



The
Electoral
Commission

Media handbook

European Parliamentary and local council
elections in Northern Ireland

April 2014

Contents

About this handbook	1
Media contacts and resources	2
European Parliamentary and local elections overview	3
European Parliamentary and local elections timetable	5
Who's who at the elections?	7
Standing for election	9
Campaigning	11
Party spending and donations	13
Candidate spending and donations at the election	15
Electoral fraud	17
Registering to vote	19
Voting	22
The Electoral Commission's public awareness campaign	26
Counting the votes	27
After the election	32
Appendix A - List of Deputy Returning Officers and their contact details	33
Appendix B – European Parliamentary election count centre details	36

Appendix C – Count of layout of King’s Hall Pavilion for European Parliamentary election	37
Appendix D – Evacuation procedures King’s Hall Pavilion	38
Appendix E – Notice of requirement of secrecy	39
Appendix F – Electoral Commission public awareness campaign	40

About this handbook

This handbook covers the European Parliamentary and the local council elections taking place in Northern Ireland on Thursday 22 May. It is a joint publication between the Electoral Commission and the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.

A separate handbook on the European Parliamentary and local council elections in Great Britain produced by the Electoral Commission is available [here](#).

Media contacts and resources

Electoral Commission press office

Cahir Hughes - Senior Communications Officer
028 9089 4028 or chughes@electoralcommission.org.uk

Out of office hours: 07789 920 414
Email: press@electoralcommission.org.uk
Follow us on Twitter at www.twitter.com/ElectoralCommUK

Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

Tel: 0800 4320 712
Email media@eoni.org.uk
Follow us on Twitter at @eoni_offical

Websites

www.electoralcommission.org.uk

The Commission's website has a [dedicated section for journalists](#) featuring news from the Commission. The website also includes our [briefings to the House of Commons and the House of Lords](#) on issues that directly affect voters. The website also has an area containing our guidance for candidates at both the European Parliamentary and local council elections.

www.eoni.org.uk

The website of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland provides information on how to register to vote, absent voting, how to find your polling station and electoral identification requirements.

www.aboutmyvote.co.uk

This website provides information for the public on how to register and vote. It also includes a postcode search facility allowing people to find out where elections are taking place and an interactive 'polling station walkthrough'.

Images

The Electoral Commission have a selection of images that can be used by the press, which are available on our Flickr site:

www.flickr.com/photos/electoralcommissionuk/collections/

European Parliamentary and local council elections overview

On 22 May 2014 voters in Northern Ireland will vote for three representatives in the European Parliament. Seventy-three MEPs are to be elected to the 12 electoral regions across the UK. MEPs are elected in Northern Ireland using the single transferable vote while MEPs in Great Britain are elected using the party list system.

The number of European Parliament seats in the UK is divided as follows:

Electoral region	MEP numbers per region
East Midlands	5
East of England	7
London	8
North East England	3
North West England	8
South East England	10
South West England	6
West Midlands	7
Yorkshire and the Humber	6
Wales	4
Scotland	6
Northern Ireland	3

In addition voters will also vote for 462 councillors to the 11 new councils. Councillors will be elected through the single transferable vote system. The new councils will work in 'shadow form' alongside the current 26 councils until they take over on 1 April 2015. Further information on the reform of local councils in Northern Ireland is available from www.nidirect.gov.uk/newcouncils

The 11 new council districts are listed below. Once elected and relevant legislation is in place, the councils will be able to change their names.

- Antrim and Newtownabbey District
- Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon District
- Belfast District

- Causeway Coast and Glens District
- Derry and Strabane District
- Fermanagh and Omagh District
- Lisburn and Castlereagh District
- Mid and East Antrim District
- Mid Ulster District
- Newry, Mourne and Down District
- North Down and Ards District

European Parliamentary election timetable

Event	Date
Last day for publication of notice of election.	Monday 14 April 2014
Deadline for delivery of nomination papers	4pm on Thursday 24 April 2014
Last date for withdrawals of nominations	4pm on Thursday 24 April 2014
Publication of statement of candidates nominated	5pm on Thursday 24 April 2014 ¹
Deadline for applying for a postal or proxy vote	5pm on Thursday 1 May 2014
Deadline for registering to vote at the elections.	Tuesday 6 May 2014.
Deadline for applying for a postal or proxy vote for unforeseen medical reason	5pm on Wednesday 14 May 2014
Polling day	7am to 10 pm Thursday 22 May 2014
Verification of ballot papers	As soon as practicable after the close of polls ²
Counting of ballot papers	From 9am on Monday 26 May
Last day for submission of candidate spending return	Tuesday 15 July 2014 (for result declared on 26 May 2014)
Deadline to submit political party and non-party campaign spending returns (For those spending £250k or less)	Friday 22 August 2014
Deadline to submit political party and non-party campaign spending returns (for those spending over £250k)	Friday 22 November 2014.

¹ If there are any objections the Statement of persons nominated may be published later, but no later than 4pm on Friday 25 April.

² The verification of 'unused' ballot papers will begin shortly after 10pm on polling day and be conducted overnight. The verification of 'used' ballot papers will begin at 8am on Friday 23 May

Local council election timetable

Event	Date
Last day for publication of notice of election.	Monday 14 April 2014
Deadline for delivery of nomination papers	1pm on Tuesday 29 April 2014
Last date for withdrawals of nominations	1pm on Tuesday 29 April 2014
Publication of statement of candidates nominated	6pm on Tuesday 29 April 2014 ³
Deadline for applying for a postal or proxy vote	5pm on Thursday 1 May 2014
Deadline for registering to vote at the elections.	Tuesday 6 May 2014.
Deadline for applying for a postal or proxy vote for unforeseen medical reason	5pm on Wednesday 14 May 2014
Polling day	7am to 10 pm Thursday 22 May 2014
Verification of ballot papers	As soon as practicable after the close of polls ⁴
Counting of ballot papers	From completion of verification on Friday 23 May 2014
Last day for submission of candidate spending return	35 calendar after the result of the election is declared
Deadline to submit political party and non-party campaign spending returns (For those spending £250k or less) ³	Friday 22 August 2014
Deadline to submit political party and non-party campaign spending returns (for those spending over £250k)	Friday 22 November 2014.

³ If there are any objections the Statement of persons nominated may be published later, but no later than 1pm on Wednesday 30 April.

⁴ The verification of 'unused' ballot papers will begin shortly after 10pm on polling day and be conducted overnight. The verification of 'used' ballot papers will begin at 8am on Friday 23 May

Who's who at the elections?

Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

The Chief Electoral Officer, Graham Shields, administers elections and compiles the register of electors in Northern Ireland. He is the Regional Returning Officer for Northern Ireland in the European Parliamentary election. He has responsibility for the organisation and conduct of the election – including nominations, distribution of poll cards and postal ballots, the conduct of the poll and the counting of votes.

The Chief Electoral Officer is supported in his duties by the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.

Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) aim to ensure the smooth running of elections and referendums in Northern Ireland while maintaining the public perception of an impartial independent electoral service.

EONI recognises the important role that the media provide in communicating with the wider public and getting key messages out to voters.

The Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. We set standards for well-run elections and regulate party and election finance.

We publish guidance for political parties, candidates and their agents, and non-party campaigners on how they must comply with the statutory reporting requirements.

We also:

- encourage people to register to vote and raise awareness about the different ways that people can cast their vote.
- set the standards for running elections and electoral registration, and report on how well these are done
- register political parties
- make sure people understand and follow the rules on party and election finance
- publish details of how parties spend their money at elections

Deputy Returning Officer

A Deputy Returning Officers have been appointed for each of the 11 new councils. This role is normally fulfilled by the Chief Executive of a council or a person they nominate. They are responsible to the Chief Electoral Officer in his capacity as Returning Officer for all elections in Northern Ireland.

A list of the Deputy Returning Officers and their contact details are included in Annex A.

Election agent

Each candidate must have an election agent. This is the person responsible for the proper management of their election campaign. Candidates who do not appoint an agent are automatically deemed to be their own election agent.

[Read the guidance we have published for election agents here.](#)

Presiding Officer and poll clerks

The Chief Electoral Officer appoints Presiding Officers to run polling stations. They are supported by poll clerks. Polling station staff must act impartially at all times and ensure that the proper procedure for voting is followed. Their duties include organising the layout of the polling station, issuing ballot papers, checking photographic ID, assisting voters and ensuring that ballot boxes are transported securely to the count venue.

Polling agents

Polling agents can be appointed by candidates to assist in the detection of personation at polling stations. They are allowed to have a copy of the electoral register but are not permitted to remove it from the polling station until the close of poll.

Standing for election

Who can stand as a candidate at the European Parliamentary elections?

For someone to be able to stand as a candidate at a European Parliamentary election in Great Britain and Northern Ireland they must:

- be at least 18 years old on the day of their nomination.
- be a British or Irish citizen; an eligible Commonwealth citizen; or a citizen of any other member state of the European Union resident in the UK or Gibraltar.

Are there any reasons why someone couldn't stand as a candidate?

There are a number of disqualifications that would prevent a person from standing. These include:

- Being disqualified from standing for election to the House of Commons (with some exceptions)
- Being a particular type of bankrupt.
- Being detained in prison for more than a year or being subject to a particular court decision.

Further details of disqualifications can be found in [the guidance for candidates at the European Parliamentary election](#).

Who can stand as a candidate at the local council elections?

For someone to be able to stand as a candidate at the local council elections in Northern Ireland they must:

- Be at least 18 years old on the day of their nomination
- Be a British or Irish citizen, an eligible Commonwealth citizen or a citizen of any other member state of the European Union.

In addition a candidate must fulfil at least one of the following three conditions:

- Be registered to vote in the council area in which they are standing
- Have lived in the area for one year preceding the day of the election
- Have worked in the area for one year preceding the day of the election

Are there any reasons why someone couldn't stand as a candidate?

A person cannot stand as a candidate in the local council elections if they

- Work for the council
- Hold a politically restricted post for another authority
- Are bankrupt
- Have served a prison sentence of three months or more within the five years prior to the election
- Have been disqualified from being elected as a councillor under any legislation.

Further details of disqualifications can be found in [the guidance for candidates at the local council elections](#).

Do candidates and parties have to pay a deposit?

For the European Parliamentary election the deposit for each candidate is **£5,000**. After the election, the deposit will be returned if a candidate exceeds one quarter of the quota at any stage of the counting of votes.

In the local council elections there is no deposit.

How does a candidate stand for a party?

If a candidate wishes to stand for a political party in a constituency or local council, and use that party's name or a party emblem registered with the Electoral Commission on the ballot paper, they must seek the permission of that party.

The party's Nominating Officer, or someone authorised by the Nominating Officer to do so, would then issue a 'certificate of authorisation'.

[Read more about the political party registration process in the Commission's guidance here.](#)

Do you have to stand under a political party name?

No. A person may stand as an individual candidate, i.e. not for any political party. Individual candidates can only use the description 'Independent' on the ballot papers and cannot use an emblem.

Can all parties use a description and/or emblem on the ballot paper?

Yes, parties registered with the Electoral Commission are able to request that one of their registered descriptions and/or one of their party's official emblems is printed on the ballot paper.

Campaigning

There are many rules surrounding elections campaigns. These range from the use of imprints on election materials to statements about other candidates. [Detailed guidance on campaigning rules is available here.](#)

Are there rules about what candidates can say about one another?

As at all elections, it is illegal to make a false statement about the personal character of a candidate in order to affect the election of a candidate. Rules about defamation also apply to election materials.

The police may investigate allegations of the specific electoral criminal offence of making a false statement. Defamation issues are a matter for the civil courts.

The Electoral Commission does not have any regulatory role in relation to the content of campaign material used at elections.

Would the Electoral Commission investigate if someone said something false about a rival candidate or party in campaign material?

No. The Commission has no role in policing the content of campaign material. The police would investigate allegations of the specific criminal offence of making a false statement mentioned above. Defamation issues are a matter for the civil courts.

What is an 'imprint'?

An imprint is added to campaign material to show who is responsible for its production. It helps to ensure that there is transparency about who is campaigning.

It should include the name and address of the printer and promoter of a candidate's election materials.

A standard imprint should look like this:

*Printed by ABC Printing Ltd, 20 High Street, Belfast.
Promoted by J Smith on behalf of the Vote Party, both of 110 Main Street, Belfast.*

What materials should carry an imprint?

All printed election materials (i.e. posters, placards and leaflets distributed for the purpose of promoting the election of a candidate) must include an imprint.

Not including an imprint on European Parliamentary election material could result in enforcement action by the Commission.

Electronic materials – such as websites and emails – should also have imprints. The imprint should include the name and address of the promoter and the organisation on whose behalf it has been produced.

What is a hustings event?

This is a meeting where election candidates or parties debate policies and answer questions from the audience.

Hustings events are usually held by organisations, such as community groups or campaigners, so that voters can ask candidates about issues that are important to them.

The Commission produces guidance for parties, candidates, agents and hustings organisers. For further information, please see the *Hustings events* document [on the Commission's website here](#).

Party spending and donations at the elections

There are limits on what political parties and candidates can spend on campaigning in the run-up to the elections.

What is the 'regulated period'?

This is the period of time during which spending limits and rules apply to political parties.

For the European Parliamentary elections in 2014, it began on **23 January 2014** and ends on **22 May 2014**.

How much can parties spend at European Parliamentary elections?

The spending limit for parties for the regulated period is £45,000 multiplied by the number of MEPs to be returned in each region. In Northern Ireland this means the maximum a party can spend is £135,000.

As the local council elections are being held during the regulated period for the European Parliamentary elections, party spending at these elections is also regulated if a party is contesting both elections.

Does spending before the regulated period count?

It can in some cases. Money that was spent before the start of the regulated period must be included if the goods or services purchased are used during the regulated period.

What activities count towards the spending limit?

Activities included in campaign spending are:

- Advertising of any kind. For example, street banners, websites or YouTube videos.
- Production of party political broadcasts
- Unsolicited material sent to voters. For example, letters or leaflets.
- The manifesto and other documents setting out a party's policies.
- Market research or other methods of finding out how people intend to vote.
- Press conferences or other dealings with the media.
- Rallies and events.
- Transport in connection with publicising a campaign.

Who can parties accept donations from?

Political parties in Northern Ireland may only accept donations over £500 from permissible UK and/or Irish sources. Since November 2007 parties have to report all donations from the same source, in the same calendar year, that total over £7,500 to central parties and donations over £1,500 made to 'local accounting units'. The Commission, as legally required, does not publish this information.

Are there limits on how many donations a party can accept?

No. Limits are only placed on the amount of money parties spend during the regulated period.

Do parties have to report their spending?

Yes. After the election, political parties have to report how much they spent on campaigning during the regulated period. This report must be made to us.

The reporting deadline for political parties in Northern Ireland is **22 August 2014**.

Will I be able to see parties' spending returns after the election?

Yes. The Commission will publish these returns no later than 20 working days following the deadlines above.

What about non-party campaigners' spending?

There are also limits on non-party campaign spending.

[Read more about these rules here.](#)

Candidate spending and donations at the elections

Like parties, individual candidates and their agents at the European Parliamentary and local council elections must follow certain rules about how much they can spend, who they can accept donations from, and what they must report after the election.

What is the 'regulated period' for candidates?

The regulated period begins on the date after a person officially becomes a candidate and ends at the close of the poll.

The earliest date a person can officially become a candidate is **Monday 14 April 2014**.

How much can individual candidates spend at European Parliamentary elections?

The spending limit for each candidate at the European Parliamentary election in Northern Ireland is £135,000

This is the same as the limits for party spending.

The spending limit for candidates at the local council election is £600 plus 5 pence per elector in relevant district electoral area.

The expenditure limits for joint candidates are reduced. Joint candidates normally contest the election for the same party in one district electoral area. If there are two candidates the limit is reduced by one-quarter per candidate. If there are more than two candidates the limit is reduced by one-third per candidate.

Who do candidates report their spending to and when?

The election agent of a candidate at the European Parliamentary election will need to prepare and submit an election spending return to the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland by **Tuesday 15 July** (for results announced on **Monday 26 May**).

Both the candidate and election agent will need to sign a declaration stating that the return is complete and correct to the best of their knowledge and belief.

The election agent of a candidate at the local council elections must submit their spending return to the Deputy Returning Officer of the local council area they contested within 35 days of the declaration of the result.

Do candidates still have to tell the Chief Electoral Officer or the Deputy Returning Officer if they don't spend anything?

Yes. Even if a candidate does not spend anything, a nil return must be submitted.

Will I be able to see the returns after the election?

Yes. Candidates' spending returns for the European Parliamentary election are kept by the Chief Electoral Officer and will be available for public inspection on request for a year after they were received. The spending returns of candidates at the local council election are made available for public inspection by the Deputy Returning Office of the local council area.

Do candidates have to report donations as well as spending?

Yes. The candidate's spending return must include details of all donations towards their campaign that were over £50 in value.

Some candidates, however, may receive donations for political activities other than their candidacy (for example, the donation of travel expenses to a country in which they have an interest) They must report these donations in their capacity as a 'regulated donee' to the Electoral Commission if the donations are over £1,500.

What is a 'regulated donee'?

Regulated donees are:

- holders of relevant elective office
- members of registered political parties
- members associations

There are rules on the donations regulated donees can accept, and the loans they enter into, that are in connection with their political activities.

[Read more about the rules affecting regulated donees here.](#)

Electoral fraud

There are a number of criminal offences relating to electoral fraud. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) would investigate any allegations that an offence may have taken place.

The PSNI has designated a Single Point of Contact (known as a SPOC) to lead on election-related crime and who will give advice to local police officers. Anyone making an allegation should be prepared to give the police a statement and substantiate their concerns.

Anyone, including candidates, politicians and members of the public, who has evidence of electoral fraud taking place should go straight to the police.

What are the different types of electoral offences?

Personation

This is where an individual votes as someone else (whether that person is living or dead or is a fictitious person), either by post or in person at a polling station, as an elector or as a proxy.

Undue influence / Intimidation

A person is guilty of undue influence if they directly or indirectly make use of or threaten to make use of force, violence or restraint, or inflict or threaten to inflict injury, damage, loss or harm, in order to induce or compel any voter to vote or refrain from voting.

Bribery

A person is guilty of bribery if they directly or indirectly give any money or procure any office to or for any voter, in order to induce that voter to vote or not vote.

Multiple voting and proxy voting offences

There are various offences regarding multiple voting and proxy voting, including voting as an elector or proxy when subject to a legal incapacity to vote and voting more than once in the same election.

False registration information

It is an offence to supply false registration information to an Electoral Registration Officer. It is also an offence to supply false information in connection with an application for a postal or proxy vote.

What is the Electoral Commission doing to prevent fraud at these elections?

We work closely with the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland, the PSNI and the Public Prosecution Service to tackle malpractice. This includes producing guidance and a pocket guide to electoral offences for police officers.

Registering to vote

Who can register?

A person can register and vote in the European Parliamentary and local government elections if they are:

- aged 18 or over on polling day. (A person can register when they are 16 but cannot vote until their 18th birthday)
- a British, Irish, qualifying Commonwealth⁵ or EU citizen
- resident in Northern Ireland for the previous three months⁶

What is the deadline to register to vote?

People must register by Tuesday 6 May 2014 in order to be able to vote on Thursday 22 May 2014.

What is the deadline for applying for postal and proxy voting?

The deadline for applying for a postal vote is 5pm, Thursday 1 May 2014.

The deadline for applying for a postal proxy vote for an unforeseen medical reason is 5pm, Wednesday 14 May 2014.

How can someone register to vote?

People can register to vote by contacting the Electoral Office helpline on 0800 4320 712 or by downloading a registration form from www.eoni.org.uk or www.aboutmyvote.co.uk The form must be completed and returned to the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.

What does the Electoral Commission do to encourage people to register to vote?

At the beginning of April we will launch our public awareness campaign for the 22 May 2014 elections. The campaign, which will run across TV, radio and online media in the run up to the registration deadline, will make people aware of the need to register by 6 May 2014 if they want to vote in the elections.

⁵ A qualifying Commonwealth citizen is one that has leave to remain in the UK or does not require such leave

⁶ This will be the last election in Northern Ireland in which the three month residency requirement will apply when registering to vote.

Can someone register to vote at two different addresses?

This depends on the individual's particular circumstances. A person can register to vote at an address if they are resident at that address. It may be possible to be registered at more than one address, as long as the person is resident at each address.

An example of this may be full-time students, who may be able to register at both their term-time address and their home address. It would be an offence for a person to vote twice.

It is up to the Chief Electoral Officer to decide if a person is resident at any particular property.

Can prisoners register?

Remand prisoners (those who have not been convicted or sentenced) can register. Convicted prisoners detained because of their sentence cannot.

How do members of the armed forces register?

Service personnel and their spouses or civil partners, serving in the UK or overseas, can register either at their UK home address as an ordinary voter or as a 'service voter'.

Service voters fill out an armed services declaration so they can be registered when away from their home address on duty.

For more information visit the [Armed Forces section of our website](#).

What can the electoral register be used for?

There are two versions of the electoral register – the 'edited' register and the 'full' register.

All voters are included on the 'full' version of the electoral register but voters can choose to opt out of having their details published on the 'edited' version. Anyone can purchase the edited register from the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland for any purpose.

The 'full' version of the electoral register is available to view at any area electoral office and anyone can view it under supervision. Copies of the register cannot be made.

Do candidates and parties receive a copy of the electoral register?

Yes. Candidates for both the European Parliamentary and local council elections are entitled to a free copy of the full register for the area in which they are standing. Candidates may not pass on the register, disclose any information in the register or use it for anything other than electoral purposes.

Registered political parties can request a full copy of the register at any time.

Parties and individual candidates can use the electoral register to:

- help them campaign
- check that donations and loans come from permissible sources

Details that appear only in the full register and do not appear in the edited version of the register must not be released.

Voting

Who can vote in the European Parliamentary and local council elections?

To vote in the European Parliamentary and local council election a person must be registered to vote and also be one of the following:

- a British or Irish citizen living in Northern Ireland
- a British citizen living overseas that has been registered to vote in Northern Ireland within the last 15 years
- a qualifying Commonwealth citizen living in Northern Ireland
- a European Union citizen living in Northern Ireland
- someone registered to vote as a Crown Servant
- someone registered to vote as a service voter

European Union citizens living in the UK can only vote in the European Parliamentary elections if they have declared that they intend to vote in the UK, as opposed to in the EU country of which they are a national.

When will polling stations be open?

All polling stations open at 7am and close at 10pm. The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland will send a poll card to each elector giving the location of their polling station. It is not necessary for voters to bring their poll card when they vote.

The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland will also be able to tell voters where their polling station is. A postcode search facility is available at www.eoni.org.uk or call the helpline on 0800 4320 712

How do people vote?

There are three ways in which voters can cast their vote:

- In person at a polling station
- By post
- By proxy

What identification do you need to vote?

Voters must present photographic identification at their polling station to confirm their identity. Voters must present one of the following to poll staff before they can be issued with a ballot paper:

- a UK, Irish or EU passport
- a photographic Northern Ireland, Great Britain, Irish or EEA driving licence
- a Translink Senior Smartpass
- a Translink 60+ Smartpass
- a Translink War Disabled Smartpass
- a Translink Blind Person's Smartpass
- an Electoral Identity Card

The identification does not need to be 'current' but the presiding officer must be satisfied that the photograph matches that of the person intending to vote.

What voting system is used?

In Northern Ireland the electoral system used in elections to the European Parliament and local councils is the single transferable vote (STV).

Voters cast their votes by putting a number '1' next to the name of their favourite candidate, a '2' next to their second favourite candidate and so on. Voters can vote for as few or as many candidates as they like

What will the ballot papers look like?

The ballot paper for the European Parliamentary election will be white. The local council ballot paper will be yellow.

How does someone vote by post or proxy?

Voters in Northern Ireland can apply for a postal or proxy vote but must provide a valid reason for their application such as:

- inability to attend due to illness
- blindness or other disability
- absence on the day of poll due to work commitments

- holiday arrangements

Postal and proxy vote application forms are available from area electoral offices or www.eoni.org.uk or by calling the helpline on 0800 4320 712.

The deadline for applying for a postal or proxy vote for the European Parliamentary and local council elections is 5pm on Thursday 1 May 2014.

When applying for a postal or proxy vote, voters may be required to provide proof of their reason for not been able to attend the polling station, such as travel documentation. Postal ballot papers cannot be sent to an address outside of the UK.

When applying for a proxy vote, voters must appoint someone to vote on their behalf at the polling station or by postal vote. Proxy voters must tell their proxy candidate(s) they wish to vote for. If proxy voters change their mind and wish to vote in person, they can still do so, providing that their proxy has not already voted on their behalf.

Postal ballot papers are usually sent no earlier than 11 working days before the election and must be returned to the local area electoral office no later than 10pm on 22 May 2014. Postal ballot papers cannot be returned to a polling station.

What happens if someone is queuing at a polling station at 10pm?

For the first time at any poll a voter who is in the polling station or in a queue at their polling station at 10pm will be allowed to vote.

Are there rules on impartiality for the media?

News reports, features and editorials in print or online media are not subject to electoral law, and the law does not require them to be impartial.

Paid for advertising (including free advertising that would normally be paid for) promoting a candidate or party should be included in a candidate's election expenses, and subject to the normal rules surrounding campaign materials.

Political impartiality in broadcast media is covered by the editorial guidelines relevant to that particular broadcaster:

- The BBC's editorial guidelines on broadcasting during an election can be found [here](#).
- Commercial broadcasters are subject to the Ofcom Broadcasting Code, which can be found [here](#)

Can the media enter polling stations?

No. No filming or interviewing is allowed in the polling station. If media wish to film or conduct interviews outside the polling place, they must ensure that voters are not hindered or harassed on their way to vote and that the entrance to the polling place is not obstructed.

The Electoral Commission's public awareness campaign

The Commission is running a campaign in Northern Ireland – beginning on **Monday 14 April** – encouraging people to register to vote by the deadline of **Tuesday 6 May**. This will use media we know is particularly accessed by under-registered groups, which include young people and recent homemovers. Our campaign will run across television, press, radio, online and outdoor posters.

We will also be running a '**voter information**' campaign in Northern Ireland similar to ones we have conducted for previous elections. The voter information campaign will remind voters of the need for photographic identification at the polling station, how to vote and where to find further information on the elections. This will run across printed media, radio, online and on outdoor posters.

In addition to the above, the Commission is running a predominantly online campaign aimed at encouraging UK expats to register to vote, and is working closely with the Ministry of Defence to ensure members of the armed forces have registered.

Images from our campaign are shown in **Appendix F**.

Counting the votes

The counting of votes in the European Parliamentary election will take place at King's Hall Pavilions, King's Hall complex, Balmoral, Belfast, BT9 6GW on Monday 26 May 2014. The count will be managed by the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland and the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.

All media inquiries regarding the counts for the local council elections should be directed to the Deputy Returning Officer for each individual council. Contact details for each Deputy Returning Officer are included in Annex A.

European Parliamentary election – Count Centre visit

The Electoral Office will arrange a visit to the count centre for members of the media before the election with the Returning Officer, Media liaison Officer and King's Hall Pavilions Manager. It is anticipated that this visit will take place roughly a week before the count. If you are interested in visiting the count centre in advance tick the box on the online media accreditation form at media@eoni.org.uk. Details of the count centre visit will be emailed to you once it has been confirmed.

It is the responsibility of members of the media to ensure they have adequate facilities on the day of the count and they should discuss their requirements in advance with the King's Hall Pavilions Manager.

Media accreditation

Media access to the count centre will be strictly controlled at all times and **prior accreditation is required**. All media accreditation for the European Parliamentary election will be managed by EONI. Accreditation is open to all news broadcast and news print media.

Following accreditation individual wrist bands, which must be worn at all times while attending the count centre, will be available at the media sign in area at the count centre on **Monday 26 May 2014**. They will only be issued to individuals on production of:

- a current NUJ Card; or
- a current photographic organisation pass; or
- an original letter of authority from a print/broadcast organisation supported with a second form of photographic identification – such as a passport or Electoral Identity Card.

To apply for accreditation for the European Parliamentary election, complete the application form on the EONI website www.eoni.org.uk/Elections/Media-

[Centre/Media-Accreditation-Form](#). All applications must be submitted before **5pm on Thursday 22 May**.

There is a Media Centre on the EONI website that provides electorate statistics, previous election results and statistics, press releases and the online Media Accreditation form. This information may be of interest in the run up to the election. www.eoni.org.uk/Elections/Media-Centre

What access will the media have to the Count/Count Hall for the European Parliamentary election?

Media access to count centres is strictly controlled and members of the media will be required to wear media wrist bands and photographic identification, for example organisation ID/NUJ pass, at all times. All attendees at the count are required to have read the Notification of Requirement of Secrecy in Annex E.

A Media Liaison Officer will be present throughout the count and will be the first point of contact for media related enquiries.

Members of the media must abide by any direction given by the Returning Officer, the Senior Election Manager or any person acting on his behalf. The Media Liaison Officer will facilitate access to the counting hall for a limited period to allow filming of the box opening process. Throughout the count media will have access to a platform, from which to film, that will enable a clear visual of count proceedings. Cameras or recording equipment (including phone cameras) will not be permitted to film close-ups of ballot papers or interfere with the count process as this breaches the secrecy of the ballot.

Interviews with candidates are not permitted within the count arena. However, every assistance will be provided by the Media Liaison Officer to ensure that candidates are informed of interview requests.

Everyone present must observe safety briefs and comply with reasonable requests from the Media Liaison Officer and/or centre managers. A safety/fire brief will take place prior to the beginning of the count and members of the media are required to attend.

The decision of the Returning Officer is final, and he is not required to allow any member of the media into the count (unless they are also a candidate, candidate's agent, counting agent or accredited observer).

What happens at the count for the European Parliamentary election?

The European Parliamentary Election count will commence at 9.00am on Monday 26 May 2014. A diagram of the count layout can be found in Annex C.

There are 3 members to be elected to the European Parliament and this is a 'Single Transferrable Vote' count

Doubtful votes will be adjudicated at intervals during the count. Announcements will be made when the adjudication takes place.

The Media will be advised as soon as practicable in advance of any announcements to allow preparation time for filming. This aspect will be managed by the Media Liaison Officer.

As soon as possible after the count has been completed, the Returning Officer will declare the result. Copies of the result will be available from the Media Liaison Officer.

When will the verification of ballot papers take place?

The verification of ballot papers for both the European Parliamentary election and the local council election will take place in the count venues for the local council elections.

There are two parts to the verification process:

1. Verification of unused ballot papers (ballot boxes will not be opened)

The verification of the unused ballot papers will commence after the close of the polls on Thursday 22 May 2014. This process will be carried out at each of the local council count venues and will be completed overnight. This process will be managed by the Local Council Deputy Returning Officers or a person appointed by them.

2. Verification of the used ballot papers (opening of ballot boxes)

Verification of the used ballot papers will commence at 8am on Friday 23 May 2014 at each of the Local Council count venues. The European Parliamentary election and local council election used ballot papers will be verified simultaneously. **It is impossible to state with any certainty when the verification will be completed or at what time the local council counts will start. Broadcasters should bear this in mind when planning their schedules.**

The verification is a comparison of the number of ballot papers found in a ballot box compared with the number recorded as being issued by the polling staff (a ballot paper account). If the number of ballot papers recorded on the on the ballot paper account and the physical checks correspond, the verification of that box is complete. If they do not, the ballot papers will be recounted and the documentation checked until the Deputy Returning Officer is satisfied as to the actual number of ballot papers to be included in the count. This process will continue until all the ballot boxes have been verified.

On completion of the verification stage the Local Council Deputy Returning

Officer will announce the following:

- The eligible electorate
- The total votes polled
- The percentage turnout

Please note these figures will be for the Local Council elections only.

These figures will be available from the Local Council Deputy Returning Officer or a person appointed by them.

When the verification process has been completed the European Parliamentary ballot boxes will be transferred to the King's Hall Pavilions for secure storage until Monday 26 May 2014 when the counting will commence.

Figures on the eligible electorate, total votes polled and the percentage turnout for the European Parliamentary Election will be collated for Northern Ireland after the verification process has been completed in full. Figures will be published on the EONI website and by social media as soon as practicable after the verification

How are the votes counted for the European Parliamentary and local council elections?

The Deputy Returning Officer sorts the ballot papers into parcels according to the first preference votes cast. The number is recorded along with the total number of valid ballot papers.

The total number of valid ballot papers is then divided by the number of candidates to be elected plus one. This will then provide the quota needed for a candidate to be elected. An example of how the quota is made is provided below:

Total number of valid votes: 50,000
Number of candidates to be elected: 3
Quota: $(50,000 \div 3) + 1 = 16,668$

Any candidate who reaches or exceeds the quota is deemed elected. Any surplus votes they have are then redistributed according to the voter's choice at a fractional value to ensure fairness. The candidate with the least number of votes is then eliminated and their votes are redistributed in a similar way. This process continues until all seats have been filled.

On completion of each stage of the count, the Deputy Returning Officer will tell the candidates and agents the outcome and allow them to request a recount. The Deputy Returning Officer will allow a maximum of five minutes for candidates and agents to attend. At the end of that time, unless a recount is required, he or she shall proceed to the next stage of the count. The Deputy Returning Officer is obliged to conduct one re-count if requested, but may

refuse further re-counts. Only the most recent completed stage can be recounted.

Further information on how the STV voting system operates is available at: <http://www.eoni.org.uk/Vote/Counting-the-votes>

When are postal votes opened?

Electoral Office staff will open postal ballot packs returned up to and on polling day to check the accompanying personal identifiers.

At these opening sessions, the ballot papers must remain face down and election staff will not count these votes at these sessions.

The counting of postal votes takes place at the same time as votes cast in polling stations.

Is electronic counting used?

No. Votes are counted by hand by appointed counting staff at these elections.

After the election

Can someone challenge the result of an election?

Yes. The outcome of an election can be challenged through an election petition.

Only certain people can lodge an election petition, and only under specific circumstances.

An election petition can be presented by:

- someone claiming to have been a candidate at the election
- someone claiming to have had a right to be elected or returned at the election
- an elector who had a right to vote at the election

The allowable grounds for a petition are that:

- a successful candidate was not duly elected
- the results were not duly declared

Petitioners must present the petition within 21 calendar days of the declaration of the result. Petitioners must sign the petition and return it to the Clerk of the Crown at the Royal Courts of Justice in Belfast.

In the local council elections an election petition is presented by either a candidate or at least four people who voted or were entitled to vote at the elections.

Appendix A

Local council count venues and key contacts

DRO	Contact Details	New Council Area	District Electoral Area
Jacqui Dixon	Newtownabbey Borough Council Mossley Mill Newtownabbey BT36 5QA Tel: 028 90340001 Email: jdixon@newtownabbey.gov.uk	Antrim and Newtownabbey	Dunsilly Antrim Airport Ballyclare Three Mile Water Macedon Glengormley Urban
Dr Theresa Donaldson	Craigavon Borough Council PO Box 66 Lakeview Road Craigavon BT64 1AL Tel: 028 38312402 Email: Theresa.donaldson@craigavon.gov.uk	Armagh, Banbridge and Craigavon	Cusher Portadown Craigavon Lurgan Lagan River Banbridge Armagh
Peter McNaney	Belfast City Council City Hall Belfast BT1 5GS Tel: 028 90270202 Email: mcnaneyp@belfastcity.gov.uk	Belfast	Court Black Mountain Collin Balmoral Botanic Lisnasharragh Castle Oldpark Ormiston Titanic
John Dempsey	Ballymoney Borough Council 14 Charles Street Ballymoney BT53 6DZ Tel: 028 27660237 Email: john.dempsey@ballymoney.gov.uk	Causeway Coast and Glens	The Glens Causeway Ballymoney Coleraine Bann Benbradagh Limavady

Sharon O'Connor	Derry City Council 98 Strand Road Londonderry BT48 7NN Tel: 028 71376507 Email: sharon.oconnor@derry.city.gov.uk	Derry and Strabane	Ballyarnett Foyleside The Moor Waterside Faughan Sperrin Derg
Joan McCaffrey	Omagh District Council The Grange Mountjoy Road Omagh BT79 7BL Tel: 028 82256203 Email: joan.mccaffrey@omagh.gov.uk	Fermanagh and Omagh	Erne West Erne North Enniskillen West Tyrone Omagh Mid Tyrone Erne East
Adrian Donaldson	Lisburn City Council Lagan Valley Island 1 The Island Lisburn BT27 4RL Tel: 028 92509206 Email: adriand@lisburn.gov.uk	Lisburn and Castlereagh	Lisburn South Downshire East Downshire West Castlereagh South Lisburn North Killultagh Castlereagh East
Anne Donaghy	Ballymena Borough Council 80 Galgorm Road Ballymena BT42 1AB Tel: 028 25660346 Email: anne.donaghy@ballymena.gov.uk	Mid and East Antrim	Larne Lough Coast Road Braid Ballymena Bannside Knockagh Carrick Castle
John McLaughlin	Magherafelt District Council 50 Ballyronan Road Magherafelt BT45 6EN Tel: 028 79397979 Email: chief.executive@magherafelt.gov.uk	Mid Ulster	Carntogher Moyola Magherafelt Cookstown Torrent Dungannon Clogher Valley

<p>John Dumigan</p>	<p>Down District Council Downshire Civic Centre Downshire Estate Ardglass Road Downpatrick BT30 6RA</p> <p>Tel: 028 44610800 Email: john.dumigan@downdc.gov.uk</p>	<p>Newry, Mourne and Down</p>	<p>Slieve Gullion Newry Crotlieve The Mournes Slieve Croob Downpatrick Rowallane</p>
<p>Trevor Polley</p>	<p>North Down Borough Council The Castle Bangor BT20 4BT</p> <p>Tel: 028 91278000 Email: trevor.polley@northdown.gov.uk</p>	<p>North Down and Ards</p>	<p>Ards Peninsula Comber Newtownards Bangor East and Donaghadee Bangor Central Bangor West Holywood and Clandeboye</p>

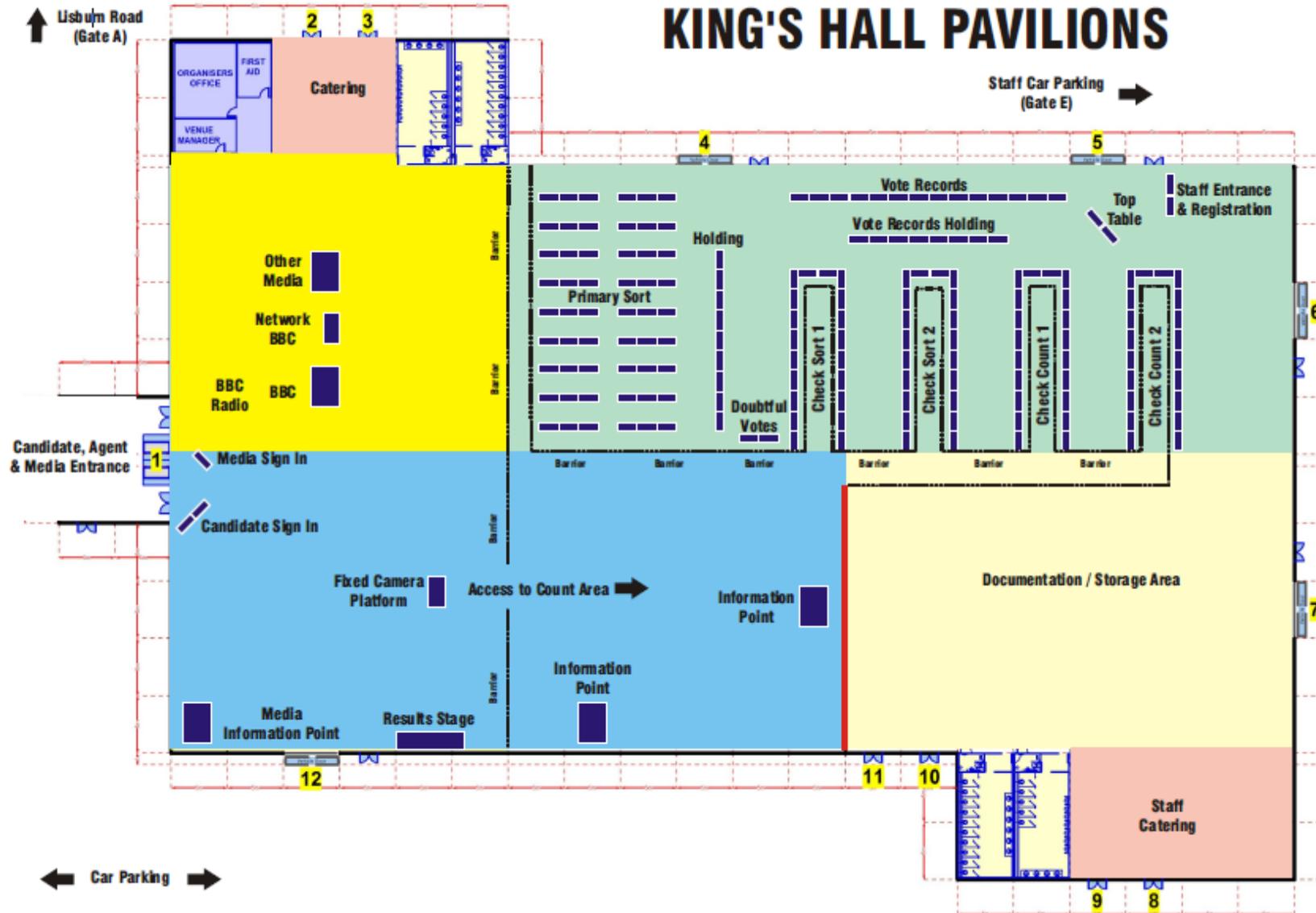
Appendix B

European Parliamentary election count centre details

Count Centre	King's Hall Pavilions
Region to be counted	Northern Ireland
Returning Officer	Graham Shields
Admission to the Count Centre	Admission is permitted from 8.15am.
Start time	9.00am
Key contacts	Senior Election Manager – Liz Murray Information Officer – Rae Kirk Media Liaison Officer – Vivienne Pike
Parking facilities	Onsite parking is available
Refreshments	The café will be open from 9am to close.
Media area	The Media Centre will be located inside the main door of the Count Centre. An Information and Media Liaison area will also be located in this area.
Accreditation details	Prior media accreditation is required. This can be done online at this link www.eoni.org.uk/Elections/Media-Centre/Media-Accreditation-Form

Appendix C

Count layout of King's Hall Pavilions for European Parliamentary election



Appendix D

Health and safety at Kings Hall count venue

- The King's Hall Pavilions has full disabled access.
- There is a No Smoking and No Alcohol policy in place.
- There is a First Aid area within the count venue.
- Electoral Office Staff are available to assist and ensure that the Centre is evacuated safely in the event of an Emergency

Evacuation procedure main hall count centre

- There is no planned tests of the Fire Alarm during the duration of the Count
- In the event of the Fire Alarm sounding you are to leave the King's Hall Pavilions immediately by the nearest Fire Exit and assemble in the King's Hall Conference Centre.
- You are to remain in the assembly area unless you are directed to somewhere else by either Electoral Office Staff or King's Hall Pavilions Management
- You are not to re-enter the building until told to do so.

Appendix E: European election notification of requirement of secrecy

Your attention is drawn to Regulation 30 of the European Parliamentary Elections (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2004, and in particular to the maximum penalty set out in sub-paragraph (7) for anyone found guilty of this offence. Level 5 is currently set at £5000. It is the policy of the Chief Electoral Officer to report to the police any person suspected of breaking any of these provisions.

Polling Station

- (1) The following persons –
- (a) the returning officer and every presiding officer or clerk attending at a polling station,
 - (b) every candidate or election agent or polling agent so attending,
 - (c) every person so attending by virtue of any of sections 6A to 6D of the 2000 Act shall maintain and aid in maintaining the secrecy of voting and shall not, except for some purpose authorised by law, communicate to any person before the poll is closed any information as to –
 - (i) the name of any elector or proxy for an elector who has or has not applied for a ballot paper or voted at a polling station;
 - (ii) the number on the register of electors of any elector who, or whose proxy, has or has not applied for a ballot paper or voted at a polling station; or
 - (iii) the official mark.
- (4) No person shall –
- (a) interfere with or attempt to interfere with a voter when recording his vote;
 - (b) otherwise obtain or attempt to obtain in a polling station information as to the way in which a voter in that station is about to vote or has voted;
 - (c) communicate at any time to any person any information obtained in a polling station as to the way in which a voter in that station is about to vote or has voted, or as to the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of the ballot paper given to a voter at that station;
 - (d) directly or indirectly induce a voter to display his ballot paper after he has marked it so as to make known to any person the way in which he has voted.
- (6) No person having undertaken to assist a voter with disabilities to vote shall communicate at any time to any person any information as to the way in which that voter intends to vote or has voted, or as to the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of the ballot paper given for the use of that voter.

Issue and receipt of postal ballot papers

- (5) Every person attending the proceedings in connection with the issue or the receipt of ballot papers for persons voting by post shall maintain and aid in maintaining the secrecy of the voting and shall not –
- (a) except for some purpose authorised by law, communicate, before the poll is closed, to any person any information obtained at those proceedings as to the official mark; or
 - (b) except for some purpose authorised by law, communicate to any person at any time any information obtained at those proceedings as to the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of the ballot paper sent to any person; or
 - (c) except for some purpose authorised by law, attempt to ascertain at the proceedings in connection with the receipt of ballot papers the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of any ballot paper; or
 - (d) attempt to ascertain at the proceedings in connection with the receipt of the ballot papers the way in which any vote is given in any particular ballot paper or communicate any information with respect thereto obtained at those proceedings.

Count

- (2) Every person attending at the verification of the ballot paper accounts or the counting of the votes shall maintain and aid in maintaining the secrecy of voting and shall not –
- (a) ascertain or attempt to ascertain at the counting of the votes the number or other unique identifying mark on the back of any ballot paper;
 - (b) communicate any information obtained at the verification of the ballot paper accounts or the counting of the votes as to the way in which any vote is given on any particular ballot paper.
- (3) No person attending at the verification of the ballot paper accounts shall express to any person an opinion based on information obtained at that verification as to the likely result of the election.
- (7) If a person acts in contravention of this regulation he shall be liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding level 5 on the standard scale or to imprisonment for a term not exceeding 6 months.**

Appendix F

Public awareness campaign images



The Electoral Commission

For further information and a form visit www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/armedforces



Translations and other formats

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

Tel: 020 7271 0500

Email: publications@electoralcommission.org.uk