

Electoral Registration in 2000

A study carried out by the Social and Vital Statistics
Division of the Office for National Statistics on behalf
of The Electoral Commission

September 2004 – April 2005

Main Report - August 2005

Charley Greenwood

Acknowledgements

The author would like to thank colleagues in Social and Vital Statistics (SVS) Division, Census Branch and Information Management Group within ONS.

The advice of employees in other government departments and information suppliers is also greatly appreciated.

Our thanks to the project representatives at the Electoral Commission for their guidance and interest.

Finally, we express our appreciation for the participation of the public in ONS surveys and in the Census upon which studies such as this are entirely dependent.

Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	page iii
<i>List of Tables and Figures</i>	page vi
<i>Report Overview</i>	page vii
<i>Summary of main findings</i>	page ix
 <i>Report Chapters</i>	
1 Background and methodology	page 1
2 Non-registration in the population	page 3
3 Non-registration and area	page 5
4 Non-registration and personal characteristics	page 15
5 Non-registration and electoral registration practice	page 37
6 Indicators of non-registration	page 45
7 Causes of non-registration	page 47
8 Comments	page 53
 <i>Appendices</i>	
A1 <i>Methodological Approach – sample development and matching</i>	page 55

List of Tables and Figures

Table / Chart	Page	
Table 3.1	Non-registration by country and region	5
Chart 3.1	Non-registration (%) by region	6
Table 3.2	Non-registration by type of authority	7
Table 3.3	Non-registration by density of population	8
Table 3.4	Non-registration by age profile of Local Authority	9
Table 3.5	Non-registration by area-level deprivation	10
Table 3.6	Non-registration in Local Authorities with ethnic minority populations	11
Table 3.7	Non-registration by ethnic minority profile of Local Authority	11
Table 3.8	Non-registration by political balance of Local Authority	12
Table 3.9	Non-registration by problems reported by Local Authority	13
Table 4.1	Non-registration by age	15
Chart 4a	Non-registration (%) by age in single years	16
Chart 4b	Non-registration (%) and Mobility (%) by age in single years	17
Chart 4c	Non-registration (%) by age and family situation	17
Table 4.2	Non-registration by sex and age	18
Chart 4d	Non-registration (%) by sex and age	18
Table 4.3	Non-registration by ethnic group	19
Chart 4e	Non-registration (%) by ethnic group	19
Table 4.4	Non-registration by ethnic minority (grouped) and age	20
Table 4.5	Non-registration by ethnic minority (grouped) and nationality	20
Table 4.6	Non-registration by country of birth	22
Chart 4f	Non-registration (%) by Country of birth and length of time in UK	22
Table 4.7	Non-registration by nationality	23
Table 4.8	Non-registration by religion	24
Chart 4g	Non-registration (%) by religion and country of birth / nationality / length of UK residence	24
Table 4.9	Non-registration by length of residence	25
Chart 4h	Non-registration (%) by length of residence	25
Chart 4i	Non-registration (%) by length of residence and age	26
Table 4.10	Non-registration by tenure	27
Chart 4j	Distribution of non-registration in the sample (by tenure)	27
Table 4.11	Non-registration by economic activity status	28
Table 4.12	Non-registration by occupational group	29
Table 4.13	Non-registration by student mobility	30
Table 4.14	Non-registration by where student sampled	30
Table 4.15	Non-registration by whether reported a long-term illness or disability	31
Table 4.16	Non-registration by highest educational qualification	32
Table 4.17	Non-registration by highest educational qualification (age 18-34, country of birth UK)	32
Table 4.18	Non-registration by marital status and sex	33
Table 4.19	Non-registration by relationship to head of household	34
Table 4.20	Non-registration (households with 2 or more unrelated adults)	35
Table 4.21	Non-registration for head of household (single eligible person households)	35
Chart 4k	Distribution of non-registration in the sample (by relationship)	35
Chart 5a	Non-registration rate (%) by registration form completion (initial)	38
Chart 5b	Registration form non-completion rate (%) by use of canvassers	38
Table 5.1	Proportion LA's using canvassers by area level characteristics	39
Chart 5c	Non-registration rate (%) by use of canvassers	40
Table 5.2	Non-registration by LA use of canvassers and area level characteristics	41
Table 5.3	Non-registration by carrying forward of names	42
Chart 5d	Non-registration rate (%) by electoral registration budget	43
Table 6.1	Profile of non-registration by associated characteristics	45

Report Overview

Structure of the Report

The report is divided into a summary, eight chapters and an Appendix.

Report Summary provides a brief statement of key points and findings from Chapters 1-8.

Chapter 1 presents the background and aims of the study, and explains the methodology employed. Further details of the methodology are in the Appendix.

Chapter 2 describes how estimates of non-registration in the population of England and Wales in 2002 are derived from an analysis of non-registration in the study sample.

Chapter 3 presents analysis of the rates of non-registration in the study sample according to a number of area-level characteristics.

Chapter 4 examines how individual-level characteristics were related to non-registration in the study sample. Where appropriate, the effect of controlling for other variables is shown, and the distribution of non-registration in the sample is also examined.

Chapter 5 assesses the effect of local authority electoral registration practices on levels of non-registration, by relating information from a survey of registration practice (undertaken in 1999 by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister) to the study sample.

Chapter 6 provides a profile of non-registration in the sample. The chapter presents a series of variables which are likely to be useful indicators of non-registration in the population.

Chapter 7 examines whether the indicators of non-registration presented in Chapter 6 are causal factors in non-registration, by examining the likely mechanism of non-registration in different groups.

Chapter 8 presents ideas for future research, and comments on some possible policy implications of the findings.

Significance

Unless stated otherwise, differences cited in the text are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Summary of main findings

Non-registration in the Population (Chapter 2)

England and Wales

The study has assessed the level of non-registration within a 'study sample' of people - representative of 95% of the household population of England and Wales in October 2000. The rate of non-registration for people in this study sample was 7%. By adjustments based on evaluation of the registration rate for the remaining 5% of the population, an estimate of non-registration for the complete household population of England and Wales was made of between 8% and 9%. The equivalent estimate for 1991 was 7-9%.

Non-registration in the Study Sample (Chapters 3-8)

The study sample (representative of 95% of the population), consisted of people drawn from a large social survey (the Labour force survey) supplemented by records drawn from the Census (for those households which did not respond to the survey). The figures presented in Chapters 3-8 of the report are for this study sample, except (where stated), for characteristics only measured within the survey. As noted in Chapter 2, people of all recorded nationalities were included in the sample.

Area (Chapter 3)

Analysis of the study sample showed that non-registration rates were similar in England (7%) and in Wales (6%), but varied considerably by region within England, ranging from 4% in the West Midlands to 18% in Inner London. Non-registration rates were generally higher in metropolitan areas and areas with high population densities, young populations, and areas with high proportions of ethnic minority people, and high levels of employment or income deprivation.

Personal Characteristics (Chapter 4)

Younger people were the most likely to be unregistered, with the levels highest among 'attainers'¹. Among people aged 18-24 non-registration was highest for those who lived away from home, and this was in part due to their higher level of mobility. At all ages, men were more likely to be unregistered than women.

People from some ethnic minorities had a relatively high likelihood of non-registration, but the rate for Asians² and Black Caribbean people was similar to that for white people across all age groups. The level of non-registration among Asian people seemed to have decreased considerably since 1991 (7% compared with 15%). Non-registration was associated with nationality, country of birth and religion, but when length of residency in the UK was controlled for, the latter two declined in importance.

One important factor in non-registration for all groups of people was the length of residence at the sampled address prior to the qualifying date. The likelihood of non-registration was

¹ Those aged 16-17 at the qualifying date, but due to become 18 whilst the 2001 register was in force.

² Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi (grouping used in 1991)

found to decline with length of time at the address, from 35% for those resident for two to three months to around 2% for those resident for 10 or more years. Those living in privately rented accommodation were also more likely than owner-occupiers to be unregistered.

A relatively high proportion of the unemployed, people in non-permanent employment, and people without qualifications were unregistered. Single people, and those who were divorced or separated were more likely than other people to be unregistered. Young people living with parents were more likely to be unregistered than their parents, but were still markedly less likely to be unregistered than other young people not living with their parents. In general, people not related to the head of household at an address had high levels of non-registration.

Electoral Registration (Chapter 5)

There is no clear evidence of the effect of electoral registration practises (e.g. canvassing) on levels of non-registration. However, as outlined in Chapter 3, this may be due to practices being introduced with reference to the existing levels of non-registration itself. For this reason the effect they might have on raising levels of registration rates may be hidden.

Indicators of non-registration (Chapter 6)

Some variables function very effectively at identifying large numbers of unregistered people in the sample. It is possible to account for over half (52%) of all non-registration in the study sample with reference to just three groups; those living with parents, those having moved within the 6 months prior to the qualifying date and those renting from a private landlord. These three groups represented 19% of the sample. By considering, also people who were unrelated to their head of household (e.g. lodgers), the unemployed, those receiving certain benefits, full-time students, single people under thirty and those who were divorced or separated, the proportion of non-registration accounted for was over 73%, by reference to 35% of the sample.

Other useful indicators of non-registration included being a member of some (but not all) ethnic minority groups, having non-UK nationality, moving to an address less than 2 years before the qualifying date, being in non-permanent employment, and not having qualifications. Many of these indicators overlapped, and the effect of some are largely subsumed by others, but they may all still be potentially useful as ways to identify groups of people likely to have been unregistered.

Causes of non-registration (Chapter 7)

When each of the measured characteristics examined in Chapters 3-6 is considered in the context of the effects of the others, those most clearly associated with non-registration were age, sex, mobility, ethnicity, nationality, marital status, relationship to the head of household, and whether the head of household was registered. However, it is possible that the direct causes of non-registration vary in different sub-groups, with the reason for non-registration sometimes being a lack of desire, sometimes a mistake by another household member, and sometimes a lack of opportunity (e.g. no registration form). The precise mechanism of non-registration for an individual may be defined as much by their relationship with other people in their household as by their personal characteristics.

Comments (Chapter 8)

The study covers the period prior to the introduction both of rolling registration and of edited registers. It would be interesting to measure the effect of these on registration rates. Further research is also suggested on the role of the head of household both in terms of specific failures to register eligible people, and a likely positive general effect on registration rates.

1 Background and methodology

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) was commissioned to carry out the Electoral Registration Check (ERC) study in the summer of 2004 as part of a wider project by The Electoral Commission (EC) into Electoral Registration within the UK.

The overall aims of the Commission's research project were

- to undertake research on registration rates across localities to identify the extent of under-registration in particular communities³ and
- to provide reliable statistics on the extent of electoral registration, and non-registration, in Britain.

The specific aims of the ONS study were

- to investigate levels of electoral registration in the household population of Great Britain (subject to potential limitations on the supply of data in Scotland⁴) at or around the time of the census in 2001, prior to the introduction of rolling registration and the creation of separate full and edited registers;
- to seek estimates of registration levels amongst sub-groups of the population, along with some evaluation of factors contributing to non-registration; and
- to provide information contributing to future strategies for research.

In 1993, the ONS's predecessor organisation, The Office of Population, Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) published a report into registration levels in Great Britain. The research for this project was carried out as part of the Census Coverage Survey undertaken after the 1991 census.

Interviews were carried out in Summer 1991 at a sample of addresses in order to establish the eligibility of occupants for inclusion on the 1991 electoral register. This included finding out whether they were resident at the sampled address on the 'qualifying date' for registration - the preceding 10th October (1990). As a separate exercise, in order to find out who was registered at the address, interviewers consulted paper copies of February 1991 electoral registers held in local libraries. As neither element of this approach was possible retrospectively for 2001, the ONS proposed instead to match a sample of population records against electronic versions of the electoral register for February 2001.

To provide a population sample suitable for this purpose, the 'study sample' was developed using the address sample of a large ONS social survey, the Labour Force Survey (LFS)⁵. Data from responding households in the LFS sample at the time of the electoral registration qualifying date in October 2000 formed the majority of the study sample. In addition the sample contained census records for people in households or people who were in the LFS address sample but who did not respond to the survey. In practice the two sets of records were processed separately, but were treated as one sample.

³ 'The Electoral Registration Process' : The Electoral Commission

⁴ Which is controlled by the General Register Office for Scotland

⁵ The address sample for the LFS is a random sample of address records from the Post Office's Postal Address File (PAF) (small users) along with addresses drawn from a separately maintained list of NHS accommodation.

The two elements of the study sample were extracted from relevant archives, compared (to check that people were not being ‘double counted’), and then prepared individually for matching to the electoral register by name and address⁶.

From the sample of 15,157 addresses in England and Wales, the ONS derived from the two data sources an available pool of 23,963 eligible adults living within non-communal households at the time of the qualifying date in October 2000. Automated matching of these people against a collated version of the local authority electoral registers of February 2001 was supplemented by detailed clerical matching using searchable databases also based on the 2001 electoral register.

The matching was carried out of all people of eligible age⁷ in the study sample against candidate records within the electoral register. For most cases, the matching used the most complete name information available from the survey or census. In a small number of cases, matching used with less complete names, such as initial and surname or surname and title. The error rate for the multi-stage matching processes and related assumptions was estimated to be less than 1% overall and to be unbiased. The methodology is outlined in greater detail in the report appendix.

Having established datasets containing information about the characteristics of people in the study sample, and their registration status, further information about the characteristics of the area in which people lived was also added from Census 2001 area-level tabulations. Information about electoral registration practice in the local authority was added from the findings of a survey of electoral registration officers carried out by the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) in 1999⁸.

This information about the people in the study sample, along with some derived variables relating to the household characteristics and relationships between household members was analysed in relation to the registration status of each person. The findings are presented in Chapters 2-5. Some additional analysis and interpretation is presented in Chapters 6-7.

⁶ The electoral register does not contain other information, except, (for some records) titles such as Mr and Mrs.
⁷ everyone aged 17 or over, plus all 16 year olds who would become 18 years of age during the life of the 2001 register.

⁸ This information was only available for the 251 local authorities responding to the DETR survey, providing information for local authorities containing approximately 66% of the people contained in the ERC sample. More information can be found at the website of the DETR’s successor Department, the Office for the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM)

http://www.odpm.gov.uk/stellent/groups/odpm_localgov/documents/page/odpm_locgov_605385.hcsp

2 Non-registration in the population

The combined study sample of 23,963 eligible adults was representative of approximately 95% of the household population of England and Wales in October 2000. The estimate of non-registration based on this study sample is 7%.

The 5% of the population not represented by the study sample consists both of people who were found by the census enumerator but who did not return a census form (and for whom we cannot therefore check registration status), and groups that census coverage studies showed were not covered by the census. There is likely to be a relatively high level of non-registration in this part of the population which needs to be taken into account when providing an estimate for non-registration in the population as a whole.

There are two approaches to estimating non-registration among the 5% of the population not represented by the study sample:

1. *Measuring non-registration amongst census non-responders*

Analysis of non-registration among census non-responders drawn from the 2001 Census Coverage Survey (CCS) suggests that up to 55% of census non-responders were not registered⁹. On this basis estimated non-registration for the entire household population of England and Wales in October 2000 would be 9%. The true figure is likely to be below this level as the CCS oversamples hard to enumerate areas and thereby over-represents those least likely to be registered.

2. *Weighting the study sample by characteristics associated with non-registration*

A key indicator of non-registration is mobility. In the estimates of the characteristics of the population derived from the 2001 Census, mobility within the previous 12 months was estimated at 11%. The level in the study sample was 9%. By weighting the relevant components of the study sample (in particular survey non-responders) to replicate this level of mobility the adjusted estimate for overall non-registration is 8%.

Considering both these approaches, the best estimate for non-registration amongst the eligible household population in 2000 lies between 8% and 9%.

⁹ The sample for this analysis was distinct from that of the main study, being based on the Census Coverage Survey (CCS) sample, and on previous ONS work linking CCS records to the Census. However, once the sample was drawn of CCS-responding, Census non-responding people, the methodology employed for matching records to the electoral register was consistent with that used on the main study sample.

Comparison with 1991

The OPCS Electoral Registration study in 1993 estimated non-registration in 1991 for the household population of England and Wales to have been between 7% and 9%.

There has been a slight change in the definition of eligibility between 1991 and 2000. In the 1993 study those with nationality outside the UK, Republic of Ireland or Commonwealth were ineligible, and the 1993 study treated them as ineligible (unless they were in fact found to be registered). However, by the year 2000 those born in EU countries were also entitled to be registered to vote. This means that in 2001 the only people not automatically entitled to vote were those with a Nationality outside the UK, EU or Commonwealth. Even among this group, some people may be eligible (an example being where dual citizenship is acquired), and as the analysis of registration in Chapter 3 shows, a proportion of those with such 'ineligible' nationalities were in fact registered to vote. However, the information is not available to determine which people among this group are not eligible. For this reason, for the current study the ONS have also treated as eligible, people with UK, Commonwealth, EU, and other nationalities¹⁰.

If the estimate of non-registration for 2000 were based on an eligible sample restricted to the same nationalities and citizenship status as the 1991 study, then the estimate of non-registration would be 1 percentage point lower, that is between 7% and 8%¹¹.

On either basis, whether absolute or equivalised, the estimate for non-registration in 2000 lies within the range estimated by OPCS for 1991. Hence there is no evidence of a change in the overall levels of non-registration in the household population between 1991 and 2000.

Analysis in chapters 3-8

Analysis of registration amongst subgroups is based on the study sample. This allows comparison of relative levels of non-registration between different groups.

Some analysis is based only on LFS survey respondents within the study sample for whom we have additional information from LFS survey data on some topics.

Because of the difference in the coverage of the current study sample and the 1991 sample, comparisons between 2000 and 1991 are not made for individual subgroups unless they can be justified by the scale of the change.

¹⁰ This has implications for some interpretation of results for characteristics associated with Nationality, as the eligible figures will contain some people who were ineligible. This is discussed in the text of Chapter 3.

¹¹ Because of the removal from the eligible sample of two groups with high proportions of unregistered people.

3 Non-registration and area

This chapter assesses levels of non-registration in England and Wales in 2000 by administrative area and by area level characteristics. All analysis is based on the study sample unless otherwise stated.

3.1 Country and region

Table 3.1 shows levels of non-registration by country and region. There was no significant difference in the level of non-registration between Wales and England in 2000 (6% and 7%).

The figures for non-registration in English regions outside London ranged between 4% and 8%. Outer London (11%) and Inner London (18%) had the highest rates of non-registration.

Table 3.1 Non-registration by country and region

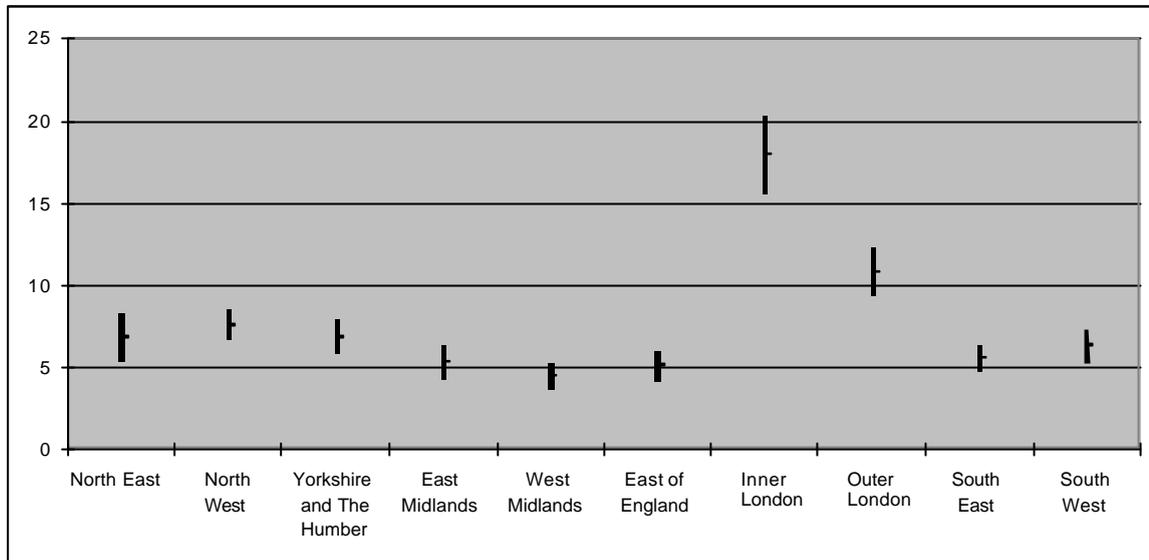
<i>Study sample</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>	
	Percentage not registered	Base (= 100%)
England	7	22,594
North East	7	1,244
North West	8	3,203
Yorkshire and The Humber	7	2,338
East Midlands	5	1,994
West Midlands	4	2,498
East of England	5	2,268
London	13	2,895
London - Inner	18	985
London - Outer	11	1,909
South East	6	3,668
South West	6	2,295
Wales	6	1,369
England and Wales	7	23,963

Chart 3.1 illustrates regional variation in levels of non-registration. A line above and below each point estimate indicates the 95% confidence intervals.

Chart 3.1 Non-registration (%) by region

Study sample

England



note: vertical lines represent 95% confidence intervals above and below point estimate

3.2 Local Authority

Table 3.2 shows that in England, metropolitan areas had a higher level of non-registration than non-metropolitan areas (8% compared with 5%). This difference is still evident if the comparison excludes London (7% compared with 5%).

Table 3.2 Non-registration by type of authority

<i>Study sample</i>	Percentage not registered	Base (= 100%)
England		
Metropolitan ¹ (including London)	8	<i>11,850</i>
Metropolitan ¹ (excluding London)	7	<i>8,956</i>
Non-metropolitan ²	5	<i>10,550</i>

1 – comprising 36 Metropolitan Districts plus 46 Unitary Authorities

2 – comprising 239 Non-metropolitan Districts (excludes Unitary Authorities)

Metropolitan areas tend to have a higher population density, lower age profile and higher levels of ethnic minority population than other areas. Subsequent sections will show that these factors are associated with relatively high levels of non-registration.

Registration levels at the local authority level are not presented here because the sample sizes are generally too small. The clear differences at the regional level, however, suggests that some degree of variation must exist at a local authority level.

3.3 Population density

Table 3.3 shows registration levels by population density. In England and Wales, non-registration in the 25% of local authorities with the highest density of population was higher than that in other areas (9% compared with 5-6%). There was no difference in levels of non-registration across areas with lower population densities.

The pattern is similar when a ward-level measure of population density is used.

These variations may be reflecting the association between population density and other factors linked to non-registration - for example, 35 of the 38 local authorities in the highest decile for concentration of ethnic minorities were also in the highest quartile for population density.

Table 3.3 Non-registration by density of population

<i>Study sample</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>	
	Percentage not registered	Base (= 100%)
Local Authority Level measure		
Quartile 1 (lowest population density)	5	3,766
Quartile 2	6	4,899
Quartile 3	6	6,683
Quartile 4 (highest population density)	9	8,352
Ward Level measure		
Quartile 1 (lowest population density)	6	1,701
Quartile 2	5	3,869
Quartile 3	6	5,521
Quartile 4 (highest population density)	9	6,363

3.4 Age profile of area

Table 3.4 shows non-registration in terms of the distribution of local authorities with particularly old or young populations. Local authorities with high proportions of young adults and those with low proportions of people aged 55 or over had the highest rates of non-registration. In the 25% of areas with the highest proportion of 16-24 year olds, 9% of people were not registered, compared with 5% in other quartiles. Similarly, in the 25% of areas with the lowest proportion of people aged 55 or over, 10% of people were not registered, compared with 5-6% in other quartiles.

Table 3.4 Non-registration by age profile of Local Authority

<i>Study sample</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>	
	Percentage not registered	Base (= 100%)
16-24 age group		
Quartile 1 (lowest proportion of this age group)	5	<i>4,091</i>
Quartiles 2 & 3	5	<i>11,155</i>
Quartile 4 (highest proportion of this age group)	9	<i>8,453</i>
55+ age group		
Quartile 1 (lowest proportion of this age group)	10	<i>7,505</i>
Quartiles 2 & 3	5	<i>11,905</i>
Quartile 4 (highest proportion of this age group)	6	<i>4,290</i>

3.5 Index of deprivation

Indices of deprivation have been generated for local authorities in England and Wales by the Office for National Statistics using socio-demographic data from the 2001 Census.

Table 3.5 shows that areas with high levels of employment and income deprivation had the highest levels of non-registration. On both measures, 8% of people in the quartile with the highest deprivation were not registered, compared with 5-6% in other quartiles.

Table 3.5 Non-registration by area-level deprivation

<i>Study sample</i>		<i>England and Wales</i>
	Percentage not registered	Base (= 100%)
Employment Deprivation		
Quartile 1 (lowest deprivation)	6	3,222
Quartile 2	5	4,162
Quartile 3	6	5,159
Quartile 4 (highest deprivation)	8	9,858
Income Deprivation		
Quartile 1 (lowest deprivation)	6	3,178
Quartile 2	5	4,087
Quartile 3	6	5,199
Quartile 4 (highest deprivation)	8	9,937

3.6 Ethnic profile of area

Table 3.6 shows levels of non-registration in 2000 for people living in Local Authorities in England and Wales which had relatively large ethnic minority communities.

Levels of non-registration in those local authorities which had the highest proportions of people in the non-white ethnic minority groups were higher (8-12%) than those in areas with the highest proportion of white people - i.e. areas with the lowest proportions of people from non-white ethnic minority groups (5%).

Table 3.6 Non-registration in Local Authorities with ethnic minority populations

<i>Study sample</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>	
	Percentage not registered*	Base (= 100%)
10% of LA's with the highest proportion : White	5	1,333
10% of LA's with the highest proportion : Indian	9	3,448
10% of LA's with the highest proportion : Pakistani	8	3,690
10% of LA's with the highest proportion : Bangladeshi	10	3,416
10% of LA's with the highest proportion : Black - Caribbean	11	3,437
10% of LA's with the highest proportion : Black - African	12	3,201

* proportion shown is non-registration for all people within these areas

Table 3.7 compares non-registration levels for those local authorities with high proportions of people from any ethnic minority group with levels in other local authorities. Within the former areas the non-registration rate for all eligible people was higher (11%) than the rate for non-registration elsewhere (5%), and this was true for both white people (8% compared with 6%) and ethnic minorities (19% compared with 14%).

Table 3.7 Non-registration by ethnic minority profile of Local Authority

<i>Study sample</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>	
	Percentage not registered	Base (= 100%)
10% of LA's : highest proportion of people in Ethnic Minorities	11	3,834
<i>rate amongst only white population in these LA's</i>	8	2,708
<i>rate amongst only ethnic minority population in these LA's</i>	19	1,126
90% of LA's : lower proportions of people in Ethnic Minorities	5	19,955
<i>rate amongst only white population in these LA's</i>	6	18,940
<i>rate amongst only ethnic minority population in these LA's</i>	14	1,015

3.7 Political profile of area

Evidence from studies carried out on behalf of the DETR¹² in 1999 demonstrated a link between the extent to which the distribution of political power between councillors of different parties within local councils affects subsequent voter turnout. The finding was that Local Authorities where control was split between different political groups (as measured by the relative numbers of councillors for each party) - were likely to have higher turnout.

It might be hypothesised that this same factor could affect voter registration. Table 3.8 shows non-registration analysed by a dichotomous variable indicating whether a local authority was under control of one political party (in 1998) or had 'no-overall control'. Clearly if this were a factor then one might also expect the status of the relevant Parliamentary Constituency to play a part in people's considerations, but the information to allow this analysis is not available.

No clear relationship can be seen, suggesting that there was no strong tendency to register, or refrain from registering associated with the degree of balance of political control within the Local Council area in which people lived.

Table 3.8 Non-registration by political balance of Local Authority

<i>Study sample (251 LA's, 66% of people in sample)</i>	Percentage not registered	<i>England and Wales</i> Base (= 100%)
Local Authorities with one party in overall control	7	11,985
Local Authorities with no overall control	7	4,111

¹² see chapter one for more information

3.8 Special Problems

The 1999 DETR survey of local authority electoral registration practice also asked about a number of special problems which might be encountered during electoral registration. Table 3.9 shows the responses to these questions analysed by levels of non-registration in the areas concerned. The 25 local authorities reporting problems registering foreign nationals had higher rates of non-registration than other areas (11% compared with 7%). This is consistent with findings in section 3.6 concerning registration rates and area level measures of ethnicity, and also with findings in Chapter 4 that will show the role of nationality in non-registration.

Authorities reporting difficulties with the registration of non-native English speakers also had a higher rate of non-registration than other areas (9% compared with 7%).

These figures represent area level measures, and given the small size of some of the sub-populations concerned, it is unlikely that the difficulties encountered with the group in question would be solely responsible for any observed increase in the level of non-registration. Instead it is likely that difficulties with registration for certain groups is concentrated in areas which also have other groups associated with high non-registration. For this reason, the fact that the non-registration rate in areas reporting problems registering travellers is lower than in other areas does not mean that the problem of non-registration for travellers is not as great as for other groups. It may be that the areas where registration of travellers was perceived to be problematic were less densely populated, non-metropolitan areas where registration rates were otherwise higher than average.

Overall the table does provide support for the following statements

- Local authorities reporting specific difficulties supporting registration in certain groups do also have higher than average measured levels of non-registration
- Authorities with generally low levels of underlying non-registration, may still be experiencing difficulties helping some (smaller) groups to register.

Table 3.9 Non-registration by problems reported by Local Authority

	<i>England and Wales</i>			
	<i>Study sample in the 251 responding LA's</i>			
	Percentage not registered		Base (= 100%)	
	LA reporting	LA not reporting	LA reporting	LA not reporting
problems registering : students	8	7	5,248	10,912
problems registering : homeless	7	7	1,695	14,464
problems registering : travellers	5	7	1,563	14,596
problems registering : foreign nationals	11	7	1,354	14,805
problems registering : non-native English speakers	9	7	1,422	14,738
problems registering : armed services	6	7	1,803	14,356
problems registering : multiple occupancy	7	7	5,440	10,719

4 Non-registration and personal characteristics

Chapter 4 looks at the ways in which a range of personal characteristics are related to levels of non-registration.

4.1 Age

Table 4.1 shows non-registration rates analysed by age at the qualifying date for the 2001 electoral register. In the study sample, the highest rate of non-registration was found amongst people in the youngest age-groups. The progression was quite marked, ranging from 34% for eligible 16 year olds (those becoming 18 within the life of the February 2001 register) down to 2% for those aged 65 or over.

There are two main reasons why people in older age groups were most likely to be registered. Firstly, older people had different characteristics from young people, (an example a lower rate of moving home), which led directly to a reduced likelihood of non-registration. Secondly, because overall levels of non-registration in previous decades were lower¹³, it is likely that a higher predisposition to registration persisted in the older age groups.

Table 4.1 Non-registration by age

<i>Study sample</i>	Percentage not registered	<i>England and Wales</i>
		Base (= 100%)
Age banding 1		
16-17 (18 whilst 2001 register in force)	28	479
18-24	16	2,211
25-34	11	3,858
35-44	6	4,542
45-54	4	4,043
55-64	3	3,308
65-99	2	5,029
Age banding 2		
16 (18 whilst 2001 register in force)	34	136
17	25	343
18-19	15	674
20	17	351
21-24	17	1,186
25-29	14	1,724
Age banding 3		
18-34	13	6,069
35-54	5	8,585
55-99	2	8,337

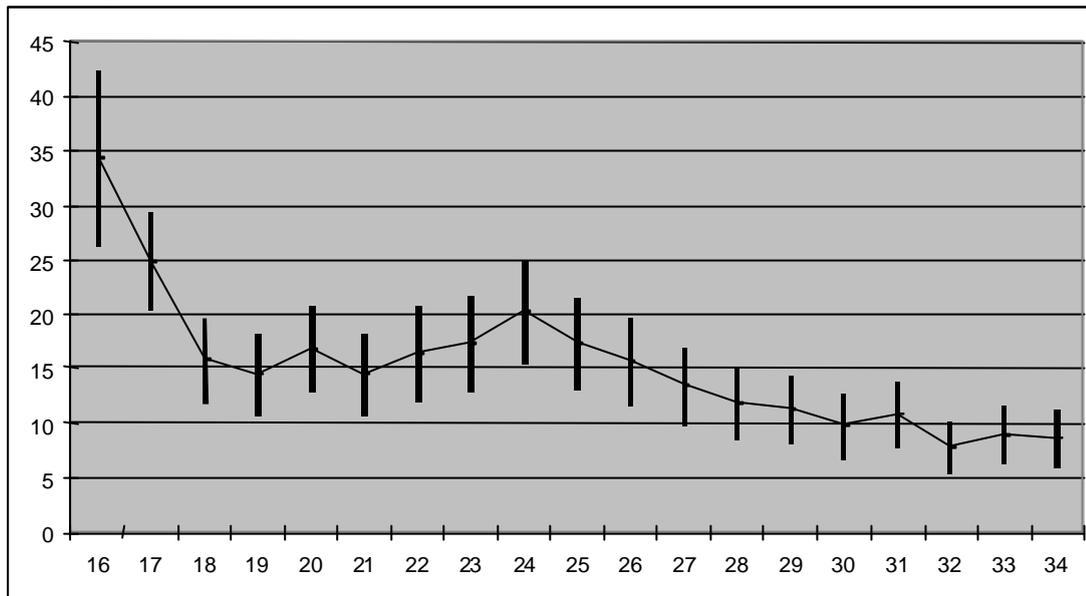
¹³ The non-registration rate was 4% in 1966. (source: 'Electoral Registration in 1991' Stephen Smith, OPCS 1991).

In order to understand why non-registration is more likely to occur among young people it is useful to examine their age-profile more closely. Chart 4a shows the proportion unregistered at each age from 16 to 34. There was an initial drop in rates of non-registration from 34% for eligible 16 year olds, to around 15% for 18-21 year olds. Non-registration then rose again amongst people in their mid-twenties, before falling to below 10% for those in their early thirties.

Chart 4a Non-registration (%) by age in single years

Study sample

England and Wales



note: vertical lines represent 95% confidence intervals above and below point estimate

It is clear that ‘attainers’ (those aged 16 or 17, but becoming 18 during the life of the forthcoming electoral register) were relatively likely to be unregistered. The most likely explanation for this would be a lack of awareness among people completing the household’s electoral registration form that people under 18 were eligible to be registered.

The increase in the likelihood of non-registration from the level seen in the 18-21 age group to that seen among people in their mid twenties was also reported in both 1991 and 1981. This suggests that the increase in this period was reflecting changes in circumstances during early adulthood, rather than being a phenomenon specific to the particular age cohort in 2000.

The rise in non-registration during this period, is likely to be due an increased level of mobility during these years. Chart 4b shows overall non-registration rates compared with mobility among people living away from a parental home. The proportion moving home¹⁴ rose during the early twenties and fell thereafter, and the rate of registration rose and fell in parallel with this.

¹⁴ in this chart, moving to an address within the six months prior to the qualifying date is taken as the indicator of mobility because it is available for both survey and census data. A more detailed examination of the effect of mobility is given in section 4.7. The percentage moving excludes those who moved but were subsequently living with their parents (i.e. moving with or to a parental home).

Chart 4b Non-registration (%) and Mobility (%) by age in single years

Study sample – people not living with parents

England and Wales

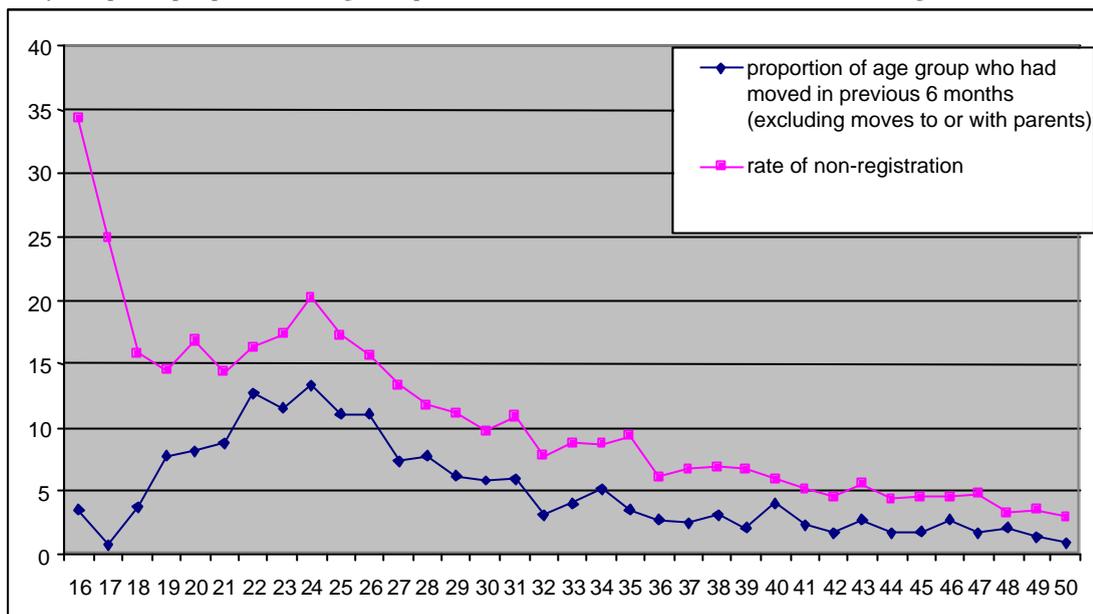
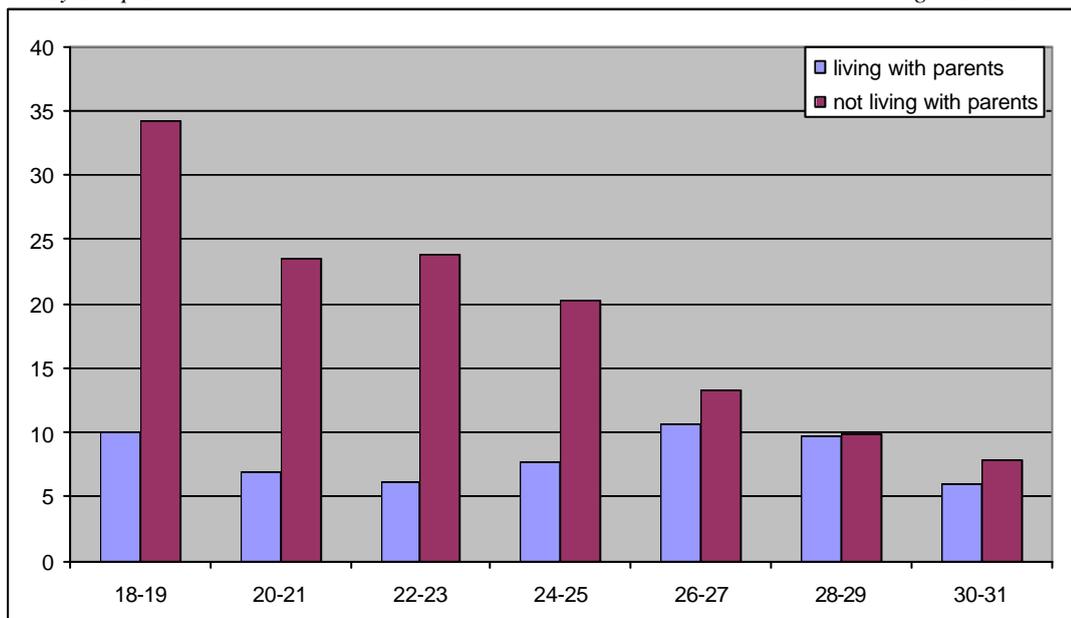


Chart 4a (previous page), showed the overall rate of non-registration among young people living with their parents and those living elsewhere. Chart 4c presents non-registration rates (by age) for these two groups separately. Among those living with parents, the proportion unregistered showed little age variation. In contrast, among those living elsewhere the proportion unregistered showed a downward trend across the age range. There was little difference between the groups in the likelihood of non-registration among people in their late twenties.

Chart 4c Non-registration (%) by age and family situation

Survey sample

England and Wales



4.2 Sex

Table 4.2 and Chart 4d show levels of non-registration in England and Wales by sex and age.

Men were more likely than women to be unregistered at all ages (8% compared with 6%), but the difference was most evident among younger people (for whom overall levels were higher). The fact that the difference between men and women is seen across the age range, may imply a genuine gender variation in propensity to register.

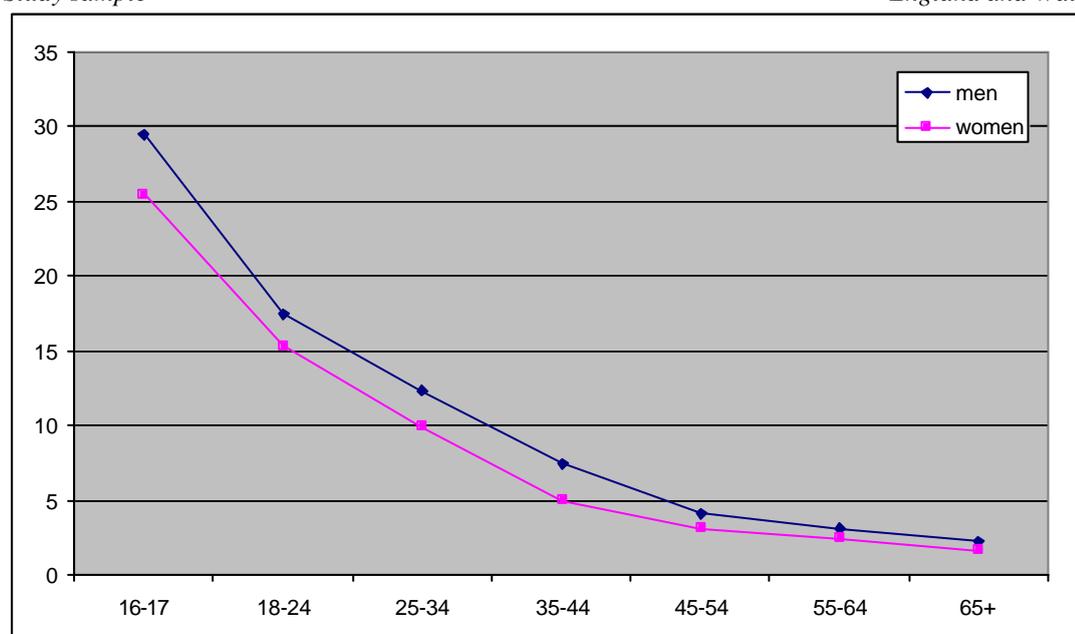
Table 4.2 Non-registration by sex and age

<i>Study sample</i>		<i>England and Wales</i>			
		Percentage not registered		Base (= 100%)	
		Male	Female	Male	Female
Age					
	16-17	29	25	248	232
	18-24	18	15	1,073	1,136
	25-34	13	10	1,866	1,990
	35-44	7	5	2,177	2,362
	45-54	4	3	1,976	2,063
	55-64	3	2	1,612	1,693
	65+	2	2	2,115	2,911
	All ages	8	6	11,293	12,654

Chart 4d Non-registration (%) by sex and age

Study sample

England and Wales



4.3 Ethnic group

Tables 4.3 and Chart 4e show non-registration rates analysed by ethnicity. Overall, people in ethnic minority groups were about 3 times as likely to be unregistered as white people (17% compared with 6%) but, amongst the different ethnic minority groups, the proportion not registered showed considerable variation.

Among Asian people (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi)¹⁵, the proportion unregistered (7%) was similar to that for white people. This represents a reduction in non-registration amongst these communities since 1991. Although the equivalent 1991 figure of 15% is not strictly comparable¹⁶, the difference is marked enough to suggest that a real reduction has taken place.

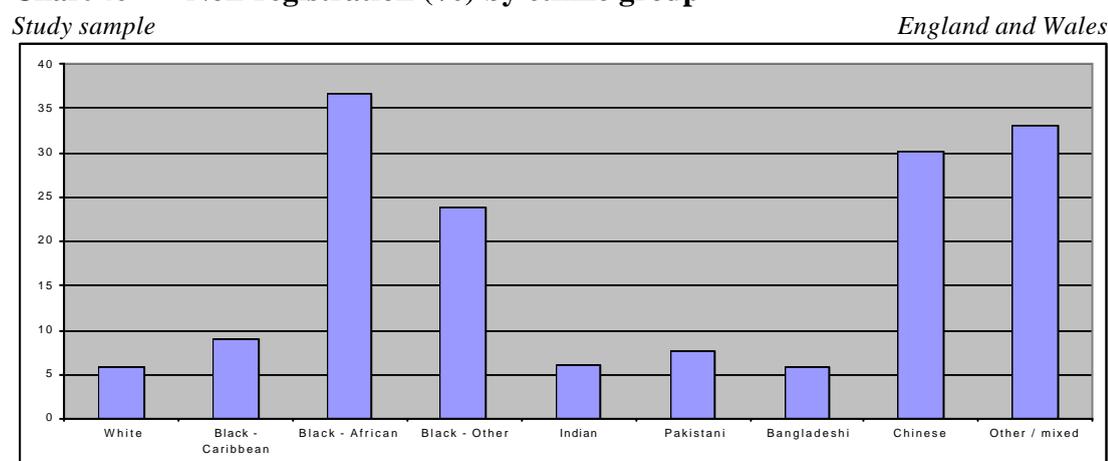
The rate of non-registration among Black Caribbean people (9%) was also similar to that among white people. In contrast the rates among Black Africans, other Black groups, Chinese people and people in other ethnic minority groups were high (37%, 24%, 30% and 33%).

Table 4.3 Non-registration by ethnic group

<i>Study sample</i>		<i>England and Wales</i>	
	Percentage not registered	95% CI	Base (= 100%)
Black Caribbean	9		225
Black African	[37]	28%-46%	116
Black Other	[24]	14%-38%	46
Indian	6		413
Pakistani	8		220
Bangladeshi	[6]	2%-16%	63
Chinese	[30]	21%-41%	80
Other / mixed	33		299
Ethnic Minority (all)	17		1,462
White	6		21,648

note: figures bracketed [] have small bases and hence correspondingly large 95% confidence intervals – these are shown alongside

Chart 4e Non-registration (%) by ethnic group



¹⁵ grouping presented because figures available for 1991

¹⁶ due to differences in sample coverage – see discussion in Chapter 2

Table 4.4 shows the combined level of non-registration by age for Asian and Black Caribbean people. The non-registration rate for people in these ethnic minorities was very similar across all age groups to that for people who were white. This suggests that ethnicity (in the broadest sense of being a member of an ethnic minority) was not of itself a significant factor in determining non-registration.

Table 4.4 Non-registration by ethnic minority (grouped) and age

<i>Study sample</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>					
	Percentage not registered			Base (= 100%)		
	18-34	35-54	55+	18-34	35-54	55+
White	12	4	2	5,048	7,588	7,491
Asian (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) and Black Caribbean	11	4	3	320	332	190
All other ethnic minorities	41	26	[16]	235	204	67

note: figures bracketed [] have small bases and hence correspondingly large 95% confidence intervals

Although it is clear that people in some ethnic minority groups were much more likely to be unregistered than other people, further investigation of people in the ‘other’ ethnic minority group showed that there was also an important relationship between registration and nationality, and in particular to nationality associated with ineligibility. Table 4.5 shows the rate of non-registration by ethnicity and nationality based on the survey sample, with a further breakdown of nationality into ‘eligible’ and ‘ineligible’¹⁷.

Table 4.5 Non-registration by ethnic minority (grouped) and nationality

<i>Survey sample</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>					
	Percentage not registered			Base (= 100%)		
	All	Nationality		All	Nationality	
		Eligible	Ineligible		Eligible	Ineligible
White	5	5	68	18,315	18,188	127
Asian (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) and Black Caribbean	6	6	[11]	813	766	47
All other ethnic minorities	32	17	71	460	332	129

note: figures bracketed [] have small bases and hence correspondingly large 95% confidence intervals

¹⁷ ‘eligible nationality’ means the stated nationality was UK, EU, or Commonwealth. ‘ineligible’ refers all other nationalities. See also Chapter 2.

One third (32%) of those in the ‘other’ ethnic minority groups in the survey sample were not registered, but within this there was difference by nationality. Amongst those with an ‘eligible’ nationality the non-registration rate was 17%, whilst for those with an ‘ineligible’ nationality¹⁸ the rate was 71%. The latter figure was clearly very high, although it was only marginally higher than the non-registration rate for white people with an ‘ineligible’ nationality (68%).

In terms of their effect on overall levels of non-registration, ethnic minority groups made up 6% of the study sample but accounted for 16% of non-registration. Asian and Black Caribbean people, represented 3% of the sample and accounted for 4% of non-registration. People from other ethnic minority groups – representing 2% of the sample – accounted for 12% of non-registration, although those with an eligible nationality (1.7% of the sample) accounted for a smaller proportion (5%). The remaining 84% of non-registration was accounted for by the 94% of the sample who were white.

¹⁸ ‘ineligible nationality’ means that the stated nationality was not UK, EU, or Commonwealth, and does not automatically confer the right to be registered to vote (in any of local, parliamentary or European elections). However, people with ‘ineligible’ nationalities could still be eligible to be registered, (for example if they have dual citizenship).

4.4 Country of birth

Table 4.6 shows non-registration rates by country of birth. The countries are grouped according to categories relevant to eligibility for electoral registration.

Non-registration was highest amongst those born outside the UK, the Commonwealth or the EU and lowest amongst those born in the UK and Republic of Ireland.

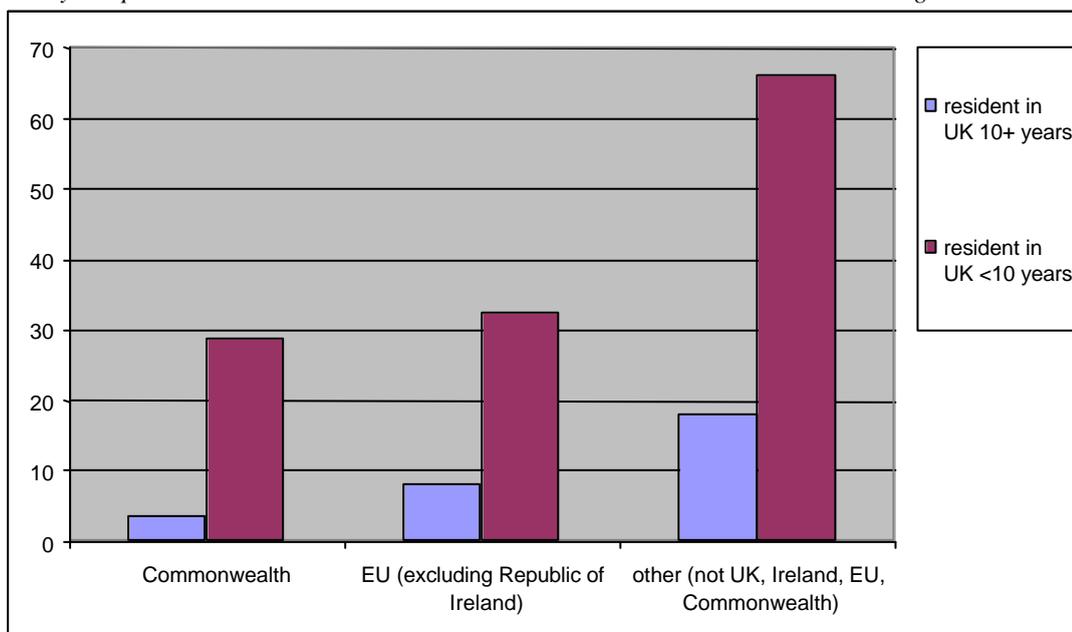
Table 4.6 Non-registration by country of birth

<i>Study sample</i>	Percentage not registered	<i>England and Wales</i>
Country of Birth		Base (= 100%)
UK	6	21,580
Republic Ireland	6	259
Commonwealth	9	872
EU	14	231
Other	35	641

Non-registration rates for those born outside the UK are likely to have been affected by length of residence. Chart 4f shows non-registration rates (among the survey sample only) for people born in different countries according to whether or not they had been resident in the UK for 10 years or more in 2000. For those who had been resident in the UK for ten years or more the non-registration rate was substantially lower, regardless of country of birth.

Chart 4f Non-registration (%) by Country of birth and length of time in UK

Survey sample *England and Wales*



4.5 Nationality

Table 4.7 shows a similar analysis of non-registration by nationality. This data was not included in the Census and so was only available for the survey sample.

As explained in Chapter 2, for this study people of all nationalities have been treated as eligible because stated nationality may not definitively determine eligibility (an example being where dual citizenship is acquired).

People with UK or Irish Republic nationality had the lowest rate of non-registration (5-6%). Those with nationality outside the UK, Ireland, Commonwealth or EU had a very high level of non-registration (60%), and accounted for 15% of all non-registration within the survey sample. An unknown proportion of these would have been ineligible.

Table 4.7 Non-registration by nationality

<i>Survey sample</i>		<i>England and Wales</i>
	Percentage not registered	Base (= 100%)
Nationality		
UK	5	<i>19,223</i>
Republic Ireland	6	<i>165</i>
Commonwealth	17	<i>258</i>
EU	19	<i>103</i>
Other ('ineligible')	60	<i>303</i>

4.6 Religion

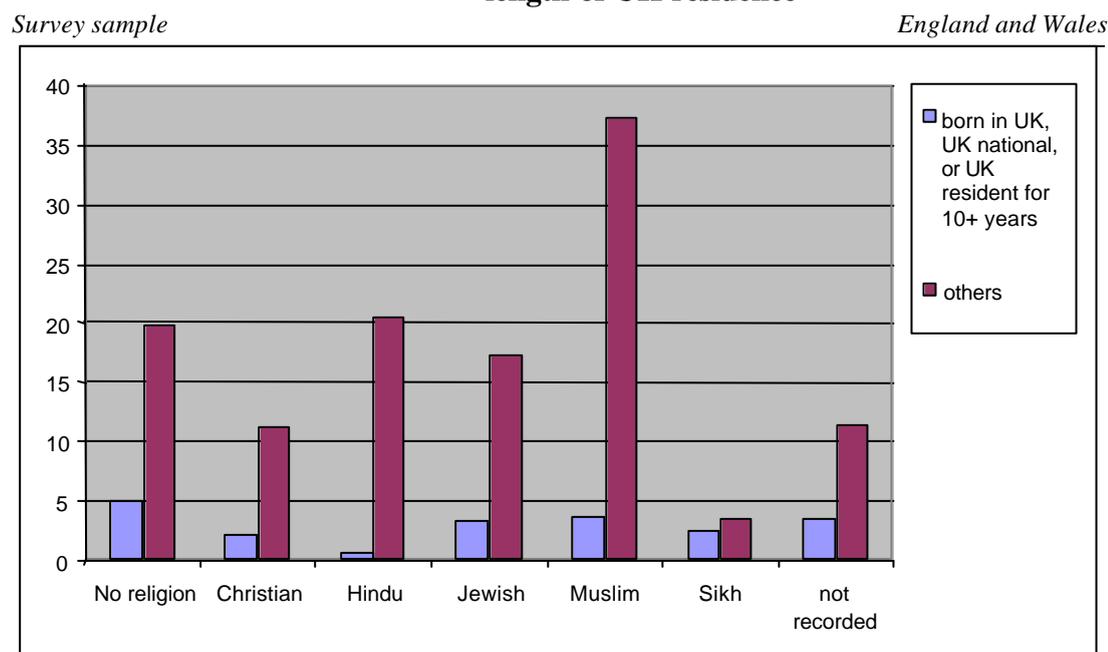
Table 4.8 shows that non-registration rates varied according to religious affiliation. The range was quite large, with the proportion not registered amongst Muslims being the highest (14%), although analysis suggests that much of this variation is likely to be due to other factors such as eligibility due to residency and nationality. To illustrate this, Chart 4g shows non-registration rates by religion in the survey sample for people who were either born in the UK, lived in the UK for ten or more years, or were UK nationals, compared with others. The rate of non-registration was markedly lower in this group across all religions, and the rate for Muslims (4%) was no longer higher than that for people of other religions.

Table 4.8 Non-registration by religion

<i>Study sample</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>
	Percentage not registered
	Base (= 100%)
Religion	
No religion	8
Buddhist	-
Christian	4
Hindu	5
Jewish	[7]
Muslim	14
Sikh	3
Any other religion	-
Not recorded	6
	2,525
	-
	15,076
	168
	82
	305
	107
	-
	1,371

note: figures bracketed [] have small bases and hence correspondingly large 95% confidence intervals

Chart 4g Non-registration (%) by religion and country of birth / nationality / length of UK residence



4.7 Length of residence at sampled address

As discussed earlier, non-registration was closely associated with moving address. Table 4.9 shows non-registration by length of residence. People who had moved in the 6 months before the qualifying date for the Electoral Register were much more likely to be unregistered than those who had lived at the same address for 6 months or more (33% compared to 6%).

Table 4.9 Non-registration by length of residence

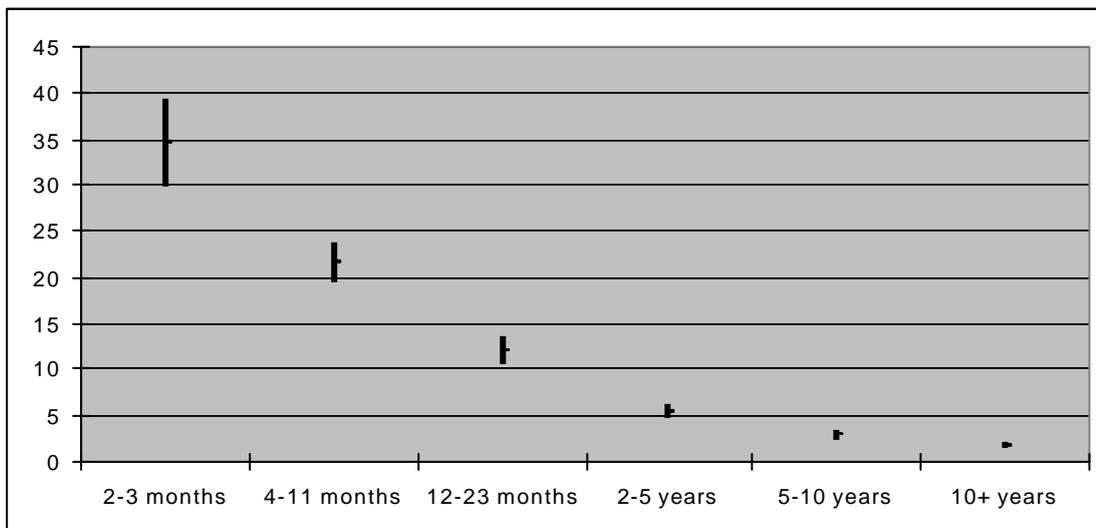
<i>study sample</i>	Percentage not registered	<i>England and Wales</i>
		Base (= 100%)
Address 6 months prior to qualifying date (April 2000)		
Same as at qualifying date	6	22,794
Different	33	1,169

The above figures are for the study sample as a whole. The survey sample provides more detailed information about mobility prior to the qualifying date. Chart 4h shows the level of non-registration relative to the number of months prior to the qualifying date that a person moved to the address.

There was a clear relationship between length of residency at an address and the likelihood of non-registration. Over one-third of people moving into an address in the 2-3 months immediately prior to the qualifying date were unregistered and for those moving in the preceding 4-11 months the likelihood of non-registration was still over one in five. For those moving in during the 1-2 years before the qualifying date (for whom October 2000 was their second qualifying date), around one in eight were unregistered. Less than one in twenty of those resident for between two and ten years were unregistered, while for those resident ten or more years at an address the likelihood of non-registration was as low as one in fifty.

Chart 4h Non-registration (%) by length of residence

Survey sample *England and Wales*



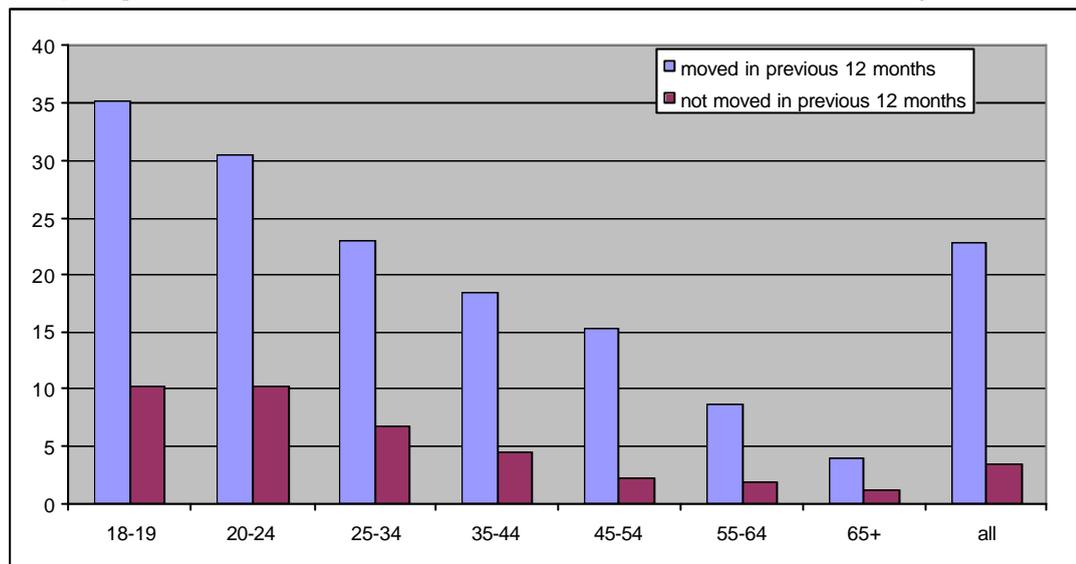
note: vertical lines represent 95% confidence intervals above and below point estimate

Chart 4i shows that mobility was associated with non-registration across the age range, suggesting that mobility and age (or other factors associated with age) were independently related to non-registration. A high rate of mobility among younger age groups contributed substantially to their high levels of non-registration overall, but among older age groups, moving home also increased the likelihood of non-registration.

Chart 4i Non-registration (%) by length of residence and age

Survey sample

England and Wales



In the study sample as a whole, those people who had moved within 6 months prior to the qualifying date made up around 5% of the population, but accounted for 23% of the total non-registration.

4.8 Tenure

Table 4.10 shows registration rates by tenure. People living in rented or rent free accommodation were about five times as likely to be unregistered as owner-occupiers (15% compared with 3-4%). Within the rented sector, people living in accommodation rented from private landlords or employers were much more likely to be unregistered (19-27%) than those renting from a local authority, housing association, relative or friend (9-11%). Some of the variation in registration rates in different tenure groups is due to the different levels of mobility in the different groups.

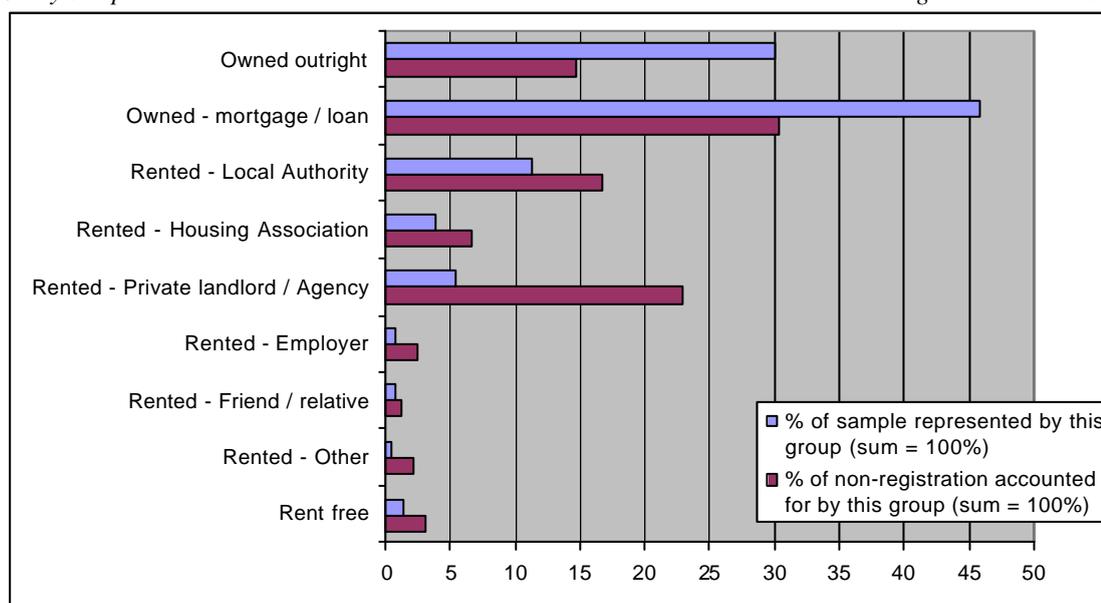
Table 4.10 Non-registration by tenure

<i>Study sample</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>	
	Percentage not registered	Base (= 100%)
Tenure		
Owned outright	3	6,979
Owned - mortgage / loan	4	10,658
Rented	15	5,564
Council (Local Authority)	10	2,627
Housing association, charitable trust or similar	11	899
Private landlord or letting agency	27	1,269
Employer of a household member	19	193
Relative or friend of a household member	9	191
Other	29	106
Rent free	14	329

Chart 4j shows the percentage of non-registration accounted for by each tenure group, and contrasts this with the distribution of tenure across the study sample. People living in privately rented accommodation represented 5% of the sample but accounted for 18% of non-registration.

Chart 4j Distribution of non-registration in the sample (by tenure)

Study sample *England and Wales*



4.9 Employment status

Table 4.11 shows that unemployed people had a higher rate of non-registration (18%) than employees (6%) or the self employed (7%). Non-registration amongst students is discussed in more detail in section 4.11.

Table 4.11 Non-registration by economic activity status

<i>Study sample</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>	
	Percentage not registered	Base (= 100%)
Employment status		
employee / scheme*	6	9,292
self employed	7	1,754
unemployed	18	656
economically inactive	6	9,536
Student (not in employment)	22	575
other inactive	5	8,961

* includes those identified in survey sample as being on government schemes whose non-registration rate was higher at 13%, (base = 90).

4.10 Occupation group

Table 4.12 shows non-registration rates for those in employment, by major occupation groups¹⁹. Those working in elementary (unskilled) occupations had a higher non-registration rate than all other groups (10% compared with 5-8%).

Table 4.12 Non-registration by occupational group

<i>Study sample – all in employment</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>	
	Percentage not registered	Base (= 100%)
Major Occupation Group		
Managers & Senior Officials	6	2,094
Professional occupations	6	1,448
Associate Professional & Technical	7	1,498
Administrative & Secretarial	5	2,032
Skilled Trade Occupations	8	1,657
Personal Services Occupations	7	1,439
Sales and Customer Service Occupations	7	1,098
Process, Plant and Machine Operatives	6	1,200
Elementary Occupations	10	1,143

Around 15% of all non-registration in the study sample (and a quarter of all among those in employment), was accounted for by just a few occupations. Domestic cleaners, chefs, bar staff, and those working in restaurants and kitchens accounted for 6%. Sales and retail assistants (excluding cashiers and check out assistants) accounted for a further 5%. Doctors, nurses, midwives and therapists accounted for 2% of non-registration and those working in goods handling and storage occupations made up another 2% of non-registration.

Within the survey sample, the rate of non-registration for those working in a non-permanent contract was 11% (base 619), compared with 5% (base 10,787) for those with a permanent contract. There are probably several factors at play here. Non-permanent jobs were associated with younger and more mobile populations. Between a third and a half of the non-registration within occupations such as domestic cleaning, catering and medicine were accounted for by those with 'ineligible' nationalities. People in medical occupations may also have been sampled at accommodation linked to a hospital, and may therefore have been registered elsewhere.

¹⁹ SOC2000 classification

4.11 Students

As recorded in Table 4.11, a fifth of students (22%) in the study sample were unregistered. Table 4.13 shows that nearly half (45%) of students who had moved to the sampled address within the 6 months prior to the qualifying date were not registered at that address.

Table 4.13 Non-registration by student mobility

<i>Study sample – students (in full time education)</i>		<i>England and Wales</i>	
	Percentage not registered*	Base (= 100%)	
Student mobility			
Living at sampled address 6 months before qualifying date	18	469	
At different address 6 months before qualifying date	45	95	
All	22	564	

* at sampled address

Students sampled at a parental address were less likely to be unregistered (at that address) than students sampled elsewhere (16% compared with 25%). (Table 4.14)

Table 4.14 Non-registration by where student sampled

<i>Study sample – students (in full time education)</i>		<i>England and Wales</i>	
	Percentage not registered*	Base (= 100%)	
Sampled at non-parental address	25	254	
non-parental – term time	[43]	25	
non-parental – undefined	23	229	
Sampled at parental home	16	322	

* at sampled address

note: figures bracketed [] have small bases and hence correspondingly large 95% confidence intervals

Since some students could have been registered at a different address from the one in which they were sampled the true level of non-registration among students would have been below the observed 22% level.

On the assumption that 22% were unregistered, students accounted for around seven percent of all non-registration, contributing half a percentage point to the overall rate of non-registration.

4.12 Long term illness or disability

People reporting a long-term illness or disability were slightly less likely to be unregistered than others (6% compared with 8%). However, those reporting a long-term illness or disability were, on average, older than others and this at least partially accounts for their lower level of non-registration. Table 4.15 shows that when age was controlled, there was virtually no difference between the two registration rates.

Table 4.15 Non-registration by whether reported a long-term illness or disability

<i>Study sample</i>		<i>England and Wales</i>			
		Percentage not registered		Base (= 100%)	
		long-term illness / disability		reported	not reported
		reported	not reported		
Age					
	18-34	12	13	943	4,902
	35-54	4	5	2,109	6,275
	55+	4	3	1,866	1,985

4.13 Education

Table 4.16 shows for the survey sample the proportion unregistered, analysed by highest educational qualification. Non-registration rates ranged from 4% for those with a higher education qualification below degree level, to 8% for those reporting no qualifications.

Table 4.16 Non-registration by highest educational qualification

<i>Survey sample</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>	
	Percentage not registered	Base (= 100%)
All in survey sample		
Degree	6	2,227
Higher Education	4	1,284
A level equivalent	5	3,505
GCSE / O level equivalent	7	3,307
Other qualification below GCSE*	4	1,678
No qualification	8	2,538
Not Known	10	122

* excludes other qualifications obtained by people born outside the UK, as these are not comparable.

The relationship between educational qualification and non-registration is obscured by the changes over time in the qualifications available which are, in turn, related to age.

Table 4.17 shows that for the age group 18-34, who would have had access to broadly equivalent qualifications, and considering only those born within the UK, there was hardly any variation in non-registration rates amongst those with different levels of qualification (8-9%). The only group which differed from others were people with no qualifications, of whom 14% were unregistered. This group represented 9% of the survey population, and accounted for 15% of all non-registration.

Table 4.17 Non-registration by highest educational qualification (age 18-34, country of birth UK)

<i>Survey sample – aged 18-34, country of birth UK</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>	
	Percentage not registered	Base (= 100%)
All born in UK age 18-34		
Degree	8	715
Higher Education	9	328
A level equivalent	8	1,332
GCSE / O level equivalent	8	1,278
other qualification	8	430
no qualification	14	398

4.14 Marital Status

People who were single, separated or divorced had a higher rate of non-registration than those who were married or widowed (8-14% compared with 2-3%). Men in these three categories, and particularly separated and divorced men, were more likely to be unregistered than their female counterparts. This may reflect a greater likelihood of men to move out of the marital home following separation or divorce.

It would follow if this were the case, that divorced / separated people recently moved to a new addresses within the sample would be more likely to be men than women. Since it is not known whether recently moved /divorced people are still registered (or able to vote) at their previous marital address, the difference in non-registration rates between divorced or separated men and women may be smaller than is suggested by the findings in Table 4.18²⁰.

Table 4.18 Non-registration by marital status and sex

<i>Study sample</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>					
	Percentage not registered			Base (= 100%)		
	All	Men	Women	All	Men	Women
Marital Status						
Single	14	15	13	<i>6,156</i>	<i>3,243</i>	<i>2,909</i>
Married	3	4	3	<i>11,356</i>	<i>6,533</i>	<i>6,545</i>
Separated	14	17	12	<i>506</i>	<i>222</i>	<i>349</i>
Divorced	8	11	6	<i>1,514</i>	<i>761</i>	<i>1,054</i>
Widowed	2	3	2	<i>1,698</i>	<i>424</i>	<i>1,672</i>

²⁰ There is also some difference in the self-reporting of marital status amongst divorced and separated men and women, which may also have an effect on the relative non-registration rates analysed by marital status.

4.15 Relationship to head of household

Information about the part played by family and household structures in determining levels of non-registration can also be obtained by examining relative registration levels in terms of people's relationship to the survey / census-defined head of household.

Table 4.19 suggest that there were three broad levels of non-registration for individuals within households. For the head of household, along with their spouse and parents, non registration rates were low at between 3% and 6%. For partners, children or other relatives of the head of household the proportion unregistered was higher, between 12% and 18%. Finally, unrelated household members, including sharers, lodgers and friends, had the highest non-registration rates, 39 to 46 percent.

The person selected as head of household for survey purposes is often the one who has lived at an address the longest, and may also be the property owner or main tenant. These facts would account, at least in part, for their greater propensity to be registered. The person chosen may also have been the member of the household most likely to have filled in the household's electoral registration form, thus reducing their chance of non-registration as a result of incorrect assumptions by the form filler about people's eligibility. Thus, among households containing two or more unrelated adults and those consisting of a household head and sharers, the household head was considerably more likely to be registered than other eligible household members. (Table 4.20)

Table 4.19 Non-registration by relationship to head of household

<i>Study sample</i>	Percentage not registered	<i>England and Wales</i> Base (= 100%)
Single person households		
Head of household (sole member)	5	3,069
All other households		
Head of household	6	9,242
spouse	3	6,517
partner	13	981
parent	6	153
child	12	2,581
other relative	18	195
sharer	46	144
lodger	[42]	38
friend	39	109
other non-relative	44	105

note: figures bracketed [] have small bases and hence correspondingly large 95% confidence intervals

Table 4.20 Non-registration (households with 2 or more unrelated adults)

<i>Study sample</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>					
	Percentage not registered			Base (= 100%)		
	All	Tenure of person		All	Tenure of person	
		Owner occupier	Other		Owner occupier	Other
All households consisting of 2 or more unrelated adults						
Head of household	23	0	38	<i>241</i>	<i>91</i>	<i>146</i>
Other household members	40	[22]	47	<i>317</i>	<i>76</i>	<i>229</i>
All households consisting of head of household plus 'sharers'						
Head of household	28	-	-	<i>90</i>	-	-
Other household members ('sharers')	46	-	-	<i>141</i>	-	-

note: figures bracketed [] have small bases and hence correspondingly large 95% confidence intervals

In households containing only one eligible adult the non-registration rate was 7% (Table 4.21). Within this group, non-registration rates were highest (12%) where the single eligible person was living with children below the eligible age.

Table 4.21 Non-registration for head of household (single eligible person households)

<i>Study sample (households with one eligible person)</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>	
	Percentage not registered	Base (= 100%)
All households with 1 eligible person	7	<i>4,234</i>
Households consisting of 1 eligible person living alone	5	<i>3,069</i>
Households consisting of 1 eligible person + (ineligible) children	12	<i>1,165</i>

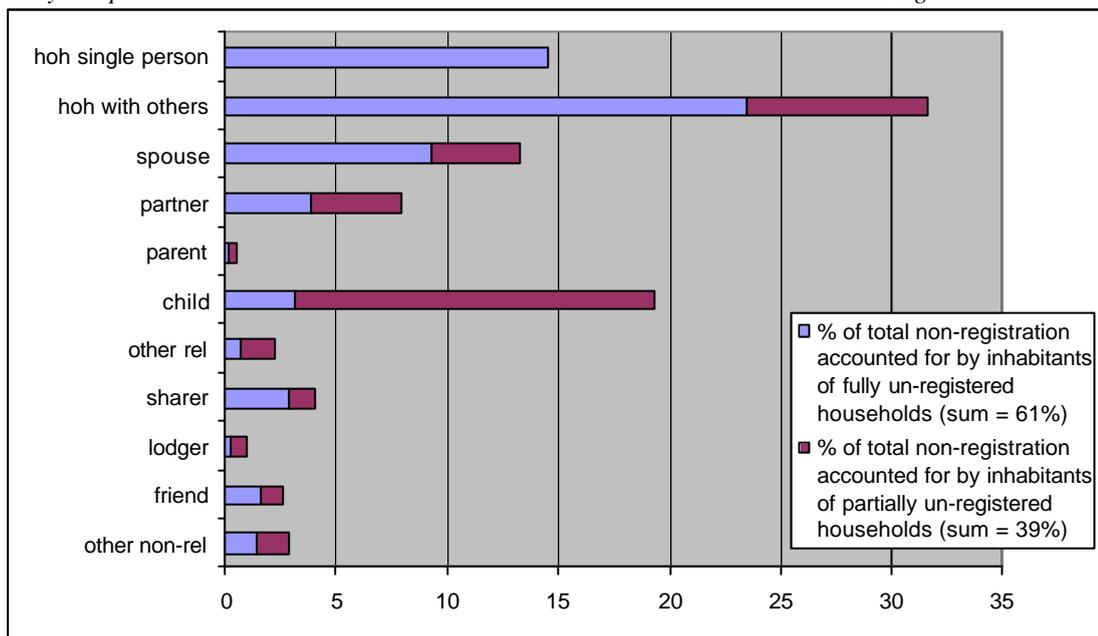
As shown in section 4.1 young people living with parents were less likely to be unregistered than people of the same age living in other circumstances. Despite this lower rate of non-registration, children of the head of household accounted for 19% of overall non-registration, whilst making up only 11% of the eligible sample. The great majority of this non-registration (amongst people living with parents) occurred in households in which at least one person was registered.

Chart 4k shows the distribution of non-registration within the sample. The percentage of overall non-registration accounted for by each type of household member is shown, and this is broken down into that occurring within partially registered households, and that occurring in fully unregistered households. As can be seen, non-registration of eligible children within a ‘partially registered’ household formed a sizeable component of overall non-registration (16%).

Chart 4k Distribution of non-registration in the sample (by relationship)

Study sample

England and Wales



5 Non-registration and electoral registration practice

Chapter 5 presents the data on non-registration in relation to electoral registration practice by Local Authorities in England and Wales. Information on electoral registration practice is taken from the Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) survey of Local Authorities in 1999. The 251 Local Authorities which responded to the survey represented 66% of the ERC study sample population.

The DETR survey sought information on a wide range of practices designed to improve registration rates. However, because many of these were not widely carried out, and because for a number of others, their distribution in 1999 was unlikely to reflect their distribution in 2000, we have investigated only the following measures

- the use and levels of canvassing
- carrying forward of names on the register from year to year
- overall electoral registration budget

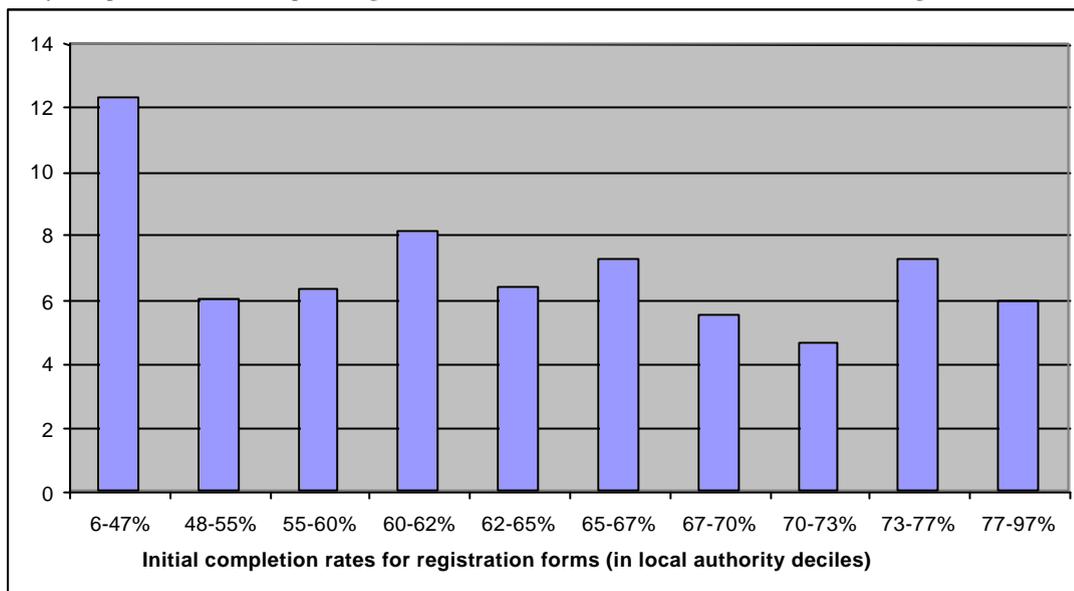
These measures of local authority electoral registration practice are not independent of non-registration because the decisions made by local authorities about whether, where and how much to apply them are based in part on assessments about the prevailing registration situation. Certain practices may be applied in areas which have high levels of non-registration, but the result may still be rates that are higher than average – even if the practice involved has been effective at reducing non-registration to some degree. However, if we do not know what the rate would otherwise have been it is not possible to know whether the practice has made a difference. This applies to all measures concerning electoral registration practice, from the amount of canvassing undertaken to the size of budget available for electoral registration.

In order to give some indication of whether particular areas may have been harder to register independently of the measures listed above, we have first examined whether the rate for the initial completion and return of electoral registration forms before reminders or canvassing differs from areas to area. We have assumed that since an initial distribution of forms was a consistent practice across all authorities, this initial rate of return may reflect something of the prevailing registration situation.

Chart 5a shows the rate of non-registration by level of initial completion and return of electoral registration forms before reminders or canvassing. The categories on the x-axis each represent one tenth (a decile) of the local authorities responding to the survey, arranged in order of progressively higher initial rates of completion and return.

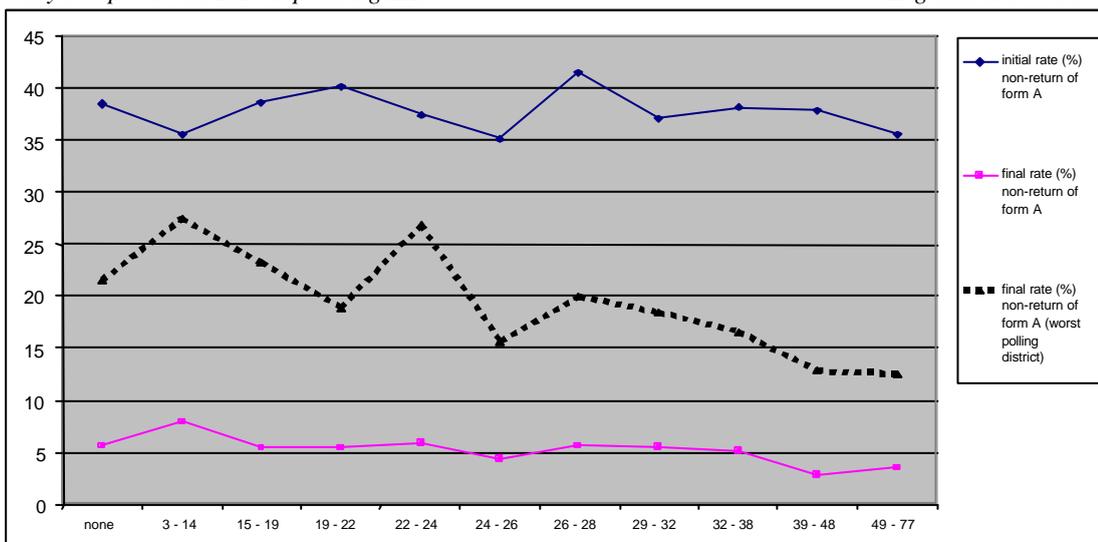
The lowest decile (representing 22 local authorities) with initial rates of completion and return of forms below 47% (in 1999) did have a markedly higher subsequent rate of non-registration in 2000. For other local authorities there was no clear relationship between initial completion rate and registration rates.

Chart 5a Non-registration rate (%) by registration form completion (initial)
 Study sample in the 251 responding LA's England and Wales



Having shown that there was a relationship between very low rates of initial form completion and registration rates, we can examine whether canvassing was concentrated in these areas. Chart 5b shows the initial rate of completion and return of electoral registration forms by the numbers of canvassers employed (per 100,000 population) for the local authorities within the decile²¹. The first category on the x-axis represent those local authorities using no canvassers, and the next ten categories each represent one tenth of the remaining local authorities responding to the survey, arranged in order of progressively higher numbers of canvassers used.

Chart 5b Registration form non-completion rate (%) by use of canvassers
 Study sample in the 251 responding LA's England and Wales



* x axis shows numbers of canvassers employed per 100,000 population
 y axis shows the percentage for non-return of forms averaged across the population of the 22 local authorities within the decile

²¹ Also shown are the final rate of form completion for the local authority (lower line), and the final rate of form completion in the 'worst' polling district (middle line).

Since poor initial rates of completion of registration forms were associated with high levels of non-registration, we might expect to see more intensive canvassing in these areas. Instead the graph shows that there does not seem to be a strong association between the initial rate of registration form completion and the use of canvassing²². However, the most intensive use of canvassing did seem to be associated with relatively low rates of final non-completion of forms in the local authority as a whole, and also in the ‘worst’ polling districts within the authority.

Whilst these findings do not support the idea that canvassing was being used predominantly in areas where registration was most ‘difficult’, they are consistent with the idea that, where canvassing was most intensively used, a greater reduction in final non-completion of forms was achieved, along with a reduction in the variation between best and worst districts.

Although the decision about where to use canvassing did not seem to be strongly linked to the initial rate of form completion, there may have been other criteria for the decision. Table 5.1 shows the level of use of canvassing analysed by area-level measures shown in Chapter 3 to be associated with non-registration.

The number of local authorities in some of the cells of the table is small, but it seems that local authorities with high levels of ethnic minority populations did make more use of canvassing than other areas. Canvassing was also more likely to be used in areas with high population density than other areas.

Table 5.1 Proportion LA’s using canvassers by area level characteristics

<i>251 responding LA’s</i>				<i>England and Wales</i>
	Percentage using:			Base (= 100%)
	No canvassers	Some canvassers	Total	
Ethnic minority population				
Decile 1 (LA's with most ethnic minority population)	15	[85]	100	<i>26</i>
Other LA's (90%)	30	70	100	<i>225</i>
Population density				
Quartile 1 (LA's with highest population density)	18	[82]	100	<i>71</i>
Other LA's (75%)	32	68	100	<i>179</i>
Employment Deprivation				
Quartile 1 (LA's with most employment deprivation)	25	[75]	100	<i>67</i>
Other LA's (75%)	29	71	100	<i>184</i>
Income Deprivation				
Quartile 1 (LA's with most income deprivation)	27	[73]	100	<i>67</i>
Other LA's (75%)	29	71	100	<i>184</i>

note: figures bracketed [] have small bases and hence correspondingly large 95% confidence intervals

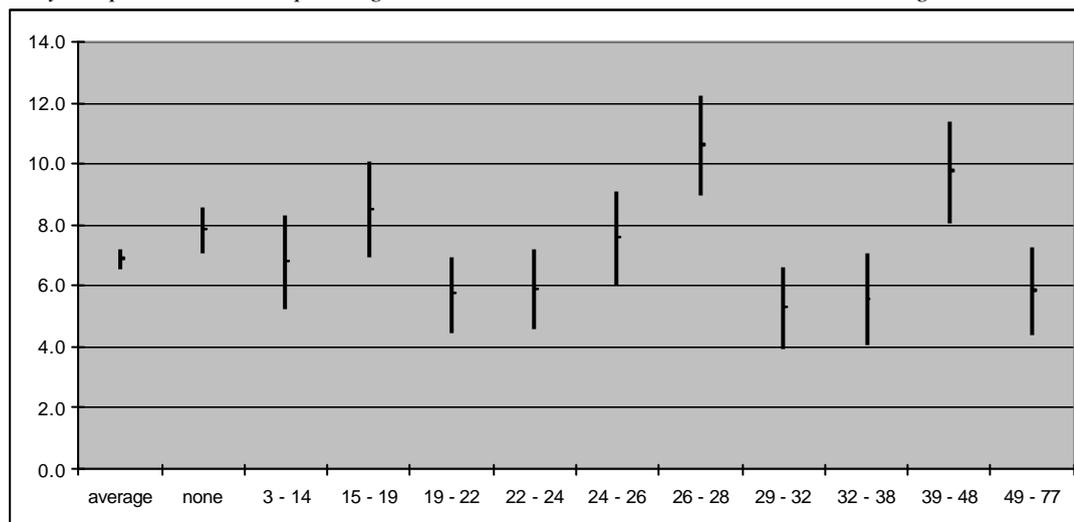
²² over a quarter of local authorities recorded an *initial* rate of return for form A of below 60%.

Although canvassing was more likely to be used intensively in areas with characteristics associated with non-registration, the relationship between canvassing and resultant levels of non-registration is not clear. Chart 5c shows the rate of non-registration across local authorities, grouped according to the numbers of canvassers employed per 100,000 people in the local population. The first category on the x-axis averages all responding local authorities, the second represents those local authorities using no canvassers, and the subsequent ten categories each represent one tenth of the remaining local authorities responding to the survey, arranged in order of progressively higher numbers of canvassers employed.

Chart 5c Non-registration rate (%) by use of canvassers

Study sample in the 251 responding LA's

England and Wales



note: vertical lines represent 95% confidence intervals above and below point estimate

x axis shows numbers of canvassers employed per 100,000 population

y axis shows the percentage for non-registration averaged across the population of the 22 local authorities within the decile

While it can be shown that there were some local authorities employing relatively large numbers of canvassers that also had lower than average levels of non-registration there is no clear association (either positive or negative) between the intensity of canvassing and registration rates. As noted above, canvassing may be employed in a variety of circumstances, and against a variety of prevailing registration condition, and these obscure the effect that canvassing has on registration. Nonetheless one would expect to see some evidence of a relationship between canvassing, measures of the underlying conditions affecting registration, and registration rates.

Table 5.2 shows registration rates by intensity of canvassing and area level characteristics identified above as being associated with non-registration. This shows a clearer pattern of association between local authority practice and rates of non-registration. As expected, the most intensive use of canvassing was concentrated in the areas with the highest non-registration rates, but only in the local authorities with area level characteristics associated with non-registration. In the remaining areas there was no clear association between the use of canvassing and the non-registration rate.

While this does not inform us about the nature of any effect that canvassing has on registration, it clarifies the way in which canvassing was used.

Table 5.2 Non-registration by LA use of canvassers and area level characteristics

Study sample in the 251 responding LA's

England and Wales

	Percentage not registered			Base (= 100%)		
	No canvassers	1-26 per 100,000	27+ per 100,000	No canvassers	1-26 per 100,000	27+ per 100,000
Ethnic minority population						
Decile 1 (LA's with most ethnic minority population)	9	8	14	457	883	973
Other LA's (90%)	6	7	6	4,205	5,058	4,621
Population density						
Quartile 1 (LA's with highest population density)	7	8	11	1,283	2,666	1,929
Other LA's (75%)	6	6	5	3,379	3,275	3,577
Employment Deprivation						
Quartile 1 (LA's with most employment deprivation)	7	8	10	2,188	2,636	2,319
Other LA's (75%)	6	6	6	2,474	3,305	3,276
Income Deprivation						
Quartile 1 (LA's with most income deprivation)	7	8	10	2,332	2,729	2,206
Other LA's (75%)	6	6	6	2,330	3,213	3,389

5.3 Carrying forward

Carrying forward is the practice of taking names forward from a previous year's register for addresses for which there have been no completed registration form returned, and no information from canvassing. The intention of carrying forward is to assume, in the absence of other information, that the last known occupants were still resident thus potentially registering eligible people, rather than risking not registering people who were still resident. In 2000, the non-registration rate for local authorities carrying forward names (7%) was similar to that for those not carrying forward (8%).

Table 5.3 Non-registration by carrying forward of names

<i>Study sample in the 251 responding LA's</i>		<i>England and Wales</i>		
	Percentage not registered			Base (= 100%)
	LA's not carrying forward	LA's carrying forward	Not carrying forward	Not carrying forward
All	8	7	<i>2,286</i>	<i>11,080</i>

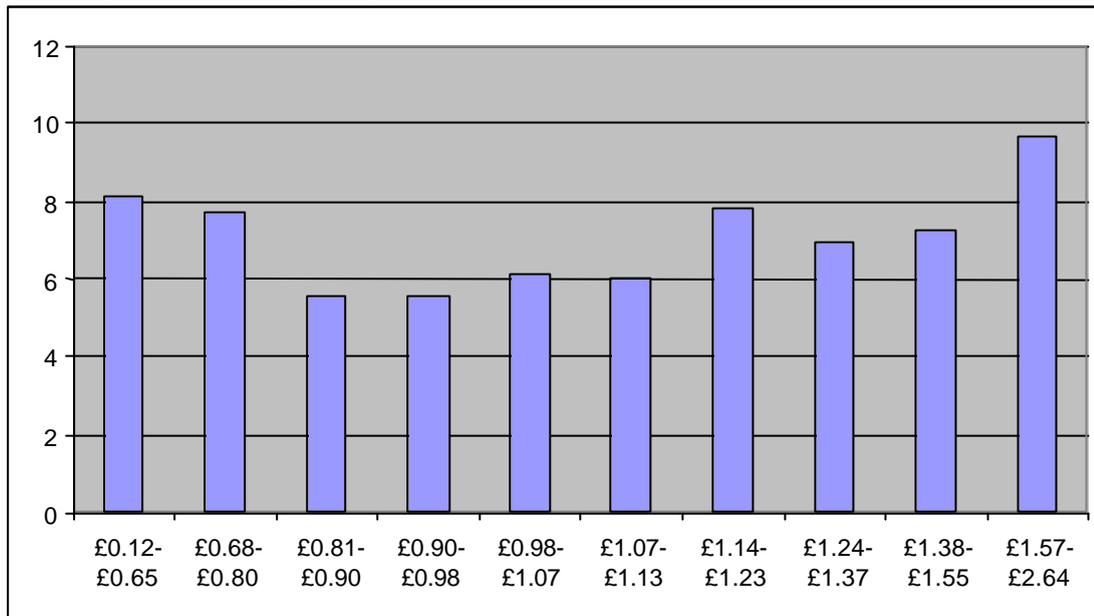
5.5 Budget

Chart 5d shows non-registration rates by reported annual electoral registration budget (per adult) in the local authority. As before, any relationship between the two is complicated by the two-way relationship between action by the local authority and non-registration rates. The chart shows a u-shaped relationship between electoral registration budget and non-registration rates. This is compatible with the idea that, at one extreme, a relatively small budget per elector was associated with a slightly raised level of non-registration and, at the other extreme, local authorities in areas with high ‘underlying’ propensities to non-registration were spending more money than average on electoral services.

Chart 5d Non-registration rate (%) by electoral registration budget

Study sample in the 251 responding LA's

England and Wales



x axis shows annual electoral registration budget (per adult) by local authorities (grouped in deciles)

6 Indicators of non-registration

Chapter 6 presents a profile of unregistered people in terms of variables drawn from the analysis in chapters 3 and 4. The intention here is not to generate a set of mutually exclusive predictors of non-registration, but to present a series of overlapping, but independently useful, markers which can identify non-registering people within the population.

Table 6.1 lists fourteen groups of people drawn from the study sample, showing the proportion of the sample each represents, the rate of non-registration within the group concerned, and the proportion of overall non-registration the groups accounts for. Although there is overlap between the groups (in terms of the unregistered people they contain), they represent a convenient set of characteristics by which to define a large proportion of non-registration.

The first four groups taken together represent one fifth (19%) of the sample, but (cumulatively) account for over half (52%) of all non-registration. Groups 1 to 10, representing 35% of the sample, account for three quarters (73%) of total non-registration. With the addition of groups 11 through 14, (for which only survey information is available) we can account for 82% of all non-registration, with reference to 42% of the sample.

Table 6.1 Profile of non-registration by associated characteristics

<i>Study sample</i>	<i>England and Wales</i>		
Group	% of study sample in this group	% of this group not registered	% of overall non- registration found in this group
1) Being an 'attainer' (aged 16-17)	2	28	8
2) Living with parents	11	12	19
3) Having moved in the 6 months prior to the qualifying date	5	33	23
4) Renting from a private landlord	5	27	21
Cumulative group consisting of categories 1-4	19	19	52
5) Being unrelated to of the head of household (e.g. lodger)	2	43	10
6) <i>Receiving unemployment benefit, council tax benefit, income support or housing benefit</i>	5	10	8
7) Being unemployed (excludes inactive)	3	18	7
8) Being aged under 30 and single	15	17	38
9) Being a full time student	2	22	8
10) Being divorced or separated	10	10	14
Cumulative group consisting of categories 1-10	35	14	73
11) <i>Having moved in the 23 months prior to the qualifying date</i>	16	16	37
12) <i>Having a non-UK / EU / Commonwealth nationality</i>	1	60	11
13) <i>Being an EU national</i>	0	19	1
14) <i>Being a Commonwealth national</i>	1	17	3
Cumulative group consisting of categories 1-14	42	13	82 *

* Variables in italics were available for the survey sample only, but the percentages shown are of the study sample as a whole. If variables 11-14 had been available for all study sample data, the non-registration found in categories 1-14 would probably have represented over 84% of all the non-registration found in the study sample.

The function of the table is not to explain non-registration, merely to provide a range of potentially useful indicators for it in the population²³. Some characteristics which are potential predictors of non-registration, such as ethnicity, or religion, have not been listed here. In the case of ethnicity this is because it only appears to be a useful predictor of raised levels of non-registration for certain ethnic groups. If it were appropriate to use ethnicity as an identifier then clearly those groups shown to have a higher likelihood of non-registration in Section 4.3 would be the most relevant.

Other examples of variables which overlap in terms of non-registration with those listed and which might serve as potential indicators for non-registration include, being a young person without qualifications (see Section 4.13), and working in the occupations referenced in Section 4.10.

It should be noted that not all the indicators in the list are predictors of non-registration once other variables are controlled for, and some of the characteristics included in the list actually represent the opposite of a successful predictor of non-registration. For example, people aged in their early twenties and living with their parents are less likely than other people of their age to be unregistered, but nonetheless there clearly was a reason why young people living with parents were unregistered more often than their parents, and it is for this reason that they are presented as an identifiable group.

²³ the inclusion of groups in the list, is informed by the following factors:

- the amount of non-registration the group accounts for in the sample.
- the rate of registration within the group.
- the extent to which the group is readily identifiable (i.e. avoiding complex definitions).
- whether the definition of the group is related to the eligibility criteria for registration (for example attainers, or EU citizens), where it can be envisaged that instructions on registration forms might influence registration.
- whether characteristics are involved which might allow of administrative identification or contact within the population (e.g. receipt of benefits)
- whether clearly defined situational characteristics are involved – e.g. renting in the private sector, or living with parents, particularly where these are likely to relate to the ‘mechanism’ of non-registration.

Some categories, such as moving within the preceding 23 months, and being a single person under 30 subsume a large proportion of the non-registration accounted for by other categories - category 1 (attainers) is also almost entirely contained within category 2 (people living with parents - but the smaller groupings are still listed where they contribute some unique cases, or where it seems likely that they might allow unregistered people to be more efficiently identified, and by extension contacted.

7 Causes of non-registration

This chapter seeks to draw together the findings from chapters 2-6 and discusses the mechanisms of non-registration.

It has been the approach of this study to maintain a distinction between:

- **indicators of non-registration.** These are variables which are useful because they can identify groups of people who are relatively likely to be unregistered in the population. Such identifying characteristics may be of practical use for targeting interventions even if they do not themselves play a causal role in non-registration. Furthermore they can be useful as identifiers even though other variables (with which they are correlated) are found to be more successful predictors of non-registration.
- **predictors of non-registration.** These are variables which, when other variables are controlled for, appear to be associated with non-registration. They may play a causal role in non-registration, but this does not follow from the fact of their association.
- **causes of non-registration.** These are the mechanisms actually leading to non-registration for a given individual or household. These could be attitudinal characteristics or specific 'situational' factors, for which variables may not be available within the data. However, it may be possible to make inferences about the mechanisms of non-registration for some groups of people given other known facts and associations.

Chapter 6 presented some useful indicators which defined groups in the sample within which a large proportion of non-registration was found. These variables are thus potentially useful for identifying people likely to be unregistered in the population. For this purpose it does not matter that the variables involved overlap in terms of the unregistered people they identify, since it may be valid to target non-registration in multiple ways. However, if the aim of policy is to remove potential barriers to registration then some evidence is required about the specific mechanisms by which non-registration occurs, and if changes are to be made in the processes involved in registration then it is important to know whether there are factors which protect against non-registration which might be affected by such changes.

There are two types of information we can use to meet these requirements. Firstly, an understanding of which characteristics are most directly associated with non-registration, and secondly information about the specific reasons why non-registration occurs.

Previous studies, following on from the main 1993 OPCS report, and carried out using 1991 data, developed extensive, multi-level, multivariate logistic regression models of non-registration²⁴. These studies identified **age, sex, ethnicity, tenure** and **mobility** as key predictors of non-registration, once other variables available in the 1991 data had been controlled for. Some of these variables were found to be effective predictors of non-registration at both the household or individual level, with tenure also functioning when expressed as an area level measure²⁵.

²⁴ 'Tranches 2 and 3: Modelling data from the 'electoral registration in 1991' survey : Sharon Bruce, 1994

'Tranche 1: Modelling data from the 'electoral registration in 1991' survey : Heady and Smith, 1993 (unpublished)

²⁵ that is, the proportion of the local population privately renting

Similar analysis has been carried out using data from the 2000 study sample, building on earlier findings about the relationship between individual, household and area-level variables²⁶. The analysis confirms an association between non-registration and the variables identified using 1991 data, with some minor changes. Ethnicity had become less important as an explanatory variable by 2000, and was also found to be strongly conditioned by length of residence in the UK and by nationality (for which information was not available in 1991). The effect of an individual's age was found to be important only for the 16-17 (attainers) age group, although people living in a household where the head of household was under 25 also had an increased likelihood of non-registration. People with no qualifications were more likely to be unregistered than people with qualifications.

The length of time that the head of household had been at the address was found to be marginally more statistically significant in determining non-registration than the length of residency of the eligible individual themselves, (although the two are clearly correlated, and the latter did also influence the likelihood of non-registration). Those living in a household where the head of household had moved within the preceding year were five to six times more likely to be unregistered than those where the head of household had been resident for ten years or more. Where the head of household had moved between 12 and 23 months before, the eligible household members were still two to three times more likely to be unregistered than in the households with the longest-resident head of households.

Another factor which appeared to be of some importance was the relationship between the eligible person and the head of household. The head of household and their spouse or partner were markedly less likely to be unregistered than other relatives or non-relatives. However, this could also be expressed as an increased likelihood of non-registration for people who were single, divorced, separated or, to a lesser extent, widowed over those who were married. Finally, (and highlighting the central role of the head of household in registration), being an eligible person in a household where the head of household was registered was also a strong predictor of registration, (although this follows directly from the fact that the rate of registration was highest for the head of household).

These findings suggest which variables are the most directly associated with non-registration once other variables are controlled for. Some of the other variables examined in Chapter 4 may have been correlated with non-registration in part because they were correlated with these key variables (for example, ethnicity may have been correlated with non-registration because it was also correlated with nationality). However, while under-registration is modelled reasonably effectively by the broad categories outlined above, the actual mechanism by which it occurred are likely to have varied between the different groups identified in Chapters 3-5.

Information is not available to model non-registration for each group separately, but instead we can relate our understanding of predictive variables to the most likely mechanisms of non-registration. The latter are not known independently, but will be reflected to some extent in the reasons which people would give to explain non-registration. These reasons are not available in 2000 data, but the surveys conducted for the 1991 and 1981 studies did collect information about reported reasons for non-registration²⁷.

²⁶ Some of the variables identified in Chapter 4 as being of most relevance to non-registration were only available in the survey data, so the models of non-registration were developed using survey data only.

²⁷ The reasons given usually represent the head of household's account of the reasons for non-registration rather than being always those of the eligible person concerned. They were subject to recall error (being reported

In 22% of cases of non-registration the reasons given for non-registration were that the eligible person was thought to be ineligible, either on grounds of age (the eligible person was thought to be too young), residency (they were thought not to be eligible on the qualifying date), or because they were thought not to be a UK citizen. These reasons were also clearly linked to relevant personal characteristics associated with non-registration (such as age, mobility or nationality), but the analysis of 2000 data suggests that there was also likely to have been an interaction between perceived ineligibility on the basis of that characteristic and the household situation the eligible person was in. For example, among people in younger age groups, the less close the relationship with the head of household (often the person completing the registration form), the greater the likelihood that the eligible person would be unregistered.

In around a fifth of cases (19%) involving non-registration in 1991 it was reported that the eligible people themselves did not wish to be registered. This lack of desire to be registered is usefully considered in relation to the personal characteristics of the eligible person themselves (for example by asking whether young people were less likely to want to be registered, and why). Although we do not have data about the desire to be registered in 2000, the fact that very little non-registration occurred in older age groups, and the fact that men were more likely to be unregistered in all age groups suggests that the lack of desire to be registered, (if still responsible in 2000 for a fifth or more of non-registration) is likely to have been correlated with some characteristics that were available for analysis, such as age, and possibly sex.

For 15-20% of cases of non-registration the reason given was that there had either been no registration form received or that a form had been completed and returned and the person was not sure why they were not registered. In both situations the implication was that non-registration was not under the control of the household. This type of non-registration was likely to have been associated with particular key factors such as tenure and mobility, but again, situational factors, such as the access by members of the household to post received at the address, and wider factors, such as the electoral registration practices of the local authority, were likely to have played a part in the specific mechanisms of non-registration.

Analysis of the reported reasons for non-registration from 1981/1991 and of the groupings of people identified in chapter 6, suggest three useful distinctions in the mechanisms leading to non-registration; firstly whether the non-registration was intended or unintended, secondly, whether registration was under the control of the eligible person themselves²⁸, and thirdly, whether the non-registration was more influenced by situational factors (such as household circumstances) or by characteristics of the eligible person (such as age). Whilst it appears that the key explanatory factors of age, sex, mobility, nationality and tenure were clearly related to non-registration across most groups in 2000, it also seems that the way they can be used to explain non-registration will differ for different groups. They are of greatest relevance if considered in the context of the different types of reasons for non-registration, and with reference to the mechanisms of non-registration most specific to the group concerned.

Attainers, for example, whilst defined very directly by age as a group, differ from the broader category of 'those living with parents' in that registration was more likely to have been

retrospectively six months after registration) and conformance bias (since they implicitly involve the reporting of failure to properly complete the form).

²⁸ Some non-registration was likely to have been purely determined by someone other than the eligible person themselves (e.g. the person completing the registration form), or even by circumstances outside the control of the household (where for example a registration form was not received).

unintentional, and to have occurred without the involvement of the eligible person (the attainer is unlikely to have been involved in filling in the form given that their eligibility was unrecognised). The mechanism of non-registration is likely to have been simply that the head of household filled out the form and, ignorant of their eligibility, omitted the attainer.

In contrast, those in a similar situation of living with parents, but aged 18 or over, had a markedly higher chance of being registered. This was probably due to the change in age in prompting recognition in the household that a person was eligible. As a result, the reasons for non-registration were likely to be different, and related instead to misunderstandings or misapprehensions about the nature and likely period of residency of the eligible person, rather than beliefs about their ineligibility due to age. There is also a greater chance that the eligible person was involved and in agreement about the lack of necessity for registration.

For young people living away from home, the mechanism of non-registration was further complicated by a range of factors including mobility, tenure, and the age (and tenure) of the oldest household member. Not being related to the head of household increased the likelihood of non-registration in this group. The precise mechanisms were less clearly defined by a single 'reason', and were more likely to involve an interaction (or lack of interaction) between eligible household members and other tenants or landlords.

For those in privately rented accommodation, the reasons for non-registration may also be related to the certain characteristics of the person, such as age or occupation, or they may be affected by the circumstances of the living arrangements. For example, in situations involving sub-letting or the informal renting out of rooms, non-registration may have been due to the fact that the landlord did not wish to record the fact of the letting arrangement. In such a situation it may have been of relatively little immediate consequence to the eligible person that he or she had to give up the prospect of registration in order to obtain or secure accommodation. Furthermore, people in privately rented accommodation, (including new conversions of houses into separate flats), or renting rooms within existing accommodation, may have also been less likely to have been reached by electoral registration forms than people in owner-occupied properties or council accommodation, which means that, the characteristics of the individual, the household situation, and local authority registration practices may all have played a part.

For eligible people under thirty and single, in addition to the factors described above, a lack of desire to be registered may have been an important factor in non-registration. This lack of desire may in turn may have been caused by a lack of interest in political participation, or by a desire to remain unregistered in order to avoid appearing on a public register. In the former case the non-registration may have been closely associated with factors such as age, whilst in the latter case, it may have been more related to characteristics of employment or economic circumstances. Other factors which are not available to this study, such as an adverse financial or credit history or difficulties with personal or family relationships may play a part in a desire to avoid registration.

Similarly, for those separated or divorced, non-registration may relate directly to key explanatory factors such as increased levels of mobility following separation, or to more complex situational factors, such as a desire to avoid the public recording of cohabitation with new partners, or the desire to retain registration at the marital address.

Conclusions

The sociodemographic characteristics most clearly associated with non-registration in 2000 were age, sex, mobility, tenure, and nationality, but for many unregistered people in the study sample the mechanism of non-registration was also strongly conditioned by the nature of their relationships within the household.

There do not appear to have been strong permanent barriers to registration based on general personal characteristics such as ethnicity, but rather it was situational factors, such as the relationship to the head of household, or the perceptions of the head of household that had the most immediate and direct effect (positive or negative) on registration. It was also the case that 'risk-factors', such as mobility or living in private accommodation, tended to accumulate to certain people, often in conjunction with other factors, such as being engaged in certain types of employment or being unemployed. However, in many such cases there will also have been a more specific mechanism for non-registration, and by implication a 'reason'.

Perhaps uniquely, mobility of address does appear to have had the effect of increasing the rate of non-registration across all groups examined. Conversely, remaining at an address for a period of time had a restorative effect on registration rates for all groups, bringing an increased likelihood of registration over time. Given the fairly uniform nature of electoral registration practice, this generality in the effect of mobility on registration, and its relative independence of other factors is plausible.

With regard to the importance of relationships on non-registration, previous studies with 1991 data suggested that the age of the oldest household member could (in lieu of the age of the eligible person) be used as a predictive factor in non-registration. In 2000, the mobility of the head of household appeared to function as a predictor of non-registration as effectively as that of the eligible person. The evidence suggests that the presence and actions of the head of household increased the likelihood of registration for many groups²⁹.

To take an example, an eligible individual's likelihood of being unregistered was just 5% in households where the head of household was registered, but in households where the head of household was not registered it was as high as 70%. For those eligible people not related to the head of household their likelihood of non-registration was already high – standing at over 40% – but when the head of household was registered the chances fell to 23% and when the head of household was unregistered it rose to 88%.

In one sense this is simply an alternative way of describing how high the likelihood of registration was for the head of household relative to other people, but it also may be viewed as evidence that the role of a head of household in the system of household registration could function to raise overall levels of registration. When the head of household became involved in registration (as indicated by the fact of their own registration), there was a corresponding increase in the likelihood of registration for other people. We have not been able to quantify such an effect, so we cannot determine whether it may have outweighed any negative effect on registration rates caused by a failure on the part of the head of household to recognise eligibility in others³⁰.

²⁹ including the same groups of people that in some instances the head of household failed to recognise as eligible.

³⁰ In fact the negative effect of the head of household on registration by means of his or her being unaware of eligibility in others is arguably a construction for which there is no controlled measure – we do not know how likely 16-17 year olds would be to register without the intervention of heads of household.

Nonetheless, it seems plausible that the presence of a head of household carrying out a duty of recording the occupants of a household may serve to increase the level of registration amongst those people who are not highly motivated to be registered (it is difficult to see how it could have an adverse effect). Since we do not have information about the size of this group in the population, (just as we do not have information about the propensity for non-registration in the absence of canvassing), we cannot quantify this effect, but indirect evidence cited above suggests that it may exist.

8 Comments

This chapter presents some suggestions for potential research on electoral registration and electoral registration practice in the light of the findings of this study.

Research into non-registration

It seems likely that the introduction of rolling registration should have provided a way to reduce non-registration levels during the period between qualifying dates. Prior to rolling registration it was possible for people living at an address in months prior to the qualifying date to judge that a forthcoming change of address made registering at their present address pointless. Because of this, and because the effect of mobility on non-registration persisted beyond one year, rolling registration should have had the potential to reduce the level of non-registration even as measured by the present study (at the qualifying date). The introduction of a full and edited register may also have reduced the disincentives to appearing on the register amongst certain groups, although there is no evidence as to the baseline levels for these disincentives in 2000.

If measures of changes in levels of non-registration since 2000 were required before the 2011 census, the most effective method would be to repeat the comparison between a large survey sample and the electoral register for a relevant time period. Although the LFS sample is not a full population sample, it may be possible to establish a reliable indicator of change between 2000 and another time period, provided that the pattern and level of response in the survey had not changed substantially. However, the electoral register databases used in this study were based on the last version of the registers before the introduction of full and edited versions, and equivalent resources may therefore not be available for a later time period.

Another potential focus for research might involve attitudinal studies based on samples of the types of people identified within this study as being most associated with non-registration. It might be possible to investigate the mechanism of non-registration, and make measurements of hidden registration (at another addresses) and true eligibility status in relation to citizenship. A sampling frame for such work might include the occupants of addresses updated via rolling registration within a selection of local authorities.

Given our analysis of the mechanisms of non-registration, some research which might support understanding of how electoral registration practice could be modified includes assessment of:

- the extent and manner in which the duty of a responsible householder to sign a declaration on a household form regarding the household as a whole (regardless of requirements on other householders to provide information or signatures) has a positive effect on rates of registration.
- testing the inclusion in the declaration signed by the person taking responsibility for completing the form of a statement that the form had been shown to every household member over the age of 15 in order to allow them each to determine their own eligibility for inclusion.

A1 Appendix 1 – Methodological Approach

This chapter presents additional detail of the study methodology

Combined sample

The 1993 study of non-registration, was based on 1991 Census data and information from the Census follow up study. The most important reason for using survey data in addition to Census data for the current study was that in the absence of follow-up data, eligibility on the basis of residency would have been uncertain for a proportion of cases. Whilst the Census data records whether or not a person lived at the address 12 months before, it does not ask for the date when they moved in. For this group (who are also more likely than average to be unregistered) there is therefore uncertainty about whether they were resident on the qualifying date. For this reason the idea was developed of taking information about residency from a Labour Force Survey (LFS) sample whose interviews were conducted in a series of five interviews running across the October 2000 qualifying date, and using this in conjunction with Census data for people missing from the survey data. This reduced the number of cases for whom eligibility was uncertain, and had the added advantages that where the identifiers used in matching to the register was not complete in one source, a match could be attempted using information from the other source. In addition, for the survey-based part of the sample a broader set of sociodemographic information became available for subsequent analysis.

Drawing the sample and defining eligibility

The sample design was based on a sample of 15,157 household addresses in England and Wales. The addresses were selected originally as a sample for the Labour Force Survey (LFS) in Spring 2000, and were drawn from the Royal Mail's Postcode Address File (PAF) which is the standard sampling frame of addresses for large scale ONS social surveys. A small proportion of addresses are added from a separately ONS-maintained list of NHS accommodation. The sample is unclustered geographically, meaning that addresses were drawn from all areas of England and Wales with equal probability of selection.

For the LFS survey, interviews were sought with the occupants of all selected addresses during the period March-May 2000. All households interviewed at these addresses (except for those addresses which were discovered to be ineligible as second homes, or business premises) were interviewed again, either by telephone or face-to-face, at three month intervals over a period of a year. Where new households or people arrived at the address during this time these were incorporated into the survey.

For the electoral registration study, information about all the people recorded as being resident at the sampled addresses was extracted from a data archive and collated to show the pattern of residency for each person across the five LFS interviews. For the third of these three-monthly 'waves', the interviewing period was September-November 2000. The majority of people interviewed in this period had also been interviewed at earlier interviews, and were also resident at later visits, but there was also some movement of people and households in and out over the relevant period. By tracking residency within the household over the preceding and succeeding interviews, it was possible to determine whether people were resident at the address on the 10th

October 2000, (the qualifying date for the February 2001 register) for the majority of people within the survey sample.

For those people who were first contacted for interview only after the qualifying date, (because they moved to the address), it was usually possible to determine from the survey data whether they had moved in before the qualifying date by referring to the answers given about when they had moved to the property.

Overall, this meant that in the survey sample data there were four types of people

A1) Those who were known to have been resident at the address on the qualifying date

A2) Those who were known to have moved into the address after the qualifying date

A3) Those who were known to have moved out of the address before the qualifying date (either because subsequent occupants of the same property had moved in before that date, or because household members reported that someone who had lived there had moved away)

A4) Those who were recorded as being resident at some point prior to the qualifying date, but about whom there was no information about residency or non-residency after the qualifying date (this was usually because the household refused to take part in later interviews, and as a result the address was not recontacted near the time of the qualifying date).

In terms of residency, all members of group 1 were eligible for inclusion on the register and all members of groups 2 and 3 were ineligible. People in group A4 were possibly resident at the qualifying date but without further information their eligibility could not be determined.

The second source of information available on who was resident at the sampled addresses on the qualifying date was the Census of April 2001. The first step was to extract from archive the details of the forms returned for the relevant addresses, and these records were then matched by a combination of date of birth and name to the records from the survey sample. This allowed us to identify

- Which people within the Census sample had already been accounted for by the survey sample. This ensured that people were not double-counted.
- Which people had moved into addresses after those known to the survey had moved away, but no further contact had been made.
- Which people (in group A4), with whom no contact had been made after the qualifying date, were in fact still resident the following April, and thus were resident across the qualifying date.
- Which people lived at sampled addresses in April 2001 but had never been contacted by the survey. For most of these people we knew that they had been resident on the qualifying date, because in the census they reported having lived at the address for over 12 months, but a smaller proportion reported moving in within the preceding 12 months, and for these people the exact date may have fallen before or after the qualifying date.

This reduced the uncertainty about who was resident on the qualifying date to people in the following two groups

B1) People in group A4 not subsequently recorded by the Census.

B2) People who had never been contacted by the survey, but who responded to the Census, and who had reported moved into the address within the preceding 12 months.

A small number of addresses contained survey data for people from group B1 before the qualifying date and Census data for group B2 people after the qualifying date, with no information available about which set of people were resident on the qualifying date. Where

there was no information to suggest that the property was vacant or occupied by other people over the qualifying date all people in groups B1 and B2 were treated as eligible (in terms of residency), but were assigned an ‘eligibility weight’ reflecting their likelihood of having been resident as follows

- *For people in group B1* – an eligibility weight corresponding to a likelihood that they were resident at the October 2000 qualifying date, given that they were not resident at the census date

$$1 - \left(\frac{\text{number of weeks between last known contact and qualifying date}}{\text{number of weeks between last contact and census date}} \right)$$
- *For people in group B2 who were in an address where type B1 people were also recorded* – an eligibility weight corresponding to the inverse of the probability for group B1 people at the same address
- *For people in group B2 who were in an otherwise ‘empty’ address* – an eligibility weight corresponding to the likelihood of moving in before the qualifying date given that they were not resident one year before the census

$$1 - \left(\frac{\text{number of weeks between qualifying date and census date}}{52} \right)$$

Whilst the ‘eligibility’ weight was set at a proportion between zero and one, the score given to represent ‘registration’ was set at one in order to yield an overall compatibility between numerator (numbers registered) and denominator (eligible people). This leads to a small reduction in the precision of estimates, but with the numbers of cases involved relative to the overall sample size, this is negligible, and is offset by the avoidance of bias which might accompany the exclusion of these people.

Having established eligible by virtue of residency, the study sample was screened for eligibility on the basis of age. Only those people who would have become 18 within the life of the February 2001 Electoral Register were eligible for inclusion, so the cut-off point was a date of birth before February 15th 1984. As described in Chapter 2, no screening on the basis of nationality or other characteristics was carried out.

Matching Techniques

The matching process for the project was divided over several phases of the project, and involved a number of different methods and tools. It was also carried out in different locations as work on identifiers from Census archives was undertaken within a designated environment.

Matching formed an important part of both the development of the eligible sample and of the measurement of registration and in both instances there was no prospect of accepting partial matching. When developing the sample, partial matching might have led to the exclusion of groups of people with a different likelihood of registration from the eligible sample, and thus to bias. For the process of matching the eligible sample to the electoral register, partial matching would have led directly to an inaccurate measure of registration levels.

As a consequence, and because there were also a number of tools and methods available for matching, a multi-sweep approach was adopted, designed to allow each matched record a number of chances to be matched. In general the sequence followed was ‘fully automated’, ‘corrected and automated’, clerical. However, for the final matching between the eligible population sample and the electoral register there was more than one clerical stage, because

there were two separate matching approaches used. In total the matching exercises involved in the study fell into three broad categories

- Development of the Eligible sample
- Matching the eligible sample to the Electoral register
- Other matching

Sample development

- 1 Matching the original survey address sample to both survey data records (for responding households) and to other archived identifying information such as names. This was done using previous survey identifiers and new identifiers designed for the project.
- 2 Matching the study sample of addresses to the census address register to devise a census address sample for extraction of census person-level information. This involved manipulation of address formats and partial automatic matching of addresses accompanied by some semi-clerical matching where addresses were equivalent but formatted differently.
- 3 Matching the extracted person level census records to survey information to identify common records. This was done using address, date of birth, and names. Neither source is completely 'clean' as census data is subject to handwriting recognition error during form scanning, whilst the survey records are liable to spelling differences due to the fact that whilst the Census is self-completion, survey interviewers record names to suit the purposes of recall rather than as a substantive record of identity. However, date of birth and name was almost always sufficient to determine a case as a match or non-match.

There were a small number of people (around 1%) where

- date of birth and name were refused, or where only forenames were given during the survey, or where census data was unreadable, and
- for whom the information about the period of residency from both sources did not conclusively permit or rule out a match, and
- where there was no information about any intervening residents, or vacancy of property.

For these situations assessments were made of the plausibility of the match based on combinations of available name information, the number of people, gender and marital status, and length of time between measurements, relative to the prevailing trends in terms of mobility and household composition. The likelihood of match was scored from zero for impossible (i.e. different gender) through to a relatively high probability for cases with the same gender, household size and marital status, according to estimates of the likelihood of that household type being replaced with another of the same type during the period. Most cases had a probability either of zero or near one, and matches were then assigned to relevant cases on the balance of probabilities. Whilst the error-rate involved in this process is difficult to estimate, the effect of this error on the overall accuracy of matching between the two sources is likely to be negligible (less than 1%), and is judged to be less than the error arising from the exclusion of people who are less clearly identifiable or willing to give a full name or date of birth, and who may also be less likely than average to register to vote. The overall match rate for those in the survey sample to census records was 95%, which was appropriate given the rate of moving in and out of addresses over time. The effective match rate is therefore good for matching exercises of this nature.

After the match between survey and census was developed, the two sources were kept separate during subsequent analysis, with flags on each source to indicate the match

status. Census records which were matched were retained to help during matching work to the electoral register, but were excluded during analysis of registration rates, as they were already counted in the survey matching sample.

Matching to Electoral register

- 4 The first phase of measuring registration rates involved matching between the people in the sample responding to the LFS survey and the electoral register. This was carried out in several stages. Firstly, recorded name information from the social survey was matched ‘automatically’ (forename and surname) with name information in the Collated Electoral Register (CER) database. Where unique one-to-one matches existed between the two records these were set to one side and then the records which had not been matched were scrutinised. At this point clerical modifications were made to the entries in the survey data to compensate for
 - Spelling errors (e.g. Browne for Brown, Jacqueline for Jackie).
 - Shortened forms – e.g. Harry for Harold, Dick for Richard
 - Changes from maiden to married name (and vice versa)³¹.
- 5 These changes were all recorded and then the process run again. This time, after the matching of forename and surname, the matched records were set to one side and another sweep run using initial and surname, again accepting only unique one-to-one matches. These were then set to one side and a further sweep carried out, clerically assigning provisional matches where appropriate, for example where Mr and Mrs Surname could be provisionally matched to male and female people of that surname with no other adult household members. Non-unique matches were examined separately to see whether they could be assigned to other household members.
- 6 For all inconclusive matches, cases were transferred to a Census matching environment and any other information available from the linked Census records (where these had been matched) was used to test for a match to the electoral register. This allowed most inconclusive or partial matches to be confirmed or rejected. Where this occurred, a check was run that this new information did not impact on the uniqueness of other matches in the household.
- 7 All relevant Census records which were eligible (but which were not in the survey-responding sample of people) were also then matched to the CER using the same methodology of multiple sweep with progressive matching and removal.
- 8 Finally, the eligible survey and census records which failed the above matching processes, were matched individually against the Searchable Electoral Register (SER). Initially they were matched by searching for the name (and where relevant, close variants) within the appropriate postcode or town. This allowed for the possibility of address format discrepancies between the two sources. Any records which failed this matching process were then matched again using the SER but this time by bringing up all the registration records for the relevant street or postcode and searching through these for the address and within this any candidate records with similar names for scrutiny. This allowed for the widest possible matching given variations of spelling of name, as well as identifying further potential discrepancies with address information. It also overcame other specific difficulties such as the occasional reversed listing of forename and surname, or slight variations in the presentation of married names.
- 9 After matching, identifiers were removed for the analysis stage.

³¹ The availability of contact information from all five interviews (through to March-May 2001), helped with this

Other matching

The Collated Electoral Register (CER) was too large to match people to directly, since it was known that some clerical matching and adjustment of names would be required, and the database contained 41 million entries. Hence it was necessary to prepare a pool of candidate records from the CER for matching. Records were extracted from the full database on the basis of postcode matches initially. From the resultant pool, addresses were selected using full address details, to give person level records (where these existed) for the majority of sample addresses. This process involved a degree of information re-formatting and clerical matching to narrow down the pool of CER records to one address per sample address.

Records were not retrieved for all addresses from the CER and there was no reliable method for determining whether this was because there was no person registered at the address or because of a failure in matching, although inspection could sometimes determine from surrounding address entries within the postcode which was the case. Fortunately however, it was sufficient to extract as many candidate records as possible, because any population records not found during the CER matching process, were all still destined to be matched in multiple sweeps using the searchable tools (SER). Hence, the result of the failures to match in the CER extraction phase were to increase the project workload, but were otherwise 'non-critical'. This was important because it emerged that minor discrepancies between sources existed in address formatting and occasionally postcode.

Overall Matching Reliability

As noted above, estimating the error arising from the matching error for each stage and from the assumptions made where matches were assigned is difficult, but in all cases the numbers of cases involved were small, and the resultant effect on overall estimates judged to be low. The approach to defining the eligible set of cases has been to include all appropriate cases, even for the few instances where information was incomplete, and to make informed assumptions where necessary which would lead to a lower overall rate of error than the exclusion of those cases. In respect of matching to the electoral register to determine registration rates, the approach has been to give each case as many chances of being matched as possible, using more than one source for the register, and at least two clerical sweeps for each case focusing on different potential causes of matching error.

Our estimate of the additional error in the overall estimates for non-registration caused by these procedures and assumptions is that it should have a theoretical limit of one percentage point in either direction. Given that the matching processes and assumptions have been designed to avoid the introduction of bias as far as possible, the effect on overall estimates in the report is estimated to be minimal, and there should be no correlation between this and other known sources such as sampling error and the uncertainty which accompanies estimates for Census non-responding people.