

EU referendum: Campaigner update No. 5

January 2016

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The legislation to hold a referendum on the UK's membership of the EU by the end of 2017 received Royal Assent on the 17 December 2015. The date of the referendum is not yet known.

We are the regulator of political funding and spending. Our objective is to ensure integrity and transparency of campaign funding and spending for voters.

We register campaigners and regulate their spending and donations at referendums.

We will be publishing guidance for campaigners and will continue with these updates to keep you informed.

About this update

The government has announced that the European Union Referendum Act 2015 (the Act) will be brought fully into force on **Monday 1 February 2016**. This fifth campaigner update explains which rules will be in force from that date and what you need to do now if you are a campaigner.

It covers:

- status of the Act and the campaigner rules
- guidance for campaigners
- registering as a campaigner
- pre-poll reporting
- donations and loans
- where you can find more information

Status of the Act and the campaigner rules

The government has announced it plans to commence the Act on 1 February 2016. This means that:

- campaigners will be able to register with us from 1 February 2016
- campaigners must start recording all donations received and loans entered into on or after 1 February 2016 for referendum campaigning that are over £7,500. These will be reportable by registered campaigners in pre poll reports
- registered campaigners must follow the rules on checking permissibility of donations and loans before they accept them

The government will also make regulations to provide further details on the rules for campaigners, including timing for the designation process, the length of the referendum period and the date of the referendum. These need to be debated by the UK Parliament and we do not yet know when the government will make the regulations. We will keep campaigners updated through this update and on our website.

Guidance for campaigners

We are publishing our guidance for the EU Referendum in stages. This is because the Act does not set out all of the rules. We published guidance in early January on:

- an overview of the rules
- how to register as a campaigner
- the designation process

Now that the government is commencing the provisions in the Act, we will be publishing guidance in the first week of February on:

- donations for EU referendum campaigners
- loans for EU referendum campaigners
- permissibility for EU referendum campaigners

All the guidance will be available on this [page](#).

The next stage of guidance, which we will publish after the regulations have been laid in Parliament, will cover:

- timetables and deadlines
- managing spending
- working together with other referendum campaigners
- the requirements of pre poll reporting
- public bodies and referendum material

How do I register?

You can register as a campaigner online via [PEF Online](#) from 1 February 2016. This is our secure online registration area. Alternatively, you can register by completing and returning form EUR1 which is available from our [website](#).

Anyone can spend up to £10,000 on campaigning **during** the referendum period. If you want to spend more than £10,000 you must register with the Electoral Commission.

You must register separately as a referendum campaigner even if you are already registered with us as a political party or a non-party campaigner.

As a registered campaigner you must follow the rules on spending, donations and reporting.

Pre-poll reporting

In the run up the referendum, registered campaigners (other than registered political parties, but including minor parties) must report certain donations and loans to us. This is called pre-poll reporting.

Registered campaigners must submit pre-poll reports by certain deadline dates, setting out what donations they have received and loans they have entered into on or after 1 February 2016 for referendum campaigning that are over £7,500. This includes donations received and loans entered into before the campaigner registers. Spending on referendum campaigning before the start of the referendum period does **not** count towards a campaigner's spending limit.

The pre-poll reporting deadlines dates along with the start of the referendum period will be set out in regulations made by the government. We will advise campaigners when this happens on our [website](#).

What should you do now?

You should keep accurate records now of any donations or loans over £7,500 for the purposes of referendum campaigning (whether before or during the official referendum period) so that you can comply with this reporting requirement.

Donations and loans

Before a registered referendum campaigner or a campaigner intending to register accepts any donation of more than £500 or enters into a loan of more than £500, they must take all reasonable steps to:

- make sure they know the identity of the true source
- check that the source is permissible

As soon as you receive a donation, you must make sure you know who the donor is, and start checking their permissibility. You have 30 days to decide whether to accept or refuse the donation and to return the donation if the source is impermissible.

Our guidance explains how to check permissibility for donations and loans for all campaigners.

Where you can find more information

We are always happy to give prospective campaigners advice on how to comply with the rules. Please contact us on 0333 103 1928 pef@electoralcommission.org.uk

Alternatively use the email addresses below.

- England: pef@electoralcommission.org.uk
- Scotland: infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk
- Wales: 0333 103 1929 infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk
- Northern Ireland: infonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk

For other information about the referendum

On our website, www.electoralcommission.org.uk, you can find:

- more information about our role in referendums
- our key principles for running referendums
- our approach to assessing referendum questions
- our findings on the referendum question
- briefings on the Bill explaining our position on provisions where appropriate