

Introduction to registering a political party

This document is for people who are thinking of setting up a political party and want to know where to start.

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Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact us:

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Terms and expressions we use

We use '**must**' when we refer to a specific legal or regulatory requirement. We use '**should**' for items we consider to be minimum good practice, but which are not legal requirements.

You do not have to follow this guidance, but if you do, you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law.

Our approach to enforcement

The Commission regulates political funding and spending. We are committed to providing those we regulate with a clear understanding of their regulatory obligations through our guidance documents and advice service.

Wherever possible, we use advice and guidance proactively in order to secure compliance and we regulate in a way that is effective, proportionate and fair.

If you do not comply with legal or regulatory requirements you or your organisation may be subject to civil or criminal sanctions. [Find out more about our approach to enforcement.](#)

Introduction to registering a political party

This document explains:

Why and how to register a political party, the basic rules you'll need to follow and where to find more information.

The document covers:

- Introduction to the Electoral Commission
- The registers of political parties
- Official roles within a party or group
- Who can register with us
- The structure of your party
- Choosing a party name, description and emblem
- Financial reporting requirements and responsibilities
- What next?

Related documents

- [Overview of party names, description and emblems](#)
- [Overview of maintaining party details](#)
- [Process for registering a political party](#)
- [PEF Online: Getting started](#)
- [Introduction to being a party treasurer](#)

You can find all of our guidance on our [website](#).

Summary

If you are thinking about setting up a political party, you may need to register with us. If you do, there are rules you will need to follow.

This document explains why and how to register with us, outlines the basic rules you'll need to follow and tells you where to find more information.

Political parties and campaigners are vital to a healthy democracy and we encourage participation.

Introduction

The Electoral Commission – who we are

We are an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. Our aim is integrity and public confidence in the democratic process. The Electoral Commission:

- registers political parties and regulates party compliance under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA)
- maintains the registers of political parties in Great Britain and Northern Ireland
- sets standards for electoral registration and running elections, and reports on how well this is done
- runs any referendums held under PERA
- publishes details of where parties and other election campaigners get money from and how they spend it
- makes sure people understand and follow the rules on party and election finance
- makes sure people understand it is important to register to vote, and know how to vote

Why register?

Registration of a political party is not compulsory and you can only apply to register a party if you have an intention to contest elections. Independent candidates can contest elections without a party being registered.

The main benefit of registering is that your party name, description and emblem can appear on the ballot papers. We use the term **'identity marks'** when we refer to party names, descriptions and emblems.

The rules for each election set out which identity marks can appear on ballot papers. You should check with your local returning officer to verify what you can and cannot use for each election.

A registered political party must comply with the controls and responsibilities set out in PPERA. Failure to comply with PPERA may be a criminal offence which can attract prosecution or civil sanctions, including a fine. Find more information in our [Enforcement Policy](#).

Before deciding to apply to register a political party, you should ensure you read our [guidance for party treasurers](#) to get an understanding of the financial reporting obligations of a registered political party.

Can I stand for election without being a member of a party?

Yes, you can stand for election without being a member of a party by standing as an independent candidate. In that case, you can use the word 'Independent' (and/or 'Annibynnol' in Wales) to identify yourself on ballot papers, or have no description.

[Find information about nominating to stand as an independent candidate.](#)

Parish and community council elections

At parish and community council elections independent candidates can, at the discretion of the Returning Officer, use a description not registered with us provided that the description does not exceed six words in length and cannot be confused with a registered political party.

Types of political party

There are two types of registered political parties that can stand for election and nominate a person to stand in the name of that party. These are:

- **political parties** that can stand in all elections their registration applies to, either in Great Britain or Northern Ireland (separate registers apply in each area)
- **minor parties** that are registered on the basis that they only intend to contest parish and/or community elections in England and Wales respectively

Registered political parties

Registered political parties can contest all elections including those for:

- parish and community councils
- local authorities
- Police and Crime Commissioners
- National Assembly for Wales
- Northern Ireland Assembly
- Scottish Parliament
- UK Parliament

PPERA imposes a number of controls and responsibilities on registered political parties. [Read all of our guidance for parties.](#)

Political parties can be registered on the Great Britain register, the Northern Ireland register or both. Depending on which registers they appear on, they can contest elections in England, Scotland or Wales (the Great Britain register), or Northern Ireland (the Northern Ireland register), or in all of the above where they appear on both registers.

Registered minor parties

Minor parties are parties that only contest parish council elections (England) and/or community council elections (Wales). Minor parties are unable to contest elections in Scotland.

Minor parties are registered on the Great Britain register. You cannot register a minor party in Northern Ireland.

Parish and community council elections

In England and Wales parties can choose to only contest parish council elections (England) or community council elections (Wales). If you intend to only contest these elections you should consider registering as a minor party.

Under PPERA, minor parties are not subject to the financial controls that registered political parties must comply with. They are only required to submit an annual registration confirmation with us. The information they need to submit when registering with us is much less detailed.

A minor party can always apply to change its status to a registered political party at a later date if you wish for an additional application fee of £150. The application fee is not refundable.

The registers of political parties

There are two registers of political parties in the UK, one for Great Britain (GB) and one for Northern Ireland (NI). We maintain both the Great Britain and the Northern Ireland registers.

These registers contain the details of all political parties registered to contest elections in all or some of England, Scotland and Wales (Great Britain register) and Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland register).

You may only apply to appear on both registers if you plan to contest elections in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

A party registered on both the Great Britain and the Northern Ireland registers are two separate registered parties for PPERA purposes.

Parties on the Great Britain register must also indicate whether they want to contest elections in all or some of England, Scotland and Wales.

Registering your party

To register a party you will need to submit an application to us which we will assess against the statutory tests set out in PPERA. It is important that you ensure that all of the information you provide as part of your application is accurate. It may be a criminal offence if you include information in your application which you know, or should know, is false.

Registration of a political party upon submission of an application is not automatic. If the party's application does not meet the statutory tests, the party cannot be registered.

In assessing your application, we will also consider our public sector equality duty.

It is your responsibility to determine the details of your application and to ensure that your application complies with the requirements of PPERA. Until a final decision is taken on your application, we cannot confirm whether it will be successful. We will notify you of our reasons if we refuse your application.

What do I need in order to register a political party?

You can register online by visiting [PEF Online](#).

Your new party application will need to include:

- your completed application form
- a copy of your party's constitution
- a copy of your party's financial scheme that has been adopted by the party
- a non-refundable application fee of £150

Your completed form will include:

- your party name
- descriptions and emblems if you choose to apply to register any
- your party's headquarter address and contact information
- where you intend to contest elections, for example in Great Britain or Northern Ireland

You will also need to complete declarations on that form by the party officers that:

- the party intends to contest elections
- the party has processes in place to comply with the rules that govern the election and financial activities of parties

If you cannot apply online, please contact us using the contact details at the end of this document. We will discuss a suitable alternative way for you to apply, for example by post.

Intention to contest elections

In order to be registered, a party must intend to contest elections. For example, the party must intend to have at least one candidate appear for the party on ballot papers in at least one election. As part of the application, you might be asked what the party has done or will do to realise its intention to contest elections.

The party must only remain registered as long as it has an intention to contest elections.

What officer roles are needed in a registered political party?

Your party must apply for people to be registered for certain official roles.

These are:

- a party leader
- a party treasurer – who is responsible for your party's compliance with the financial rules

- a nominating officer – who will authorise the use of the party's name, descriptions and emblems on ballot papers

You must have at least two officers for the party. If one person fills all three official roles, you must register someone as an additional officer. This additional officer must hold some specified office or role within the party.

The treasurer and nominating officer cannot be the same person unless they are also the leader.

You are not required to appoint a treasurer if you are registering a minor party. All of your party officers, including any optional officer roles if you are required to have one, must sign your application form.

Optional officer roles

- campaigns officer – who will be responsible for your party's compliance with the financial rules for campaign expenditure instead of the treasurer. They cannot also be the treasurer
- additional officer – you must apply to have an additional officer if the party leader is also the treasurer and nominating officer

What officer roles are needed in a minor party?

Minor parties are only required to register a party leader and nominating officer.

You must have at least two people to hold these roles. If one person fills the two official roles, you must register someone as an additional officer.

Your financial scheme

Unless you are a minor party, you must include a financial scheme for our approval as part of your application. The financial scheme you provide must have been adopted by the party.

Your financial scheme demonstrates how your party will comply with the legal requirements of party and election finances under PPERA.

Your scheme must include procedures for:

- accounting records
- handling donations and loans
- maintaining your registered details with us
- authorising and reporting on campaign spending

You should ensure that all of the proposed registered officers of the party sign the scheme.

We produce a [template scheme](#) that you can use to create your party's own financial scheme. You do not have to use this scheme. It is a template only and the scheme that the party submits with its application must accurately reflect how the party actually operates in practice.

As part of the assessment process, you may be asked to evidence how the party has adopted its financial scheme. For example, you may be asked about what procedures the party has in place to deliver the obligations set out in its financial scheme.

A party registered in both the Great Britain and the Northern Ireland registers are two separate registered parties for PPERA purposes. Where you are applying to register in both the Great Britain and Northern Ireland registers, your financial scheme must show that the financial affairs of the party in Great Britain will be conducted separately from those of the party in Northern Ireland. If you use the template scheme, you must ensure that it is amended to reflect this.

This is important because the rules about where a party can obtain its funding from differ depending on which register the party is registered.

Failure to comply with the financial reporting rules set out in PPERA may be a criminal offence which can attract prosecution or civil sanctions, including a fine.

Most parties operate as a single unit. However, you may wish to have party branches. These are called ‘accounting units’ and each unit is responsible for their own finances. Each accounting unit must have their own treasurer and second officer. When you apply, you must tell us if you plan to have accounting units. If your party will have accounting units, our standard template scheme is not suitable. We can provide further advice on what is required, so please contact us.

Your financial scheme must reflect how the party is run and managed in relation to the above procedures. If these procedures change, or a person named in the scheme is no longer a registered party officer, you will need to update your financial scheme. If you update your financial scheme you must provide an updated copy to us for approval.

If we are not satisfied that your financial scheme sets out the arrangements for regulating the financial affairs of the party for the purposes of PPERA, or that it has been adopted by the party, your application will be rejected.

The Party constitution

PPERA requires a party to have a written constitution that sets out the structure and organisation of a party.

As part of your application, you must provide your party’s constitution. This should set out the arrangements for your party’s governance and the rules for carrying out its business.

Your constitution must be consistent with the processes and detail of your financial scheme under PPERA. For example, the two documents should agree on how your accounts are signed off and who is responsible for the accounts.

Your constitution must reflect how your party is run and managed. As a guide your constitution should include:

- Details of the register or registers the party is applying to be registered in. A party registered in both the Great Britain and Northern Ireland registers are two separate parties for PPERA purposes. Where a party is applying to register in both the Great Britain and Northern Ireland registers, the party’s financial scheme must show that the financial affairs

of the party in Great Britain will be conducted separately from those of the party in Northern Ireland. The constitution should also reflect that.

- The party's aims and objectives.
- A reference to an intention to contest elections and at what type of elections, for example UK parliamentary general elections.
- The candidate selection process (or at least a statement that the party will have one).
- The structure of the party and who is responsible for managing the party, including the responsibility of the party officers, the terms of office and procedure for change of those officers.
- How the party will make and record decisions, as well as any other governance arrangements. For example the frequency, timing and type of meetings and the quorum for meetings.
- If the party has membership, and if so the process and rules governing that membership.
- That the party have adopted its financial scheme.
- How the constitution can be changed and the process for dissolution of the party.

If your constitution does not include sufficient information about the structure and organisation of your party your application will be rejected.

You must also ensure that your constitution and how the party operates complies with equalities law. If you don't do so, your application will be rejected. You should read the guidance for political parties produced by the Equality and Human Rights Commission which is [available on their website](#).

Your constitution should be kept up to date and you must provide us with particulars of any change occurring in your constitution during your annual confirmation of registered details. **You also need to provide us with an updated copy whenever you change it.**

Choosing a party name, descriptions and emblems

As part of your registration application, you must specify a party name. In addition to your name you may also apply to register:

- up to 12 party descriptions
- up to 3 emblems

In deciding on what party name, descriptions and emblems to apply to register, you should ensure that you read our [guidance on party names, descriptions and emblems](#).

To help you make your decision, you should [search the registers](#) to determine if there are any similar identity marks on the register. If your proposed identity marks are likely to result in voters confusing them with those of another registered party we will not register them.

You should also undertake a search of the internet to see if there are any existing groups or organisations which have a name or logo that is the same as, or similar to, the identity marks that you want to apply to register. We cannot register an identity mark that is likely to result in a voter being misled.

You can apply to change your party name, descriptions, emblems and add joint descriptions at a later date if you wish for an additional non-refundable application fee of £25 per application.

What is a description?

A party description is an optional identity mark that you can register in addition to the party name. A voter must be able to identify your party from the description. For example, a way to do that may be to include the party name in the description. A description cannot be exactly the same as the party name.

A description can, depending on the specific election, either act as an alternative to the party name or be used in addition to the party name on the ballot paper.

You do not have to register with us any messages that you intend to use in your campaign. You only need to register any description that you intend to use on ballot papers.

What is an emblem?

A party emblem is an optional, visual, black and white representation (or logo) of a party. Your party and its candidates will be able to choose to use one of your emblems on ballot papers at all elections.

What identity marks (names, descriptions and emblems) can't we register?

As a guide, we cannot register an identity mark that in our opinion:

- is likely to mislead voters as to the effect of their vote
- is the same as another registered identity mark which is on the same register
- is the same as an identity mark from a deregistered party which was on the same register and is protected
- is likely to result in voters confusing it with another party identity mark that is already registered or protected
- is likely to contradict or hinder instructions or guidance given for voting
- is obscene or offensive
- contains certain prohibited words
- is, or contains an acronym or abbreviation that is not well known and widely used and not spelt out
- links in any way to online material or contains reference to online content
- contains a reference to a person's name unless it is a person directly associated with your party
- an emblem that contains text which cannot be read at the size emblems appear on ballot papers (2cm square)
- contains more than six words
- is not in Roman script
- is likely to amount to an offence if published

You must submit your emblem in black and white.

For more detail on the tests, and how we apply them, please read our guidance [Overview of party names, descriptions and emblems](#).

What will appear publicly on the register of political parties once you are registered?

Once registered the following details will be made publicly available online:

- the party's name
- whether you are registered in Great Britain or Northern Ireland
- date of registration
- if registered in Great Britain whether you intend to contest elections in England, Scotland and/or Wales
- the party's descriptions (if any)
- the party's emblems (if any)
- the party officers' names
- the party's head office address. As this information will be publicly available, if using your home address you may wish to consider using a PO Box or other address

The Commission's duty to maintain the register

Under PPERA we have a duty to maintain the registers of political parties. In accordance with that duty we may conduct reviews of the registers to ensure that a party and each of its identity marks continue to meet the statutory tests for registration.

This could mean that if in future we consider that any one or more of the party's registered identity marks no longer meet the statutory tests they will be removed.

If a party's circumstances change or it comes to our attention that the party are not operating in accordance with its constitution or financial scheme, we might review the party's registration. This will depend on the specific circumstances.

If a party does not contest elections, we may also review the party's registration.

The party will normally be contacted about any such review.

Financial reporting requirements and responsibilities

Registered political parties

Under PPERA, registered political parties must comply with rules on donations and spending and reporting requirements.

These rules include continuous donation and loan controls, spending controls during regulated elections, annual accounts reporting and annual registration renewal.

These rules are to ensure the integrity and transparency of party political finance. If you don't follow them, you may be subject to fines or other enforcement action. In some cases, this can include a referral for criminal prosecution.

The officers of a registered political party have significant responsibilities, so it's important that you understand these fully before you register with us.

Minor parties

Under PPERA, minor parties are not subject to the financial controls that registered political parties must comply with. They are only required to submit an annual registration confirmation with us.

Independent candidates

Under PPERA, independent candidates have no party reporting responsibilities, but they must report their election spending and donations to the local Returning Officer after the election.

What next?

If you have decided that you want to register your party, you are almost ready to apply.

We recommend that you now read the following documents:

[Overview of party names, descriptions and emblems](#)

[Process for registering a political party](#)

These documents will explain the rules and process of registration in more detail. You will then have all the information you need to make the correct application decisions.

Where can I get further advice?

You can find more information in the guidance documents we have suggested in this document, or you can [view our full range of guidance and up-to-date resources on our website](#).

You can contact us on one of the phone numbers or email addresses below.

Contact us on:

England: 0333 103 1928
partyreg@electoralcommission.org.uk

Scotland: 0333 103 1928
infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk

Wales: 0333 103 1929
infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk

Northern Ireland: 0333 103 1928
infonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk

Visit us at <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk>

We welcome feedback on our guidance – just email us at:
partyreg@electoralcommission.org.uk.