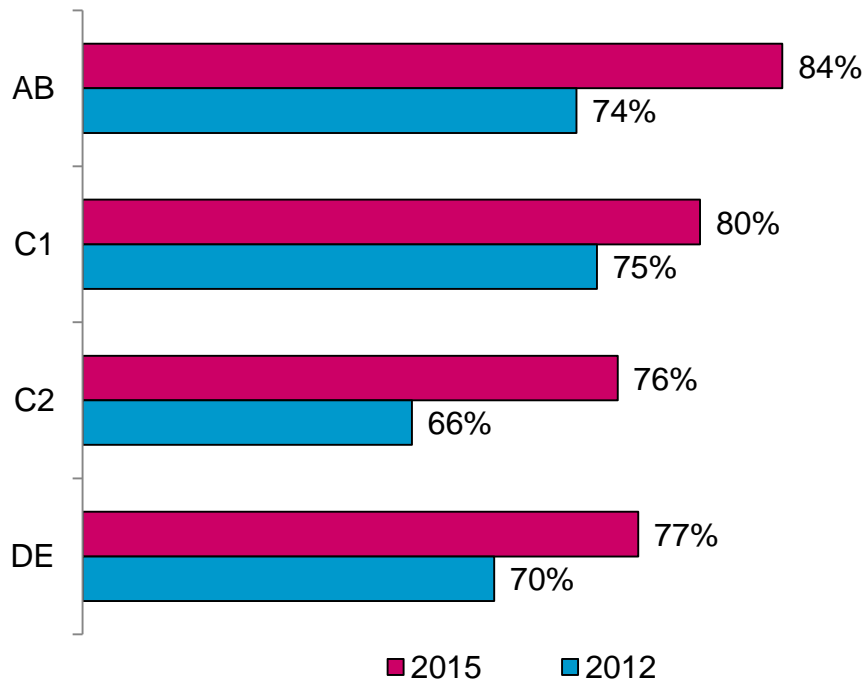
Socio-economic group

2.47 In 2012 we reported that there were variations in levels of completeness according to socio-economic group. We found that those living in households categorised as social groups AB and C1 were more likely to be registered than those in C2 and DE households with the lowest levels of completeness among those in households categorised as C2.

2.48 The chart below shows completeness by socio-economic group for the December 2015 registers and the April 2012 registers. While the pattern previously observed is still present, there has been a statistically significant, positive change among all groups since 2012.

2.49 In 2012 completeness for the C2 group was significantly lower than any of the others. In 2015, an increase in completeness among C2s means that it is now in line with that of the DE and C1 categories. The level of completeness for the AB group (84%) continues to be statistically significantly higher than that for both C2s (76%) and DEs (77%).

Figure 2.10: Completeness by socio-economic group - December 2015 and April 2012 (local government registers).



Base (unweighted): 2015 (2,020), 2012 (2,173)

2.50 This pattern of completeness by socio-economic group in Northern Ireland is slightly different from that reported in Great Britain. As in Northern Ireland the highest levels of completeness in Great Britain are found among ABs (88% compared with 84% in Northern Ireland). However in Great Britain there is less distinction between C1 and the C2 groups and DEs clearly record the lowest levels of completeness (80% in Great Britain). In Northern Ireland there is little difference between the completeness of the C2 and DE groups but a notable gap between them and the level of completeness of C1s.

Tenure

2.51 Tenure is a variable that has previously been strongly associated with levels of completeness: homeowners (both outright and mortgage/shared ownership) are more likely to be registered than people in other types of tenure.²¹

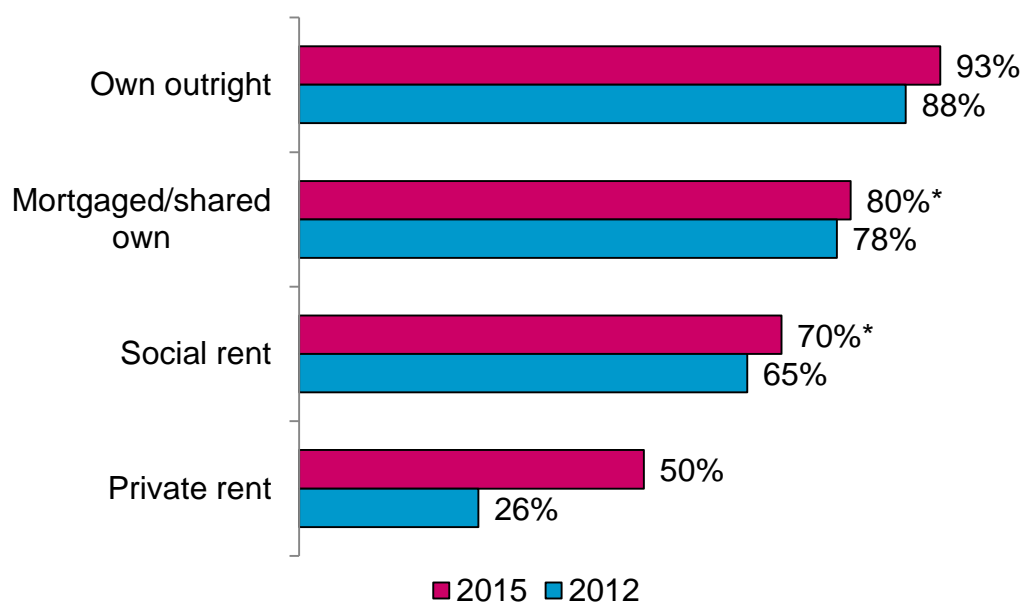
2.52 There has been a statistically significant uplift in completeness since our last assessment among those who own their property outright, with an increase from 88% to 93%. Those privately renting continue to have the

²¹ Electoral Commission, *Continuous electoral registration in Northern Ireland* (November 2012); *The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain* (July 2014); *The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain* (July 2016).

lowest levels of completeness although, as the chart shows, there has been a statistically significant increase in completeness since our last assessment in 2012 with completeness now at 50% compared with 26% previously.

2.53 The 2015 estimates for completeness bring the levels of completeness for private renters in Northern Ireland much closer to the levels found in Great Britain (50% in Northern Ireland compared to 57% in Great Britain). At our last assessment of the Northern Ireland registers the difference between the two was much larger at 26% in Northern Ireland in comparison with 57% in Great Britain.

Figure 2.11: Completeness by tenure - December 2015 and April 2012 (local government registers).



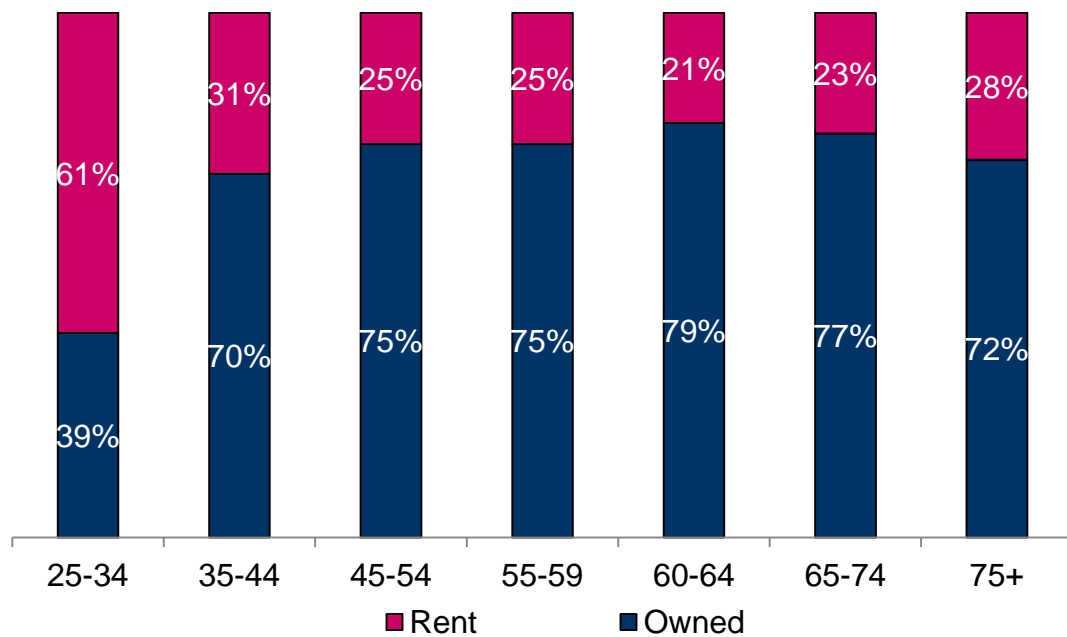
Base (unweighted): 2015 (2,026), 2012 (2,173)

Note: * Difference against 2012 estimate not statistically significant. In 2015 the questionnaire differentiated between 'council rent' and 'housing association rent' while in 2012 council rent was the only option. Council rent and housing association have been combined into 'Social rent'.

2.54 Tenure intersects with age and mobility. As we have seen these both have a significant impact on registration. As outlined above, younger people and those who have recently moved are likely to have lower than average levels of completeness.

2.55 As outlined in paragraph 2.30, in Northern Ireland 25-34 year olds have the lowest levels of completeness among adults over 20. According to the Family Resources Survey for Northern Ireland, 61% of households, where the head of household is aged 25-34, rent their property; close to half (47%) rent their property from a private landlord. 25-34 is the only age category where the majority live in rented accommodation. The relationship between age and tenure is shown in Figure 2.12 below.

Figure 2.12: Households by tenure and age of head of household, Northern Ireland 2013-2014.



Source: Family Resources Survey report 2013-2014

2.56 Private renters also tend to live at their address for a shorter amount of time than other tenure groups. The Family Resources survey also records information about length of residence, this data shows that 43% of those that own their property (either outright or with a mortgage) have lived at their property for more than 20 years. In contrast half of those that rent from a private landlord have lived at their address for less than 2 years (31% for less than 12 months, 19 for between 12 months and 2 years).²² As we have set out in the section on length of residence above, those who have lived at their address for less than two years are much less likely to appear on the register than long term residents.

Highest qualification

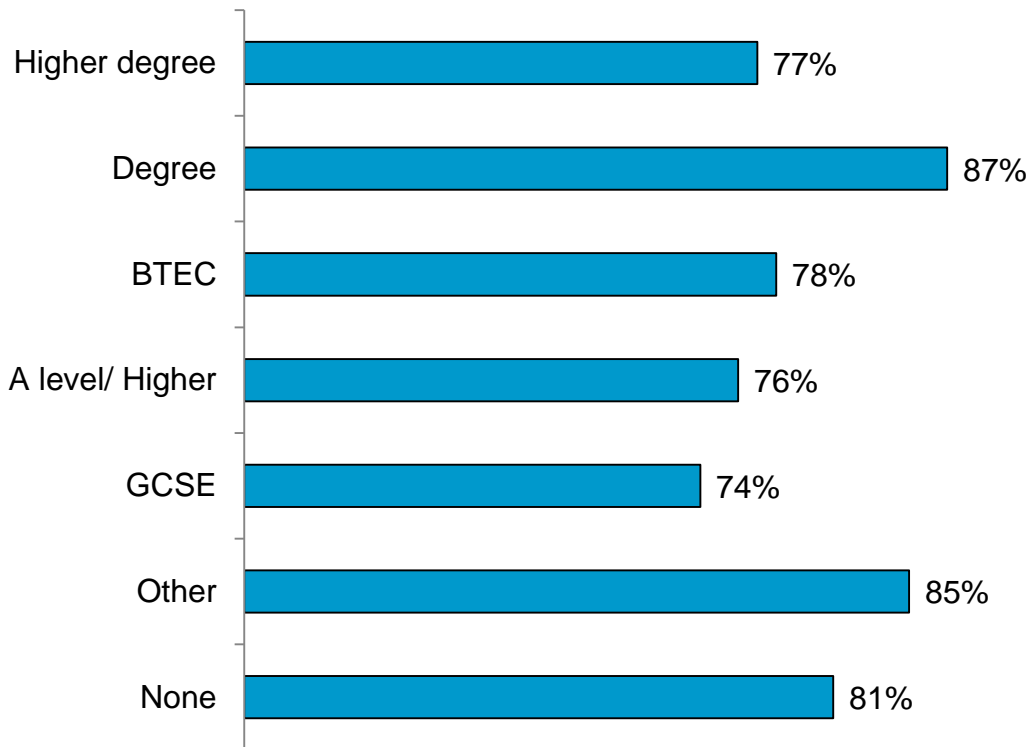
2.57 We did not report on levels of completeness by highest qualification in 2012. The results from this study do allow for this analysis. As figure 2.13 below shows, the highest levels of completeness are found among those with a degree, at 87% this is statistically significantly higher than all other education categories aside from 'other' where completeness is 85%.

2.58 There are relatively high levels of completeness among those that report having no formal qualifications (81% in Northern Ireland compared with 87% in Great Britain). This is likely to be a result of age, 51% of those aged over 65, whose information was gathered in this research, have no qualifications,

²² Northern Ireland Statistics and Research agency, *Family Resources Survey 2013/14* (October 2015).

compared with just 11% of 25-34s, 7% of 20-24s and 6% of 18 and 19 year olds. Those classed as having a different qualification ('Other') are also more likely to be aged 65 or over which will largely explain the high level of completeness.

Figure 2.13: Completeness by highest qualification- December 2015 (local government registers).



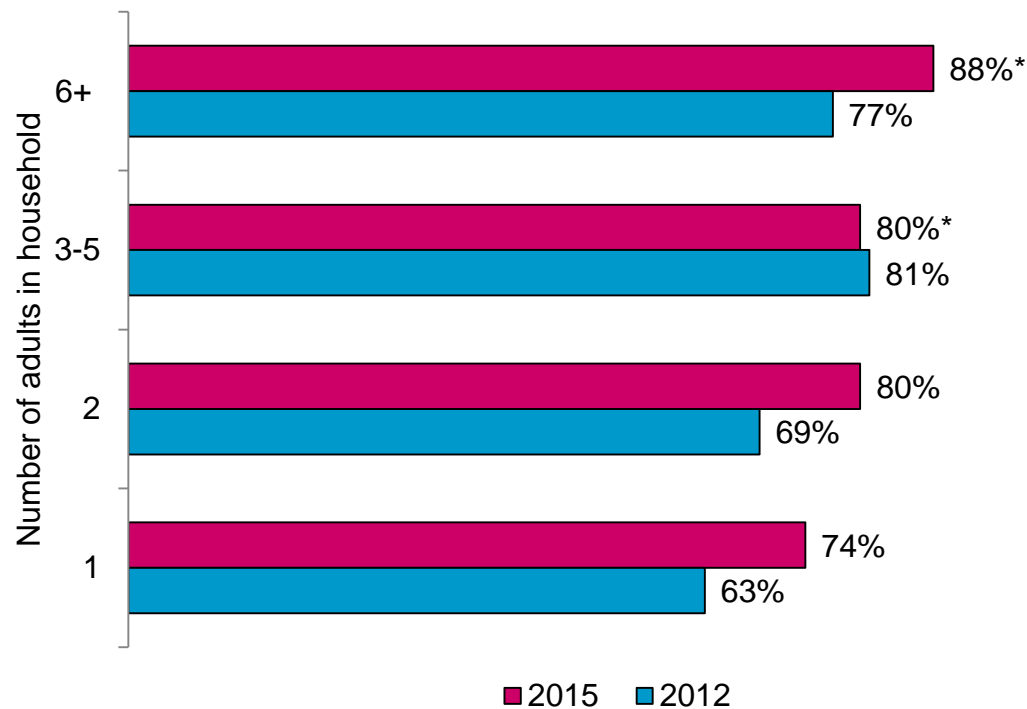
Base (unweighted): December 2015 (1,970)

Adults in the household

2.59 The chart below shows levels of completeness by numbers of adults living in the household for the December 2015 registers and the April 2012 registers. It indicates that, as in 2012, levels of completeness are higher among houses with more than one adult occupant. The lowest levels of completeness are found in households containing just one adult (74%). There is not a statistically significant difference in completeness between 2, 3-5, and 6+ adult households.

2.60 This trend is different to that found in Great Britain. In Great Britain we find that multi-occupancy households (where there are more than 6+ adults) have significantly lower levels of registration compared with any other group. In addition in Great Britain levels of registration for one-adult households are not significantly lower than those households containing 3-5 adults.

Figure 2.14: Completeness by number of adults in the household - December 2015 and April 2012 (local government registers).



Base (unweighted): 2015 (2,026), 2012 (2,173)

Note: * Difference against 2012 estimate not statistically significant.
Base size among 6+ households is small (70 in 2015 and 39 in 2012)

Attitudinal and behavioural characteristics

Attitude towards electoral registration and voting

2.61 In previous reports on electoral registration we have argued that mobility alone cannot explain the differences in levels of registration between old and young people and between home owners and private renters²³.

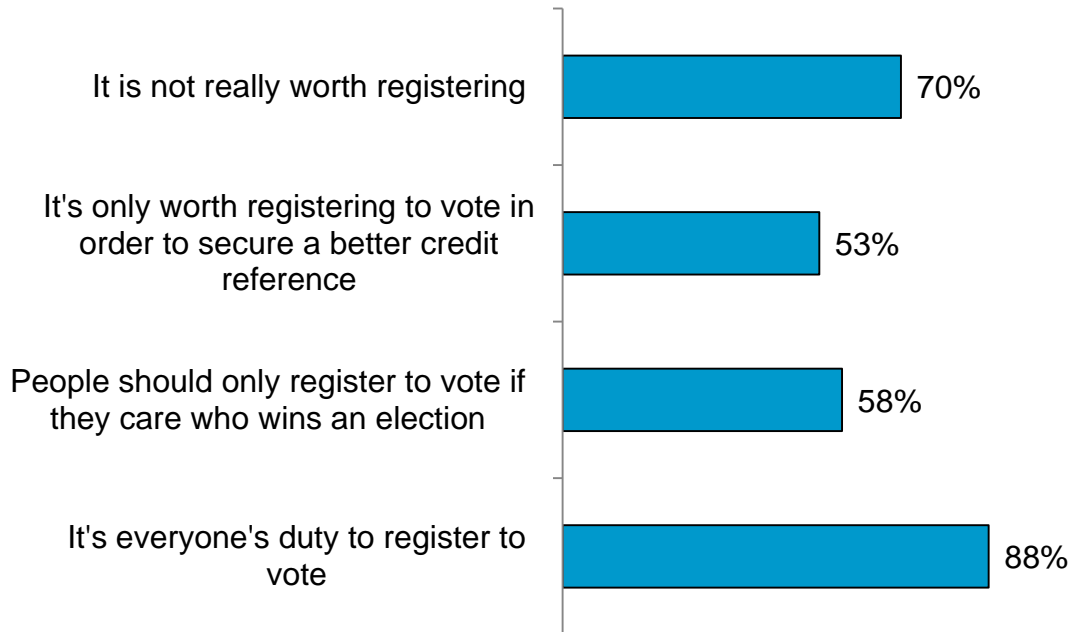
2.62 In fact, low levels of completeness among those groups, especially young people, are strongly linked to attitudes towards voting. As part of our survey, we asked respondents about their views on electoral registration and voting (comparable data is not available from our 2012 study).

2.63 The data presented on this topic is not fully representative of the population of Northern Ireland as it is based on the responses collected from people who were interviewed rather than for all those residing at that property. It nevertheless provides an interesting insight into the relationship between completeness and attitudes towards registration and voting.

²³ The Electoral Commission, *The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain* (July 2014), *The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain* (July 2015).

2.64 Those who feel that it is a duty or obligation to register are far more likely to be registered (88%) compared with those who think people should only register if they care who wins an election (58%) and those that do not believe it is worth registering at all (70%).

Figure 2.15: Completeness by attitude towards electoral registration - December 2015 (local government registers).



Base (unweighted): Base (950) Respondents only. 'Don't knows' excluded. Question: Which one of these statements comes closest to your views about registering to vote?

Note: Base size among 'not really worth registering' and 'only worth registering to vote in order to secure a better credit reference' is small (48 and 39 respectively).

2.65 The view that it is everyone's duty to register to vote is far less prevalent among younger age groups: 35% of 16-24s and 53% of 25-34s believe that it is everyone's duty to vote, significantly lower than the 84% of over 65s that believe this is the case.²⁴

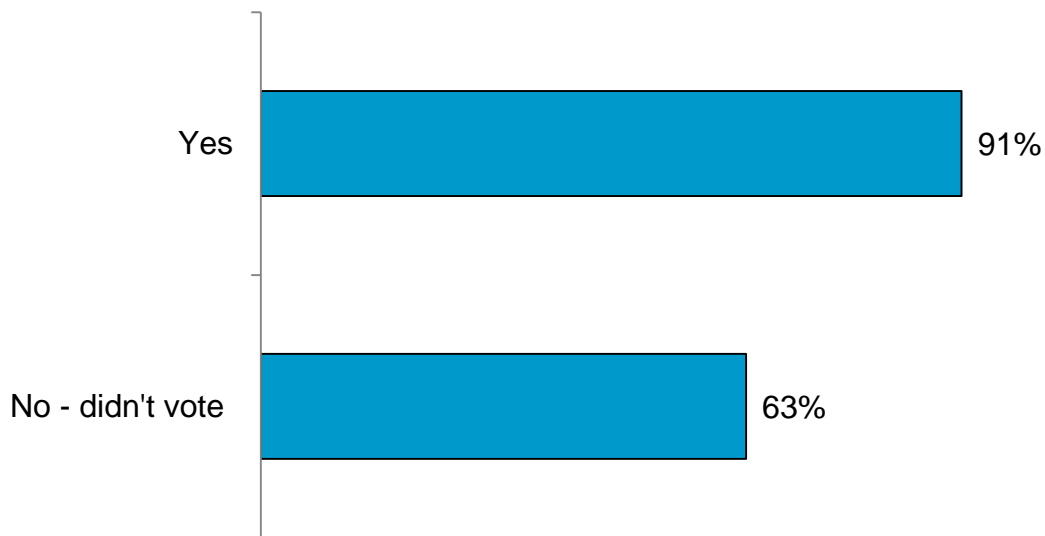
2.66 The same pattern can also be observed with attitudes towards voting. Again those who feel it is an obligation or a duty to vote are far more likely to be registered at 88% compared with 64% among those who believe it not really worth it, and 68% among those that think you should only vote if you care who wins. That it is an obligation to vote is also an attitude less likely to be held by younger age groups: 28% of 16-24s and 47% of 25-34s believe that it is a duty to vote compared with 77% of over 65s.

Turnout at the 2015 UK Parliamentary general election

²⁴ Note small base size (38).

2.67 We also asked respondents if they had voted at the 2015 UK Parliamentary general election. Predictably those who report that they voted in 2015 are significantly more likely to appear correctly on the December 2015 registers. This further demonstrates the interplay between voting and registration.

Figure 2.16: Completeness by turnout at the 2015 UKPGE- December 2015 (parliamentary registers).



Base (unweighted): Base (943) Respondents only. 'Don't know' excluded
Question: Did you vote at the last UK Parliament elections that were held in May 2015?

2.68 It also reasserts what we have noted above, that those groups that are typically less likely to be registered show lower levels of political engagement, demonstrated by the fact that they are less likely to participate in elections.

2.69 Our post-poll public opinion data for the 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly election also supports this. 18-34 year olds were twice as likely as those over 35 to say that they did not vote. Private renters were also more likely to say that they did not vote.²⁵

²⁵ Electoral Commission/BMG Research, *Northern Ireland Assembly election post-poll public opinion survey*, September 2016. Note the data gathered from our public opinion surveys is not designed to provide figures on turnout: the sample does not include a representative split of voter and non-voters and is not adjusted for over claim (where people think it is more socially acceptable to say they voted). This means the figures presented here on non-voting are lower than in reality. Nevertheless the results do allow us to compare the figures in relation to one another (rather than in an absolute context) and do suggest that younger people and private renters were less likely to have voted.

Political view

2.70 The impact of attitude towards voting on registration is also apparent in the findings on levels of completeness by political view. Again, as we reported in 2012, there appear to be significant differences between those with the highest levels of completeness - those identify as Nationalist (92.5%), those that identify as Unionist (84.1%) and those indicated that they had no political view (73.4%). As we stated previously, this lower level of completeness among those with 'no political view' is unsurprising given that we would expect those with strong political party allegiances to make more effort to ensure that their register entry is up to date.

Accuracy

2.71 Both the December 2015 **parliamentary** registers and the **local government** registers for Northern Ireland were found to be **87% accurate**.

2.72 These figures indicate that levels of accuracy have improved since our last estimate conducted on the April 2012 registers which found both the parliamentary and local government registers to be 78% accurate.

2.73 As mentioned above (para 2.17), the increased accuracy of the Northern Ireland registers, brings them closer in line with the levels of accuracy found in Great Britain. Table 2.1 shows the levels of accuracy of the December 2015 registers for Northern Ireland and Great Britain compared with the levels of accuracy recorded for Northern Ireland at our last estimate in 2012. The comparison is made with the estimate produced for Great Britain in 2011.²⁶

Table 2.1: Accuracy of the April 2011/2012 registers and the December 2015 registers in Northern Ireland and Great Britain – local government

	2011 (GB) 2012 (NI)	2015
Northern Ireland	78%	87%
Great Britain	85%	91%

Note: Base (unweighted): Northern Ireland – 2012: 2,036, 2015: 1,874
Great Britain - 2011: 9,680, 2015: 10,871.

2.74 As the table shows, the historic estimates suggest that the difference between the levels of accuracy for the Northern Ireland and Great Britain registers was 7 percentage points. For the December 2015 registers the difference is 4 points.

2.75 As has been the case for all previous studies on the accuracy of electoral registers, the majority of inaccurate entries are for individuals who are no longer resident at an address. Therefore it is not possible to collect

²⁶ Electoral Commission, *Great Britain's electoral registers* (December 2011).

demographic information about this group and we are limited in the amount of analysis we can conduct on the characteristics associated with inaccurate register entries.

Type of errors

2.76 In analysing the accuracy of the electoral registers a number of different types of error can be identified. These errors are then categorised as either a 'major' or 'minor' error:

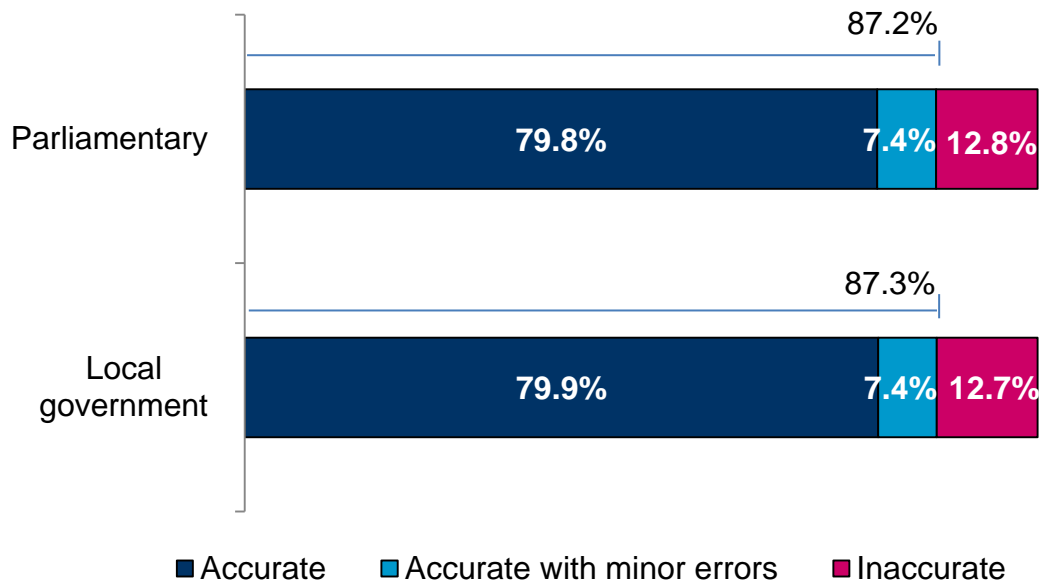
- The **major error category** is comprised of three different types of errors:
 - a) entries which refer to individuals that no longer live that address;
 - b) entries which may prevent an individual casting their vote at a polling station (for example, an incorrect name);
 - c) those errors that would mean that someone could vote when they are not eligible to (e.g. an incorrect date of birth for someone under 18).
- **Minor errors** are those which would not prevent someone from casting their vote (for example, an entry with a spelling error).

2.77 A breakdown of the types of errors used to calculate the accuracy of the registers can be found in Table 2.2.

2.78 Figure 2.17 shows the proportion of accurate entries on the registers along with those that contain errors: either major (which make them 'inaccurate') or minor errors. As the chart shows, 12.8% of entries on the local parliamentary register and 12.7% of entries on the local government registers are inaccurate.

2.79 The proportion of inaccurate entries on the 2015 registers is significantly smaller than that found on the 2012 registers where 22% of entries for both the local government and parliamentary registers were inaccurate. The proportion of minor errors in 2015 is consistent with 2012 at approximately 7%.

Figure 2.17: Accuracy of the December 2015 local government and parliamentary registers.



Base (unweighted): Parliamentary 1,851 Local government 1,874

2.80 Table 2.2 below shows the types of error found on the April 2012 **local government registers** compared with the December 2015 local government registers.

Table 2.2: Types of error on the April 2012 and December 2015 local government registers.²⁷

	April 2012	December 2015
Major errors total	22%	13%
Major errors – (a)		
No corresponding name taken at address	20%	12%
Major errors – (b)	1%	0.4%
First name and/or surname wrong on register	1%	0.1%
First name and/or surname missing on register	*%	0
UK/Irish/Commonwealth marker present ²⁸	N/A ²⁹	0.3%
Major errors – (c)	*%	0.1%
Name on register corresponds to	N/A	0

²⁷ The categorisation of major and minor errors is the same on the parliamentary register – although some proportions differ.

²⁸ These electors should not have a marker.

²⁹ These categories were not recorded in 2012

ineligible name on survey		
Attainers - DOB missing or wrong	*%	0.1%
EU citizens marker missing	N/A	0
Accurate with minor errors	7%	7%
First name/surname on register misspelled	2%	0.7%
First name/surname on register incomplete	*%	0.4%
Middle name missing from register	4%	4%
Middle name misspelled	1%	N/A
Middle name initials misspelled or incomplete on register	N/A	0.5%
Middle name initial wrong on register	N/A	0
Person does not have a middle name but middle name on register (respondents only)	N/A	0.4%
Surname is/assumed to be previous surname ³⁰	N/A	0.5%
First/middle/surname in different order on register	N/A	0.8%
DoB earlier on register for attainer ³¹	N/A	0

Base (unweighted): December 2015 – 1,874, April 2012 – 2,044

Note: Date of Birth (DoB).

2.81 As we have stated, the majority of **major errors** – those that would either prevent an individual from voting or would allow an ineligible individual to vote – has reduced significantly since 2012, down from 20% of entries in 2012 to approximately 13% in 2015. The most common major errors continue to relate to individuals who no longer live at the property; approximately 12% of all entries. This is higher than the proportion of inaccurate entries found on the Great Britain registers (9.4% overall) where 9% of entries relate to individuals that no longer live at the address they are registered at.

2.82 The proportion of entries that present **minor errors** - those that would not prevent an individual casting their vote - has remained consistent with 2012. As in the past, the most common type of minor error is missing middle names on the register (approximately 4% of all register entries as in 2012). The proportion of misspelt entries (first name/surname), although small in 2012 at 2% has reduced to less than 1% of entries in 2015.

2.83 As shown in the table above, we have added a number of minor error codes to our analysis of the 2015 registers; as a result there are not

³⁰ This assumption was made if an individual's first name matched and the surname they had given matched that of other members of their household but not the surname on the electoral register.

³¹ Where the date of birth on the register is earlier than the attainer's actual birthday. In this case they would technically be able to vote in an election before they are eligible.

corresponding estimates for 2012. Given that combined this type of error makes up less than 1% of entries this does not have an impact on the comparability of the results.

2.84 Levels of accuracy for the parliamentary registers are almost identical to those of the local government registers, there is a slightly larger proportion (0.1%) of inaccurate entries on the parliamentary register, and the proportion of minor accuracy errors is consistent at 7%.

Quantifying accuracy and completeness

2.85 This study was designed to estimate the percentage of the population not correctly registered and the percentage of inaccurate entries. Using these estimates, it is possible to further estimate the total number of people not correctly registered and the volume of inaccurate entries. However, these can only be rough approximations for several reasons.

2.86 Firstly, both the accuracy estimate and the completeness estimate are subject to margins of error (+/-1.6% and +/- 1.8 respectively).

2.87 Secondly, related to completeness, it is not possible to determine with certainty the size of the population eligible to register to vote. Eligibility is determined by **age and nationality** (see paras. 1.7-1.10). This has previously been less of an issue in Northern Ireland as, compared to Great Britain, relatively few people were not eligible for reasons of nationality.

However the Northern Ireland population is becoming increasingly diverse and this affects the accuracy of any estimate of eligibility.

Our estimates suggest between 275,000 and 330,000 people were not correctly registered in December 2015.

2.88 Data from the 2011 census offers the most accurate estimate of the size of the population. However, while annual estimates are made available which include data on age, they do not include information on nationality. Moreover, the accuracy of the mid-year population estimates is likely to decrease every year after the census.

2.89 Any attempts to calculate the absolute number of people not correctly registered at their current address is therefore based on an estimate of completeness and an estimate of the total eligible population. It can therefore only be an approximation and should be treated as such.

Completeness

2.90 Our findings from 2012 suggested that 300,000 and 390,000 people were not correctly registered in April 2012.

2.91 The findings from this study suggest that approximately **between 275,000 and 330,000 people eligible to be on the local government registers were not correctly registered in December 2015.**

2.92 As when we have provided estimates on the number of missing entries for Great Britain, we would strongly emphasise the fact that these figures do not mean that the registers should contain 275,000-330,000 more entries in total. Those not correctly registered may still be included on the register but for instance at a previous address (inaccurate entry).

Accuracy

2.93 These estimates also allow us to approximate the total number of inaccurate entries on the December 2015 registers: between 140,000 and 180,000 on the local government registers. This compares to upwards of 250,000 entries on the April 2012 registers which we estimate were inaccurate.

3 Analysis and recommendations

3.1 In this chapter we consider the findings presented above, the implications for the registration system in Northern Ireland and set out our recommendations for the future.

3.2 In our 2012 report we set out a detailed assessment of how the system of continuous registration was working and in particular how it related to the findings from that accuracy and completeness study. We concluded that the levels of accuracy and completeness we found in 2012 could be clearly linked to a key problem with the operation of the continuous registration system, namely the lack of effective procedures to capture population change in the absence of either an annual canvass of households or year round activity involving targeted canvassing.

3.3 Subsequent to our report in 2012, and in response to a specific recommendation made in that report, a canvass was conducted in 2013. Our assessment of that canvass suggested it was well run and effective.

3.4 Our 2012 report made several other recommendations and we will consider below whether and how they have been addressed.

Continuous registration: changes since 2012 and their effectiveness

3.5 In 2012 we recommended that:

- From 2015 onwards the Chief Electoral Officer should ensure that his registration activities – including general and targeted canvass activities, data matching and specific initiatives – are supported by clear and publically available plans which demonstrate how agreed standards of performance will be met, and which are evaluated on an ongoing basis

3.6 More specifically we recommended that the Chief Electoral Officer should review the data sharing agreements in place to support the continuous registration system and the process and plans in place to contact electors identified through this data, including how follow up activities are carried out.

3.7 A key question for this report is therefore whether these reviews and any subsequent improvements have resulted in a more efficient system and a more accurate and complete register in Northern Ireland.

3.8 In response to our recommendations in 2012 the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland reviewed all his arrangements with data holding organisations

although the main data sources used as part of continuous registration remain the same as when we published our 2012 report.³²

3.9 Particular progress was made through a project (part-funded by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA)) to automate the data matching process, which previously had been done manually. This has meant significant improvements in the process of data matching and EONI can now identify those individuals to whom they need to write about change to their details on the register more efficiently and accurately.

3.10 In 2013 the Chief Electoral Officer commissioned Deloitte to review EONI's existing processes for contacting electors, looking at both the procedures and the content and format of the letters. As a result, changes were made to the letters sent to electors, including putting the 'call to action' nearer the start and reducing the overall length of the letter. Changes continue to be made to the letters in response to feedback from staff and the public.

3.11 However, the findings from this study suggest that there are still issues with the operation of continuous registration – specifically that it is still struggling to deal with population movement in a way that maximises the accuracy and completeness of the register in Northern Ireland.

Attainers

3.12 Data set out in chapter 2 indicates that there has been a decline in the completeness of attainers, although the extent of the decline and the exact rate of completeness are unclear as a result of small sample sizes in the 2012 and 2015 studies. Notably there has been a clear decrease in the number of registered attainers from around 11,500 to around 5,500.

3.13 This is consistent with information from the Chief Electoral Officer on the operation of the Schools Initiative in Northern Ireland. Unlike in previous years the most recent activities have focused exclusively on Year 14 (with pupils aged 17-18) rather than also including Year 13 (with pupils aged 16-17). The decision to restrict the activity to Year 14 was taken on the basis of the resources available for the Schools Initiative.

3.14 This approach is understandable as many more Year 13 pupils will not be able to vote during the lifetime of the register being compiled that year whereas most Year 14 pupils will at some point within the year become full electors. Indeed in relation to the use of the register for elections, there is little need to register someone when they are 16 years old particularly if they can be registered when they are 17.

3.15 The registration of attainers under individual registration is a significant challenge, as we have also recently seen in Great Britain, as many will lack the

³² These are: the Business Services Organisation (who provide data from General Practitioner lists and other medical services in Northern Ireland), the Department for Work and Pensions, the Registrar General, secondary schools and FE colleges, local Councils and the Northern Ireland Office.

motivation to register but no-one else is able to do it for them (unlike under household registration).

3.16 Analysis in chapter 2 suggests our previous estimate of attainer completeness was too high. While this suggests that the Schools Initiative is not as effective as we previously believed, under individual registration and in the absence of an annual canvass it is still one of the most effective and currently available ways to engage with potential attainers.

3.17 In judging its success using absolute numbers of registered attainers it is also important to remember that it does not reach those not in education and appears to work better in schools than in less structured settings such as FE colleges. It is not therefore a mechanism for achieving 100% completeness among attainers. It is also resource intensive.

3.18 In the short to medium term, online registration may provide a partial solution here as it would allow schools to encourage pupils directly to register online without necessarily requiring EONI staff to visit schools to provide and collect hard-copy forms.

3.19 We also make a recommendation below, on how existing public data could be better used, in the longer term to help address the challenge of attainer registration.

Levels of change on the register

3.20 Evidence from the CEO's annual reports from 2013-14 and 2014-15 show that while the processes involved in data handling and contacting electors have improved, the results of these contacts are still variable. For example, between April 2014 and March 2015, analysis of BSO data led to 110,000 letters being issued asking people to register or to update their details. Approximately 37,000 responses were received to this initial round of letters (30%) with a similar level of response to the reminder letters that were then sent out.

3.21 This means that roughly 50% of the initial 110,000 elicited a response. This level of response is slightly higher than the equivalent figures we reported on in 2012 – when overall response to these letters was closer to 40%. This suggests that the matching work carried out by NISRA may have improved the quality of the initial data used to identify new electors and the changes to letters may have also made them more effective.

3.22 While around 50% is a good response rate, for an initial letter with one reminder, it does mean that only roughly half of the people that the data originally indicated need to update their details (or register) have done so. In Great Britain during the 2015 canvass an average of just over 60% of Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) were returned after the initial form and one reminder but in Northern Ireland, unlike in Great Britain, there is no house to house follow up activity to drive response rates up further.

3.23 It is unlikely that further changes to data matching processes will see a significant improvement in these response rates in the absence of additional follow up activity to target non-responders.

3.24 While this is only one example, the overall level of change on the register supports the fact that registration activity does not match the level required to deal with population movement in Northern Ireland. The table below shows the changes to the register for the previous two financial years as well as across 2009-2011.

Table 3.1: Additions and deletions to the electoral registers in Northern Ireland 2009-2016

Period	Additions	Deletions	Other changes
2009 – 2011 average	5.8%	3.8%	-
April 2014 – March 2015	77,255 (6.2%)	60,584 (4.9%)	11,911 (1%)
April 2015 – March 2016	82,812 (6.6%)	67,148 (5.3%)	6,414 (0.5%)

3.25 In contrast to the above data, levels of additions and deletions to the registers in Great Britain were each 15% in 2015 and 2013. A higher level is to be expected in Great Britain as areas of the country will see much higher population movement than Northern Ireland. However, data from the 2011 census indicates that 7.6% of people in Northern Ireland had changed address in the 12 months before the day of the census.

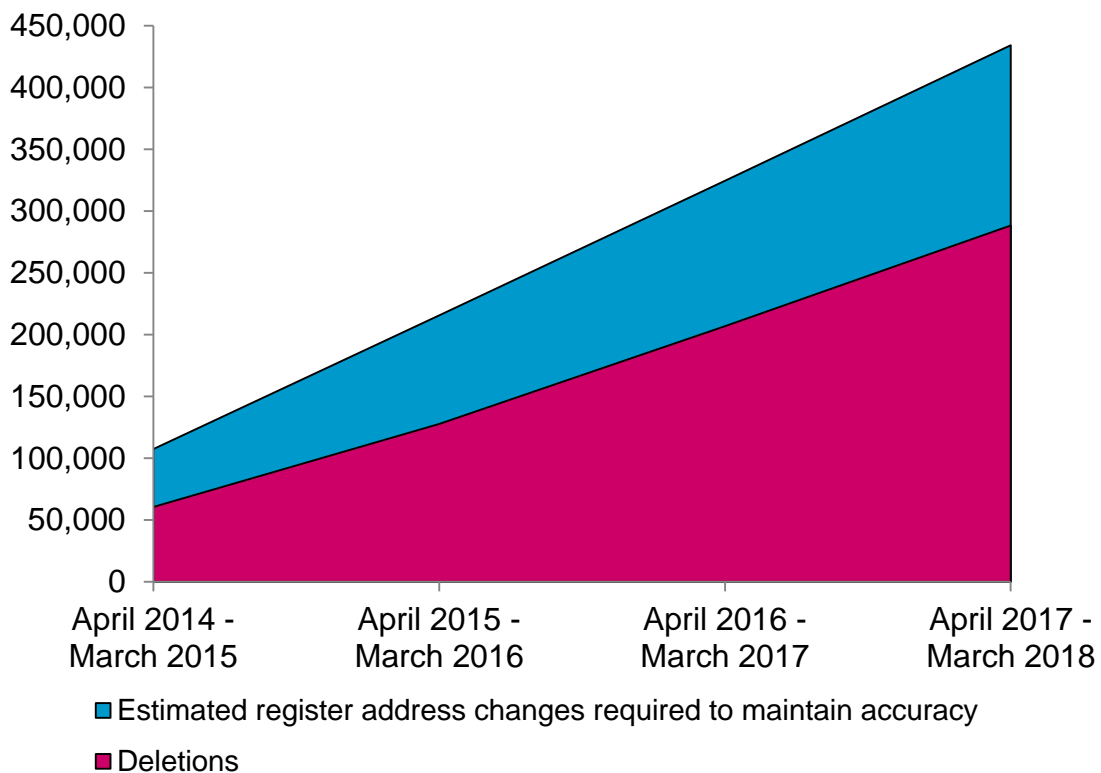
3.26 Therefore, if the level of annual change has remained broadly consistent since 2011, then the figures suggest that the register has not kept up with the changes required – particularly in deleting old entries.

3.27 The accuracy and completeness findings by length of residence also support this. As set out in chapter 2, the effects of the 2013 canvass can be clearly seen with those resident at their property over two years showing a larger increase in completeness from 2012 than those resident for less than two years (where there has been some increase but not a statistically significant one). It is also worth noting that although the level of changes being picked up appears to have increased since 2012 the periods shown in Table 3.1 include the 2015 general election and the run up to the May 2016 Assembly election and June 2016 referendum. Whether similar levels of additions and deletions will be seen in coming years is therefore unclear.

3.28 As in our 2012 report, this data therefore strongly suggests that over time the system of continuous registration, at least as currently in operation, does not effectively maintain the accuracy and completeness of the register because when people move many are not updating their registration details. Figure 3.1 below illustrates the point making the following assumptions:

- that population movement requires 7-8% of the register to be added or deleted across any given year just in order to maintain completeness and accuracy,
- there will be the same level of deletions in the next two years as recorded for the previous two,
- that the electoral register and the population will both record annual growth at a similar rate as they have done in recent years.

Figure 3.1: Deletions from the register: expected and required.



Recommendations

3.29 In order to maintain the accuracy and completeness of the registers, the registration system primarily needs to deal with population movement. Continuous registration, as currently in operation, does not do this effectively enough to avoid a gradual decline in both completeness and accuracy over time.

3.30 The main approach used by the Chief Electoral Officer to identify new electors, or existing electors who need to update their details, is a process of data matching followed by sending letters to encourage registration. It is possible that there will be an improvement in the level of response to these letters as a result of the introduction of online registration in Northern Ireland. This would be welcome but it is not guaranteed (see paras 3.38 – 3.42 below for further discussion of online registration). Although the Chief Electoral Officer should ensure that his annual reports following the introduction of online registration clearly analyse its impact.

3.31 We have therefore made several recommendations for other actions which would also help to improve the register by better identifying required register changes and encouraging new registrations:

- 1. A programme of household registration activity should be established by the Chief Electoral Officer with the aim of improving the register ahead of the next set of planned elections in Northern Ireland in 2019.** This should use the approach adopted in Great Britain of sending Household Notification Letters to properties. These letters, which make clear what names appear on the register for each property, have proved effective in Great Britain at

generating responses from households where changes need to be made – particularly if used in collaboration with the option of registering online. In addition, the resource requirements are much smaller than those of a full canvass as a household does not need to respond to the form if there is no change to make. HNLs could be used annually either across Northern Ireland or in particular areas more likely to experience population movement. As a minimum there should be activity in early 2019 ahead of the elections in May 2019.

2. **The Chief Electoral Officer should consider how targeted household canvassing** could be incorporated into outgoing registration activities, e.g. as a follow up to letters issued based **information from one of his data-sharing organisations**.
3. **When revising the forms and letters used in Northern Ireland to reflect the introduction of online registration, the Chief Electoral Officer should also review all these materials to ensure they are as effective as possible at encouraging response.** Recent learning from the Electoral Commission’s re-design of forms and letters in Great Britain, to facilitate the introduction of individual registration, should be considered as part of this work. We will discuss with the Chief Electoral Officer how we can most effectively share the findings from the work in Great Britain.
4. **Alongside the introduction of online registration the Chief Electoral Officer should consider whether a less resource intensive version of the schools initiative could be set up, working with schools and colleges to encourage pupils to register online.**

3.32 However, the accuracy and completeness findings set out in this report are not only the result of the issues with the operation of continuous registration set out above. Any action to maximise accuracy and completeness needs to also take a wider view and address the challenges inherent in the system of individual registration.

Individual registration

3.33 As we have recently noted in relation to Great Britain, one of the most fundamental elements of individual registration is the inability of one person at each property registering or de-registering all residents at that property. This has had both positive and negative effects in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

3.34 In the study ‘Electoral Registration in 2000’, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) found a strong relationship between registration of the ‘head of the household’ and likelihood of registration for other people living at that address: an eligible individual’s likelihood to be missing from the register was only 5% in households

where the 'head of the household' was registered but where the head of the household was not registered it was as high as 70%.³³

3.35 Alongside this we have always found a strong link between attitude towards registration and attitude to voting - with voters much more likely to be registered than non-voters or those who don't see voting as a duty. Some of the findings from our recent study in Great Britain suggest an **increasingly closer link between registering and voting**.

3.36 This is logical given the principle of individual ownership of registration under individual registration: if you are not interested in voting, you are less likely to register and no-one else can do it for you. The latter point suggests a closer relationship between people's attitude and their behaviour (or rather the outcome of their behaviour – where if they do not act, they do not become registered).

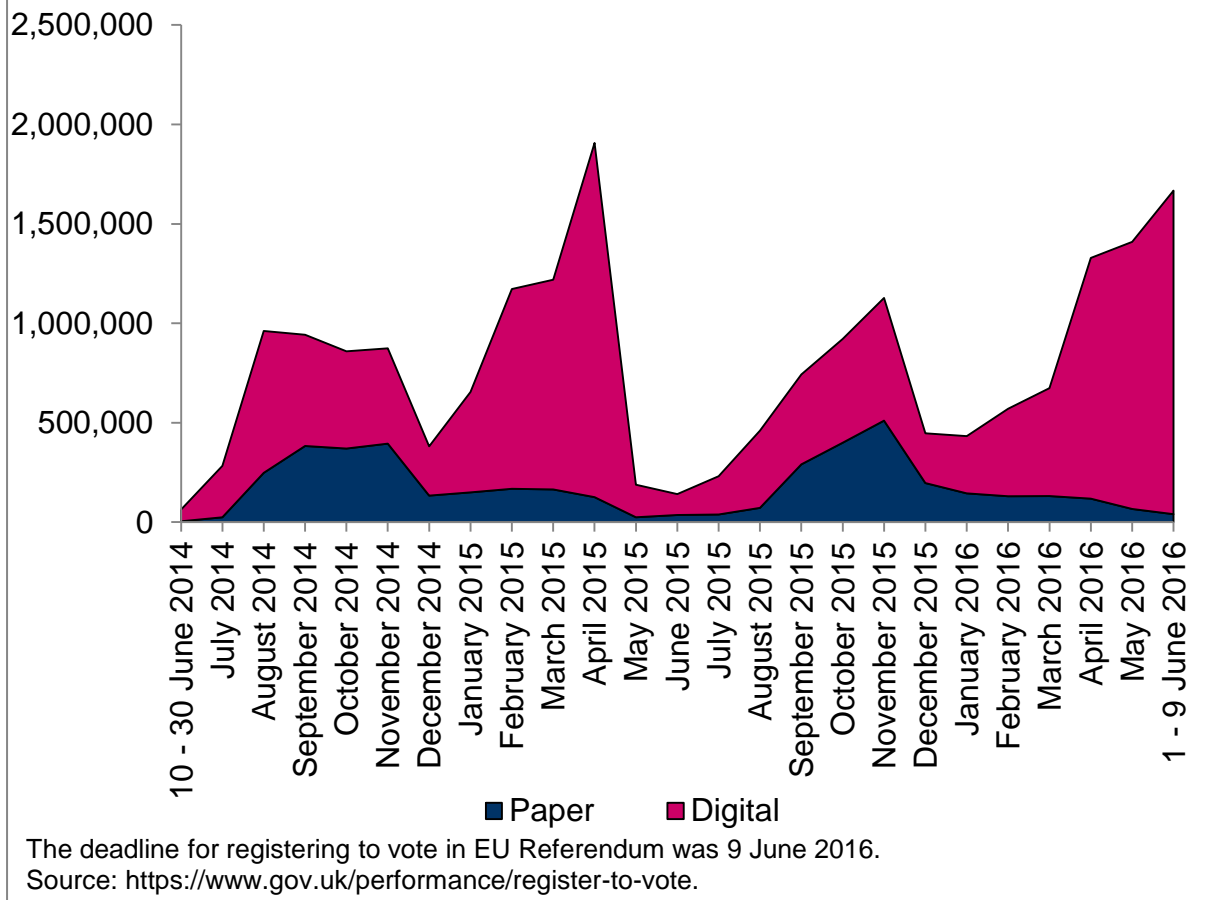
3.37 This has had a direct impact on the levels of attainer registration in Great Britain and it seems likely, given the findings here, that it is also having an effect in Northern Ireland.

3.38 In Great Britain the full implications of this, for the overall accuracy and completeness of the registers, may have been at least partly offset by the recent high turnout polls as well as the availability of online registration. The online system, where an application can be completed in five minutes, makes it easier to directly encourage people to register to vote through public awareness campaigns centred around major polls.

3.39 Figure 3.2 below illustrates the take up of online registration in Great Britain from June 2014 to June 2016 with 78% of all applications in this period made online. In addition, younger and more mobile people are the most likely to be under-registered. As a result they are also most likely to need to register at any given point in time. Data from the online system in Great Britain shows that the majority of all applications are made by those under the age of 35.

³³ Office for National Statistics, Social and Vital Statistics Division, *Electoral Registration in 2000* (August 2005).

Figure 3.2: Applications to register to vote under IER (10 June 2014 to 9 June 2016) - Digital (online) and paper form.



3.40 In Northern Ireland, online registration is not yet available although we welcome the fact that the Chief Electoral Officer and the UK Government (through the Northern Ireland Office - NIO) have confirmed that digital registration will be extended to Northern Ireland by the end of 2016

3.41 However, we have already pointed out, in relation to Great Britain, that the impact of online registration is likely to be much reduced in the absence of high turnout elections.³⁴ The introduction of online registration in Northern Ireland, while it is necessary and will have a positive impact, should not therefore be seen as a silver bullet which will address all the issues set out in this report.

3.42 Indeed it is likely to have less immediate impact in Northern Ireland than it did in Great Britain. While turnout at Northern Ireland Assembly elections mirrors the general downward trend in Britain (the 2016 election recorded a 54.9% turnout compared to 68.8% in 1998) it is also notable that despite seeing the same major polls as Great Britain in recent years – the 2015 Westminster general election and the EU referendum – levels of turnout in Northern Ireland at both events were substantially lower than the rest of Great Britain. At the 2015 general election turnout

³⁴ GB report

in Great Britain was nearly 67% while in Northern Ireland it was 58%. At the June 2016 referendum, turnout across Great Britain was 73% but in Northern Ireland it was a full 10 percentage points lower at 63%.

3.43 It is therefore likely that three factors in combination broadly explain the lower accuracy and completeness results for Northern Ireland compared to Great Britain:

- Ongoing issues with the effectiveness of the operation of the continuous registration system;
- The absence of online registration in Northern Ireland;
- The impact of individual ownership of registration at a time of relative low turnout.

Recommendations

3.44 In relation to the second bullet above, we repeat the recommendation we have made in relation to the modernisation of the registration system in Great Britain although the starting point in Northern Ireland is different.³⁵ While in Great Britain a key issue is the efficiency and resource intensive nature of the current annual canvass the issue in Northern Ireland is how to effectively manage registration in the absence of a regular canvass. However, the potential solution could be the same and we recommend:

5. Moving away from a system which relies on electors taking steps to register themselves, and instead developing automatic or direct enrolment processes which have the potential to deliver more accurate and complete electoral registers more efficiently.

3.45 Our vision of a modern electoral register is one which:

- Uses trusted available public data to keep itself accurate and complete throughout the year without relying solely on action by individuals; and
- Makes it as easy as possible for electors to ensure their own registration record is accurate and complete, particularly ahead of elections and referendums.

3.46 While our previous report focused on Great Britain, our recommendation was UK wide, and is set out in the box below.

Recommendation

The Government should be open to new ways of thinking about how to improve the registration of electors in the UK, drawing on ideas from the CEO/EROs and their teams, civil society groups and campaigners, and building on evidence about approaches used by comparable democracies elsewhere in the world.

We have previously suggested a range of areas for further exploration in our reports on the transition to IER in Great Britain, and we have welcomed the continued

³⁵ The Electoral Commission, [The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain](#) (July 2014).

engagement of UK Government Ministers in this debate with the Electoral Commission, EROs and other civic groups such as the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Democratic Participation.

We now want to see positive action to develop new ways of compiling and maintaining electoral registers in the UK, in particular to enable the CEO/EROs to make better use of available, trusted data to keep registers up to date. We believe it is time to move away from a system which relies on electors taking steps to register themselves, and instead develop automatic or direct enrolment processes which have the potential to deliver more accurate and complete electoral registers more efficiently than current resource intensive canvass processes.

We have set out a number of areas below where we think more work should be carried out now to examine in detail how future changes could be delivered, including the administrative, legal, infrastructure and financial implications of new ways of managing electoral registers in the UK.

The Commission is currently undertaking a strategic review of its future work and focus, and we intend to publish the outcome of that review by the end of 2016. We hope that the thinking set out in this report and in our strategic review will help to inform and support the UK Government's own work to deliver a modern electoral register.

3.47 Developing any form of automated registration will require detailed planning and our Great Britain report outlines a number of obvious areas where work could begin. It is worth repeating one of those here particular in relation to the challenges around attainer registration outlined in paras 3.12 – 3.18 above:

- 6. Automatic registration of 16- and 17-year-old attainers:** 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. This information could be shared with the CEO/EROs, enabling 16 year olds who have been issued with a NINo to be added to electoral registers as attainers (who are not able to vote in elections until they are 18), provided that the CEO/ERO is satisfied that the individual is eligible and meets the residence requirements for registration.

Other uses of the register

3.48 In relation to Great Britain we noted that the challenges inherent in individual registration and outlined above raise a question about the continued usefulness of the 1 December register publication date for both electoral statistics and boundary reviews. This also applies to Northern Ireland. In line with our Great Britain recommendations, we recommend that:

- 7. Parliament should consider whether it would be more appropriate in future (ahead of the next scheduled review of UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries which will use the December 2020 registers) to base constituency and boundary reviews on electorate data taken from the registers used for elections instead.**

Performance standards

3.49 Since 2008 the Electoral Commission has set standards, monitored and reported on the performance of Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers in Great Britain. During this time we have made the case that these standards should also be applied to the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland so that they can provide a benchmark on the delivery of electoral services and support the sharing of good practice.

3.50 In March 2016 we published a new set of standards for Electoral Registration Officers which aim to support them in planning for and delivering well-run electoral registration services under individual electoral registration. The Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 gives the Secretary of State the power to extend the performance standards framework to Northern Ireland. In line with the introduction of online registration by the end of 2016, we recommend that:

- 8. In line with the introduction of online registration by the end of 2016, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should introduce an Order to extend the performance standards framework to Northern Ireland, with the Chief Electoral Officer then reporting to the Commission within this performance standards framework.**

Our future research programme

3.51 Our next study on the accuracy and completeness of the registers in Northern Ireland is currently planned for the registers published in spring 2018. As with this study, this would be carried out in conjunction with a Great Britain wide study. However, this is dependent on the effective implementation of recommendations in this report and whether we believe there has been an improvement in accuracy and completeness ahead of the planned 2019 elections. Otherwise we may choose to undertake an earlier study in order to assess the registers well in advance of the 2019 elections.

Appendix A: Measuring accuracy and completeness

The overarching objective of this study was to measure the accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 local government and parliamentary registers in Northern Ireland.³⁶

Producing completeness and accuracy estimates

There are various methods used to assess the quality of the electoral registers which differ mainly on the frequency with which they can be used and the reliability of the results. These approaches are presented below.

1 Using large-scale national surveys

Large-scale, representative or random social surveys can be used to produce reliable estimates of the completeness of the registers. Such surveys tend to use the postcode address file (PAF) as a sampling frame and cross-check the information gathered against actual entries on the electoral register.

The main limitation of this method is that it requires large sample sizes, meaning surveys are expensive to conduct.

Moreover, non-response to the surveys is likely to be highest among those who are eligible but not registered. This method does not allow estimating the number of duplicate entries across local registers

This is the methodology that was used for this study and for *'Electoral Registration in Northern Ireland: Accuracy and Comprehensiveness'*, *'Continuous Electoral Registration in Northern Ireland'*, *'Great Britain's electoral registers 2011'* and *'The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain'*.

2 Comparing ONS electoral statistics (number of entries on the registers) with mid-year population estimates

These two datasets can be used to provide relatively crude estimates of the annual registration rates at national and subnational levels. Under this method, the registration rate is calculated by using data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for the total entries on the electoral registers as the numerator and dividing this by the ONS estimates for the population aged 16 and above as the denominator.

However, the method has many limitations:

- The approach cannot be used to report on the accuracy of the registers;

³⁶ Those eligible to be registered are all UK, Irish, Commonwealth and EU citizens aged 18+ and ordinarily resident in the UK; those who will turn 18 during the lifetime of the register are classed as 'attainers'.

- It is not possible to derive a figure from the population estimates for the proportion of the population whose nationality means they would be ineligible to vote;
- The accuracy of population estimates is likely to decline each year after the Census on which they are based;
- ONS electoral statistics represent entries on the electoral registers, not individual electors. It is not possible to quantify the number of entries which are duplicates or which are illegitimate using this approach. This means that the ONS figures are likely to over-state the number of registered electors.³⁷

3 Matching census records against the electoral register

A sample of census returns or data from the census coverage survey can be cross-matched against the electoral registers to derive estimates of completeness and accuracy. This approach provides reliable national estimates with detailed demographic breakdowns and is widely recognised as being the ‘gold standard’ for producing estimates of accuracy and completeness of the registers.

Variants of this approach were used in relation to the 1965, 1980, 1990, 2000 and 2010/2011 registers in Great Britain.

However, this approach also has two key limitations:

- The exercise can only be repeated every 10 years;
- Where census records are matched against register entries, there is a high probability that many of those missing from the registers are also missing from the census.

Accuracy

Accuracy means that ‘*there are no false entries on the electoral registers*’.

The accuracy of the electoral registers is therefore a measure of the percentage of entries on the registers which relate to verified and eligible voters who are resident at that address. Inaccurate register entries may relate to entries which have become redundant (for example, due to home movement), are ineligible and have been included unintentionally, or which are fraudulent.

In order to establish accuracy, all register entries held for addresses where an interview was undertaken, as well as those addresses that were found to be vacant or derelict, were checked against the survey information collected in terms of:

- Whether a corresponding name at that address was gathered in the survey;
- If so, whether the individual’s details on the register were correct.

Whether other details information related to date of birth (for attainers) and citizenship were correct on the register (including in terms of whether the person matched to the register entry was actually eligible to vote).

³⁷ An individual can have a second entry on the register if he/she spends half of the year in a second accommodation (i.e.: holiday home or student accommodation).

Three broad outcomes were possible:

- **Major error:** can be divided into three categories –
 - (a) no corresponding name was collected by the survey OR
 - (b) the register entry was matched to a person at the correct address but their name/other details were recorded incorrectly on the register to the extent that they may be unable to vote (e.g. their name would not be recognised/accepted if they tried to vote at a polling station or they would be barred from voting due to incorrect information on the register about their age or nationality) (major error type b) OR
 - (c) the register entry was matched to a person at the correct address but they were ineligible to vote (and the register details were therefore incorrect).
- **Minor error:** the register entry was matched to a person at the correct address and their name/other details were recorded incorrectly, but the error would not prevent them from being able to vote
- **No major or minor errors:** the register entry was matched to a person at the correct address and their name/other details were correctly recorded.

No major or minor errors, or just a minor error mean that a person was counted as accurate. A major error meant that a person was counted as inaccurate.

Table A1: Types of accuracy error on the December 2015 electoral registers

	Local government	Parliamentary
Major errors total (inaccurate)	12.7%	12.8%
Major errors – (a)	12.3%	12.4%
No corresponding name taken at address		
Major errors – (b)	0.4%	0.4%
First name and/or surname wrong on register	0.1%	0.1%
First name and/or surname missing on register	0	0
UK/Irish/Commonwealth marker present ³⁸	0.3%	0.3%
Major errors – (c)	0.1%	0.1%
Name on register corresponds to ineligible name on survey	0	0
Attainers - DOB missing or wrong	0.1%	0.1%
EU citizens marker missing	0	0
Accurate with minor errors	7.4%	7.4%
First name/surname on register misspelled	0.7%	0.7%
First name/surname on register incomplete	0.4%	0.4%

³⁸ These electors should not have a marker.

Middle name missing from register	3.9%	4.0%
Middle name initials misspelled or incomplete on register	0.5%	0.5%
Middle name initial wrong on register	0	0
Person does not have a middle name but middle name on register (respondents only)	0.4%	0.4%
Surname is/assumed to be previous surname ³⁹	0.5%	0.5%
First/middle/surname in different order on register	0.8%	0.8%
DoB earlier on register for attainer ⁴⁰	0	0

Base (unweighted): Local government 1,874; Parliamentary 1,851

Note: Date of Birth (DoB).

Completeness

Completeness means that ‘every person who is entitled to have an entry in an electoral register is registered’.

The completeness of the electoral registers therefore refers to the percentage of eligible people who are registered at their current address. The proportion of eligible people who are not included on the register at their current address constitutes the rate of under-registration.

In order to establish completeness, all household members for whom the survey collected information about were checked against the details on the electoral register in terms of:

- Whether they appeared on the register at all;
- Whether their name appeared correctly on the register;
- Whether other details information related to date of birth (for attainers) and citizenship appeared correctly on the register.

Three broad outcomes were possible:

- **Major error:** either they did not appear on the register OR they appeared on the register but their name/other details were recorded incorrectly to the extent that they would be unable to vote (e.g. their name would not be recognised/accepted if they tried to vote at a polling station or they would be barred from voting due to incorrect information on the register about their age or nationality);

³⁹ This assumption was made if an individual’s first name matched and the surname they had given matched that of other members of their household but not the surname on the electoral register.

⁴⁰ Where the date of birth on the register is earlier than the attainer’s actual birthday. In this case they would technically be able to vote in an election before they are eligible.

- **Minor error:** they appeared on the register and their name/other details were recorded incorrectly, but the error would not prevent them from being able to vote;
- **No major or minor errors:** they appeared on the register and their name/other details were correctly recorded.

No major or minor errors, or just a minor error mean that a person was counted as complete. A major error meant that a person was counted as incomplete.

Where an entry contained more than one type of error, for instance a misspelled first and middle name, error codes were assigned based on a hierarchy where major errors were prioritized over minor errors, then surname errors over first name errors over middle name errors.

Table A2: Types of completeness error December 2015 electoral registers

	Local government	Parliamentary
Major errors total (incomplete)	20.6%	19.5%
Major errors – (a)		
Living at address but not named on register	20.5%	19.2%
Major errors – (b)	0.1%	0.3%
First name and/or surname wrong on register	0.1%	0.1%
Middle name wrong on register	0	0
Incorrect nationality marker	0	0.2%
DoB on register later than actual DoB	0	0
Complete with minor errors	6.0%	6.1%
First name/surname on register is misspelled	0.6%	0.6%
First name/surname is incomplete	0.4%	0.4%
Middle name missing from register	3.6%	3.7%
Middle name initial misspelled or incomplete on register	0.5%	0.5%
Middle name initial wrong on register	0	0
Person does not have middle name but middle name on register (respondent only)	0.4%	0.4%
Surname is/assumed to be previous surname ⁴¹	0.5%	0.5%

Base (unweighted): Local government 2,026; Parliamentary 1,974
 Note: Date of Birth (DoB).

⁴¹ This assumption was made if an individual's first name matched and the surname they had given matched that of other members of their household but not the surname on the electoral register.

Appendix B: Logistic analysis

As was the case for previous accuracy and completeness surveys, multivariate analysis was undertaken to explore the demographic characteristics that are associated with higher or lower levels of completeness and accuracy. The purpose of such analysis is to identify which characteristics are associated with a particularly (and statistically significant) high or low level of incidence after taking into account the impact of all of the other associations accounted for in the model, and thereby helping to determine the circumstances which give rise to a particularly high incidence of incomplete or inaccurate entries on the electoral register.

Statistical modelling was undertaken using logistic regression, which is an appropriate regression technique to use where the dependent variable consists of just two possible outcomes:

- For **completeness**, the analysis looks at whether each eligible person at an address is or is not on the register;
- For **accuracy**, the analysis looks at whether an entry on the register corresponds or not to an eligible person currently living at that address.

The difference in the two measures determines the variables that can be included for analysis. Where the starting point for completeness is all eligible adults at the addresses interviewed, both household-level (e.g. tenure, social grade, number of adults in household) and individual demographic variables (e.g. age, gender, ethnicity) are included, given these were collected of all household members.

However, where the starting point for accuracy is the entries on the register for the addresses interviewed then for those appearing on the register but not found to be living at an address, no individual demographic information was (or could reliably have been) collected. Therefore it is only possible to include household-level variables in the accuracy analysis.

Interpreting the findings

The analysis was run for local government and parliamentary registers. The tables in the following sections show the outputs from the analysis. These include columns showing the b coefficient, the significance level and the odds ratio (Exp(B)).

The grey cells show the “reference” category for each variable, that is, the category for which each of the other categories compares to. To ensure consistency with the analysis conducted for the 2014 Great Britain accuracy and completeness study, the analysis employed the same reference categories.

In the case of completeness, the b coefficients for each category show the impact of being in that category as opposed to the reference category on the probability that an eligible person is on the register. In the case of accuracy the b coefficients show the impact on the probability that an entry in the register is that of an eligible person currently living at that address.

- Where the b coefficient is **negative**, that category is **less likely** to be accurate/complete than the reference category. In such cases, the odds ratio (Exp(B)) will be less than one.
- Where the b coefficient is **positive**, that category is **more likely** to be accurate/complete than the reference category. In such cases, the odds ratio (Exp(B)) will be more than one.

To aid the readability of the tables, coefficients that are statistically significantly different from zero at the 5% level of probability are emboldened.

Completeness

The results for the local authority and parliamentary register completeness models are shown in Table B1, the accuracy models are shown in Table B2. The key findings - seen across both the register types - mirrored those from previous research, namely that:

- The older that people were, the more likely they were to appear on the register, with attainees (those aged under 18) much less likely to do so;
- Those who had been resident at an address for less than two years – and especially those who had been there for no more than a year – were less likely to appear on the register;
- Those living in properties rented from a private landlord were less likely to appear on the register than owner occupiers

A number of other significant but less strong trends also emerged, again mirroring those seen in previous research:

- **Highest qualification:** Those whose highest qualification was a GCSE or lower were less likely to appear on the register than those with a degree or higher;
- **Urbanity:** Those living in rural areas were less likely to appear on the register.
- **Gender:** Males were significantly less likely to appear on the local government register in Northern Ireland

Table B1: Logistic regression modelling - COMPLETENESS in Northern Ireland

COMPLETENESS - NORTHERN IRELAND		LOCAL GOVERNMENT			PARLIAMENTARY		
Variables		b coefficient	Significance	Exp(B)	b coefficient	Significance	Exp(B)
Gender	Male	-.317	.031	.728	-.272	.070	.762
	Female						
Age	16-17	-5.594	.000	.004	-5.602	.000	.004
	18-19	-3.023	.000	.049	-3.194	.000	.041
	20-24	-1.876	.000	.153	-1.942	.000	.143
	25-34	-1.232	.000	.292	-1.253	.000	.286
	35-44	-0.745	.014	.475	-0.859	.004	.423
	45-54	-.536	.071	.585	-.560	.058	.571
	55-64	-.207	.515	.813	-.168	.601	.845
	65+						
Duration at address	Up to 1 year	-4.324	.000	.013	-4.169	.000	.015
	More than 1, up to 2	-2.818	.000	.060	-2.857	.000	.057
	More than 2, up to 5	-1.056	.000	.348	-1.191	.000	.304
	More than 5 years						
Tenure	Owner occupier						
	Council rent	-.364	.153	.695	-.325	.207	.722
	Private rent	-.527	.025	.590	-.563	.020	.569
	Rent free/other	-.043	.930	.958	-.141	.772	.869
Disability	No	-.298	.242	0.743	-.303	.232	0.739
	Yes						
Nationality	UK/ROI						
	Commonwealth	-	-	-	-	-	-
	EU	0.087	.826	1.090	n/a	n/a	n/a

COMPLETENESS - NORTHERN IRELAND		LOCAL GOVERNMENT			PARLIAMENTARY		
Variables		b coefficient	Significance	Exp(B)	b coefficient	Significance	Exp(B)
Highest qualification	Degree						
	Higher Degree	-.756	.032	0.470	-.634	.085	0.530
	BTEC	-.420	.173	.657	-.462	.140	.630
	A level/ Higher	-.202	.488	.817	-.303	.308	.739
	GCSE	-.592	.031	.553	-.669	.017	.512
	Other	-.291	.460	.748	-.750	.061	.472
	None	-1.032	.001	.356	-1.168	.000	.311
	Don't know	-.412	.499	.662	-.388	.536	.679
Number of adults in the household	1						
	2	.173	.429	1.189	.006	.978	1.006
	3 to 5	.452	.079	1.572	.359	.177	1.432
	6+	.649	.182	1.913	.534	.277	1.706
Household social grade	AB	-.004	.988	0.996	-.010	.970	0.990
	C1	-.029	.894	0.971	.017	.941	1.017
	C2	-.122	.589	0.885	-.184	.424	0.832
	DE						
Urbanity	Urban						
	Rural	-.538	.000	.584	-.487	.002	.614
	Constant	3.842	.000	46.612	3.368	.001	29.013

Base: Local Government (2,026), Parliamentary (1,974). Nagelkerke R Square values: Local Government (0.473), Parliamentary (0.451).

NOTE: Ethnicity and Commonwealth variables not included for Northern Ireland due to low base sizes.

Table does not show Don't know/Refused/not stated categories (except for Highest qualification where the 'Don't know' category is shown).

Coefficients that are statistically significantly different from zero at the 5% level of probability are emboldened.

Accuracy

The results for the local authority and parliamentary register accuracy models are shown in the tables below. Again, the key findings - seen across both the register types - mirrored those from previous research:

- Inaccurate entries were more likely to be found amongst privately rented households.
- Inaccurate entries were less likely to be found at households with multiple adults resident than at single adult households

Whilst the modelling undertaken for the 2012 'Continuous electoral registration in Northern Ireland' study and other previous studies had found some consistent patterns by household social grade - with inaccurate entries more likely to be found in DE households - this was not found to be the case again.

Table B1: Logistic regression modelling - ACCURACY in Northern Ireland

ACCURACY - NORTHERN IRELAND		LOCAL GOVERNMENT			PARLIAMENTARY		
Variables		b coefficient	Significance	Exp(B)	b coefficient	Significance	Exp(B)
Tenure	Owner occupier						
	Council rent	-.019	.944	.982	-.030	.910	.970
	Private rent	-.933	.000	.393	-1.095	.000	.334
	Rent free/other	-.650	.143	.522	-.666	.133	.514
Number of adults in the household	1						
	2	.360	.070	1.434	.299	.136	1.348
	3 to 5	.669	.003	1.952	.621	.005	1.861
	6+	1.953	.027	7.049	1.910	.031	6.754
Household social grade	AB	.278	.237	1.320	.297	.206	1.345
	C1	.348	.102	1.417	.367	.087	1.443
	C2	-.044	.842	.957	-.067	.761	.935
	DE						
Urbanity	Urban						
	Rural	-.015	.926	.985	-.007	.965	.993
	Constant	1.689	.000	5.412	1.721	.000	5.591

Base: Local Government (1,841), Parliamentary (1,819). Nagelkerke R Square values: Local Government (0.058), Parliamentary (0.065).

NOTE: Table does not show 'not stated' categories. Coefficients that are statistically significantly different from zero at the 5% level of probability are emboldened.

Appendix C: Technical appendix

Methodology

The approach taken to delivering this research builds on our previous research studies on the electoral registers: *'Electoral registration in Northern Ireland: accuracy and comprehensiveness'* (published in December 2007), *'The completeness and accuracy of electoral registers in Great Britain'* (published in March 2010), *'Great Britain's electoral registers 2011'* (published in December 2011), *'Continuous electoral registration in Northern Ireland'* (November 2012) and *'The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain'* (published in July 2014). The 2011 study was the first one that used a nationally representative sample to provide an overall estimate of the accuracy and completeness of the registers across Great Britain.

In Northern Ireland, the quality of registers was last measured in 2012 and the findings prompted interventions to improve accuracy and completeness. This study permits an exploration of how these interventions have impacted on register quality.

The research presented in this report was conducted together with GfK.

The findings presented are the result of a large scale house-to-house survey carried out by GfK that across the United Kingdom⁴² between January and April 2016.

In Northern Ireland 1,015 households were interviewed between the 6 January and the 24 April 2016 (994 were interviewed face to face and 21 via a postal questionnaire). In Northern Ireland interviewers from Millward Brown conducted the survey on behalf of GfK.

Sampling

The electoral register in Northern Ireland is collected centrally rather than at local authority level, meaning that there was no need to limit the number of local authorities selected in the sample given the full register would be available to the Commission and GfK. As with the sample for Great Britain, a multi-stage probability sample was drawn using OAs as the primary sampling units and with the probability of selection proportional to population size.

All OAs in Northern Ireland were stratified by local authority district, then population density and sorted by Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) quintile. Fifty OAs were selected at random with probability proportional to number of individuals aged 17+ resident there.

⁴² The findings for the study in Great Britain are presented in a separate report: http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0005/213377/The-December-2015-electoral-registers-in-Great-Britain-REPORT.pdf

Within each selected OA, 30 addresses were selected at random from the Postcode Address File in order to achieve an average of 20 interviews per OA (these were split into two interviewing points of 15 addresses each when actually issued to interviews). A total of 1,500 addresses were selected.

Addresses removed during fieldwork

Due to initially high response rates, the decision was taken to remove a number of addresses from the sample to ensure that the target number of interviews was not significantly exceeded. A total of 75 addresses were completely removed, resulting in 1,425 'issued' addresses in Northern Ireland.

Fieldwork

Upon commencement of fieldwork, interviewers sent out a letter addressed to 'The householder'. This explained the purpose of the study, why they had been chosen and who would be calling at the household. The letter was signed by the Electoral Commission's Head of Office for Northern Ireland. Contact details - a Freephone number and an email address managed by GfK - were provided if more information was required or to allow households to opt-out of the research.

Interviewers were required to make six or more calls to each sampled address before an address could be viewed as unproductive, with the call pattern focused on varying the times/days of the calls. Interviewers were provided with a doorstep screener to introduce the survey and to check the household's eligibility. Given they would not have been able to register in time to be on the electoral registers used for the survey, households were deemed to be ineligible if the whole household (aged 16+) had moved to the address on or after 1st December 2015.

Interviews could be conducted with any household member aged 16+. Interviews were conducted using computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI). The CAPI questionnaire made use of sample information from the electoral register (where applicable), with interviewers required to collect the full names and additional demographic information for each household member aged 16 and over and then match and compare this to the information on the electoral register. This included coding where a discrepancy existed between a name collected during the interview and the name on the register (such as where a name was misspelled). Thus it allowed interviewers to check with respondents when the information collected during the survey did not match that held on the registers.

Survey response

A total of **1,015 households** in Northern Ireland were interviewed: 994 were interviewed face-to-face with a further 21 interviews conducted using a postal questionnaire.

A detailed breakdown of response is provided in Table C1 below. This relates to the main face-to-face fieldwork (i.e. excluding the postal exercise), although response rates including the postal exercise are also shown in the final rows.

Table C1: Face-to-face survey response - detailed breakdown of outcome codes.

Address outcome	Northern Ireland	
	N	%
TOTAL ISSUED	1425	-
Deadwood	88	6.2%
Property vacant	70	4.9%
Property derelict/demolished	9	0.6%
Non-residential/ institution	9	0.6%
Ineligibles	69	4.8%
Moved in on/after 1st December - ineligible to complete	31	2.2%
Holiday home	10	0.7%
Address inaccessible	12	0.8%
Property not found	13	0.9%
Other property ineligible	3	0.2%
Non Contacts	116	8.1%
Occupied, no contact at address after 6+ calls	59	4.1%
Some contact with suitable respondent but no interview after 6+ calls	16	1.1%
No contact with suitable respondent after 6+ calls	29	2.0%
Unsure if occupied, no contact at address after 6+ calls	12	0.8%
Refusals	147	10.3%
Head Office refusal (refusal received via survey Freephone/email)	12	0.8%
Suitable respondent refused	133	9.3%
Someone else refused on behalf of a suitable respondent	1	0.1%
Entry to block/scheme refused by warden etc	1	0.1%
Broken appointment - no re-contact	0	0.0%
Respondent requested for responses to be deleted after interview	0	0.0%
Other	10	0.7%
Suitable respondent too ill/frail to participate	3	0.2%
Suitable respondent away during fieldwork	2	0.1%
Suitable respondent does not speak English	0	0.0%
Other	6	0.4%

CAPI Interview	994	69.8%
Successful interview with suitable respondent	994	69.8%
Adjusted response rate*	78.5%	
<i>Postal completes</i>	21	
<i>Total completes</i>	1015	
<i>Unadjusted response rate including postal completes</i>	71.2%	
<i>Adjusted response rate including postal completes*</i>	80.1%	

* The adjusted response rate is calculated by dividing the number of completed interviews by all issued addresses excluding those classified as deadwood and ineligible

Postal survey

As was the case in previous surveys, it was again decided to follow up a number of unproductive addresses with a postal questionnaire to further boost response. It was necessary to finalise all fieldwork by the end of April 2016 (ahead of Assembly elections on 5 May 2016) and therefore the postal survey was conducted towards the end of the main face-to-face fieldwork period, rather than after the main fieldwork was complete.

Given the need to conduct the postal survey during fieldwork, the selection of addresses for inclusion in the exercise was based on the availability of addresses that had been finalised with an unproductive outcome.

It was decided that addresses that had refused to participate in the initial face-to-face survey and those that had been finalised as a 'non-contact' should be included. The latter included those where no contact had been made as well as those where some had been made (including where an appointment to interview had been broken).

However, care was taken to ensure that any addresses where a household member had refused or were too ill to participate were reviewed prior to inclusion to ensure their suitability (e.g. that we were not re-contacting an address where further contact would be inappropriate or likely to lead to complaints). Additionally, addresses where a household member had called the survey helpline or emailed the survey inbox to ask not to take part in the face-to-face survey were not included in the postal survey.

Of the 197 postal questionnaires issued in Northern Ireland 21 were returned.

Weighting of the data and confidence intervals

As usual with a population survey of this nature, to ensure that the data collected represented the population of Northern Ireland as a whole, they are weighted.

The sample is a probability sample of households in which all household members are enumerated. It is thus, in effect, a clustered probability sample of individuals. As we wished to make inferences about the incidence of phenomena about individuals (completeness) and register entries (accuracy – which itself is defined as individuals

currently on the register), the dataset in reality becomes a close approximation of individuals currently resident at sampled addresses rather than households.

Two levels of weights were applied (targets shown in Table C2):

- **Household-level weights** were applied initially to all households interviewed covering the number of adults in the household, tenure and urbanity. Derelict/vacant properties were also included in the household-level weighting (although where no information existed in relation to number of adults or tenure for these properties they received a weight of 1.00).
- **Individual-level weights** were then applied to all adults aged 16+ within these households for age and gender.

Table C2: Weighting targets.

Weighting application	Variable		Northern Ireland
Household-level weights	Number of adults in household ⁴³	1	34.34%
		2	43.35%
		3+	22.31%
	Tenure ⁴⁴	Own Outright	32.11%
		Mortgaged	35.39%
		Council Rent	14.91%
		Private Rent	15.07%
		Rent Free/other	2.51%
Urbanity ⁴⁵	Urban ⁴⁶	59.36%	
	Rural	40.64%	
Individual-level weights	Gender ⁴⁷	Female	51.53%
		Male	48.47%
	Age ⁴⁸	16-17	3.39%
		18-19	3.32%
		20-24	8.34%
		25-34	17.01%
		35-44	16.55%
		45-54	17.80%
		55-64	13.96%
65+		19.63%	

⁴³ Source: Census 2011.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Source: Official definitions based on May 2014 residential counts.

⁴⁶ Urban properties were defined as 'settlements with more than 10,000 resident population' which matches the classification used in England and Wales

(<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/2011-rural-urban-classification>). Whilst Scotland and Northern Ireland use their own classifications which include different thresholds, it was decided to use a standard threshold across all countries for the purpose of analysis and weighting.

⁴⁷ Source: ONS Mid Year Population Estimates 2014.

⁴⁸ Source: ONS Mid Year Population Estimates 2014

Given that the population data used to weight the data includes those that are ineligible to be registered to vote, the weighting was therefore applied to all adults aged 16+ regardless of whether or not they were actually eligible for inclusion in the completeness analysis, i.e. based on their age, citizenship and when they moved to their current address, despite the fact that the final analysis excluded such respondents. The following tables summarise the criteria used for determining which cases were included in the final analysis

Table C3: Completeness filters - Local Government and Parliamentary registers

COMPLETENESS: All household members <u>meeting</u> the following criteria:		
	Local Government	Parliamentary
Citizenship	UK/Rol, Commonwealth or EU	UK/Rol or Commonwealth
Age	18+ or turns 18 during the lifetime of the register, i.e. on or before 30th November 2016	
Residency	Must have moved into property prior to 1st December 2015 or if moved from outside of NI, before 1st September 2015)	

Table C4: Accuracy filters - Local Government and Parliamentary registers.

ACCURACY: All register entries from households interviewed, plus deadwood (derelict/vacant) properties, <u>excluding</u> :		
	Local Government	Parliamentary
Citizenship	No exclusions	EU citizens (those with a G or K marker on the register)
Age	No exclusions	

Social Grade Definitions

Social Grade classification is a commonly used measure in market research which groups people into six categories: A, B, C1, C2, D and E. Social Grade is recorded about survey respondents by interviewers using a series of questions and the classification assigns every household to a grade, based upon the occupation and employment status of the Chief Income Earner.

A summary of the occupation groups included in each category is shown below.

Table C5: Social grade definitions.

Grade	Occupation groups
A	Professional people, very senior managers in business or commerce or top-level civil servants.

B	Middle management executives in large organisations, with appropriate qualifications. Principal officers in local government and civil service. Top management or owners of small business concerns, educational and service establishments.
C1	Junior management, owners of small establishments, and all others in non-manual positions. Jobs in this group have very varied responsibilities and educational requirements.
C2	All skilled manual workers, and those manual workers with responsibility for other people.
D	All semi-skilled and un-skilled manual workers, apprentices and trainees to skilled workers.
E	All those entirely dependent on the state long-term, through sickness, unemployment, old age or other reasons. Those unemployed for a period exceeding six months. Casual workers and those without a regular income.

Confidence intervals

Surveys are conducted because it is much more practical and cost effective than interviewing an entire population. However, we need to know how close our survey estimates are to the ‘true’ figures if we had interviewed the entire population. Confidence intervals are a statistical device which allows us, using our survey results, to estimate the variation that might be anticipated because a sample rather than an entire population was interviewed. This is essentially a range where the true (overall population) value is likely to sit. In general, the larger the sample, the more sure we can be of the accuracy of our survey estimates, though subject to diminishing returns at larger sample sizes. In other words, if we were to conduct the same survey again we would be more likely to get a similar result if we had a large sample than a smaller sample.

Table C6 indicates the confidence intervals associated with the completeness and accuracy findings for this survey for Northern Ireland calculated based on the effective sample size⁴⁹). When calculating confidence intervals, we typically use a 95% confidence interval. This means that we can be 95% sure that the survey estimate reflects the true figure for the entire population (other than any possible variation introduced by response bias or measurement error).

The table shows that, for example, for the local government completeness figure of 71% in Northern Ireland, the confidence interval would be up to ± 1.8 ppts. This means that we could be 95% sure that the true local government completeness figure in the (overall) population of Northern Ireland would be between 69.2% and 72.8%. The confidence intervals associated with the completeness and accuracy

⁴⁹ The effective sample size describes the effect of the weighting on the accuracy of survey estimates. It is dependent upon the size of weights applied to respondents: the more the weights deviate from 1, the smaller the effective sample size.

findings for each variable analysed in this study can be found below. Confidence intervals are not shown for any base sizes less than 30 (these are shown as “-“ in the tables).

Table C6: Completeness and Accuracy Confidence Intervals - Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland		Completeness		Accuracy	
		Local Govt Register	Parliamentary Register	Local Govt Register	Parliamentary Register
		+/-%	+/-%	+/-%	+/-%
Total		1.8	1.8	1.6	1.6
Gender	Male	2.7	2.7	0.9	0.9
	Female	2.4	2.4	0.7	0.7
Age	16-17	-	-	-	-
	18-19	11.7	12.0	11.6	11.9
	20-24	7.0	7.1	4.2	4.3
	25-34	5.7	5.8	2.2	2.3
	35-44	4.5	4.6	2.1	2.2
	45-54	3.6	3.6	1.3	1.3
	55-64	3.3	3.2	1.7	1.7
	65+	2.6	2.6	1.1	1.1
	NET: 18+	1.8	1.8	0.5	0.5
Tenure	Own outright	1.7	1.7	1.9	1.9
	Mortgaged/ shared own	2.9	3.0	2.3	2.3
	Council rent	11.5	11.5	11.1	11.1
	Housing Association rent	7.0	7.1	5.0	5.1
	NET: Social renters	6.1	6.1	4.9	5.0
	Private rent	7.0	7.9	7.5	8.3
	Rent free/other	-	-	-	-
Social grade	AB	3.3	3.3	2.6	2.6
	C1	3.6	3.6	2.7	2.8
	C2	4.5	4.6	3.7	3.8
	DE	3.3	3.3	2.9	2.9

Northern Ireland		Completeness		Accuracy	
		Local Govt Register	Parliamentary Register	Local Govt Register	Parliamentary Register
		+/-%	+/-%	+/-%	+/-%
Adults in HH	1	5.0	4.9	4.5	4.5
	2	2.6	2.7	2.2	2.2
	3 to 5	3.0	3.0	2.2	2.3
	6+	7.8	7.8	7.7	7.7
Duration at address	Up to 1 year	6.3	7.6	-	-
	More than 1, up to 2 years	9.3	9.6	8.1	8.5
	More than 2, up to 5 years	5.9	6.3	3.5	3.9
	More than 5, up to 10 years	4.1	4.2	1.9	1.9
	More than 10, up to 16 years	3.2	3.2	1.4	1.4
	Over 16 years	1.9	1.9	0.7	0.7
Nationality	UK + ROI	1.8	1.8	0.5	0.5
	Non-UK/ROI	13.1	-	-	-
	EU	13.5	-	-	-
	Commonwealth	-	-	-	-
Urbanity	Urban	2.5	2.5	2.2	2.2
	Rural	2.6	2.6	2.2	2.2
Highest qualification	Higher degree	7.7	7.4	4.1	4.1
	Degree	3.9	3.8	1.9	2.0
	BTEC	5.9	5.9	2.5	2.6
	A level/ Higher	5.1	5.2	2.8	2.8
	GCSE	4.1	4.1	1.4	1.5
	Other	5.8	5.5	3.7	3.8
	None	3.8	3.6	1.2	1.2

Northern Ireland		Completeness		Accuracy	
		Local Govt Register	Parliamentary Register	Local Govt Register	Parliamentary Register
		+/-%	+/-%	+/-%	+/-%
Month moved in (1)	Before 1st July 2015	14.7	-	-	-
	After 1st July 2015	1.4	1.7	-	-
Month moved in (2)	Before 1st May 2015	-	-	-	-
	After 1st May 2015	6.8	8.1	-	-
Month moved in (in 2015)	15-Jan	-	-	-	-
	15-Feb	-	-	-	-
	15-Mar	-	-	-	-
	15-Apr	-	-	-	-
	15-May	-	-	-	-
	15-Jun	-	-	-	-
	15-Jul	-	-	-	-
	15-Aug	-	-	-	-
	15-Sep	-	-	-	-
	15-Oct	-	-	-	-
	15-Nov	-	-	-	-
	15-Dec	-	-	-	-
Ethnicity	White	1.8	1.8	0.5	0.5
	Asian	-	-	-	-
	Black	-	-	-	-
	Mixed	-	-	-	-
	Other	-	-	-	-
Disability	Yes - mental condition	12.5	12.5	9.5	9.5
	Yes - physical condition	3.9	3.9	2.1	2.1
	Yes - disability	9.4	9.4	7.5	7.5

Northern Ireland		Completeness		Accuracy	
		Local Govt Register	Parliamentary Register	Local Govt Register	Parliamentary Register
		+/-%	+/-%	+/-%	+/-%
	Yes - other	-	-	-	-
	NET: Yes	3.7	3.7	1.5	1.5
	None	2.0	2.0	0.6	0.6
Relationship with form filler	Form filler (usually/ sometimes)	2.6	2.5	0.8	0.8
	Partner/ spouse	3.2	3.2	1.2	1.3
	Son/ daughter	5.0	5.0	2.3	2.3
	Parent	11.6	12.2	10.0	10.5
	Another family member	16.3	-	-	-
	Lodger/ housemate/ other person	-	-	-	-
	Someone outside household/ no-one fills in official forms	12.2	12.1	8.8	8.8
	Registered in the UK	Yes	2.1	2.2	0.8
	No	2.9	1.8	-	-
	Don't know	12.7	12.5	-	-
Registered at address	Yes	1.8	1.9	0.8	0.8
	No	2.2	1.3	-	-
	Don't know	10.7	10.9	-	-
Attitudes towards electoral registration	It's not really worth registering at all	13.4	13.4	10.8	10.8

Northern Ireland		Completeness		Accuracy	
		Local Govt Register	Parliamentary Register	Local Govt Register	Parliamentary Register
		+/-%	+/-%	+/-%	+/-%
	It's only worth registering to vote in order to secure a better credit reference (for taking out mortgages, credit cards etc)	16.1	16.4	-	-
	People should only register to vote if they care who wins an election	9.1	9.2	5.4	5.4
	It's everyone's duty to register to vote	2.4	2.4	0.8	0.8
Attitudes towards voting	It's not really worth voting	9.9	9.9	6.1	6.1
	People should only vote if they care who wins	6.9	6.9	3.0	3.1
	It's everyone's duty to vote	2.6	2.6	0.8	0.8
Whether voted in UK Parliamentary Election (May 2015)	Yes	2.3	2.3	0.8	0.8
	No - didn't vote	5.6	5.7	2.8	2.9
	No - was not eligible	-	-	-	-
Political views	Republican	15.5	-	-	-
	Nationalist	4.7	4.5	3.5	3.5
	Unionist	4.1	4.1	1.5	1.5
	Loyalist	-	-	-	-
	Other	9.6	8.5	7.4	7.4
	None	5.3	5.4	2.2	2.3