

May 2008



Baseline performance information – electoral registration in Great Britain

Initial analysis

Translations and other formats

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1 Introduction

1.1 The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by the UK Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA). Our aim is integrity and public confidence in the UK's democratic process through the regulation of party and election finance and setting standards for well-run elections. Our current corporate plan sets our strategic direction over the five years from April 2007. The aims and objectives of the plan are underpinned by two key priorities – demonstrating and enhancing our effectiveness as the regulator of party and election finance and leading the drive for increasingly high standards of electoral administration, including electoral registration. Our objectives for the period 2007–8 to 2011–12 are:

- integrity and transparency of party and election finance
- complete and accurate electoral registers supported by a well-run electoral registration process
- well-run elections and referendums which produce results that are accepted
- public understanding of the way our democracy works
- fair boundary arrangements for elections

Performance standards for electoral administration

1.2 The Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA) amended PERA to give us powers to set standards of performance for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), Returning Officers (ROs) and Referendum Counting Officers (RCOs) in Great Britain.¹ Under these provisions, we may:

- determine and publish standards of performance for relevant electoral officers in Great Britain (EROs, ROs and RCOs)
- direct relevant officers to provide the Commission with reports regarding their performance against the published standards
- publish its assessment of the level of performance by relevant officers against the published standards

1.3 Since the provisions outlined in the EAA came into force in September 2006, we have undertaken a significant amount of informal consultation and developmental work with external stakeholders, including input from the Electoral Leadership Forum (ELF) and a performance standards stakeholder advisory panel. A formal consultation exercise asked for views on a number of possible performance indicators for electoral registration from December 2006 to the end of January 2007. A revised set of indicators were then tested with more than 40 local authority electoral services teams during summer 2007 to ensure that the information requested in the indicators was relevant, easily obtainable and comparable across authorities.

¹ Sections 9A and 9B, PERA, as amended by Section 67, EAA. See Appendix A for the full legislative text. The Commission's powers to set and monitor performance standards do not extend to Northern Ireland or to local government elections in Scotland.

Request for information from Electoral Registration Officers

1.4 On 10 September 2007 we issued circular [EC33/2007](#), 'Electoral registration performance indicators and financial information survey', which outlined eight initial performance information collection areas for EROs. This included detailed guidance notes and templates for the collection and return of the information. EROs were asked to provide information in relation to four quantitative and four qualitative performance areas.

1.5 This data was intended to provide a baseline picture of current performance and to support the development of the performance standards themselves. The circular emphasised that the information we requested would not be used for the assessment of performance of individual EROs, but would provide firm evidence to inform the development of the final performance standards.

1.6 Prior to this exercise, there had not been any wide-scale comprehensive attempt to collect performance information from EROs across Great Britain. We considered that it was essential to have this information available before attempting to define or set standards of performance for EROs. To support our statutory role in keeping under review the law relating to electoral registration, it is likely that we will want to repeat this survey in future years, although we may not need to collect as many different items of data.

1.7 The deadline for submission of the performance information was 18 January 2008, seven weeks after the conclusion of the annual canvass and publication of new electoral registers in the first week of December. We received returns from 403 out of 407 EROs, ensuring that the information used to inform the performance standards is as robust and comprehensive as possible.

Purpose of this paper

1.8 The information we have collected from EROs is available to download from our website, www.electoralcommission.org.uk. The purpose of this paper is to communicate the headline findings from the data. We intend to undertake more detailed follow-up analysis on specific issues as we continue the development of performance standards.

1.9 On 26 March 2008 we also published a consultation paper on draft performance standards for EROs in Great Britain (available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/your-say/ecconsultations.cfm). The performance standards are intended to provide confidence that the electoral registration process is well run and will, in the long term, enable us to identify where processes and risks are not being managed effectively, and to provide targeted support where appropriate.

Use of this information

1.10 The information available on our website has been presented in alphabetical order by local authority name for ease of reference. However, we are aware that once published, the data may be manipulated in a variety of different ways. The aim of this exercise has never been to draw firm conclusions about the performance of EROs, but to provide detailed contextual information to enable us to set accurate and reflective performance standards and provide a baseline to measure and support improved performance in the longer term.

1.11 For this reason, we wish to make it clear our strong view that it would not be appropriate to use the data to construct 'league tables' of performance. We did not collect this information in order to assess performance, and we do not believe that it gives an indication of the best or worst 'performers'.

1.12 Once we have concluded our consultation on draft performance standards, we aim to publish the final standards for EROs by September 2008. We will then use our powers under Section 9B of PPERA to request reports of performance against those standards from EROs. We aim to publish our first assessment of performance against the standards in spring 2009.

2 Data returns

2.1 We asked all EROs to submit their completed data returns to their regional office by 18 January 2008. Table 1 below gives a breakdown of the responses by European Parliamentary region.

Table 1: Number of returns by region

Region	Returns	Out of	Percentage
East Midlands	39	40	97
Eastern	48	48	100
London	33	33	100
North East	23	23	100
North West	43	43	100
Scotland	32	32	100
South East	66	67	99
South West	44	44	100
Wales	21	22	95
West Midlands	33	34	97
Yorkshire & the Humber	21	21	100
Total	403	407	99

2.2 We received 403 out of 407 returns, which represents an overall response rate of 99%. We did not receive responses from the four EROs appointed by Amber Valley Borough Council in Derbyshire, Monmouthshire County Council in Wales, Runneymede Borough Council in Surrey and Stratford-on-Avon District Council in Warwickshire.

2.3 Before the data collection exercise started, some practitioners and other bodies raised concerns about the additional burden that the data collection would have on EROs. Having concluded this first exercise, we are satisfied that it did not represent a significant or undue administrative burden. EROs have told us that it took between one and a half hours to half a day to collate this data and complete the spreadsheet, depending in part on the type of electoral management software used.

2.4 Considering that this exercise was a voluntary return of data, and taking into account the concerns about additional administrative burden outlined above, the overall number of returns has exceeded our expectations. Due to the high volume of returns, we have been able to analyse as complete and accurate a set of performance data for electoral registration as possible. In turn this will provide a baseline picture of electoral registration trends against which we can monitor year-on-year progress, as outlined in paragraph 4.27.

2.5 Table 2 below shows the rate of return by local authority type. For the purposes of this paper, the City of London is included within the classification of London boroughs and the Isle of Wight is included within the grouping of English unitary authorities.

Table 2: Number of returns from EROs by type of local authority

Type of authority	Returns	Out of	Percentage
English unitary authorities	46	46	100
London boroughs	33	33	100
English metropolitan districts	36	36	100
Scottish unitary authorities	32	32	100
English district councils	235	238	99
Welsh unitary authorities	21	22	95
Total	403	407	99

3 Quality of data

3.1 One of our main concerns before the data collection exercise began was whether the data would be of sufficient quality to enable us to conduct a meaningful analysis, and consequently help us to set realistic performance standards. The information we received was sufficient to conduct an initial analysis of the data and the high response rate meant that we could conduct our analysis with a near complete set of returns. However, our analysis has highlighted some overarching concerns with the quality and accuracy of the information supplied by the Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and this has, to some extent, affected our analysis.

3.2 Some EROs have expressed concerns to us about the accuracy of the summary data provided by their election management software systems, and this is an issue we will be exploring further with the software suppliers themselves. In particular, these concerns related to the total figures for the annual canvass response and the numbers of electors carried forward from the September 2007 electoral register.

3.3 We reviewed returns for these and other indicators to identify any potentially anomalous data, and asked the relevant EROs to recalculate and confirm their figures. In cases where the ERO has provided us with an alternative response the figures have been corrected. Where we have not received further clarification from the ERO, we have included the original figure in our analysis, except in a small number of cases identified in the text of this report. We have also noted in our analysis where a small number of figures may have had a significant effect on the overall analysis.

3.4 As much of our electoral registration research has concluded, concerns remain about the reliability of any estimate of the overall registration rate obtained by comparing the total number of electors with population estimates. The most fundamental concerns include:

- current population estimates do not take account of eligibility status
- the most recent mid-year estimates available from Office for National Statistics/General Register Office for Scotland are now effectively 18 months old, and do not therefore take account of subsequent population changes
- overall registration totals may include an unquantifiable element of duplicate or redundant entries

3.5 Some EROs did not provide a response to each question on the survey. This was particularly the case in respect of the four quantitative indicators and the free text boxes within the four qualitative indicators. While a full and complete return for every ERO would be preferable, we do not think that the level of non-completion is sufficient to invalidate any findings. Nevertheless, we will undertake follow-up analysis and work to identify why some EROs were not able to provide this key management information.

4 Quantitative information

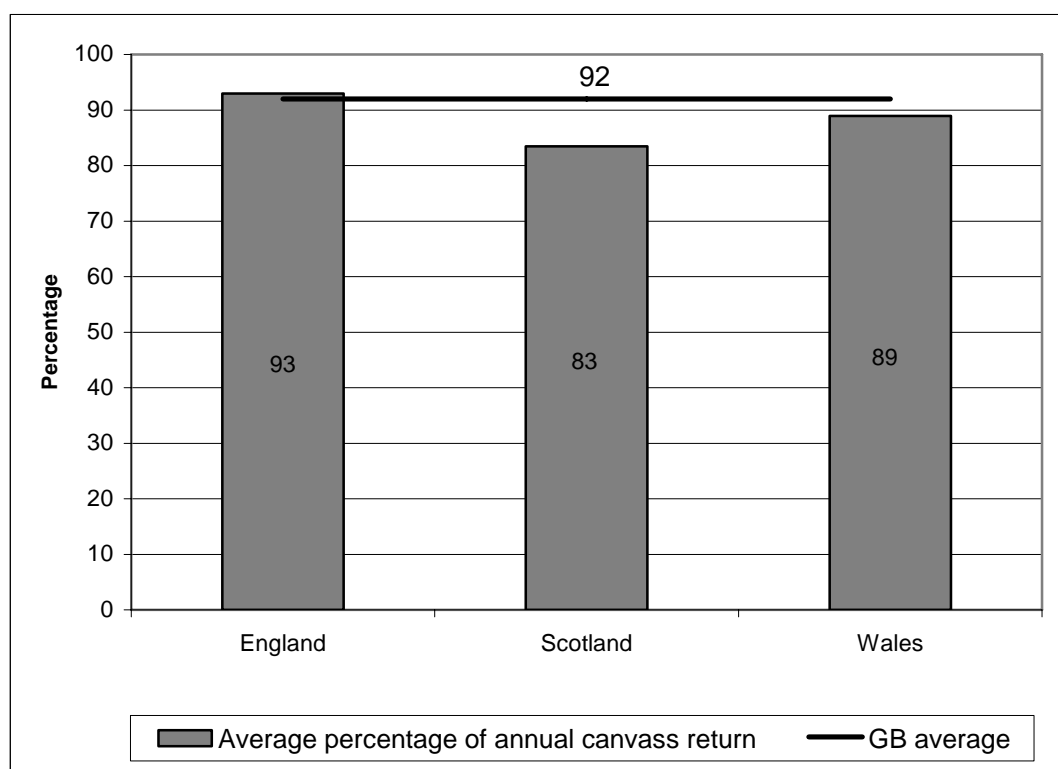
4.1 We asked Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to provide information on four sets of quantitative and four sets of qualitative data. This section deals with the quantitative data, a breakdown of which is shown below. The four quantitative measures were:

- success of the annual canvass
- carry forward of elector records
- changes to the electoral register
- completeness of the electoral register

Indicator 1 – Success of the annual canvass

4.2 This indicator examines the extent of householder participation in the annual canvass. It helps identify the success of the annual canvass in achieving returns from householders. EROs were asked to give information on the total number of households sent an annual canvass form and the total number that were returned. Chart 1 below shows the average canvass return rate for EROs from England, Scotland and Wales as a percentage.

Chart 1: Average annual canvass return rate by country

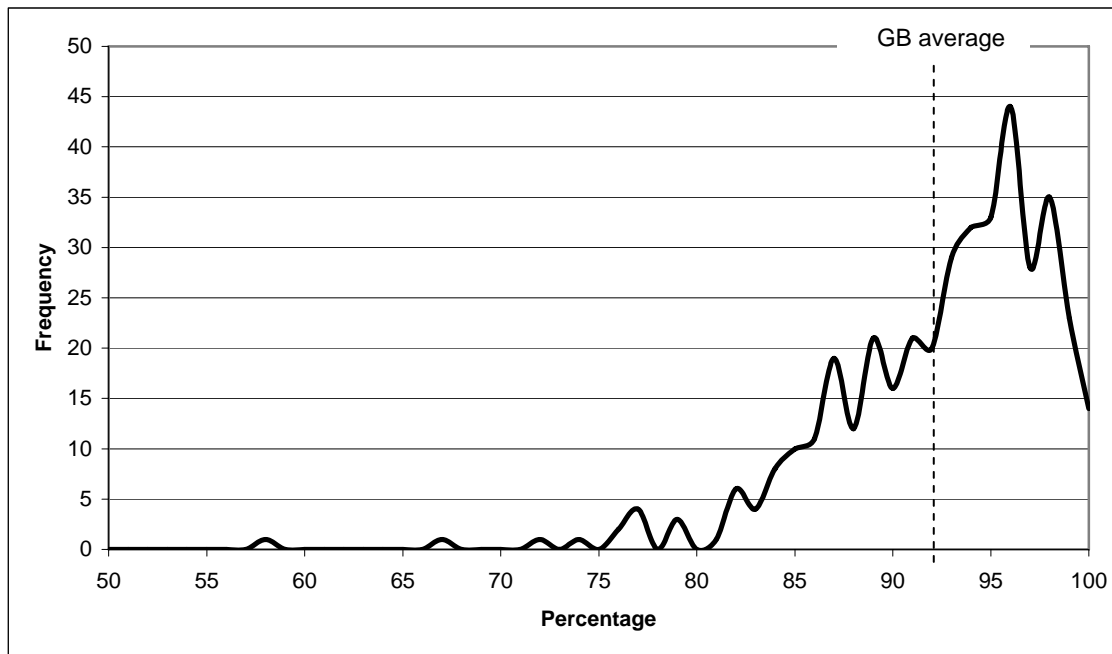


4.3 The return rates for EROs from England and Wales are relatively close to the average – 93% and 89% respectively. However the chart shows a significantly lower return rate for EROs in Scotland (83%). We understand that this can be explained by a difference in the method used to calculate the

annual canvass return rate by EROs in Scotland. They did not include households where the details were confirmed through council tax or other records but only where the owner or occupier of the household replied. This was due to a different interpretation of the term 'householder participation' in the accompanying guidance. This is an area that we will seek to clarify in the future.

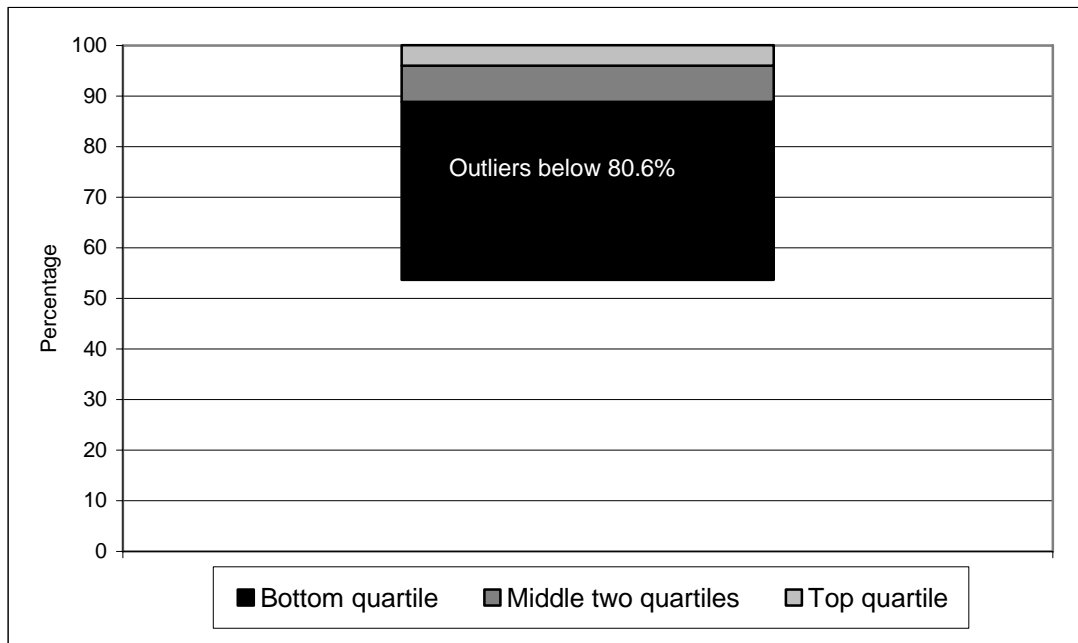
4.4 In a number of areas, EROs reported figures of fewer than 100 for the total canvass return, despite having sent out many thousands of canvass forms. When completing the data return template, the calculated percentage return rate was entered rather than the actual number of returns received. Although we have been able to confirm the correct figures, which are available in the accompanying data table, it was not possible to include these specific figures in this analysis.

Chart 2: Annual canvass return rate – frequency distribution



4.5 The Chart 2 above shows the distribution of all the results relative to the average annual canvass return rate for EROs in Great Britain.

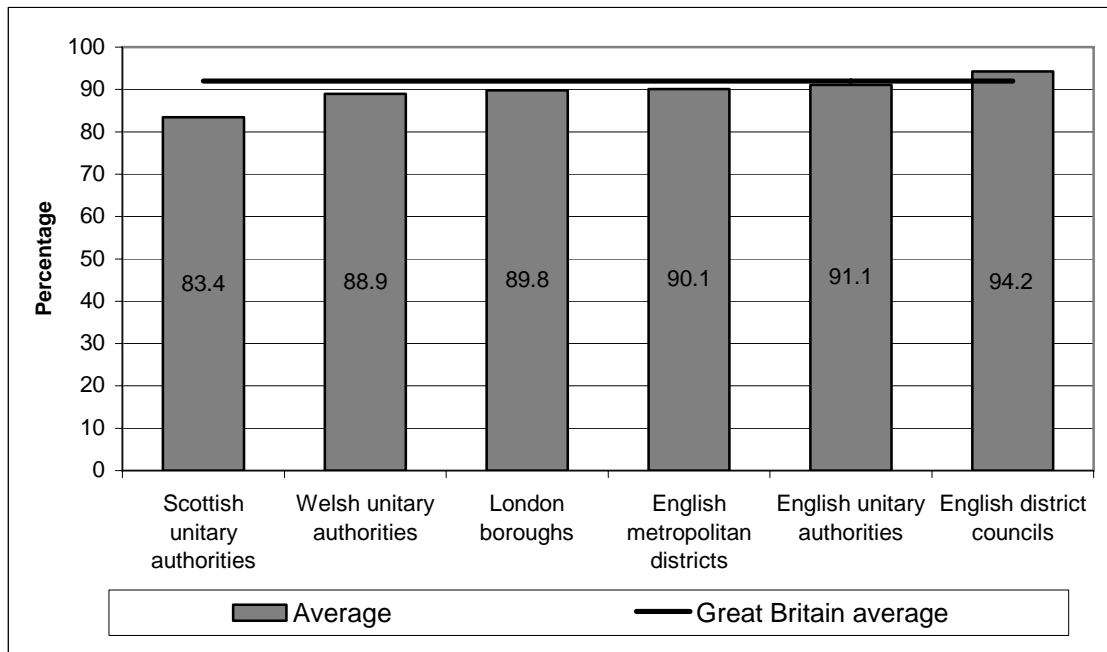
Chart 3: Annual canvass return rate – quartiles



4.6 Chart 3 above shows the results by quartile. If values defined as outliers (two standard deviations from the mean) are ignored, the remaining results all show a return rate of at least 80%. In total we received responses from 13 EROs that their annual canvass response rate was below 80% and although these are considered outliers by the definition described above, they have been included in the analysis.

4.7 The range in Chart 3 is a little over 45%, which is a significantly large range. This was the result of a significantly low return rate of 57% provided by one ERO. As illustrated in Charts 2 and 3, the majority of EROs provided figures close to the Great Britain average of 92%. Three-quarters of all EROs – the top and middle two quartiles – reported canvass return rates of more than 88%.

Chart 4: Annual canvass returns by type of authority

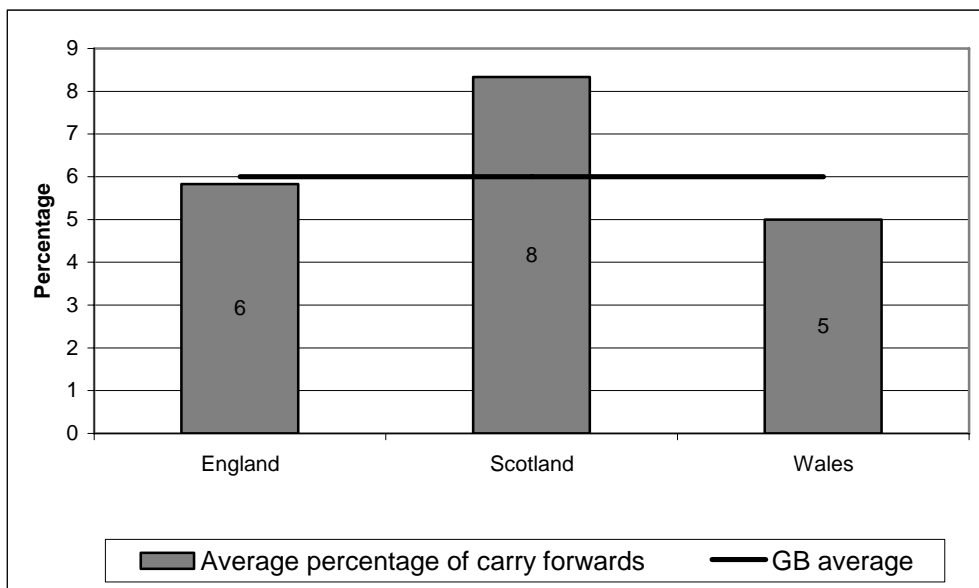


4.8 Chart 4 above shows the breakdown of annual canvass returns by type of local authority. The chart shows that the return rate for all the local authority types are close to the Great Britain average, apart from in the Scottish unitary authorities. Our understanding of the possible reasons for this variance is explained above.

Indicator 2 – Carry forward of elector records

4.9 In the event that the annual canvass form is not returned or for any other reason insufficient information is obtained as to residence, the ERO may retain a person's entry in the register of electors 'for the period expiring with the publication of a revised version of the register'. This is often referred to as a 'carry forward' of an elector's details. This indicator measured the number of entries on the December 2007 register that had been carried forward from the September 2007 register.

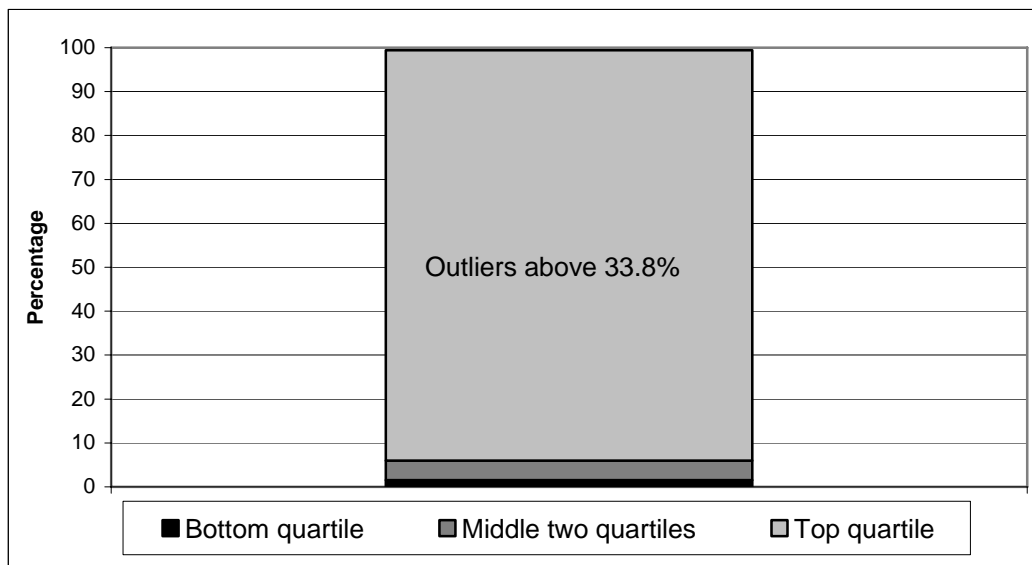
Chart 5: Percentage of elector records carried forward by country



4.10 Chart 5 above shows the number of electors' entries that were carried forward as a percentage of the number of electors on the local government register at 1 December 2007. The Great Britain average of 6% is also shown. On average, the proportion of records carried forward by EROs for Scottish authorities (8.3%) was higher than the average for Great Britain as a whole. The proportion of records carried forward were smaller in England and Wales² (averages per authority of 5.8% and 5.1% respectively). There were three returns from EROs in Scotland above 15% that pushed Scotland's average higher than the Great Britain authority average.

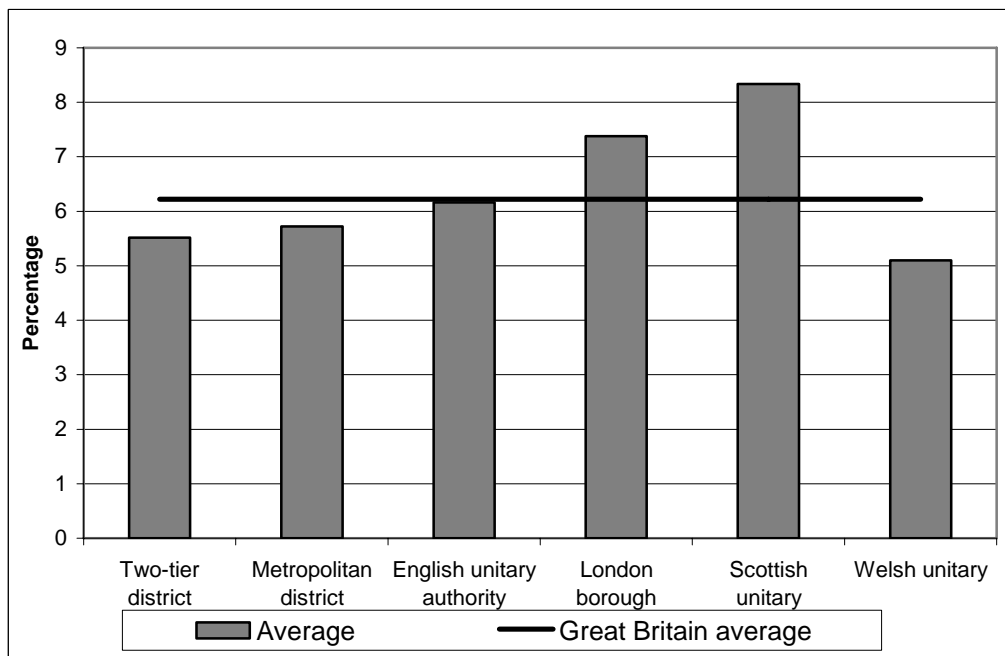
² The average for Wales does not include one outlier of 90.8% which if included increases the average from 5.1% to 9.4% and gives an inaccurate reflection of the number of carry forwards in Wales. This figure was removed from this analysis as it was deemed to be an erroneous figure.

Chart 6: Percentage of elector records carried forward – quartiles



4.11 Chart 6 above illustrates that the majority of the results are clustered below 4.8% while the top quartile has a range of 4.4% to 93.4%, although any result above 33.8% is considered to be an outlying value. Nine out of 403 responses to this question were above 33.8%, and these figures have heavily skewed the top quartile.

Chart 7: Percentage of elector records carried forward by authority type

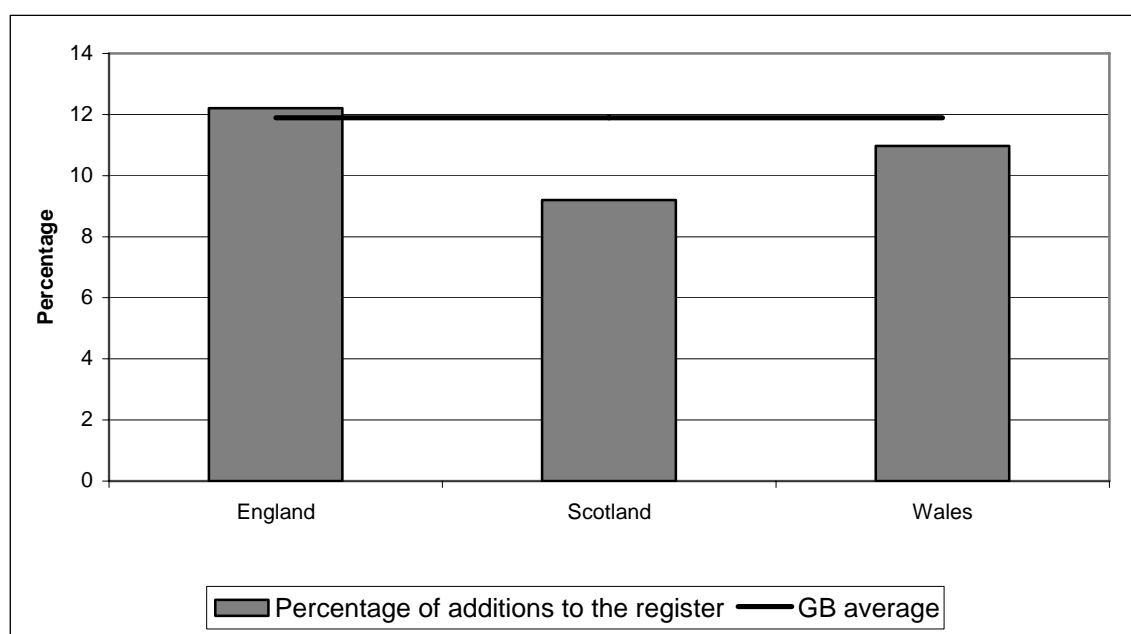


4.12 Chart 7 above shows that EROs from two types of authority carried forward more than the average number of electors during the annual canvass. The data from EROs for London boroughs contains one figure, which if removed would lower the average from 7.6% to 4.9%, but we cannot say whether this figure is an error, and it has been included in this analysis.

Indicator 3 – Changes to the electoral register

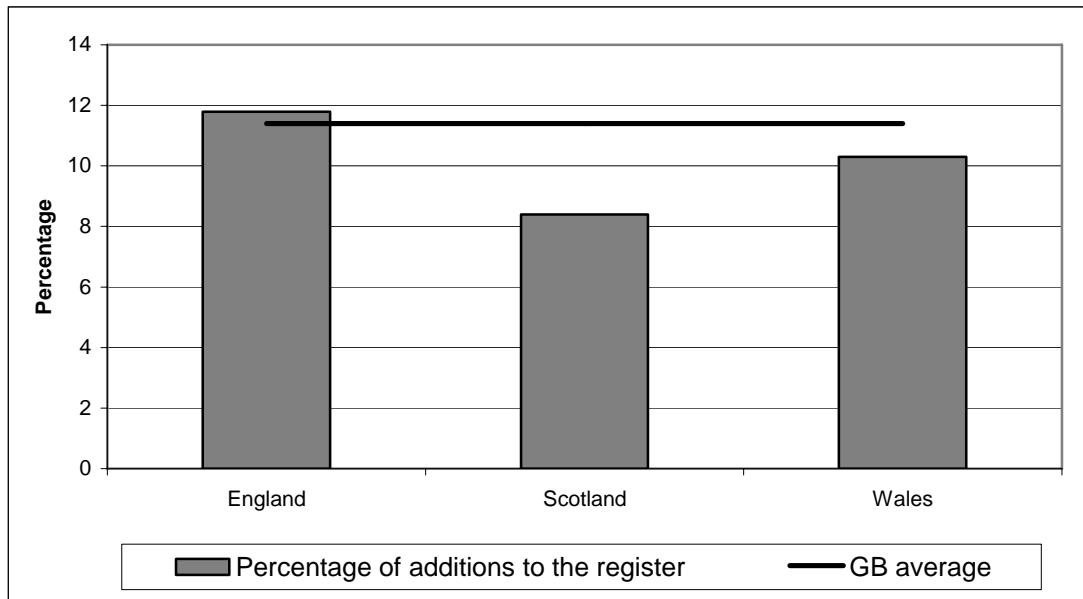
4.13 The purpose of this indicator was to assess the rate of turnover of changes to the electoral register recorded during the annual canvass. The level of turnover of changes indicates the nature of the area in terms of transience of residency (for example, areas with a high population of students may have a higher registration turnover). This indicator was defined as the number of records deleted as a percentage of the total number of electors included in the pre-canvass local government register (1 September 2007), and the number of records added as a percentage of the total number of electors included in the new local government register published on 1 December 2007.

Chart 8: Average percentage of additions to local government electoral registers as a proportion of the 1 December 2007 register, by country



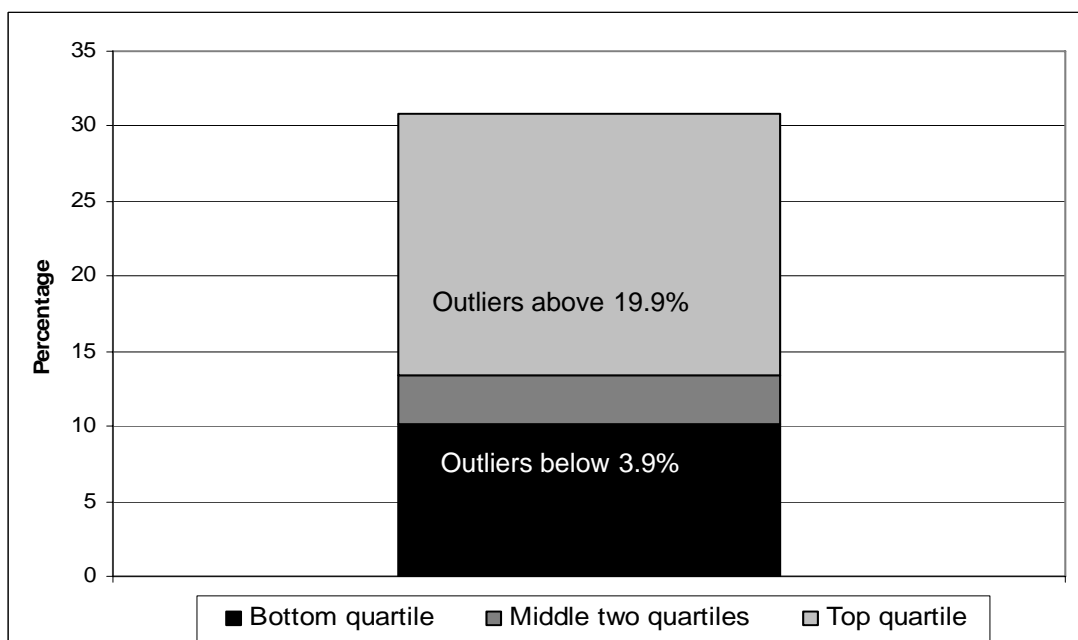
4.14 Chart 8 above shows that on average, according to returns from EROs in Great Britain, the number of records added to the local government registers during the annual canvass accounted for 11.9% of the local government electoral registers published on 1 December 2007. The average proportion of electors added to local government registers in Scotland, at 9.2%, was significantly lower than the average for Great Britain as a whole, and the average proportion in Wales, at 11%, was slightly lower than the Great Britain average.

Chart 9: Average percentage of deletions from the local government electoral registers as a proportion of the 1 September 2007 register, by country



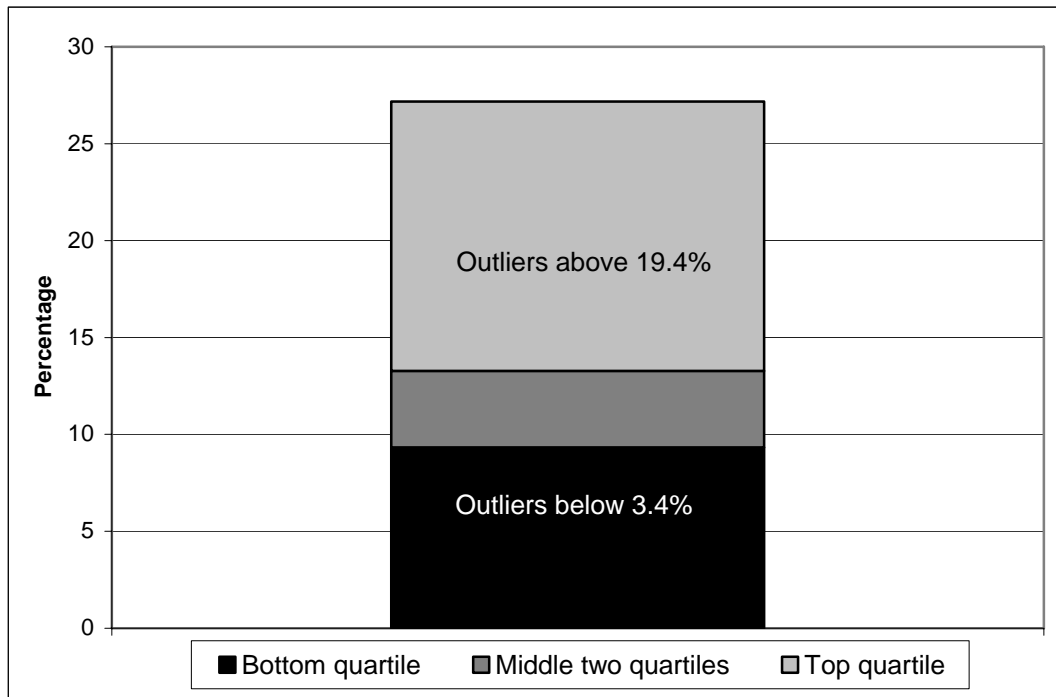
4.15 Chart 9 above shows that, compared with the proportion of records added to the register following the annual canvass, on average EROs across Great Britain deleted a similar proportion of electors from the 1 September 2007 electoral register, at 11.4%. Again, on average, EROs in Scotland deleted a significantly smaller proportion of electors from the 1 September register than the average across Great Britain, at 8.4%, while the average deletion rate for EROs in Wales was 10.3%.

Chart 10: Additions to the electoral register as a percentage of the 1 December 2007 local government register – quartiles analysis



4.16 Chart 10 above illustrates the distribution of percentages of additions to the 1 December 2007 electoral register. Three quarters of EROs reported that additional records accounted for less than 13.4% of the December register. The top quartile of reported additions, representing just under 100 EROs, ranges from 13.4% to 30.9%. Values are classified as outliers if they are below 3.9% (11 results) or above 19.9% (11 results).

Chart 11: Deletions from the electoral register as a percentage of the 1 September 2007 local government register – quartiles analysis



4.17 Chart 11 above illustrates the distribution of percentages of deletions from the 1 September 2007 electoral register. Three-quarters of the results are below 13.3% with the top quartile ranging up to 27.2%. Values are classified as outliers if they are below 3.4% or above 19.4%. Three-quarters of EROs reported that deleted records accounted for less than 13.3% of the September register. The top quartile of reported additions, representing 87 EROs, ranges from 13.3% to 27.2%. Values are classified as outliers if they are below 3.4% (10 results) or above 19.4% (14 results).

Chart 12: Additions to the electoral register by local authority type

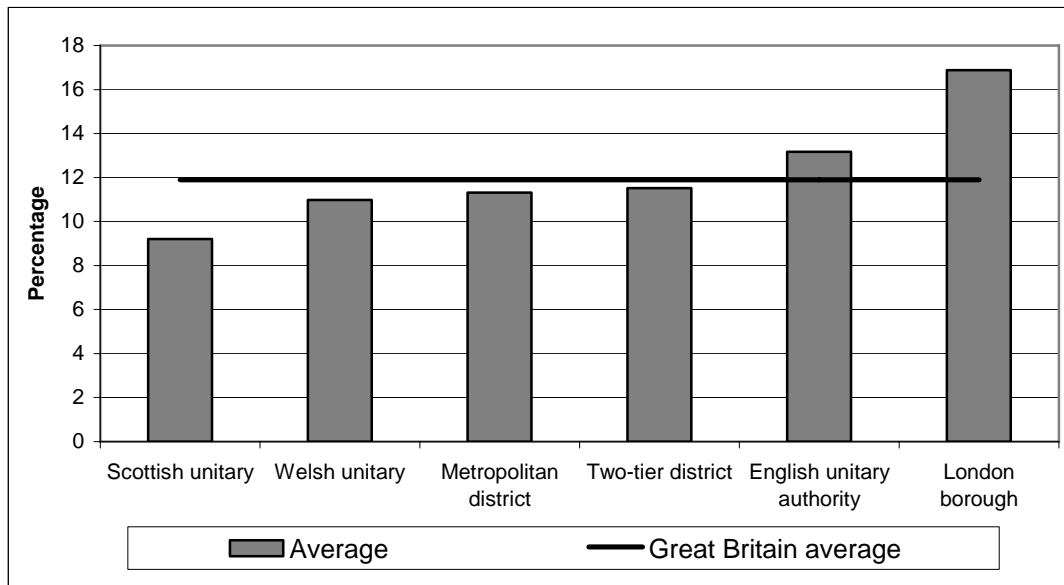
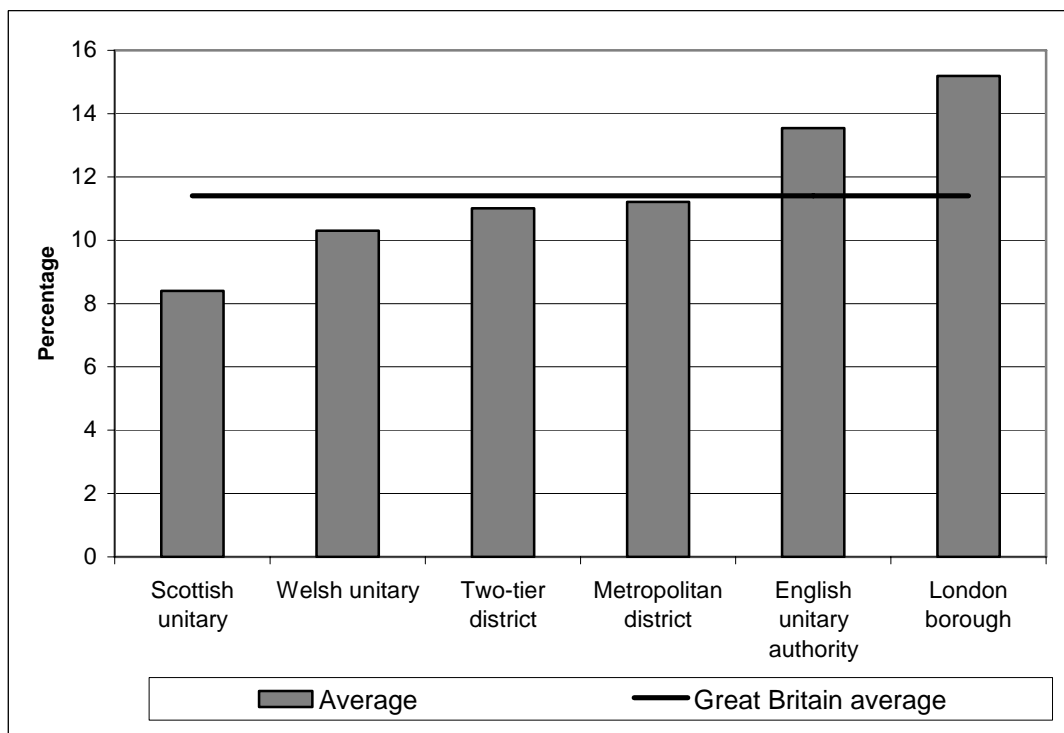


Chart 13: Deletions to the electoral register by local authority type



4.18 Charts 12 and 13 above illustrate that the proportion of additions and deletions is broadly similar in most types of authorities. On average, London boroughs have reported the highest proportion of changes, including both additions and deletions.

Indicator 4 – Completeness of the electoral register

4.19 This indicator was developed in order to provide a comparison between the number of records included in the 1 December electoral register and the most recently available population estimates for each local authority area. This could provide a proxy measure for the overall registration rate in each area, although as we have made clear in paragraph 3.4 above, significant concerns remain about the reliability of any estimate of the overall registration rate obtained by comparing the total number of electors with population estimates. The figures are based on the number of electors on the local government register at 1 December 2007 as a percentage of the most recent mid year Office for National Statistics/General Register Office for Scotland voting age (18 and over) population estimates (which are from mid-2006).

Chart 14: Numbers of electors on 1 December 2007 local government registers as a percentage of mid-year population estimates – quartiles analysis

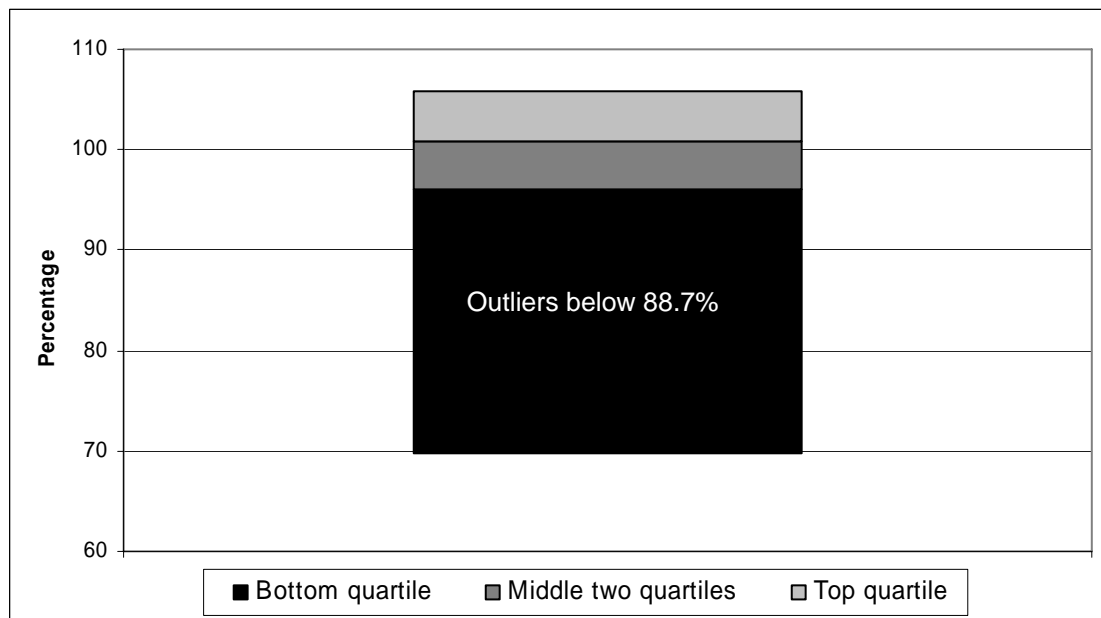
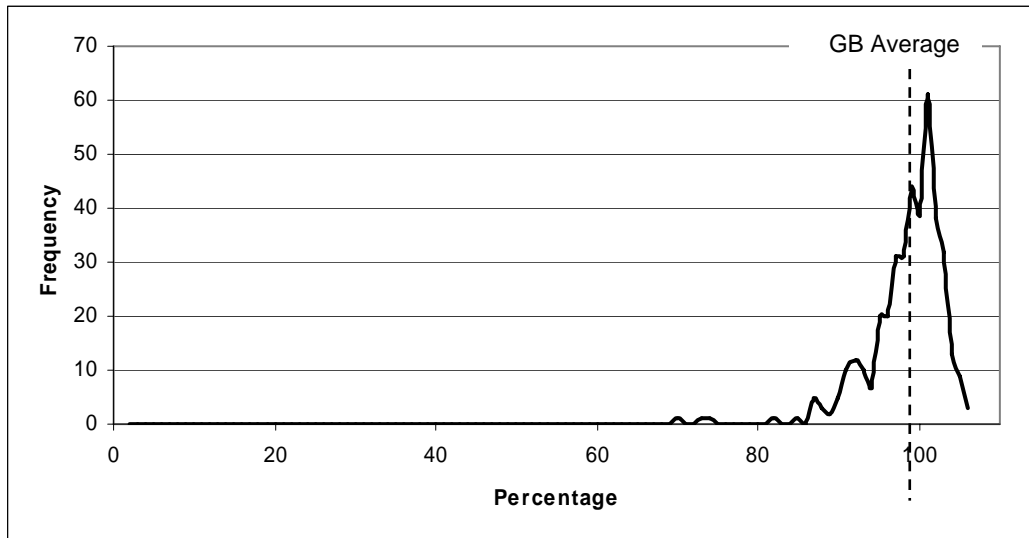
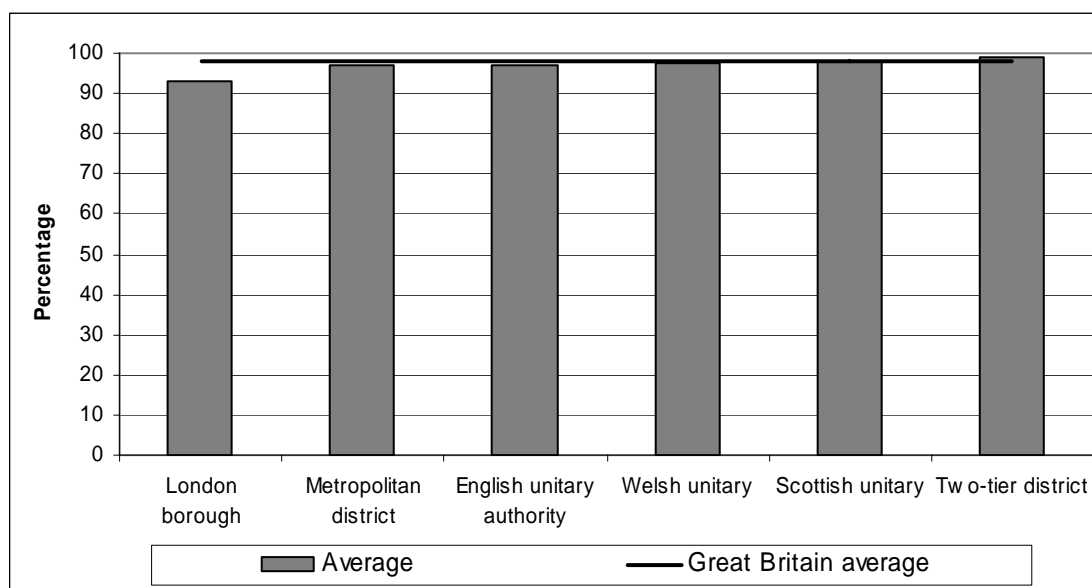


Chart 15: Numbers of electors on 1 December 2007 local government registers as a percentage of 2006 mid-year population estimates – frequency distribution



4.20 As Charts 14 and 15 illustrate, the comparison of the total number of electors included in the 1 December 2007 electoral registers against the most recently available population estimates suggests in a number of local authority areas the number of electors exceeds the estimated voting age population, and the Great Britain average of 97%. However, as we have explained in Chapter 3 of this paper, a number of factors may provide possible explanation for this discrepancy, including the age of the most recently available population estimates, the fact that current population estimates do not take account of eligibility status, and the potential that overall registration totals may include an unquantifiable element of duplicate or redundant entries.

Chart 16: Numbers of electors on 1 December 2007 local government registers as a percentage of 2006 mid-year population estimates – by local authority type



4.21 Chart 16 above shows that the average figure for different local authority types does not vary considerably from the average figure for all authorities, with the exception of the average figure for London boroughs, which is slightly lower.

Summary

4.22 The analysis provided here illustrates that there are variations in the process outputs relating to the annual canvass of electors across Great Britain. However, in some cases, quite significant ranges of output results can be attributed to relatively extreme outlier results.

4.23 We believe that data relating to annual canvass processes provide essential context to support the assessment of performance. Analysis of varying annual canvass response rates, for example, suggests that there is a relatively small range of performance at or above the average response rate by the top and middle two quartiles of authorities. EROs in some areas, however, struggle to achieve a good coverage of returns from households. This may be the result of particularly challenging local demographic circumstances, but may also indicate that specific performance issues need to be investigated further with individual EROs. We also collected information about return rates between different response mechanisms (i.e. postal return, door-to-door canvass, telephone or internet confirmation), and are continuing to analyse the information provided.

4.24 Similarly, information about the proportion of records that are carried forward from the previous electoral register to the new December register may help to provide an indication of the overall accuracy of records included in the register, since records carried forward are up to a year older than confirmed

records. Again, although the majority of EROs reported having carried forward a small proportion of electors records, a minority reported significantly higher rates. Again, this may be linked to local circumstances, but may also indicate that performance issues need to be investigated further with individual EROs. Information about the turnover of records following the annual canvass also provides useful context to the work of EROs, illustrating the relative stability of the electorate.

4.25 Indicator 4 sought to compare local government electoral registration figures with population estimates. However, as we have outlined above, we are not persuaded that the indicator as calculated represents a reliable measure of individual authority-level registration rates. We do not intend to collect this data in future years, although it should be noted that authority level figures for electoral registration are collated and published by the Office for National Statistics each year.

4.26 In some cases we believe that the figures reported to us may be erroneous – for example, where we have asked for total figures for the number of households responding to the annual canvass, a small number of EROs reported their own calculation of the canvass response rate. We will investigate these and other data quality issues further.

4.27 In future years, we propose to ask EROs to provide data relating to annual canvass return rates, including information about return rates between different response mechanisms. We also intend to ask for information about the number of records carried forward from the 1 September electoral register to the new December register. This information will not be used as part of the performance standards assessment. However, it may be used in conjunction with information derived from the performance standards assessment to provide specific local context and to identify overarching trends and issues for further investigation.

5 Qualitative information

5.1 In addition to the four quantitative measures outlined above, we also asked Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to report on four qualitative areas to describe the practices that were used to support the function of electoral administration. EROs were given a series of statements and three possible responses, 'yes', 'no' or 'in part'. In the majority of instances where an answer of 'no' had been given, the ERO did not provide a supporting narrative as to why. Most of the narrative boxes were only completed if the ERO had ticked yes or in part. This has meant that in some cases we have not been able to look in more depth at the reasons why EROs are not taking carrying out a particular function. The four measures were:

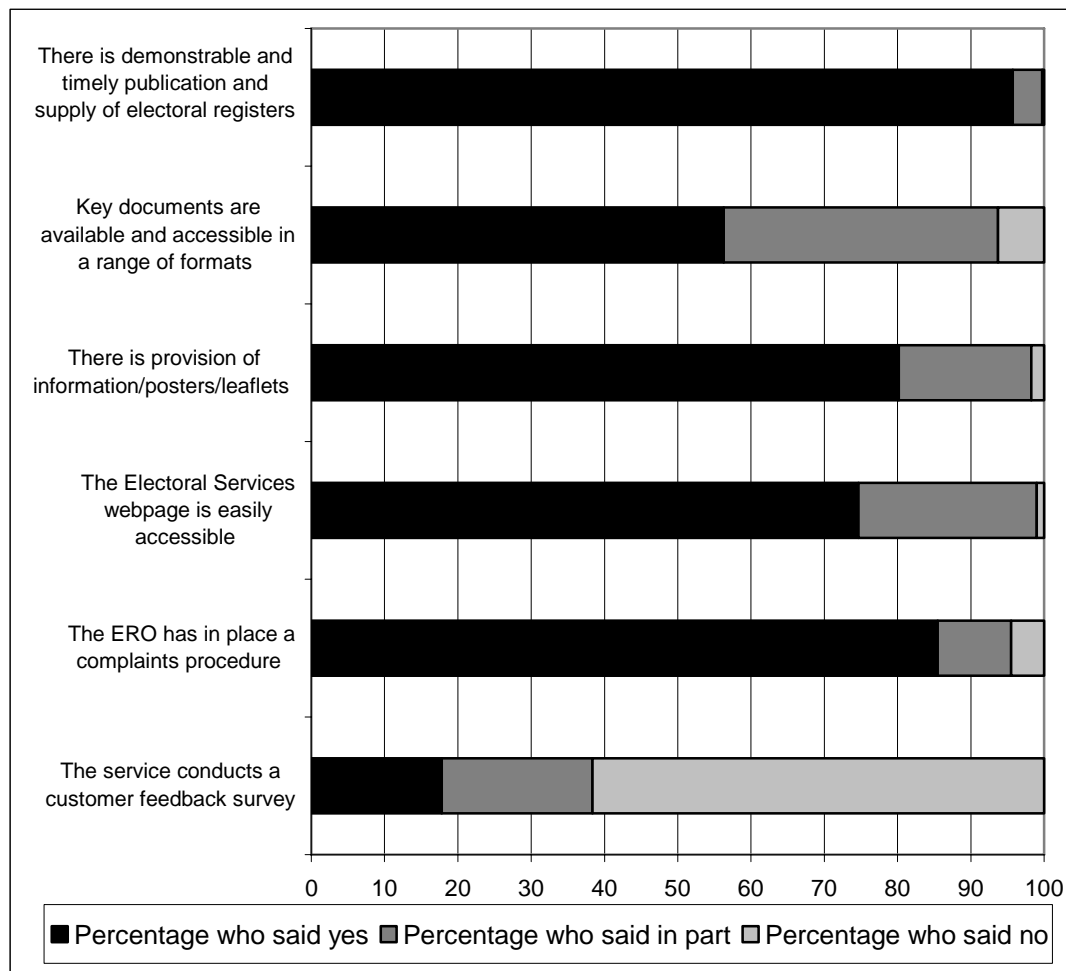
- customer service focus
- activities carried out by the ERO to improve accuracy of the register and absent voter lists
- encouraging participation and registration
- enhancing electoral integrity

Indicator 5 – Customer service focus

5.2 This qualitative indicator is designed to show how many EROs are undertaking activities related to customer service issues. The activities assessed were:

- demonstrable and timely publication and supply of electoral registers
- key documents available and accessible in a range of formats
- provision of information/posters/leaflets
- easily accessible webpage
- complaints procedure
- customer feedback survey

Chart 17: Responses to Indicator 5



5.3 As Chart 17 illustrates, the response of EROs varies from activity to activity. While a significant majority (95.7%) of EROs report that they can demonstrate timely publication and supply of electoral registers, relatively few report that they carry out a customer feedback survey (17.8%).

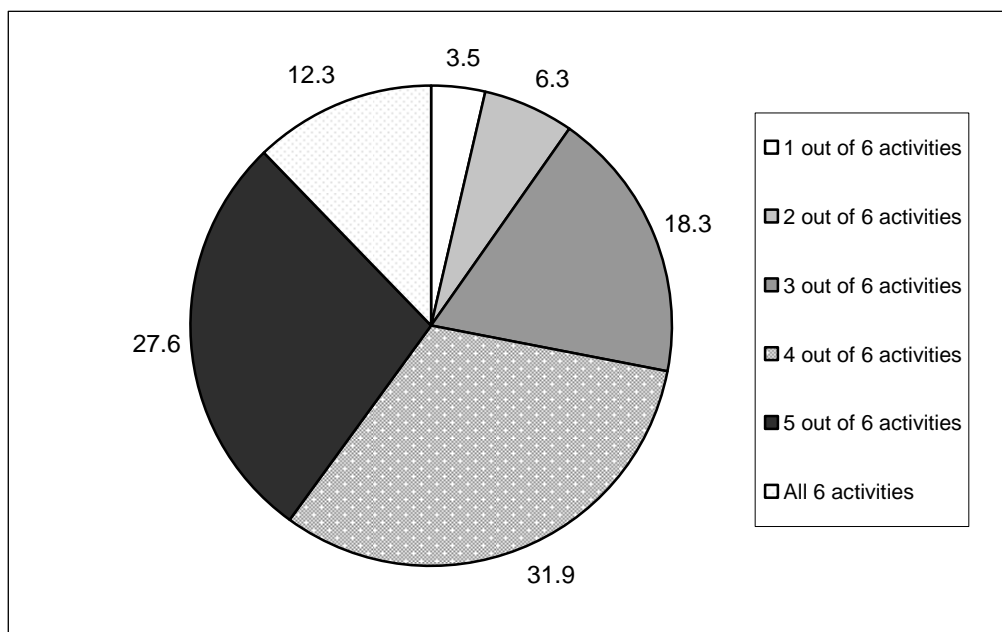
5.4 Of those EROs who said that they did not carry out a feedback survey, the most common reason for this was the lack of resources to undertake the task. EROs also said that the council sometimes uses other methods to gather feedback, such as citizen’s panels, focus groups and participation panels. Some EROs said that they monitor customer feedback through the telephone and internet registration processes but not through an official survey, however a number are investigating the feasibility of carrying out a survey in the future.

5.5 Just under half of all EROs do not (or do only in part) make provisions for key documents to be available and accessible in a range of formats. The most common reason given for this was that they say they receive very few requests for documents in an alternative format. However, some EROs say that other formats are only available on request, and were not held at all times. Another consideration is the cost implication of producing documents in a range of formats but many said that they used the Electoral Commission’s

resources instead. Many also said that documents were not produced in Braille as only a small proportion of partially sighted/blind people can read Braille.³

5.6 Aside from the feedback survey, the vast majority of EROs report that they undertake all the activities either entirely or in part.

Chart 18: Customer services – percentage of EROs carrying out activities



5.7 Chart 18 above shows the percentages of EROs carrying out the six activities. Only 12.3% of EROs indicated that they fulfilled all six activities listed under this indicator (by answering ‘yes’ to each question). No ERO reported that they did not undertake any of the activities listed and less than a tenth are fulfilling only one or two of the activities.

5.8 EROs from Scottish unitary authorities were most likely to indicate they fulfilled all six activities under this indicator (47% answered yes to all questions, followed by EROs from London boroughs (22% answering yes to all)). The least likely group of EROs to have answered yes to all are those employed by Welsh unitary authorities.

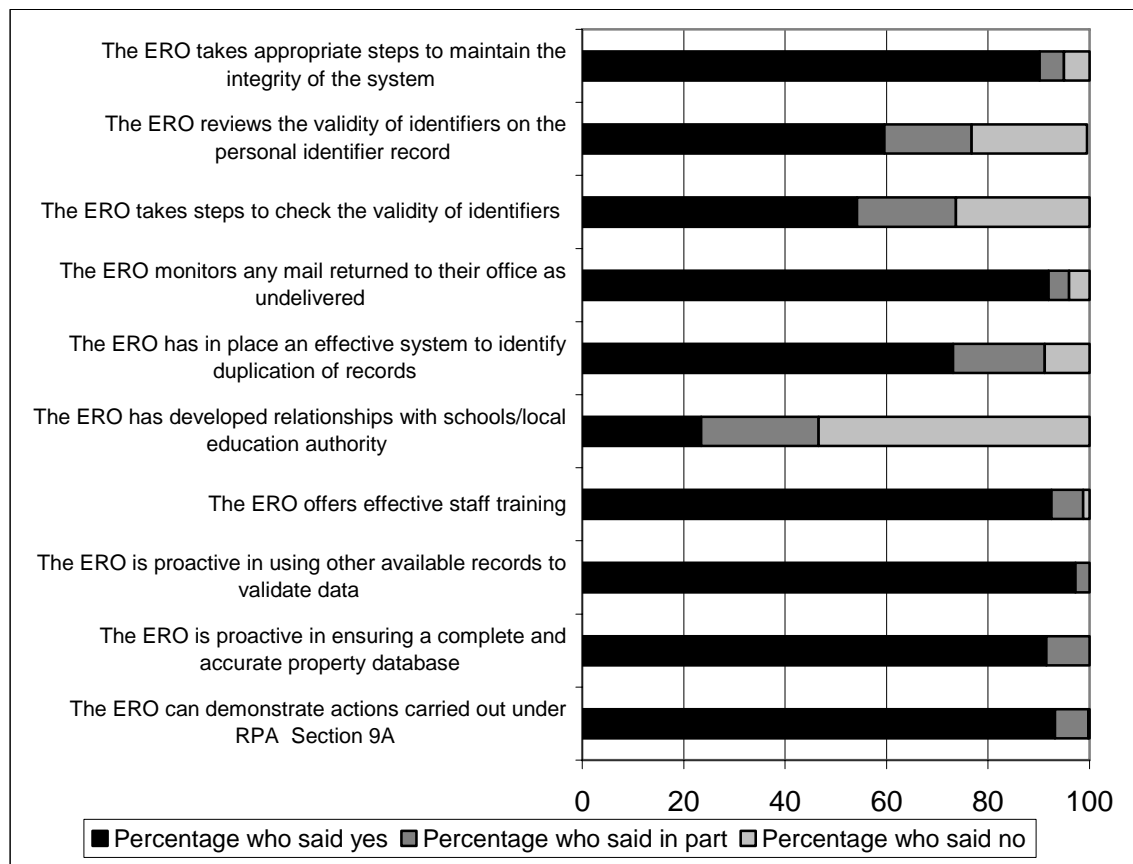
³ The Royal National Institute of Blind People publication *Blind and partially sighted adults in Britain – the RNIB survey 1991* says that just under 3% of visually impaired readers read Braille.

Indicator 6 – Activities carried out by the Electoral Registration Officer to improve accuracy of the register and absent voter lists

5.9 This indicator concerns the work done by EROs to improve the accuracy of the electoral register and absent voter lists. These include:

- steps to maintain the integrity of the system
- reviews of the validity of identifiers on the personal identifier record
- checks on the the validity of identifiers
- monitoring of any mail returned as undelivered
- systems to identify duplication of records
- relationships with schools/local education authority
- staff training
- use of other available records to validate data
- ensuring complete and accurate property database
- actions carried out under the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA) Section 9A

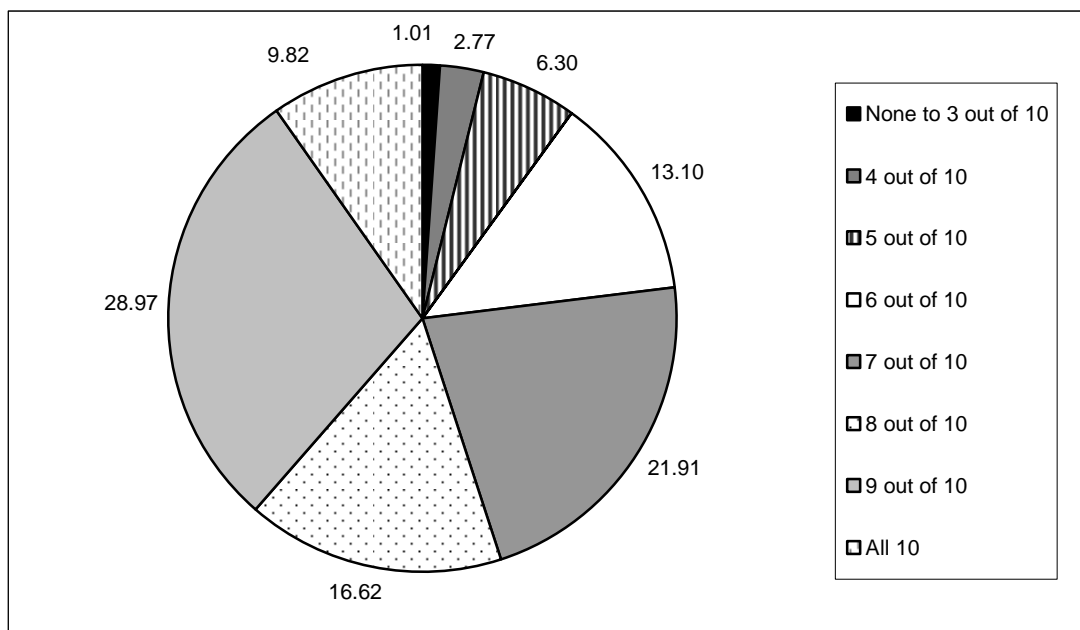
Chart 19: Responses to Indicator 6



5.10 Chart 19 above summarises EROs' responses to Indicator 6. EROs were least likely to report that they had developed relationships with schools or the local education authority for information on potential attainers (over half answered 'no' (53%) with a further 23% reporting that they do this only 'in part'). Explanations given by EROs suggest that possible reasons for this could be either a lack of resources or, for some types of authority, the links with schools were not available. Some EROs said that the schools in their area were not particularly helpful in this type of work, and they did not get encouraging feedback to pursue links with them. Others said that this was an area that they intended to develop.

5.11 A number of EROs said that they do not take steps to check or review the validity of absent vote identifiers. Reasons given included insufficient resources to undertake a random check, and there were too many applications to be able to check each one. Others said that they had no information against which the validity of identifiers could be checked. Some also said that the review will be carried out as required by statute every five years.

Chart 20: Accuracy and absent voters – percentage of EROs carrying out activities



5.12 Chart 20 above illustrates the percentages of EROs carrying out different proportions of the 10 activities. Only 9.8% of EROs indicated they carried out all 10 activities listed under this indicator. In all 96.2% of EROs answered yes to half or more of the activities. Only 0.25% of EROs indicated that they did not undertake any of the listed activities.

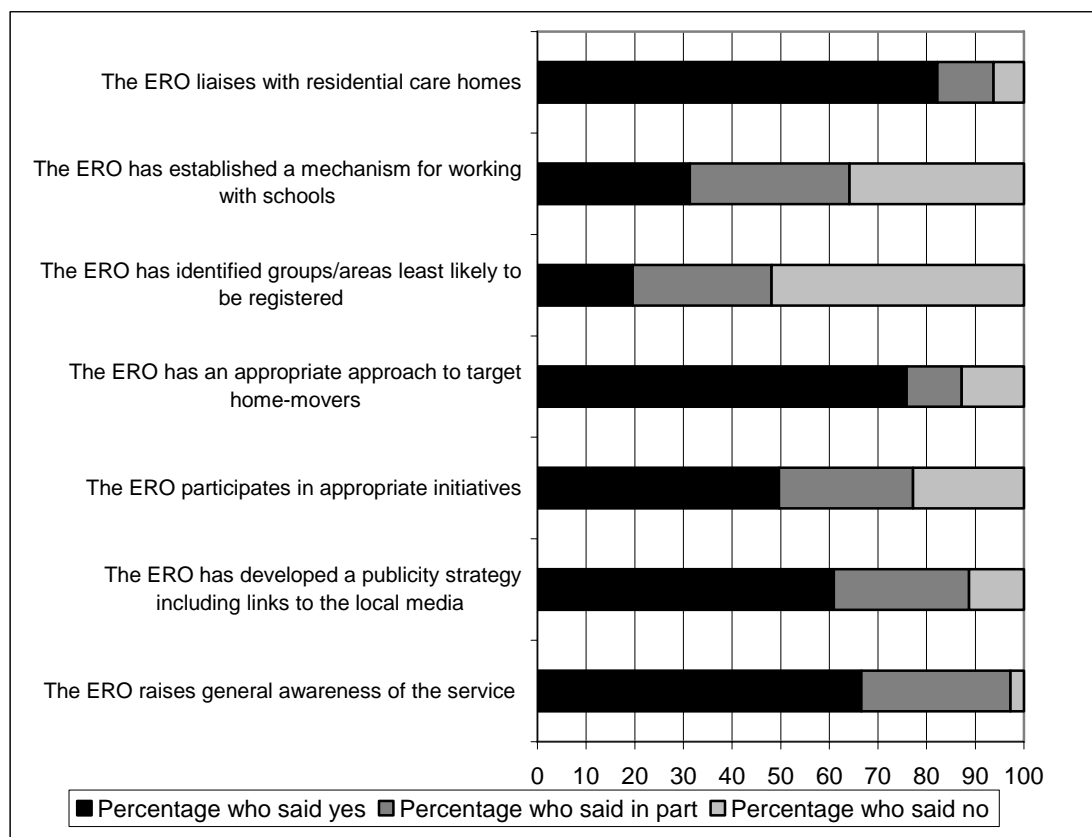
5.13 EROs from London boroughs were most likely to have answered yes to all 10 activities (25%), very closely followed by those in Welsh unitary authorities (23.8% answering yes to all 10 activities).

Indicator 7 – Encouraging participation and registration

5.14 This indicator concerns the activities undertaken by EROs to encourage registration and participation in their local area. These include:

- liaison with residential care homes
- mechanisms for working with schools
- identifying groups/areas least likely to be registered
- approach to target home-movers
- participating in relevant initiatives to highlight local democracy
- development of a publicity strategy including links to the local media
- raising general awareness of the service

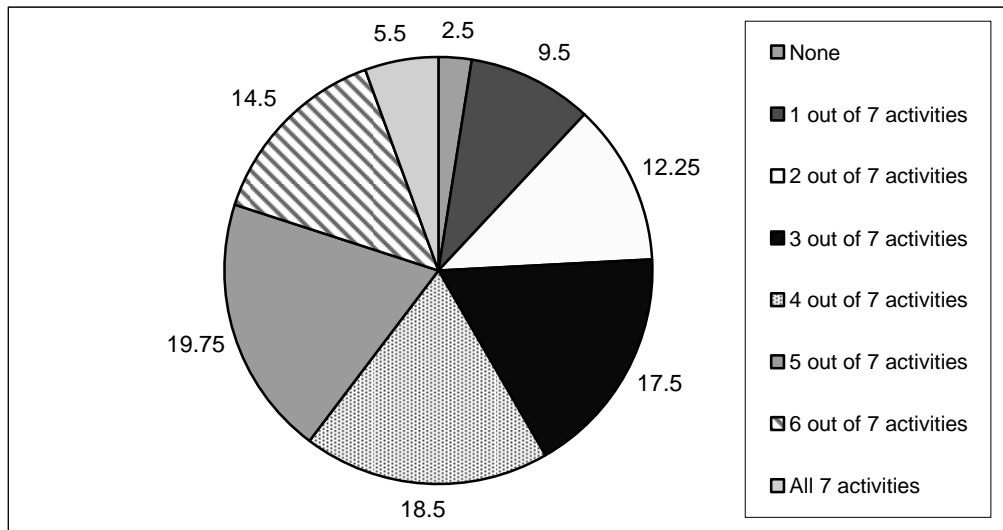
Chart 21: Responses to Indicator 7



5.15 Chart 21 above summarises EROs' responses to Indicator 7. EROs were most likely to liaise with residential care homes (with 82% answering yes to this question) and least likely to identify groups or areas least likely to be registered (with only 19.6% answering yes). We found a number of reasons were given for this, with the most common being a lack of resources available to do this work and that this kind of work was sometimes carried out by other departments within the local authority, and not necessarily by the ERO.

5.16 Following on from paragraph 5.10, only a third of EROs have established a mechanism for working with schools, with just under a third having no mechanism in place. Again, some EROs said that this was due to lack of resources. The number of universities and perceived interest in electoral administration was also considered a factor but their relationship with schools was an area that EROs said they intend to address in the future.

Chart 22: Encouraging participation and registration – percentage of EROs carrying out activities



5.17 Chart 22 above illustrates the percentages of EROs carrying out different proportions of the seven activities. Few EROs (5.5%) indicated that they undertook all seven activities listed in their entirety. In all, 58.3% answered yes to at least four out of seven activities. Only 4% did not answer yes to any of the activities listed.

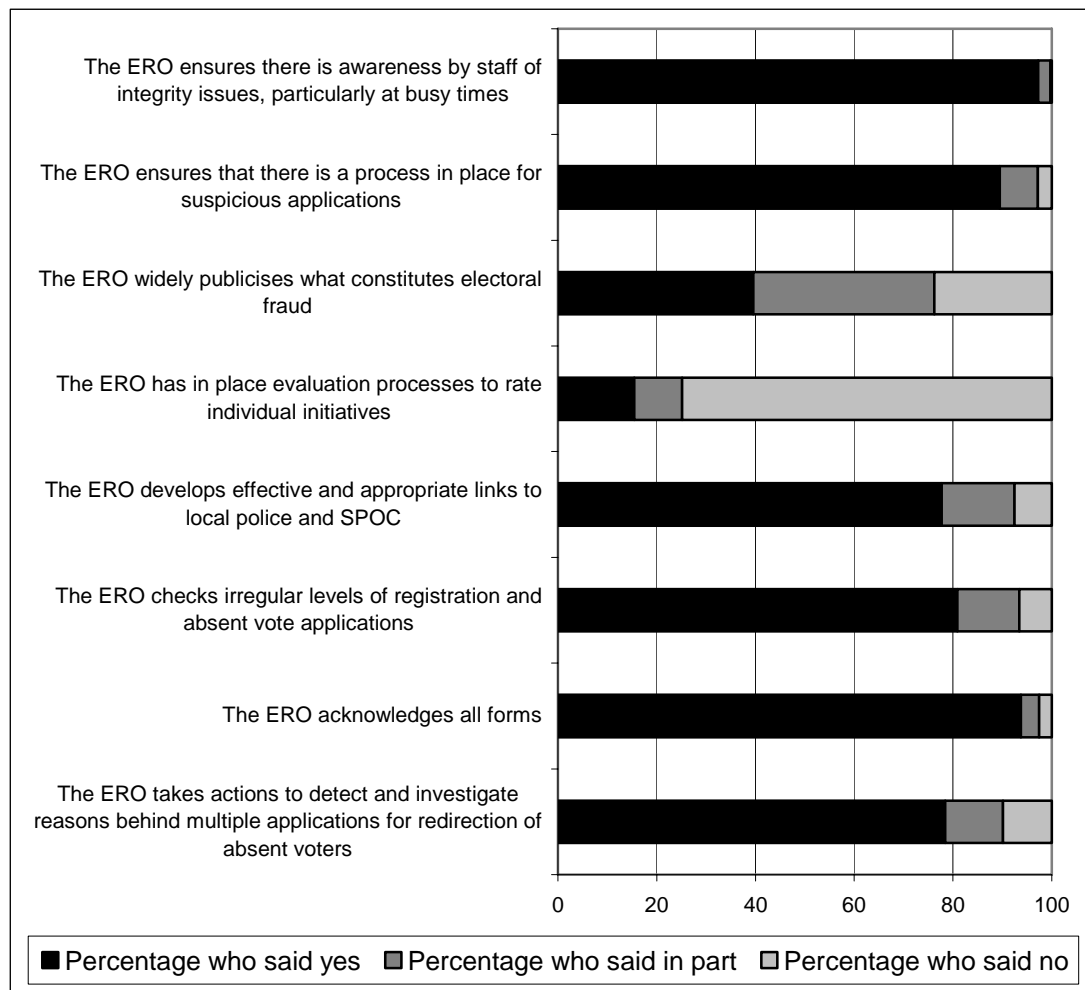
5.18 EROs from London boroughs are significantly more likely to have indicated that they fulfil all seven activities with 15.6% answering yes to all. They are followed by EROs from English district councils with 5.2% answering yes to all. Only one authority reported that they did not carry out any of the activities listed, and EROs from two-tier district authorities were more likely than other authorities to indicate they only fulfil one activity (14% of these answered yes only once).

Indicator 8 – Enhancing electoral integrity

5.19 This indicator concerns activities undertaken by the ERO to enhance electoral integrity. These include:

- awareness by staff of integrity issues, particularly at busy times
- ensuring that there is a process in place for dealing with suspicious applications
- publicising what constitutes electoral fraud
- evaluating processes to rate individual initiatives
- links to local police and SPOC⁴
- checking irregular levels of registration and absent vote applications
- acknowledging all forms
- action to detect and investigate reasons behind multiple absent vote applications

Chart 23: Responses to Indicator 8

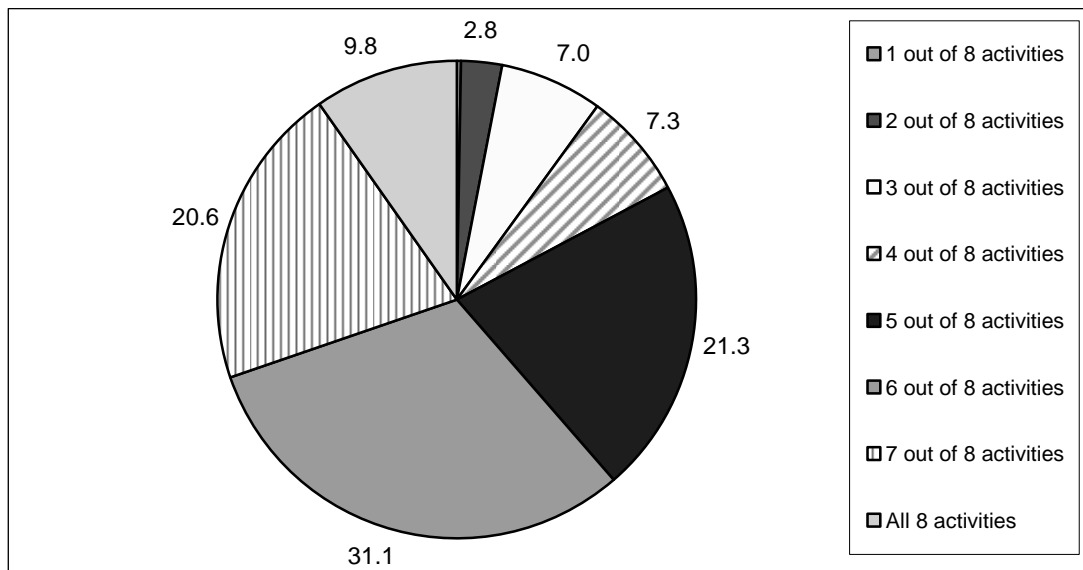


⁴ The SPOC is a nominated 'single point of contact' between the local authority and the local police force.

5.20 Chart 23 above summarises EROs' responses to Indicator 8. EROs were most likely to ensure staff were aware of the potential of electoral fraud (97.2% answered yes to this) but around 60% said they did not publicise what constitutes electoral fraud or did so only in part. They were least likely to have in place evaluation processes to determine the success of individual initiatives (15.5% answering yes). Those that did state why they did not have an evaluation process to rate individual initiatives said that they were unclear on how they would go about this.

5.21 EROs were mostly likely to answer 'in part' regarding the activity on publicising what constitutes electoral fraud (36.6% answered 'in part'). Some EROs commented that they felt that electoral fraud was not a big problem, or that greater publicity regarding electoral fraud might deter genuine electors from registering.

Chart 24: Enhancing electoral integrity – percentage of EROs carrying out activities



5.22 Chart 24 above illustrates the percentages of EROs carrying out different proportions of the eight activities. Only 9.8% of EROs indicated they fulfil all eight of the activities listed under this indicator. In all, 82.8% of EROs answered yes to at least half of the activities listed.

5.23 EROs from Welsh unitary authorities were more likely to indicate they fulfilled all eight activities (14.3% answering yes to all), closely followed by unitary district authorities (13.6% answering yes to all). All the EROs indicated that they fulfilled at least one of the activities listed. EROs from London boroughs were the only group to indicate they fulfilled only one of the eight.

Summary

5.24 The responses from EROs to these four qualitative questions illustrates that there is some variation between authorities in the types of activities that are carried out to support the annual canvass process. It is pleasing to note that many EROs have already put in place key process and procedures that we might expect to be needed to support an effective electoral registration process.

5.25 There are many activities which nearly all EROs report having carried out, but there are also a number of activities which are much less likely to be carried out. These include promotional activities such as developing links and relationships with local schools to identify potential electors, and management activities such as carrying out post-activity evaluation.

5.26 We have used the findings from this analysis to develop a series of draft standards for EROs, which we issued for consultation in March 2008. We have revised and updated the standards to reflect the findings of this analysis. In particular, we have reviewed the wording and format of the standards to ensure they are more objective than some of these qualitative indicator areas, and to allow EROs to indicate their achievement along a scale of performance.

6 Conclusions

6.1 The purpose of this exercise was, as far as possible, to collate complete and comprehensive information about the work carried out by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), to ensure that our ongoing work to support improvements in performance appropriately reflects current issues and trends.

6.2 This paper has provided some initial analysis of the data and information that we collected from EROs. This was the first time that we had sought information and data from EROs. We have been very pleased with the response to our request for information from EROs, and grateful for their cooperation in undertaking this exercise.

6.3 Although the quality of data and information that we received from EROs was generally high, there are a number of areas that we will explore with EROs and their electoral management software suppliers to ensure that robust key management information is available in a reliable and robust format.

6.4 The aim of this exercise has never been to directly assess the performance of EROs or reach definitive conclusions on the reasons for any trends or anomalies in the data. We do not believe that it would be appropriate to use the data to construct 'league tables' of performance by EROs, and we have not sought to do so.

6.5 Our analysis has identified a number of issues that we will consider and explore with EROs in more detail as we develop our work to support performance improvement. These include:

- considering the role of electoral management software in supporting analysis of quantitative registration data
- seeking more information to understand the specific local factors that may have contributed to some of the outlying results from EROs
- identifying what further support, from us or others, might help to address inconsistencies in practice

6.6 The draft standards which we have published for consultation are qualitative in nature, and have taken into account the findings from our analysis of the information we collected during this exercise. The qualitative information has given us an important indication of the common practices used by EROs to deliver an effective electoral registration process. We have revised the format of the qualitative measures to be more definitive and objective, giving greater scope to accurately assess the performance of EROs.

6.7 We intend, in future, to request that EROs provide us with certain key pieces of quantitative management data. This will not form part of our assessment of performance against the standards, which will be qualitative in nature. However, we will analyse performance data to provide comparative context for local performance at national, Great Britain-wide or authority 'type' level. We expect that this information will support EROs' own performance reviews.

Appendix A – Sections 9A and 9B, Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000⁵

9A Setting of performance standards

- (1) The Commission may from time to time—
 - (a) determine standards of performance for relevant officers, and
 - (b) publish, in such form and in such manner as they consider appropriate, the standards so determined.

- (2) The standards of performance are such standards as the Commission think ought to be achieved by—
 - (a) electoral registration officers in the performance of their functions;
 - (b) returning officers in the administration of the elections specified in subsection (6);
 - (c) counting officers in the administration of the referendums specified in subsection (7).

- (3) Before determining standards under subsection (1), the Commission must consult—
 - (a) the Secretary of State, and
 - (b) any other person they think appropriate.

- (4) The Commission may determine different standards for different descriptions of relevant officers.

- (5) When the Commission publish standards under subsection (1) they must send a copy of the published standards to the Secretary of State who must lay a copy of the published standards before each House of Parliament.

- (6) The elections specified in this subsection are—
 - (a) an election mentioned in section 5(2);
 - (b) a parliamentary by-election;
 - (c) an election under section 9 of the Scotland Act 1998 (constituency vacancies);
 - (d) an election under section 8 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 (vacancies in constituency seats);
 - (e) a local government election in England or Wales.

- (7) The referendums specified in this subsection are—
 - (a) a referendum to which Part 7 applies;
 - (b) a referendum under Part 2 of the Local Government Act 2000.

⁵ As inserted by Section 67 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.

(8) For the purposes of this section and sections 9B and 9C, the relevant officers are—

- (a) electoral registration officers;
- (b) in relation to elections within subsection (6), returning officers;
- (c) in relation to referendums within subsection (7), counting officers.

9B Returns and reports on performance standards

(1) The Commission may from time to time issue directions to relevant officers to provide the Commission with such reports regarding their level of performance against the standards determined under section 9A(1) as may be specified in the direction.

(2) A direction under subsection (1)—

- (a) must specify the relevant officer or officers to whom it is issued (and may specify a description or descriptions of relevant officers),
- (b) may require the report or reports to relate to such elections or referendums (or both) as may be specified in the direction, and
- (c) may require the report or reports to be provided in a form specified in the direction.

(3) A report provided to the Commission in pursuance of subsection (1) may be published by the relevant officer to whom it relates.

(4) The Commission shall from time to time prepare and publish (in such manner as the Commission may determine) assessments of the level of performance by relevant officers against the standards determined under section 9A(1).

(5) An assessment under subsection (4)—

- (a) must specify the relevant officer or officers to whom it relates;
- (b) must specify the period to which it relates;
- (c) may specify the elections or referendums (or both) to which it relates.

(6) The Commission must not prepare an assessment under subsection (4) unless they have received reports in pursuance of subsection (1) from the relevant officer or officers for the matters to which the assessment relates.

(7) Before publishing an assessment under subsection (4), the Commission shall—

- (a) provide to each relevant officer a copy of those parts of the assessment which relate to him;
- (b) have regard to any comments made by him regarding the factual accuracy of the assessment.

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Chart/ table number	Name
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